

Gender Reconciliation as the Basis for Re-creating Nigeria.

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Abstract

This study is on the very important place of mainstreaming gender reconciliation and gender roles in the re-creating of Nigeria. It comes against the background of lack of gender balance and consequent crisis in gender relations in families, workplaces and social meetings in Nigeria, nay most developing societies. The objective of the study is to begin the much-desired definition of complementary roles of genders in the task of re-creating of nation building through equitable participation in policy making. The study adopts critical expository method as it concludes that to properly begin the journey to a new Nigeria, there is urgent need for psych-social renewal of mindset of both genders on the indispensability of any of the genders in the human progress in question. The study positing a novel African theory of gender equality, also argues loudly for gender reconciliation, more and above, the gender empowerment approach.

Keywords: Gender, reconciliation, re-creating

Introduction

In every research, there must be an existing problem and in every existing problem, there should not be silence because humanbeings are not built in silence but in words, in works and in actions/reflections. What motivated this research is the effects of gender imbalance in Nigeria, which the crises are obvious in the families, workplaces, businesses and other gender relations. They are of massive proportions and are creating profound misery in Nigeria and have thwarted sustainable development. To achieve successful development and sustain it in Nigeria, requires the strengths of both genders practically. In support of this, Okeke affirms that "Nigeria is for all of us 1". This implies that Nigeria's benefits and burdens are not only for male gender but also female, therefore everything should be accepted and shared by both genders.

Realistically, to exist humanly, is to name the world and things in the world but when once named, the world changed and turned, reappearing to the namers as a problem. It then requires a new naming because it is only when a man and a woman name things and nourish them with true words and actions that they can transform the world. A man and a woman exist to name the world, name things in the world and change the world positively. Since, the word 'gender' or rather 'gender roles' is turning to be a problem to the namers, it therefore requires change. To this effect, Heraclitus affirms that " everything is in the state of constant flux, nothing endures in the world, nothing is static or permanent, change is the only thing that is real, every other thing is ephemeral 2". Therefore, gender roles are to be changed since they are not naturally made but socially constructed.

Furthermore, gender imbalance in the society is global and has endured throughout history. Every society does not treat women the same way. Women in some societies are more

subjugated than women in other societies. There is a growing evidence that Nigeria is one of the countries where women oppression is gaining rapid attention. Nigeria has been experiencing lots of gender crises and still experiencing them despite that the crises are affecting everyone, man and woman, rich and poor, young and old. Such crises are: Terrorism, Political Instability, Poverty, Economic Recession, High Level of illiteracy, Gender inequality, Insecurities and so on. These crises have thwarted Nigeria from attaining sustainable development and have resulted into more crises in gender relations in families, workplaces and social meetings in Nigeria. The previous and present leaders/elites have made efforts yet, the challenges are increasing on daily basis. Nigeria became worse since 2021/2022, the insecurities in Nigeria led and still leading Nigerians to untimely death, untold hardship, increase of crime/corruption and broken marriages. A country known as 'Giant of Africa', blessed with many natural and human resources is about to be known as a failed nation. Tallen identified that "over the years, there had been gender imbalance and there is need to change the narratives 3". From this expression, there is need to reconcile and empower both genders in order to attain sustainable development in Nigeria.

The alarming part of it is that despite all the efforts, including the girl-child education, women political representations, economic empowerments, the problem still showing it's ugly face, this requires the needs for gender reconciliation. Since humanbeings are made in words, works, actions and reflections, there should be gender reconciliation through dialogue. How is it possible to create a new Nigeria when half of the population is left behind? Do women lack the ability to lead Nigeria? Are Nigeria not for both men and women? Why are the Nigerian women not allowed to involve in decision making, peace talks and peace keeping? Since culture is dynamic, why is Nigeria's culture of hegemonic practices not dynamic? Is continuation of empowering one gender(women)

not disempowering the other? Why trying to solve problem by creating another problem? Why not reconcile both genders and empower both for the benefits of all? Are men not also hurt? What is in men's silence? Why shouldn't men also advocate for their own rights? Why shouldn't both genders be treated equally? Why not discard statues inherited from our grandparents and parents that are now problematic? Why not welcome gender reconciliation, tackle poverty and promote the development of wellbeing of the Nigerian communities in all ramifications? It was Ezebuilo who suggested that " ... a deep commitment to justice and rejection of all forms of unfairness is at the core of genuine human society ⁴". It should be noted that for any agitation of women liberation is for all. When a woman is good, men will be the beneficiaries when women are treated bad, the same men will receive the negative effects. In line with this, Ohaeto asks,

... for how long would women continue to carry the weight of the socio-cultural hindrances they experience daily and expect to make some notable marks in life? What assurances are there that the men would let go of the age-long patriarchal structures if women continue to withdraw into their 'shells' when dangers loom in the face of these obstructions? ⁵

So, this study is an urgent demand for deconstruction, reconstruction and construction of gender roles, let roles be based on potentials and merits in order to recreate Nigeria. When gender roles are renamed and one's roles are based on one's ability and capacity, the gender roles that are causing gender crises will begin to fade, reconciliation then will take place and gender balance will properly and practically position itself. That's when Nigeria's struggles for development will be effective, implemented and trusted. This study discovers that the issue of gender roles are humanly problem, mainly problem of the mindsets and to solve it, the solution must start from the

mind, both genders need to undergo mental emancipation/decolonisation. This can be done by government and academicians providing pedagogical practices in the churches, schools and markets in order to create awareness, re-orient the masses and awake all the citizens on the issue of renaming gender roles. Mary Wolstencroft notes that "... when there is gender equality, women will change from the world of fashion to world of learning 6". When this is done, women will practically wake up from slumber, change from the world of fashion to the world of struggling for the good of all, there will be new discoveries of knowledge, potential development and desire to achieve successful by merits.

This study argues that without gender reconciliation, there can never be a new Nigeria and any efforts in re-creating Nigeria will remain a mere dream, unless there is gender balance. Women inclusion, reconciliation and empowerment for both genders will boom all aspectsof developmentin Nigeria. Conclusively, the study do not only explains gender reconciliation but also identifies setbacks to gender reconciliation, further suggest solutions to reconcile both genders and the need for re-creating Nigeria.

Gender: History has it that the word gender was first applied to human sexuality in the 1950s and 1960s by professionals working with transsexuals and intersex patients. Muonwe Micheal while commenting on this said that "... they employed the word in order to make sense of the incompatibility experienced by transsexuals between their biological sex and the sense they have of their sexual identity 7. It was in this sense that Robert Stoller who is believed to be the first person to articulate a definition of gender, saw it as "... the sense of knowing to which sex one belongs, that is, the awareness 'I am a male' or I am a female' 8. Stoller went on to distinguish between sex and gender by writing that gender is used in reference to sexual identity which can be referred to as a

psychological or cultural phenomenon while sex is an exclusively biological reality. Furthermore, he opines that gender

... is primarily influenced by people's psychological environment so much so that it can cancel out any influence derived from the biological sex. It is when this cancellation takes place in individuals that the issue of one becoming a transsexual can result 9.

Prior to the articulation of the above understanding of gender by Stoller, the word was used in English language exclusively as a grammatical term to group words into masculine and feminine. The grouping was purely a matter of social convention. It is in this line that when the word gender was adopted by feminists, they used it to depict an aspect of human sexuality that resulted from social and cultural factor. Their main aim was to show that just as it was with grammatical employment of gender, the association of certain characteristics with either men or women was nothing but a creation of society. Reacting to this, Linda Nicholson suggested that "... this automatically questioned the traditional notion that male and female traits were entirely given or natural to people because of their sex, and were thereby immutable 10."

Consequently, with the introduction of the term gender, attention was drawn to the changeable aspects of human traits. Therefore, sex was seen as biological features that distinguish male from female whereas gender was comprehended as socially constructed role assigned to men and women in the society. This shows that while sex is attributed to biological features, gender is a social construct. Henceforth, gender was seen as site for patriarchal manipulations. Thus, feminists started to argue that "... female relegation does not result from their natural sex, but is socially constructed by patriarchy in order to further its ideological interests 11". In the light of these

definitions, the notion of gender, this study will hold the view that gender is a social construct that is animated by environmental factors and differ from one culture to the other. More so, Obasi avers that

... gender is central to the way society is organized. For instance, family, religion and other social institutions. Gender affects the roles men and women play in a society and also establishes and differentiates statues, partners, behaviours, dressings, works in the way they contribute to participate in and rewarded by the economy and the prevailing social systems 12.

So, gender is male's and female's roles in a society one finds him or herself. The 'He' roles and 'She' roles.

Reconciliations: Reconciliation refers to the restoration of fractured relationship by overcoming grief, pain, grudge, malice, anger and forgive one another or between two genders. According to Linda, "... reconciliation is to apologize, forgive, forget, reconcile and recover 13." Reconciliation, as an outcome, is an improvement in the relations among parties formerly at odds with one another. An improvement and empowerment in the relations between both genders who were or are in crisis. When reconciliation take place, there will be changes in institutional structures such as include policies for police reform, for building the rule of law, changes in external behaviours, change of belief, resolving negative emotions and attitudes and adopting positive emotions and attitudes.

Understanding Gender Reconciliation: Gender reconciliation simply means bringing women and men, together irrespective of class, sexual orientation, gender identity, cultural or ethnic background, in a safe space for healing our country or communities and each other. This can be done through news, on social media, churches, schools, in our daily interactions and so on, focusing on healing and jointly confronting the collective

wounding of our culture, with compassion, love and ubuntu rather than with vitriol and hate. Gender reconciliation is urgently needed to heal the impacts of patriarchy, gender injustice and crises in our society and in our lives. In order to re-create Nigeria, there should be gender reconciliation to transform our gender relations and address the roots and banes of gender crises without blame, shame or judgment. Gender reconciliation is needful in re-creating Nigeria, for Ubuntu, Zulu says "... umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu", meaning "a person depends on others to be a person" which implies gender complementarity" 14. No gender can survive without the other. On this note, Ezebuilo states that "... issues surrounding gender equality are therefore not peripheral but central for the achievement of development in Nigeria and Africa ."15

Re-creating: Recreating is the act of making something again, it could be destroying the old one in order to create a new one or creating a new one or amendment. To deconstruct gender roles, reconstruct and construct new cultures that will favour both genders. Culture that will remove the gender mask and develop both genders' potentials, base roles on capacity and ability not on genders.

Setbacks and solutions to Gender Reconciliation

Colonialism and its aftermath, neocolonialism have coloured and totally altered the socio-political culture of Nigerian and African people. Only a return to the authentic African origins and reassessment of Africa's unalloyed past can ensure better understanding of the Nigerian psyche, an antithesis to the treat of neocolonialism. Over the years women have been relegated to the background in issues of the overall development despite the importance of women in the society. For any meaningful development of any kind to be successful, a vantage position should be accorded to the women as they constitute larger proportion of the population. In this regard, women should not

be left out especially in the issue of decision making that bothers on their lives as a people. Once women are involved in decision-making, both genders will be developed and empowered, then the setbacks to gender reconciliation will be corrected.

Socio-cultural factor: Family is one of the setbacks that is thwarting the society to accept gender reconciliation because that is where gender inequality starts and ends. The foundation of the rule of the father will be modified and patriarchal will not like to loose this seat of dominance. The socialization of children to expect and accept different roles in life has created a social mechanism for the development of values that engender the several forms of discriminations and domination against the female gender. This serious setback to women need to be jettisoned in order to create a new Nigeria.

The solution is human development. In Nigeria, the most neglected part of development is human development. Human being is an agent of development and needs to be developed in order to develop material aspects. It is when human being is developed that both genders will know the importance of each other and recognize the values of love, justice, truthfulness, fairness and dialogue. It is lack of human development that some societal practices are kept active by chauvinists which positioned women to be powerless and accorded an inferior status. Mary Astell asks, "... if all men are born free, how is it that all women are born slaves"¹⁶. In order to create a new Nigeria, both genders need to be reconciled and empowered so that the status of all humanbeings will be uplifted, developed and both gender's capabilities and abilities will be rebuilt together. Then roles will be based on abilities and capabilities not on gender. So, the pathway to reconcile both genders is to develop both genders first and empower them. Create awareness, re-orient and reawake both genders. If not, Nigeria cannot achieve a developed and sustainable nation. Ezebuilo

observes that "... stereotypical gender roles can prevent human development and social justice." 17 This is not merely a truth to be acknowledged but a statement that needs continuous and active promotion. If Nigeria wants to achieve sustainable development, there is urgent need to end sexism and gender oppression in families, society and reconcile both genders. More so, Arua adds that

there is also necessary to demarcate between what is authentically and primordially African/Nigerian on the one hand, and what has been adulterated and branded African/Nigeria but which in reality has no African/Nigerian roots and consequently only fruit of the modernization and globalisation of African traditionalism .18

Educating both men and women will assist both to understand that gender problem is not an African problem but the imposition of the colonial system, which introduced to systematically exclude women in Politics and social affairs. From this human development, women's struggle will be changed to against the imposition of the colonial system not to African men. Gender imbalance is western cultures not African cultures. Arua observes that

... the introduction of western education, only men could go to school and occupy available job positions as women were often held back by a long chain of children. While the introduction of salary empowered men over women, it also made the women subordinate and dependent on the man for the subsistence of the family, it was only after this introduction that the African man can now define himself as the "bread winner ", before now, he was only a "bread eater" without knowing where it came from .19

Since gender issues are imposed in Africa/Nigeria there is need to reconcile.

Culture and Tradition: The cultural practices of Nigeria societies are bias by subjugating women to men and undermining their self esteem. The overall impact of gender bias, cultural norms and practices has entrenched a feeling of inferiority in women and place them at a disadvantage to male in all aspects of life. This culture that frowns at women liberation is a setback to development and to practice the real meaning of culture is to overcome this problem. Culture and tradition are dynamic in nature. This implies that culture never remain the same for long, new culture emerges to replace the old one and when it is not replaced, the production of new one become problem and this hinder development. To create a new Nigeria, the old culture of seeing one gender as inferior needs to be modified or discarded in order to create a better culture. What use is an old and ungainful culture? Why still practicing harmful culture in the name of culture? Why not create a culture that both genders will divide the benefits and burdens of the society equally? That is why gender reconciliation is the best and last solution in remaking Nigeria. The culture of reconciling empowering both genders should be embraced not to empower only women. According to Oguji, "... to empower one gender means to disempower the order gender."²⁰ Therefore, both genders should be empowered and base gender's roles on individual's ability and capacity not on gender. Let's create a culture of gender balance in politics and governance where everything start.

Psychological problem: To create a new Nigeria, there are some falsehood that has to be replaced with the truth. And it ought to start from the mind. Men are told and brought up to see themselves as superior, powerful while women are the opposite and that is how both genders grow up with this mindset. Ideyi citing John Dewey states that "... education is

the greatest weapon needed by humanbeings to free themselves from prejudices, superstitions and irrational assumption of everyday life and expand the frontiers of their experience.”²¹ Nigeria scholars should involve both genders in dialogue through conferences, seminars, churches and in all social media in order to address the gap. Since the major problem of gender inequality is from mindset, the solution must first start from mind. This call for mental emancipation in order to create a new Nigeria.

Politics: Politically, both genders should be allowed in decision making. The idea of seeing women as the voters while the men are the ruler will thwart some issues that are affecting women not to be discussed which will turn to be a problem to the entire society. According to Mary Stonecraft, "... when the society grant gender equality and implement it practically, women will change from fashion world to learning world ²²". That means, there will be new discoveries of knowledge. Marriage that is turning into a battlefield or barrack will also be restored. Women will then learn how to balance their family roles and work. Okediadi puts it right, "Let there be a meaningful philosophy of life in which men and women enjoy equal right."²³ To strengthen this fact, Wollstonecraft holds that, "... family is the foundation of the state and marriage as the 'cement of the society.'²⁴ When women are involved in decision making, they will create rules that will guide marriage/family which will definitely end gender crises because they all start in the home. The democratic principle to vote and be voted for need to be practicalized, it should not be only on a paper. To deny women decision making is the greatest injustice. Both genders should know that their destinies are joined and lead to complement each other. To create a new Nigeria, both genders may not be equal in all aspects, no two humanbeings are equal but they are certainly complementary and should learn to work and walk together.

Needs for Re-caking Nigeria

Equality is not necessarily when men and women begin to play the same role but when both genders functions, recognized, organized and equally appreciated. Just as no two engine planes can fly without one engine, that is how a new Nigeria cannot be created without gender reconciliation. According to Cynthia Brix and William Keepin: "Humanity will never be able to move fully forward into its next phase of evolution, toward a new civilization of love and harmony without first reconciling gender imbalance."²⁵ In similar views, Martin Luther Jr emphasized that "... social change does not happen by keeping corruption and injustice hidden but rather by confronting darkness with the power of love."²⁶

For the purpose of our posterities, gender reconciliation should be carefully considered or addressed if not for any other reason, for the sake of the family unit and societal development. Furthermore, D.H. Lawrence says, "... the future of humanity will be decided not by relations between nations but by relations between men and women."²⁷ This shows how important relationship between men and women and the need for gender reconciliation. Even our forefathers know the importance of gender complementarity and were practising it until when the colonial system took away African egalitarian system, the contemporary Africans should return all their lost lifestyles now that they are free and have acquired knowledge. Offor empathises on human rights , such as , civil, political, social, economic and cultural rights, that when all these rights are observed, development and democracy will be infinitely linked."²⁸

Since male domination in all social endeavors with little or no contribution of the female gender is harmful, hindering progress and sustainable development in the most societies, we should pave way for gender reconciliation in order to create a

new Nigeria. It will enable individuals, both men and women to reduce their hardship in all ramifications and improve living. if there must be a smooth process of development in any society, there must be a clear and repeated recognition of the function being played by both genders and this will be resulted in the academy, employment and access to opportunities. On this point, Marcuse "... calls on women's liberation movement as a positive and potential force in the transformation of the society."²⁹ From his expression, human development lies on women's liberation. Marcuse further claims that

... it is the woman, who, holding the flag of revolution would guide her people for freedom. Marcuse goes on to describe this woman; she wears no uniform, she has naked breast and her beautiful face has no trace of violence. She holds a gun in her hand, which says that for an ultimate victory over violence, there is need for continuous struggle.³⁰

As far as Nigerian situation is concerned, the issue at hand should not be civilisation but change of culture and tradition that neglect any gender's well-being. Deconstruction of harmful culture and tradition will pave way for civilisation and development.

For women to attain complete independence as human beings and play their roles in the families there must be true gender reconciliation and smooth relationships which will bring massive developments, love, respect and esteem must also be accorded to them. Nigeria must value women's contributions to home building and family stability in order to re-create Nigeria and sustainable development to be attained. Women's contributions towards the economic, educational, political and social developments of Nigeria are enormous, they cannot be effective in the family when they are abandoned, marginalized, let them complement each other both in the family and outside

family. Both genders should be responsible for contributing to society's development. Women have the power for the organization of the family and the large society. They have many tasks, responsibilities and should be allowed to complement each other in all ramifications.

In Nigeria and Africa as whole, women possess enormous power that holds the society together. They create and build moral life of the society starting from children because family is the most crucial part of life and societal survival. With women roles and functions, nobody needs a prophet to tell that Nigeria survival and the future of children depend on the women. That is why gender reconciliation is the solution in re-creating Nigeria.

Conclusion.

People have credited to Francis Bacon statement that knowledge is power but many of us know that use of knowledge is actually where the power lies, for it is through the use of knowledge that power is generated and exercised over others. In the same way, most Nigerian women have acquired knowledge but were not allowed to use it especially in political field where major decision making and policy formation take place. And when they are not allowed to be using this knowledge they have acquired through education; there is possibility of abusing the acquired knowledge or they may start misusing it in their family or marriage. For instance, the families, workplaces, social meetings' crises we are witnessing in recent time in Nigeria are the outcomes of imbalance in gender and this requires gender reconciliation in order to re-create Nigeria. If not, our country will never reach the level of sustainable development of our dream. Therefore, it is a matter of urgent public importance, let us involve both genders in all aspects of human development. This will be achieved through

change of rule of law, policies and announcing it through news, organization of seminars, conferences and excursion tours for both men and women so as to enrich everyone's mind, mentally, politically, socially, economically and otherwise. Creating awareness, re-awaking, re-orienting and empowering both genders are re-creating Nigeria.

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