

RIGHTS OF WOMEN IN THE URHOBOS FAMILY SYSTEM: A CONTEXTUAL ANALYSIS

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Abstract

Women and the girl child has never occupied a significant place or position, within the Urhobo family system. Culture and tradition have not been kind to the Urhobo woman as a daughter or a wife. In the Urhobo family system, women are conditioned to think that they are lesser creatures than the men. In Urhobo land, women are brought up to take all the short comings of a man without complaining and this makes the lot of women to be lamentable. Traditionally, in the Urhobo family system, women and men alike have accepted the fact that men have rights and women do not because of the patriarchal structure of the system. Male behavior has been considered the norm and women have been viewed to some degree as inferior. Men are supposed to be the bread winners of their families, while the women compliment their efforts. However, in Urhobo land the reverse is the case; apart from few educated men who care for their families, the women in rural areas are the ones who bear the burden. Many Urhobo men, once they lose their jobs or when they are over fifty years, they abandon their first obligation of caring for their family, and their wives take over. Women in Urhobo societies are believed to be their husband's property and it is unethical for them to acquire too much, especially in landed properties. This belief is, being

themselves properties of their husbands, they could not own properties. In cases, where she owned landed properties before marriage, all such are automatically transferred to her husband after marriage. The husband owns her and all her properties. Those who escape this kind of human rights violation are the highly educated females. The purpose of this paper therefore is to highlight some of the abuses of women's rights in the Urhobo family system and how this abuses can be brought to a halt. The method adopted in carrying out this research, include: historical and phenomenological. The historical method has been used to gather secondary data about Urhobo people from books, articles and newspaper clippings. The phenomenological approach involved collecting primary data through oral interviews and participant observations. Using phenomenological approach, this researcher examined the data with a view to providing an explanation to them. Government and human right activists should enlist the cooperation of community leaders, traditional leaders and women in their efforts to alter or eradicate all harmful cultural practices. Community based education can also be implemented to increase public awareness of the negative consequences of all obnoxious practices towards the Urhobo woman or girl-child.

Keywords: Rights, Culture, Women, Family System, Urhobo

Introduction

While tradition and culture can be commended for upholding the fabric of many African societies, they also in many cases violate human rights, especially women's rights. Practices such as early marriages, forced marriage, female genital mutilations, widow inheritance, wife assault, denial of education to girls, preference for sons and discriminatory treatment of women is rampant in many

African countries and they are simply classified as cultural and traditional. Many of these practices have their roots in social constructions of gender that promotes patriarchy and hegemonic masculinity (Hingston et al, 2019)

Although cultural traditions have rights of expression, it should be within a human right of expression, it should be within a human rights framework and certainly not at the expense of women. When it promotes violence, discrimination and oppression, it should be condemned. Kimani (2007) notes that in a 2006 study by the South African institute of security studies, it was found out that “the subservient status of women, particularly rural women, in many African countries is deeply rooted in tradition (Ani & Uwizeyimana, 2021). This results in women being subjected to violence by men. Urhobo like any other society has its own share of cultures and traditions that violates the rights of women. The oppression of women in the Urhobo family system is at the Centre of inquiry here. Although not a new debate, it should be kept on going for meaningful changes to be effected. It also explores the ways women are treated in the Urhobo family system and attempt to break down barriers by identifying how societal influence have led to the status quo. This article provides a voice for those Urhobo women denied of their human rights. As Baxter (2003) points out, space must be allocated to those female voices which have been silenced or marginalized. This paper, therefore, evaluates women in traditional belief and practices in the Urhobo family system, the concept of human rights, the plight of women in Urhobo land, some cultural practices infringing on the rights of women in the Urhobo family system, abuse

of women's right in the Urhobo family system and concludes with the quest for women's rights in the Urhobo family system.

Conceptual Clarifications

- i. Rights:** Rights, as used in this context, refers to "Human Rights". These are alienable rights which are the exclusive right of individuals in the society (Akintola, 2014). They are popularly known citizens' rights and freedom. As such, the Constitution of most countries indicate the processes and measures through which these rights would be protected or violated. In the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, in the Article Three, Section 33 to 45, provisions are made for the fundamental Human Rights. These include: freedom to life; right to dignity of human person; right to personal liberty, right to fair hearing; right to private and family life, right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; right to freedom of expression; right to peaceful assembly and association; right to freedom of movement; right to freedom from discrimination; right to acquire and own immovable property anywhere in Nigeria; restriction on and derogation from fundamental rights (1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, Volume 86: No 27)
- ii. Women:** The plural form of "woman". An adult female human.
- iii. Family:** Sociologists define family as group of persons related to one another by blood or marriage (Aina, 2008). The concept of family is universal; in order words family is found in all societies. The family is the fundamental, instrumental foundation of the larger social structure, in that all other institutions depends on its constitution. (Aina, 2008).

- iv. **System:** The word “system” has various meanings, but for the purpose of this write up, it means: the rules or people that control a country or an organization, especially when they seem to be unfair because you cannot change them. (Hornby,2006).
- v. **Contextual:** The word “contextual” is an abridged form of contextualize or contextualization. It means: to consider something in relation to the situation in which it happens or exists. It means to be connected with a particular context(Hornby, 2006).

URHOBOS AS A PEOPLE

The Urhobo people are aborigine of Delta Central within the state, the largest ethnic group. They spread over ten (10) out of the twenty five (25) Local Government Areas (LGAs) in Delta State, namely: Ethiope East, Ethiope West, Okpe, Ughelli South, Ughelli North, Sapele, Udu, Uvwie, part of Patani and Warri South in Delta South Senatorial District. The people live in nucleated settlements. Some of these are large urban centers such as Warri, Effurun, Sapele and Ughelli which are of considerable commercial, industrial, educational and administrative importance. There are also a number of medium sized industrial towns such as kokori, Okpara-In-land, Orerokpe, Avwraka, Agbarha-Otor and Oghara. The Urhobos occupy a contiguous territory bounded by latitudes 5° 15' and 6° North and Longitudes 5° 40' and 6° 25' East (Aweto and Igben, 2011). They have twenty four polities namely: Agbarha – Ame (Agbassa), Agbarho- Otor, Agbarho, Agbon, Arhavwarien, Avwraka, Ephron-Otoh, Ewu, Ewreni, Idjerhe, Mosogar, Oghara, Ogor, Okere (Urhobo), Okparabe, Okpe, Olomu, Orogun, Udu, Ughelli, Ughelle- Urhie, Ughievwen, Ughwerun and Uvwie.

WOMEN IN TRADITIONAL BELIEFS AND PRACTICES IN THE URHOBO FAMILY SYSTEM

According to Asah (2004), culture and tradition have not been kind to the Urhobo Woman as a daughter or a wife. At birth, the community anxiously awaits and shouts for joy, if the newly born is a boy, most especially if there were only females in the family. The child is treated as the first child. The male child is given names which depicts the joy of the family. Names like Enamiroro (this is what I have been thinking) Okpako (Senior Child), Kesiena (now I have it), Ovie (king) and Omovwiroro (Child of Wisdom). Meanwhile, a female child is also given names to depict her position. Names like omotejovwo, (girls are still human beings), Edirin (Patience), Ufuoma (Peace) and Omote (girl child).

In the Urhobo family system, female children are conditioned to think that they are lesser creatures than the male (Asah, 2004). In some cases, even parents imbibe into the females that they are worthless than the boys. In later years, when married, husbands also send the message that they are inferior to man. After marriage, they come to their father's house as visitors and before marriage, they live with their mothers.

This is an indirect way of keeping female children under supervision, to ensure that they maintain their virginity till marriage. The male child is raised to view girls and women as inferior, exploitable creatures. The women are seen as vulnerable and easily dominated.

Throughout history, women have been labelled physically weaker than men, more emotional, less able to learn and dependent (Isiramen, 2014). According to Asah (2004), in Urhobo land, women

are brought up to take all the short comings of a man without complaining. If she complains, she gets deaf ears from her parents and her husband's relatives. She is told that she is a woman and should not try, to be a man. A serious complaint from a woman is discussed and settled lightly over a bottle of ogogoro (local gin). It is obvious in Urhobo land that descent is patrilineal and male children are preferred to female children as heirs. The birth of a female child is welcomed with mix feeling as compared to the birth of a male child. The girl child continues to live a life of non-acceptance right from birth. The lot women and girls is lamentable according to Asah. Some even hold a strong belief that a female child once married, forfeits her inheritance right. Such is the lot of women in Urhobo land.

In the history of mankind, men have repeatedly inflicted injuries on women; they have established a direct tyranny over her. According to Burke (1972), traditionally, women and men alike have accepted the fact that men have rights and women do not. According to Asah (2004), a woman was driven from her matrimonial home, just because she refused to clean up after her husband vomited. The man vomited after getting himself drunk; and the relations felt the woman erred by refusing to clean up and give the husband a proper bath. She returned to her husband's house after proper sacrifice was carried out to appease her husband's ancestors.

According to Avwunu (2015), traditionally, it is believed among the Urhobo people that women are second class citizens, the least desired sex since they cannot foster the family name. When married, they are

considered as properties in their matrimonial homes, thus losing their identity both at home and in their matrimony. As part of a man's wealth, women can be seen but not heard, they have no voice in the home. They are expected to bear children, care for them, and add to the man's labour force and to help in their children's upbringing. They are not part of the decision making body in the family and the community because they are deemed to have nothing to contribute to the family welfare and development.

Among the Orogun people of Delta State in Nigeria, a married woman is not allowed to use another woman's wrapper to tie, even if that woman is her own sister. Moreso, it is considered a sacrilege for another man to see the nakedness of a married woman even when it is not done intentionally. If a man mistakenly walks into an Urhobo woman that is naked, it is expected of that woman to tell her husband when he returns.

Traditionally, the man may die, if he eats the food prepared by that woman in case she refused to confess, that another man saw her nakedness. In practice, these aforementioned beliefs are held from family to family and community to community. The eldest male child of every family is the supreme head of every member of that family. He represents everyone in all matters that has to do with the smooth running of the home. Thus, male child preference is not treated with levity because a man who had only female children is best considered as not having any at all.

Consequently, no known woman however old should stand to speak on behalf of the family in Urhobo gathering whether at the family or community level. However, they are allowed to manage their own affairs at the women level (Eghweya), which is strictly for women only. They may be consulted if and when necessary but they cannot represent or present their own opinion in person. At the matrimonial home, the woman is expected to reverence all her in-laws irrespective of their age. She is not to regard herself before her matrimonial family members. In this way she treats them all as her senior with full privilege accorded them. She is thus seen as being respectful, a good wife who should enjoy the family support in times of trouble, as it is often said that is not only the husband that she is married to. The Urhobo woman has no right to property and inheritance in her father's house as well as in her matrimonial home. This is because, she is regarded as being part of the husband's property, hence at the husband's demise, she is shared alongside with other properties that the man had. Her inheritance therefore, comes from that which belongs to her children. Any woman who had no issue in the marriage is not considered for anything.

The Concept of Human Rights

Human rights is the right of an individual to liberty and justice (Aina, 2008). The concept of fundamental human rights has been a topical and controversial issue through history (Kehinde, 2016). Notwithstanding the controversy on the meaning and scope of the concept, it is agreed universally that certain rights are basic to the existence of mankind. Without these basic rights, "life", to use the word of Thomas Hobbes would be "solitary, poor, nasty, brutish and

short” (Kehinde, 2016). These basic rights include the right to life, right to worship, freedom of movement, right to dignity of the people, freedom of association and freedom of expression etc.

The first attempt to give universal recognition to Fundamental Human Rights was on December 10, 1948 when the General Assembly of the United Nations adopted what is now known as Universal Declaration of human rights. The 30 articles of the declaration asserted the civil and political, economic, social and cultural rights of all people (Kehinde, 2016)

This declaration has been the major source for the entrenchment of human rights in the constitutions of many emergent states. Other declaration by the United Nations pertaining to the concept of human rights, include: the international covenant on civil and political rights; Conventions Against Torture and other cruel Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, and the Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

In 30 articles, the Magna Carta on Human Rights sets forth the basic rights and freedoms to which all men and women are entitled, without any discrimination.

They include:-

- the right to life, liberty and security of person;
- freedom from slavery and servitude;
- freedom from torture and cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment;
- equality before the law and entitlement to equal protection under it;

- freedom from arbitrary arrest and detention;
- the right to be presumed innocent until proved guilty;
- Inviolability of the home and secrecy of correspondence;
- freedom of movement and residence;
- the right to seek in other countries asylum from prosecution;
- the right to a nationality;
- the right to marry and found a family;
- the right to own property;
- freedom of thought, conscience and religion;
- freedom of opinion and expression;
- freedom of peaceful assembled association;
- the right to vote and participate in government;
- the right to social security;
- the right to work and to form and join trade unions;
- the right to adequate standard of living;
- the right to Education;
- the right to participate in the cultural life of the community.

The General Assembly of the United Nation in proclaiming the universal declaration of human right as “a common standard of achievement for all people and all nations” called on them to promote the rights and freedom it set forth (Findlay,2016). The universal declaration of Human Rights has been translated into all the main languages of the world and has been profoundly influential world-wide (Findlay, 2016). It is frequently quoted or referred to in United Nations resolutions and many national legislations. Legal systems, world-wide have incorporated its values and language. The constitutions of many countries including most newly independent

ones, reflect its influence. The Human Right programme that has developed in the United Nations is to a large extent, conceived within the framework of the Universal Declaration and, in fact, the programme as a whole promotes its observance and implementation.

Nevertheless, it is obvious that many countries of the world pay mere lip service to the observance of human rights. The mass media reports on a daily basis the increasing violation of civil liberties by governments. Tyranny and oppression reigns supreme in many countries as the basic rules of human rights have long been thrown overboard in many of these countries (Kehinde, 2016)

A vivid example was the continuation of the obnoxious apartheid Policy in the racist enclave of South Africa where blacks were daily massacred and even extra judicially executed. This despicable practice continued till 1990, despite the pronouncement of the United Nations that apartheid policy is a crime against humanity. In the face of escalating violations of human rights all over the world, the role of Amnesty international as a watchdog against state abuse of human rights becomes even more inevitable (Kehinde, 2016)

The Plight of Women in the Urhobo Family System

This section seeks to identify why the Urhobo woman suffers most. There are many factors that intensify the suffering of the Urhobo Woman. Men are in control of affairs both at the domestic front and in the society. Women, like children, are to be seen and not heard. Some men even treat their wives like slaves especially those in the rural setting. Imagine a situation where a woman will be the one to

fend for the family. Most women in Urhobo land do both their job and that of their husband's. They do not only feed their homes, but they also cloth and train their children in schools. Urhobo Women are subjected to a lot of hardships by their husbands. Unlike the Itsekiri women, the Ibo women and the Benin Women, the Urhobo woman is subjected to harsh conditions of life. Considering the kind of sufferings Urhobo Women go through, an Ibo woman in 1989, said she will never give her daughter to an Urhobo man in marriage. Most Urhobo Women work like elephants, but eat like ants.

Urhobo women have always been humiliated by both husband and in-laws. Men are never seen to be at fault. As a patriarchal society, it is not considered to include women in the distribution of inheritance. That is why, whenever a woman loses her husband, the male relations quickly come around to confiscate the property of their brother or son. The plight of women in Urhobo land is so deploring. Most men don't treat their wives with dignity. Many a woman in Urhobo land, endure marriage rather than enjoy marriage. Most men, especially the polygamists live like sloths. They believe that, if one wife does not bring food for them, another one will give him food because of sex. An Urhobo woman can be denied sex for one year by her husband for no reason. Some men have even turned their wives into punching bags and some women have died as a result of frustration.

Some Cultural Practices Infringing On The Rights Of Women In The Urhobo Family System.

Culture and tradition have not been kind to the Urhobo woman as a daughter or as wife. In Urhobo land, inheritance and rights are the

problems plaguing girls and wives when a father or a husband dies (Asah, 2004). When a man dies, a diviner is called to ascertain the cause of his death, while in that of a woman, it is believed that her sins and wicked actions caught up with her. So it is seen that a man never dies a natural death. In most cases, the first accused culprits when a man dies are the wife, mother, sister, aunt, or daughter. Culturally, when an Urhobo man dies, the first male child automatically inherits the father's properties and position, even when there are elderly females. In some cases, the son also inherits the wives including his mother. If the women refuse to be inherited by the eldest son, the family must return the bride price and vacate the family compound immediately after which she can remarry. In Urhobo land, women are brought up to take all the short comings of man without complaining. If she complains, she gets deaf ears from her parents and her husband's relatives.

The law of inheritances in Urhobo traditional religion is patrilineal, restricting the willing of properties to males and in most cases the female is totally abandoned especially in landed properties. Erinoshio (1977), says that women are inhibited by restrictions imposed by tradition and culture. They are placed at a disadvantage of no importance or significance; property was passed from father to son, but not to wife or daughter. In the history of mankind, men have repeatedly inflicted injuries on Women, by having established a direct tyranny over her. Traditionally, Women and men alike have accepted the fact that men have rights and women do not. Male behavior has been considered the norm and women have been viewed to some degree as inferior (Asah, 2004). For example, the males can

have as many women friends as they can, but as for the females, when they are seen with male friends, the assumption is that they are flirting. These attitudes are part of the stereotypes that shape the thinking about women and women's behavior. Ultimately, they help determine women status in the society.

Women in Urhobo societies are believed to be their husband's property and it is unethical for them to acquire too much, especially in landed property. The belief is that being themselves properties of their husbands, they could not own property. In cases, where she owned landed properties before marriage, all such are automatically transferred to her husband after marriage. The husband owns her and all her properties. Those who escape this kind of human rights violation are the highly educated females. Traditional structures place women in a position of dependence on the men and they are obliged to fulfill certain roles as subordinates.

In the Urhobo family system, the question of inheritance remains gross denial of the female's rights to inheritance in an age long tradition that has defied modern realities. When a man dies, while the wife wallows in deep sense of loss, the spouse' relations are engrossed in the sharing of his property. Where the wife is stubborn over the property, force is applied to evacuate them (Edewor, 2001). The family of the deceased is not bothered if the property was jointly acquired by the couple. Often, women are alone in their grief and words remain their only weapon in a male dominated society. According to Akintude (2002) as cited by Asah, the rites widows observe, vary from place to place. Men hardly undergo any rites

when their wives die. A man may be free to have sexual intercourse with another woman that same night as a way of consoling him. He is forbidden from shedding tears, whereas some of the rites women are made to undergo are dehumanizing when their husband dies.

A widow with young children or with female children is treated as if the deceased has no children. The family elder's lots are improved at the expense of the children's welfare. This is done as if the wife is incapable of managing the late husband's estate. Women pass through hardship and harrowing experience at the death of their husbands. In matters of sex, the traditional men in Urhobo land have an upper hand. A woman cannot desire sex and invite the husband. The husband has the right to her body when and how he desires. Asah (2004) spoke with twenty old and young women combined in her family compound about sex; not one of them has ever experienced an orgasm, but they all said their husband enjoyed sex with them. They had sex when invited by their husbands and were abandoned as soon as they were pregnant. A man is free to desire any woman he wants, but the wives do not have such freedom. This is one of the degradation and deprivation that women or wives go through. Asah (2004) also discovered that some women she interviewed have not had sex with their husband for over a year. These women at times have to lobby and beg for it by cooking delicious meals for the man. The man has the sole prerogative to invite them. They shy away from sex discussions but men openly discuss their conquests and their next victim.

The head of a fish, the gizzard of a chicken and the sweetest parts (liver, kidney, heart) of any bush meat are given to the husbands. Some of the women have lost their homes and others fined for eating these parts. As a child, Asah wondered why her mother gave her father so much meat and fish in a big clay pot of soup while they ate little or no fish and meat and at times, they scrambled for the remains of their father's food. This is the lot of girls and wives in Urhobo land. Women in Urhobo land have little or no rights and none in terms of inheritance. Their right to happiness and comfortable living is determined by the male folks and society. Urhobo women have been brought up to think that they are lesser creatures than the males; sometimes even parents make female children feel worthless than the males. Men should therefore, apply the golden rule "do unto others as you would want them to do to you"

Women have overwhelmingly been the ones who have suffered most. They are the ones who have borne the brunt of indignities, insults, sexual harassment and lack of respect at the hands of men. Moreover, the Urhobos frown at older women getting married to the younger men, but see it as a right for an older man to marry a younger woman, even as young as their daughter. At times also, girls are given out in marriage to settle family debts (Asah, 2004).

The Quest for Women's Rights in the Urhobo Family System

Civil rights reform came as a result of many years of oppression suffered by African- American people. Women's Right reform came about after many years of economic deprivation and physical abuse. Children's rights has been examined and reformed as a result of the

child abuse that exist in our society. Our society has developed in a positive way because somebody was persecuted (Hunter, 1995). Women and children account for two thirds of the world's population, yet they are voiceless in the society and therefore vulnerable (Ojo, 2017). The notion of human's rights, that all humans beings have inherent rights that cannot be abridged or denied, has evolved historically from a traditional religious emphasis on collective entitlements, earned by having performed certain obligations, to a modern recognition of individual rights, grounded in the humanity of the individual person (Formicola, 2011).

Today, as a result of parallel and sometimes intersecting political and religious endeavours, the concept of human rights includes: civil, political, social, economic, developmental, and spiritual rights, that is, an aggregate of freedoms that reflect a broad contemporary commitment to social justice and the right of conscience (Formicola, 2011). Christianity, in contrast to other religions, emphasize both a legalistic and relational approach to rights (Witte and Johan, 1966). This is the result of its seminal theological beliefs; the notion that individuals are created in the image and likeness of God, that they possess a spiritual nature embodied in the immortal soul, and that they are destined to seek their own salvation (Witte and Johan, 1966).

Christianity, has therefore understood that humans have certain natural, collective obligations to God and others, but that they also have certain personal obligations and rights because they possess a soul (Formicola, 2011). This belief has generated the justification and pursuit of those rights necessary within the state or temporal world

to achieve one's salvation. Christian religious institutions, because of their basic belief in the value of the human being as a creature created in the image and likeness of God, have played the most significant roles in the advancement of human rights in the world. Interestingly, with various governments, they have worked to monitor repression, to educate government and media about human rights violations and social and injustice, to lobby and bring pressure to bear on social and public institutions, and to use their resources to transform society.

Translating the universal rights of women and international laws and connecting them with local ideas and values involves challenging arguments regarding cultural norms, ethical sensibilities and gendered ideas of communities. More importantly, translating women's human rights into local ideas and national values needs a progression and legitimacy. Simply put, situating the rights frameworks within the local contexts need to be gradual and is also expected to fit into the system of cultural meanings in order to be embraced and recognized by the local communities. In the light of this, culture is an important element that can be used as a legitimate tool in advocating for women's rights.

During an African widow's summit, Human Rights activists and political leaders in Nigeria were unanimous in their call for a concerted action towards abolishing all known forms of cultural and traditional practices being meted out against women and the actualization of the full rights and privileges of widows in Nigeria (Yusuf, 2017). They spoke at the African Widows' Summit in Commemoration of Second International Widows Day pioneered by

Felix king foundation at the Best Western Hotel in Benin City, Edo State, Nigeria. Among Activists that attended the event include; Dr. Joe Okei- Odumakin, Founder, Women Arise Initiative; Dr. Mohammed Aliu Momoh, an international finance and business leader and Hajia Yusuf, Convener, Bring Back Our Girls Campaign.

Presenting a paper entitled “Confronting Inequality to Promote Change”, Okei-Odumakin (2017), drew the attention of all and sundry to the plight of widows and other obnoxious practices faced by women in the society by calling for a change of attitude and interpersonal relationship that is cordial; a readiness by individual and the society to confront all such practices until a positive change becomes visible to all. She attributed the successes recorded in the continued scourge and maltreatment of women to insensitivity and the silence of the oppressed which is the victory of the oppressors. She adds that the society demand equity and justice for mutual relationship as a panacea to protecting the vulnerable ones (Okei-Odumakin, 2017).

Citing a number of cases of deprivation in which her organization has intervened in the past, Okei – Odumakin, then called on women to brace up to the challenge by speaking out whenever and wherever such incidence occur and to always stand for their right most especially at the demise of their husband.

Also speaking on the paper, entitled “Girl Child Education: Panacea for Potential Growth”, Yusuf (2017) blamed the scourge of maltreatment of women and the vulnerable in our society on

ignorance, saying that spreading education to the poor and the vulnerable will go a long way in preparing them for the right task of effectively fighting for their rights if and when the situation arises. She decried the continuous relegation of women in Nigeria that often translate into denied rights of inheritance, lack of access to basic education and other amenities. She called on the male folks to invest in the education of women and the girl child as a way of securing the future even as they hold their wives in confidence with the aim of empowering them to make decisions at some critical points as joint heirs and partners in progress.

From the foregoing, as a people, if the Urhobos should deny the poor and the vulnerable their own human dignity and capacity for freedom and choice, it causes the denial of both our collective and individual dignity at all levels within the family system. More so, it negates the norm of the society and breaches biblical ethics on caring for one another as enshrined in every society. The denial of the vulnerable groups in the society suggests a deviation from the norm, from biblical admonitions; the onus then rest on all to take seriously the responsibility of caring and protecting these groups we can refer to as weak. It behooves the people of the Urhobo ethnicity to not only support Women, but take it upon themselves as a duty to fight for them whenever they encounter where they are being maltreated.

Meanwhile, wife of Edo State Deputy Governor, Mrs. Mary Ann Shaibu (2020) has lauded the Supreme Court for upholding the right of a female child to inherit properties of their biological father. In her reaction to the Supreme Court judgment, Mrs. Shaibu in a statement

said, “This judgment has indeed restored the pride of place of female children which has been rendered voiceless in the society” (2020). Several customary laws in Nigeria disentitle women from partaking in the sharing of their biological father’s properties and this has led to several psychological traumas for the Nigerian Girl child, giving them a sense of deprivation and rejection.

Shaibu, (2020) described this as a breach of section 42 (1) and (2) of the Nigerian constitution which is the supreme law of the land. She argued that most of the customary laws that are anti-female are in conflicts with the nation’s law. She assured women that their heavens were now open and at liberty to aspire to the highest height of their dream. Although there is a tendency to portray culture as stubbornly resistant, it is not static and is subjected to change (Hingston and Asuelime, 2019). Community involvement according to Ibahwo (2000) offers the best prospects for a culturally sensitive solution to resolving the conflict between national human rights and cultural traditions. As noted by Hersh (1998), efforts to change harmful traditions are most effective when they originate within the culture that practices them. Involving the community can yield positive results as seen in the case of redressing female genital mutilation (FGM) in Kenya and Uganda. With the involvement of the community, it was decided that cutting of the genitalia be prohibited and the other harmless rites retained such as the teaching of customary norms and sexual reproductive health (Hingston and Asuelime, 2019). Girls in Kenya even received a certificate after undergoing the traditional rites. In Uganda, this initiative was even supported by men. This experiences show that community

involvement is important and it should be explored in addressing other culture based human rights violation (Hingston and Asuelime, 2019).

Conclusion

This study has revealed the historical challenges of women within the Urhobo society. Thus, Government and human rights activists should therefore enlist the cooperation of community leaders, traditional leaders, religious and the victims in their efforts to alter or eradicate all harmful practices. Community conversations is useful in this respect as it brings the people in the community together to discuss and dialogue about issues affecting their lives and to find a way forward. The involvement of religious and traditional leaders is vital as they are influential enough to convince their people to abstain from or alter harmful traditional practices.

Community based education can also be implemented to increase public awareness of the negative consequences of these practices and the need for change. Many community achievements have been initiated and supported by women themselves. Feminist post structuralism recognizes the importance of agencies and recognizes that oppressed groups (African Women) are not permanently trapped into silence, victimhood or knee jerk refusal by dominant discursive practices (Baxter, 2003). The use of feminist post structuralism, can give a voice to Urhobo Women violated by harmful tradition and bring to light the ambiguities and complexities involved.

It is important that while confronting those traditions which violates girls and women in the Urhobo family system, respect should be shown for our culture and positive practices should be commended. This will help to pave the way for peaceful deliberations and change within our communities in Urhobo land. Although community involvement is vital, government intervention is also necessary and laws condemning harmful practices must be implemented and enforced. Culture and traditions are not static and can be altered or phased out. With the right approach, the fight against harmful traditional obnoxious practices that condone gender based violence against women and oppression of women can yield positive results and Urhobo women can enjoy their heritage rather than be violated by it.

Recommendations

In view of the prevailing circumstances, it has become imperative to make the following recommendations. The crises which women in Urhobo land go through calls for proper attention from both the church and the society. A special platform should be created at all levels in Urhobo land where men can be enlightened on the need and importance of caring for their women. People should volunteer to defend and provide free legal services and advice for the protection of women against unwholesome traditionally practices that had helped in dehumanizing the female gender in Urhobo land.

The church in Urhobo land should fight for the personal freedom and betterment of women who suffer, using the weapons of persuasion, education, and legislation. The church should objectively react to all

the issues of violation of women's right in the Urhobo family system, in a way that will convince all that she is serious, and that it is not serving as a politically sponsored agency. Church wide organizations such as the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN), Christian Council of Churches (CCN), the Pentecostal Fellowship of Nigeria (PFN), among others, must team to fight evil practices, particularly among Christian men in Urhobo land.

Moreover, the church in Urhobo land, must as a matter of urgency embark on systematic/ aggressive discipleship for her members about how to balance spirituality with socio-cultural reality. The need to disciple members on practical Christian living, how to become good husbands and stewards of influence, resources etc cannot be over-emphasized. Church pastors, and all other Christian leaders, must join hands together to fight for the protection of women's rights as well as to ensure redress when citizen's rights are violated. The time to wake up and be alert to that responsibility is now.

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