

**HUMAN RIGHT OF WOMEN WITH FOCUS ON WIDOWHOOD
PRACTICES IN NIGERIA: A CALL FOR PROPER HUMAN RIGHT
EDUCATION IN NIGERIA**

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ABSTRACT

Bereavement associated with widowhood is generally considered to be a difficult life event which constitutes a source of emotional and psychological stress that requires a period of time to overcome. Widow is subjected to some unpleasant rites. Such practices include shaving of hairs, wearing of black/white clothes, sleeping and sitting on the floor or mat, being refrained from bathing for a number of days, seclusion and being made to swear with husband's corpse, among many others. Against this backdrop women are discriminated against, degraded and dehumanized despite the provisions in Nigerian's statutes such as the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria 1999 (as amended) and various other International and regional Human Rights Instruments which Nigeria ratified. Since human rights have become a global concern, there is the need to ensure awareness of its importance. One way of ensuring awareness is through education. This paper x-rays some of the widowhood practices in some parts of Nigeria. The seemingly challenges of governments in Africa-Nigeria being the largest population that do not seem to properly address the issues of protections and promotion of human rights in their domains are all discussed. The significance of human right education for the promotion of human rights is explored. Conclusions are drawn and recommendations are made.

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INTRODUCTION

Tradition is a way of life. In Africa, traditions are strong and deeply rooted in the people, though there are many traditional practices that are harmful to people, these traditions continue to be perpetrated. As they say, 'it is the tradition of our forefathers, it must continue'. Some of these harmful traditions and practices include widowhood rites, female genital mutilation, and son preference over the daughter and many more. These beliefs and customs promote the inferior status of women among male dominations.

Our focus for this paper is on widowhood rites or practices which is not only harmful but violate the rights of women. The harmful traditional practices directly associated with the widowhood rites includes but not limited to, wife being the first and prime suspect of the killer of her husband(a practice that is only applicable to the widow but not the widower because he is a man so he-man cannot be accused killing his wife), shaving of hairs, sleeping with the corpse of a husband in a lock-up room for certain period of time, wearing of black/white clothes, sleeping and sitting on the floor or mat, being refrained from bathing for a number of days, seclusion and being made to swear with husband's corpse, oaths taking staying indoor, wailing and crying loudly morning and night. Where she is accused of having a hand in her husband death she may have to prove her innocent by drinking the water with which the corpse was bathed, and a host of other hostile ordeals that woman could be made to go through. Most often the widows have no option but to go through those ordeals for fear of threats from male folk and the members of the family of the late husbands, ostracizes from friends, the community and the entire society, worst still she is compelled by the love she had for the deceased as a way of showing last respect

Eweluka (2002) noted that the customary law permits and perpetuates discrimination on the basis of gender, especially in family relations. Women experience and suffer marital frustrations and depression. These continue even at the demise of the husband, whereby women face series of dehumanizing treatments from the in-laws, with the claim that, she killed her husband. Olakitike (2009) expressed that these widowhood practices vary from one place to another and many of these practices violate a woman's human rights. This is because from time memorial, societies across the globe have been male dominated and still remains so especially in Africa. Hence, Nwosu (2007) opined that the disorganizing and traumatic experience which

accompanies death of husbands tends to be greater on women than that of men as a widower. For instance, while the wife immediately becomes the primary suspect for her husband's death, the man is immediately offered an appropriate substitution to comfort him upon the loss of his wife.

According to Nwanegbo (1996) in some places the widow will be taken to an isolated place where she will have her food in broken earthen pot, while her hair will either be left unkempt or be completely shaven off; while in some other places, ten men will have to lie with the widow after her husband's death and she has to cry very early each morning and call her husband by his name, the morning period varies from each ethnic group, but normally between seven (7) days to one (1) year.

It is sad to say that most often, most of the ordeals are carried out by fellow women who at best are also potential widows. This call for human rights education to be targeted at both the victims and perpetrators. Thus, this paper focuses on widowhood practices in some Nigerian societies, reasons for the prevalence of widowhood practices, its implications on Nigerian widows. The paper further discusses the effect of multiple legal systems in the country which continue to undermine women fundamental rights. The paper finally discusses at interval, the potential role human right education can play in promoting and protecting of human rights of women in Nigeria.

Before going to the detail it may suffice to remind ourselves the human rights principles its tenets and its relevant to women. According to Flowers et al. (2000: 3) human rights are those rights that belong to every individual man, woman, boy, girl, infant or elder simply because he or she is a human being. Human rights are the rights a person has simply because he or she is a human being. The UDHR has a complete statement that covers economic, social, cultural, political and civic rights. These rights apply to all people everywhere. Humans are all homo sapiens species: men, women and children, whilst rights are entitlements or the freedom a human being is guaranteed (Donnelly 2003). In the same vein, Arbour and Johnson (2005: 1) refer to human rights as the sum of individual rights and collective rights laid down in state constitutions and international law. Human rights are based on the principles of respect, dignity and equality. These rights are enshrined in many international human rights treaties such as the UDHR.

The principles of human rights are that they are universal and inalienable, indivisible, interdependent and interrelated (Nickel 2010). Human rights are universal, meaning that no one

has to earn or deserve human rights. The universality comes about from the realisation that everyone is born with and possesses the same rights regardless of race, country, colour, gender, religious, cultural or ethnic background. Human rights are inalienable in the sense that they can never be taken away from an individual, that is, by virtue of being a human being one cannot lose these rights. Thus, no person may be divested of his or her human rights save under clearly defined legal situations. Indivisibility means, one cannot be denied a right because one decides that it is less important or non-essential.

The interdependence of human rights is because all rights: political, civil, social, cultural and economic, are of equal importance and none can be fully enjoyed without others. Human rights are interdependent in that, all human rights are part of a complementary framework because each human right entails and depends on other human rights (Flowers et al. 2000: 3). Violating one such right affects the exercise of other rights. For example, the right to life presupposes respect for the right to food and good standards of living.

WIDOWHOOD PRACTICES IN SOME NIGERIAN SOCIETIES

With over two hundred and fifty ethnic groups in Nigeria, the implication is that, there could be as many types and forms of widowhood practices in the country. These practices exist across the nation, but with differences in the forms and extent to which they can be harmful and detrimental to the widows. Most of these widowhood practices are, however, predominant in the Yoruba and Igbo speaking areas of the country, where widows are often times suspected to have caused their husbands' death. As Ogamba, Ebele (2000:15) confirms, "It is almost a common syndrome that widows are accused of being responsible for their partner's death". So they establish their innocence through certain acts which are heinous ordeal practices some of which were mentioned above. It is not possible to address the practices across the various ethnic groups in this single paper. We shall therefore focus on the Yoruba and the Igbo- two of the three predominant ethnic groups where the widowhood rites practices are mostly pronounced.

The practices among the Yorubas of the South West of Nigeria

Widowhood rites are observed across different Yoruba communities and across different categories of people. A widow is expected to express her sorrow of losing her husband by wearing black clothes, crying and often falling into the ready hands of others surrounding her to

prevent her from injuring herself. Adekanye (1988). She is also expected to go into seclusion seven days during which she is not expected to take a bath or change her clothes. As a sign of severing bonds between her and her late husband, she may be expected to unweave her hair, have a low cut, shave or scrape her hairs depending on the type of practice prevalent in such Yoruba community. Similarly, the mourning period varies from one community to another. She is to sit on a bare floor or a mat at best. Fasoranti and Arunah (2007). While in some Yoruba communities, she is expected to eat from broken plates and cooked with broken pots. (Fasoranti and Arunah 2007). At the end of her mourning period which varies depending on the community, the final rites are performed on the widow.

The final rites include being 'washed' (birthed) in the night after having the final wailing and making some rituals which are expected to finally put the spirit of the departed to final rest and the 'outing' which involves change of dresses and being led to the market. These practices are not on full scale any more but the practices have not totally vanished especially in rural areas

According to Aransiola and Ige (2010) widowhood practices is observed among the Yoruba for the following reasons; to protect the woman from being harmed by the spirit of the husband; for the woman to prove innocence of the death of her husband and for the husband family to ascertain if the woman had been pregnant as at the time the husband died so that they can claim responsibility and care for the woman among other reasons. Fasoranti and Arunah (2007) noted that after the wailing periods, widows experienced several degradations and deprivation. Among the Yorubas, the widow may be accused of killing her husband and therefore could be asked to swear with either the Holy Bible or the Holy Quran or through other traditional means like being asked to drink the water used for washing the corpse in order to prove her innocence. Adekanye (1988) also noted that at the end of the mourning period, the widow is inherited by a male relative of her dead husband, just like the rest of the man's property. A process called "Osupo" in Yoruba. But this has been affected by modernization, education, Christianity and high level of exposure of the woman; as widows who fall under the above influences will refuse to be inherited like a property by the relative of the dead husband.

All these call for proper HRE, to expose both the victims and the perpetrators to the fact that human rights instruments both at national and international level abhor the obnoxious practices which also attract legal actions and international sanctions where by those rights are violated

Practices among the Igbos of South East of Nigeria

Nwanegbo (1996) makes elaborate submission on widowhood rites as practiced among the Igbo people. It was observed that in some parts of Igbo land; when a man dies the wife will tie a wrapper over her chest without a blouse. She must not talk to anybody and will not have her bath until her husband is buried. After the burial, the 'Umuada' (daughters of the man's ancestors) will come to shave her hair, bath her in an open compound, only having the privacy of being surrounded by the 'Umuada'. Apparently oblivious of the tragic loss which every widow suffers on the death of their husbands, callous in-laws conspire to apply vicious burial rites to dehumanize the embattled widow. They confront her with questions on how and when the deceased husband died, the circumstance that led to his death, what she did to save him from dying and her extent of contact with the late husband's family before his death? Where the explanations are not satisfactory, the widow must drink the water used in bathing the corpse of her husband to prove her innocence.

Subsequently, the widows were required to provide expensive items like a white goat and two jars of palm wine for purification purpose to the female members of their husband's lineage who made and implemented decision on every matter concerning widows. Nzewi continues, the widows were forbidden to touch any object including them without defilement. Hence they were given piece of sticks to scratch their bodies, while their food is also cooked in old pots rather than those normally used for cooking for other members of the family. Also, they were to sleep on old mats placed on wooden planks which would be burnt at the end of the mourning period. If a woman dies during the one year mourning period, she is perceived as being responsible for her husband's death and therefore commits an abomination (Nzewi, 1981).

These and many are the unspeakable plights of women under the guise of widowhood rites which though violate the rights of women begging for the intervention of the proper human rights education in Nigeria.

GENERAL PATTERNS OF WIDOWHOOD PRACTICES IN NIGERIA

Generally, most of these harmful widowhood practices examined in this paper include:

- a) Shaving of Hairs
- b) Wearing of Black/White clothes
- c) Sleeping on the floor or mat

- d) Sleeping with corpse in a lock-up room
- e) Refrain from taking bath for a period of time
- f) Being made to swear with Husband's corpse
- g) Seclusion
- h) Seizing of the deceased properties and sometimes with the children from the widow
- i) Forced Marriage of the widow to members of the family of the deceased husband

Shaving of Hairs

This includes even the pubic hairs, with broken bottle for shaving the hair on her head and razor for the pubic hair. In some places, there will be certain designs on her head after literally scrapping off the hairs. The significance of this is that, since the husband is dead, there is nobody to beautify her hair for, at least for a period of time (Ilozue: 2007).

Wearing of Black/White Clothes

This is meant to indicate that the widow is mourning and to make the widow un-attractive as well as to let everybody knows that her husband is dead.

Sleeping and Sitting on the Floor or mat

The symbolic effect of this by a woman at the death of her husband is dethronement .Because a woman by marriage becomes absorbed into the husband's family and is recognised by her role as a wife, therefore, the loss of her position and entitlements in the family, hence, the sitting on the floor or mat. Also, this act is a sign of mourning and grief. (Nzewi,1981).

Refrain from Bathing for a Number of Days

Neglecting a personal appearance and hygiene is really a terrible practice as we know how bad people feel when they fail to attend to their personal hygiene; particularly for a woman. The widow will be forced to stay for a number of days without bathing. This practice is simply unspeakable, unimaginable and honestly cruel, for a woman that just lost a husband, who needs pity and not punishment. Yet, widows go through this particular rite for the love of their late husband's though to their detriment.

Being made to drink/Swear with Husband's Corpse or sleep with the corpse lock-up Room

This is the worst of the practices and violations against women; though it is meant to prove if the women killed the husband or not either with witchcraft, poisoning and the likes; the act is simply

disgusting. Once a man dies, the in-laws immediately accuse the wife and ask her to confess to the killing, and to prove her innocence, she must be made to drink the water used in bathing the corpse of the late husband or sleep alone with the corpse in a lock-up room, or the widow crosses the husband's coffin three times, if she dies before the mourning period is over, she will be thrown into the evil forest because her death confirms her a murderer (Nzewi, 1981). If she refuses, obviously, she killed the husband and she would still be punished for refusing. Therefore, she must be punished whichever way to pacify the family for the loss of her husband

Seclusion

Seclusion and general isolation of the widows for a certain period from the community is a widespread practice in Africa. But its intensity and duration varies. In the islamised communities of West Africa including the islamised sections of the Yoruba States in Nigeria, this period was known as '**Iddat**'. The purpose behind '**Iddat**' on widowhood is to determine the paternity, should the woman turn out to be pregnant and also intended to give the widow time to recover from her bereavement. For non-Islamic societies of Africa, the period is much longer depending on the particular society (Sharka, 1996).

In most parts of the Igbo society, the early parts of this period are usually rigorous. During the first 28 days, the widow is not allowed to go anywhere; certain rituals must be performed at the expiration of the 28 days before the widow can perform normal activities. At this point, she must refrain from bathing, she must sit on the ground, her food must be prepared separately and she is fed by another widow from a broken plate which will be thrown away after the seclusion period. She will hold a kitchen knife or broom stick because she is not allowed to touch any part of her body with hands, but must use this knife or broom stick. At this time, she is regarded as unclean, the knife or broom stick is also to protect her from the spirits, which may attack her during this period (Umejesie, 2002).

Denial of the Widow Access to her personal effects and late husband's Movable/immovable Properties

To aggravate the misery of widows, every movable items are often transported homewards by the in-laws, leaving the poor widow empty handed. In fact, there is no end to the humiliating punishment encountered by widow under the cover of native laws, customs and practices. It ranges from stripping the widow or denying her access to her children, especially if

they are still relatively young; to denying her access to their property including their residents where both couples lived with their children. Thus, rendering the widow with children homeless at the demise of their husband and father.

Nzewi (1981) confirms the above heinous practices that among the Igbo people of Nigeria, the relatives demand for document relating to the deceased properties including lands, investment and bank account and the widows were put under traditional oaths as proof that the knowledge of relevant land and personal property of the deceased were not concealed.

The primordial notion is that, every asset in the family belongs to the husband, though this assumption is wrong in modern society in which both couples contribute to the family upkeep, but the in-laws will not hear of that, this act plunged widows deeply into poverty coupled with the grief of losing a husband. These double actions results into shock, emotional crack and temporary loss of sense or even relapse into a coma for days. Umejesie (2002). This may even lead to early death of the affected widow

While some of the bad practices are fading away with time, depending on the concerned ethnic groups and the community; Sadly enough, the seizing of personal effects of the widow with denial of access to the late husband properties are new waives cutting across the country, Hence, the practice is still very prevalent in the modern time and cut across the various ethnic groups in Nigeria. Especially, where the deceased husband is affluent and lived in urban areas. It is so bad that, writing of Will by the deceased husband before his demise often in most case could not stop the family of the deceased husband from dispossessing the widow of those properties even before the burial.

There seem to be no remedies in sight to bail out the widows in Nigeria from some of these obnoxious practices save **in human rights Education** for self-evaluation and self-consciousness of the women themselves who must be self-assertive availing themselves to the available provisions of human rights to safeguard the protection of their rights in all ramifications. Thus, HRE is of very essence and germane to bailing out women of different caliber in Nigeria from all forms of widowhood practices that seem to take women captive from enjoying their rights as accord all human race for being human, immaterial the gender affinity.

LEGAL FRAMEWORK FOR HUMAN RIGHTS AND WIDOWHOOD PRACTICES IN NIGERIA

Apparently, there is yet no separate national legal framework for the protection of widows in Nigeria except the one enacted by the Anambra State House of Assembly in 2005. Anambra is one of the States in the Eastern part of Nigeria where widowhood practice is most prevalent. Therefore, we fall back to the international human rights instruments such as CEDAW and other related regional and the Nigeria Constitutional provisions.

The United Nations has described human rights in the following terms- human rights could be generally defined as those rights, which are inherent in our nature and without which, we cannot function as human beings. This is because human rights and fundamental freedoms enable a person to fully develop and use all human qualities, intelligence, talents and conscience to satisfy both spiritual and physical needs. They are basic for mankind's increasing demand for a life in which the inherent dignity and worth of each human being will receive respect and protection. Human rights are universal and apply to all persons without discrimination; respect for individual rights needs to be upheld at all times irrespective of circumstances or socio-political systems.

The fundamental rights as enshrined in Chapter IV of the Constitution include the right to; life, dignity of human person, personal liberty, fair hearing, private and family life, freedom of thought, conscience and religion, freedom of expression and the press, peaceful assembly and association, freedom of expression, freedom from discrimination, acquire and own immovable property anywhere in Nigeria, and such property cannot be compulsorily taken over except under certain conditions. Section 34 of the Nigerian Constitution provides that every individual is entitled to respect for the dignity of his person. It states further in paragraph (a) of subsection (1) that no person shall be subjected to torture or to inhuman or degrading treatment. Section 42 also provides as follows:

A citizen of Nigeria of a particular community, ethnic group, place of origin, sex, religion or political opinion shall not by reason only that he is such a person be subjected either expressly by, or in the practical application of, any law in force in Nigeria or any executive or administration action of government to disability or restriction to which citizens of Nigeria of other communities, ethnic groups, places of origin, sex.

The fundamental rights of the widow are grossly infringed upon, her right to life, dignity of human person, equality and freedom from discrimination as enshrined in the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria 1999 (as amended). Samuel (2011) posits that widowhood rituals are inherently gender based because a widower has no strict customary laid-down laws governing mourning rites. (Afolaya 2011). The widowhood practices in their diverse ways are discriminatory, perpetrate inequality and dehumanize womanhood. It is also obnoxious, and entails violence against women, that needs immediate attention and affirmative actions.

Citizens are given rights to enforce the above stated rights (sections 33-46). It is only high court that has jurisdiction to entertain matters relating to violation of fundamental human right, yet women do not enjoy this right on equal footing with men, this is because many of the widows are not educated and knowledgeable about their rights.

In addition, there are other laws enacted by States Houses of Assembly that guarantee human rights and prohibits the obnoxious, anachronistic, archaic and harmful widowhood practices/rites. They include; The Prohibition of Infringement of a Widow or Widower's fundamental rights of Enugu State 2001 and Malpractices Against Widows and Widowers (Prohibition) Law of Anambra State 2005. Section 3 of the Anambra State law 2005 mentioned herein above provides that the Fundamental human rights as enshrined in the constitution are inalienable and accrue to every widow or widower. S. 4 (1) says, 'No persons shall compel a widow or widower:

- a) To vacate his or her matrimonial home on the ground that he or she has no male child or no child at all
- b) To drink the water used in washing the corpse of the late spouse or to perform any type of ritual in order to establish innocence of causing the death of the late spouse;
- c) To sleep either alone or on the same bed or to be locked in the room with the corpse of the late spouse;
- d) To remain in compulsory confinement after the death of the spouse for any given period;
- e) To compulsorily wear mourning cloths of any make or otherwise adopt any life style indicative of being in mourning for any given period from the date of the death of the late spouse;
- f) To compulsorily sit on the bare floor or be naked during any period of the spouse's burial rites;

- g) To be remarried to a relative of the late spouse;
- h) To shave the hairs on the head or any other part of the body;
- i) To desist from receiving condolence visits from sympathizers during the period of mourning;
- j) To weep and wail loudly at intervals at anytime after the death of the late spouse;
- k) To put ashes on the head;
- l) Not to see the corpse of the late spouse;
- m) To perform any act which contravenes the fundamental human rights provisions as enshrined in the constitution;
- n) To visit any shrine and or perform any other rituals.
- o) To forsake his or her personal hygiene.

Similarly, S. 4(3) states that a widow or widower should not be forcefully dispossessed of any property acquired or used by the couple during the life time of the deceased spouse. But this is subject to the provisions of the Marriage Act, Succession and Administration of Estate Act or any customary law not repugnant to natural justice, equity and good conscience. Consequent upon the above provision, section 5 of this law also provides thus;

(1) Any person who discriminates, contravenes or conspires with, aids, counsel, procures or assists another person to contravene the provisions of section 4 of this law commits an offence and shall be liable on summary conviction to a fine not exceeding N20,000.00 (twenty thousand Naira) or to a jail term not exceeding six months imprisonment or to both such fine and imprisonment.

(2) Any institution, group or organization which is found to have contravened, or which aids, counsels, procures or assists any person to contravene any of the provisions of section 4 of this law commits an offence and shall on summary conviction be liable to a fine not exceeding N50,000.00 (fifty thousand naira) or be proscribed until the fine is paid.

Section 6 provides for enforcement, thus, vested the Magistrate Court with the jurisdiction to summarily try any offence under this law. And appeals shall lie as of right against any decision of the Magistrate Court to the High Court, up to the Supreme Court.

An appraisal of the various Laws against widowhood practices bring to fore the fact that the legal framework in place although is not national but can be said to be appropriate in addressing the issue where widowhood rites are mostly practiced. These laws intend to reduce and/or eradicate completely the degrading and inhuman treatment, and maltreatment of widows in many parts of Nigeria especially the South East. But the problem is that of, recognition, awareness by the general populace, and enforcement. Especially the women in the rural setting where the widowhood practices are prevalence.

Women's Rights and International Protection

The issue of protection of women's rights has been of great concern to the international world. Hence several international instruments have adequately guaranteed their protection. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) which was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 1948 states in its Art. 1 that "all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in spirit of brotherhood." This provision enjoins all to respect ones rights, treating everybody equally and fairly. Article 5 provides that "no one shall be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment. Its Art. 27 maintains that every person has the right to freely participate in a community's cultural life. No coercion is permitted.

There are other international instruments that protect women's human rights and they include. International Convention on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) 1966; International Convention on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) 1966; Convention against Torture and other cruel, inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CAT) 1984. At the regional level, there is the African Charter on Human and People's Rights 1981 to address human rights in Africa in general the rights of women inclusive. For example under the African charter, Art. 5 recognize individual's rights to dignity. It provides that every individual shall have the right to the respect of the dignity inherent in a human to the recognition of his legal status with no distinction or discrimination

Similarly, the African women's protocol which is germane to our subject of discourse, defines discrimination to include; (any) distinction, exclusion or restriction or differential treatment based on sex and whose objectives or effects compromise or destroy the recognition, enjoyment or the exercise by women regardless of their mental status, of human rights and

fundamental freedoms in all spheres of life (Art.2). Art. 3 provides that “every woman shall have the right to a respect as a person and to the free development of her personality, while Articles 20(1) (a) specifically enjoins African governments to take appropriate measures in order to ensure that women are not subjected to inhuman, humiliating, and degrading treatment.

Under the ICCPR, Art. 7 provide that no one shall be subjected to torture or cruel and inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment. Art. 2 of the (ICCPR) also provide that all the rights guaranteed in the covenant must be enjoyed by all without distinction or discrimination whatsoever. This mean any distinction, exclusion or restriction made on the basis of sex which has the effect or purpose of impairing or nullifying the recognition enjoyment or exercise by women, irrespective of their marital status, on a basis of equality of men and women of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political economic, social, cultural, civil or any other field tantamount to a nullity.

Furthermore, the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women CEDAW is an international human rights document that establishes international standards for the protection and promotion of women globally. This convention ratified by Nigeria in 1986 brings to fore the commitment of the Nigerian government to eradicate all forms of discrimination against women in civil, social, cultural fundamental and political rights. (Nwogu 2008). CEDAW in its preamble recognizes that discrimination against women abound and violates the principles of equality of rights and respect for human dignity. its Article 1 thus defines discrimination against women to mean any distinction, exclusion or restriction made on the basis of sex which has the effect or purpose of impairing or nullifying the recognition, enjoyment or exercise by women, irrespective of their marital status, on the basis of equality of men and women, of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural or any other field.

Art. 2 further urge states parties to take necessary steps and measures with a view to eliminating discriminatory practices against women. Furthermore,, Art.16 enjoins states parties to take all necessary measures to eliminate discrimination against women in all matters relating to marriage and family relations. Interestingly, Art. 16 which provides for elimination against all discrimination on matter relating to marriage and family relation aptly address the issues of widowhood practices since family and family relation provide the basis or blanket under which all the heinous widowhood rites are perpetrated.

Article 2(2) provides,

State parties shall commit themselves to modify the social and cultural patterns of conduct of women and men through public information, education and communication strategies with a view to achieving the elimination of harmful cultural and all other practices which are based on the idea of the inferiority of the superiority of either of the sexes, or on stereotyped roles for women and men.

Afolayan (Afolayan 2011) says CEDAW recognizes the importance of legislation as an element to ensure the realization of individual woman's human rights and freedom on the ground of equality with men in its Articles 3 and 18. This convention insists on the education, economic empowerment of women and participation of women in policy making on equal footing with the men (Articles 10, 14 and 7 respectively). This Convention also recognizes the influence of culture and other practices that apportion stereotyped roles to girls and women in contradistinction to that of boys and men. It recognizes it as discriminatory and should be eliminated from the polity as it maintains in its Article 5(a) thus:

State parties shall take, appropriate measures to modify the social and cultural patterns of conduct of men and women, with a view to achieving the elimination of prejudices and customary and all other practices which are based on the idea of the inferiority or the superiority of either of the sexes or on stereotyped roles for men and women.

Suffice it to state that CEDAW addresses specifically the plight of women. The question is how much have been done on the part of the Government for the implementation or enforcement where there is violation. Closely related to this is how much is the awareness on the part of the rights holders such as the widows or the potential widows who are likely to be affected by these obnoxious widowhood rites? These we opine the HRE might be able to address in a society such as Nigeria as a nation

The fact that Nigeria ratified these international and regional instruments she is expected to recognize, fulfill implement and enforce them. However, having identified the copious legislations, conventions, protocols and treaties entered into or adopted by Nigeria, a critical analysis suggest that there are evidences that there are sufficient provisions especially at the international level to address the plights of women globally the Nigerian women inclusive.

However, Nigeria is yet to properly key in to alleviate the challenges facing women in Nigeria from actualizing the protection and promotion of their rights.

It is evidence in the current discourse as regards widowhood rites and women and their rights in Nigeria. The inhuman treatment like seclusion, drinking of concoctions from corpse's bathing water, sleeping with corpse, denial of widow's access to her personal effects and outright forceful ejection from matrimonial home and forceful marriage to the family member at the demise of the husband. All constitute violations of the widows' rights to their dignity of human person, personal liberty, right to family and peaceful coexistence. Therefore their rights are infringed upon with impunity in the rural settings especially on the illiterate women. Traditional observances have made it difficult, if not impossible for the National Laws, Regional and International norms to be observed and implemented. Hence these call for a panacea using HRE; otherwise the growing society and the polity will be harmed and development stultified.

POTENTIAL ROLE OF HUMAN RIGHT EDUCATION

Despite all efforts to create foray and array of human rights legal instruments, covenants, treaties and conventions to address human rights in general and the rights of women in particular; literacy is still very low in Nigeria and many African countries where the human rights efforts are most needed. People who do not know their rights are usually victims of right abuse such people lack the capacity to advocate for their rights. Norms and treaties are only words on papers if they are not practicable at national level where rights norms and treaties are met with the distinct local culture and practices and the realities of national, cultural, legal systems and local practices. Since the signing of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights by the United Nations years ago, ordinary people in most, developing countries are still suffering from denial and abuse of the rights. Ignorance of many people's rights results in this denial and abuse. All hopes is not lost as regard the way forward for the actualization of the rights of women globally- including the rights of the Nigerian women under consideration; save in HRE.

The teaching of human rights education (HRE) is informed by the United Nations Declaration on Human Rights Education and Training (2011).The United Nations Declaration on Human

Rights Education and Training states that, "...human rights education comprises all educational, training, information, awareness raising and learning activities aimed at promoting universal respect for and observance of all human rights and fundamental freedoms. Human rights education contributes to the prevention of human rights violations and abuses by providing persons with knowledge, skills and understanding, and by developing their attitudes and behaviours to empower them to contribute to the building and promotion of a universal culture of human rights (United Nations Declaration on Human Rights Education and Training 2011: paragraph 1). The United Nations, therefore, has deliberate plans for all signatories to the UDHR to put in place educational measures to sensitise the populace on human rights. Awareness of rights allows common people to defend their rights and of importance is the inculcation of a culture of human rights as part of social, political and economic life. Similarly, according to Flowers et al. (2000: 7) human rights education is all learning that develops the knowledge, skills and values of human rights.

The United Nations Declaration on Human Rights Education and Training also asserts that human rights education encompasses education about human rights, which includes providing knowledge and understanding of human rights norms and principles, the values that underpin them and the mechanisms for their protection, through human rights, which includes learning and teaching in a way that respects the rights of both educators and learners, and for human rights, which includes empowering persons to enjoy and exercise their rights and to respect and uphold the rights of others" (United Nations Declaration on Human Rights Education 2011, Article 2 paragraph 2). This shows a multipronged approach to the teaching of human rights, with the most important objective being to empower learners on human rights. The teaching of human rights in schools is very important in sensitising the young on human rights. In buttressing the importance of the schools in the promotion of human rights, the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) (2012: 13) states that: School systems play a central role in preparing young people to understand, cherish and claim human rights. In conjunction with this responsibility, teachers and all associated educational personnel need to be educated in human rights and the ways in which human rights can be carried out in schools. Of importance is ensuring that the teachers themselves are effectively prepared to facilitate human rights education (Panda 2001). Once teachers understand and appreciate the issue of human rights, they will be in a position to effectively facilitate learning that promotes human

rights. The school should not just teach knowledge on human rights but it should be a place ‘where the dignity of every child is upheld ...’ (ODIHR 2012: 9). Teachers should therefore be able to incorporate human rights in both formal and hidden curricula.

Importance of HRE to the Plights of Women and Widowhood Practices in Nigeria

The aims of HRE curriculum as perceived by the United Nation Declaration on Human Rights Education (UN Decade for Human Rights Education 1995-2004) could enhance knowledge and understanding of human rights, foster attitudes of tolerance, respect, solidarity and responsibility, develop awareness of how human rights can be translated into social reality as developing skills for protecting human rights in Nigeria. (Panda 2001). According to Eckmann et al. (2009: 1785) Human rights education does not simply aim to teach students – whether children, adolescents, or adults about human rights norms and laws. It also tries to promote appreciation for human rights as a fundamental ethical and legal basis of society and teach the value of human rights enforcement. Human rights education also fosters the attitude and behaviour to uphold human rights for all members of society. Thus, effective human rights education not only provides knowledge about human rights and the mechanism that protects them, but also develop the skills needed to promote, defend and apply human rights in daily life

Eckeman et al. (2009: 190) assert that HRE sheds light on the important protections achieved by human rights, and documents the tragic outcome when the ideal was largely absent or abandoned. Thus, human rights education is important in as far as it contributes to the prevention of human rights violations and abuses by providing persons with knowledge, skills and understanding, and by developing their attitudes and behaviours to empower them to contribute to the building and promotion of a universal culture of human rights (United Nations Declaration on Human Rights Education 2011, Article 2 paragraph 1).

In this sense, HRE contributes to the long term prevention of human rights abuses and violent conflicts, the promotion of equality and sustainable development and enhancement of participating in decision making process within a democratic system (Commission on Human Rights resolution 2004/71 (21 April 2004), preamble paragraph4). HRE promotes an understanding of the complex global forces that create abuses, as well as the ways in which abuses can be abolished and avoided. Eckmann et al. (2009: 166) highlight that there is little evidence that studying the history of the worst human rights violations teaches students how to

intervene against or prevent human rights violations in the present day. Human rights education engages the heart as well as the mind. It challenges students to ask what human rights mean to them personally and encourages them to translate caring into informed, non-violent action. In this respect, one can say human rights education facilitates peace and development. Today's societies are socially and culturally diverse. They are confronted with crises and conflicts linked to increasing globalization. As a result of the heterogeneity of contemporary societies, traditional religious, philosophical, and national narratives can no longer guarantee a normative consensus. Within this context, human rights education also aims to create a baseline consensus that enables students and citizens to engage with controversial social and political issues. It provides multicultural and historical perspectives on the universal struggle for justice and dignity. Human rights education aims at developing an understanding of our common responsibility to make human rights a reality in every society. Human rights education helps to develop the communication skills and informed critical thinking essential to a democracy.

According to Bokova and Pillay (2012), human rights education activities should be practical, relating human rights to learners' real-life experience and enabling them to build on human rights principles found in their own cultural context. Through such activities, learners are empowered to identify and address their human rights needs and to seek solutions consistent with human rights standards. Moreover, human rights education develops their capacity to have the responsibility for respecting, protecting and fulfilling the rights of others (Plantilla 2002). What is learned and the way in which it is learned should reflect human rights values, encourage participation and foster a learning environment that is conducive to personal growth. Even though the implementation of human rights education continues to lag behind the goals envisioned by international human rights programs and initiatives, human rights education has assumed an unprecedented importance on both the national and international level (Eckmann et al. 2009). It examines human rights issues without bias and from diverse perspectives through a variety of educational practices promotes democratic principles. Moreover, human rights education itself is now recognized as a fundamental human right (Bokova and Pillay 2012).

With these array of qualities of HRE, we can safely assert that if everything to remedy or safeguard the rights of widow in Nigeria seem to have fail, we have an anchor in HRE that is steady and sure to redress the plights of widows and indeed the absolute protection and the promotion of the rights of Nigerian women in general

RECOMMENDATION

Base on some of the various critical examination of the various provisions of human rights instruments and law and the analysis of the plights of women in Nigeria, observations made about the challenges associated with the implementation of the rights of women and the general protection and promotion of the Nigeria; some recommendations are therefore made:

- ❖ Human rights education at all levels especially at the grass root is of paramount and a must-especially among the rural women to better their understanding of their rights and be ready to uphold those rights at all cost
- ❖ We need some NGOs such the Human Rights Education Associates with similar contents and forms for rigorous campaign and advocacy and providing for the right initiative education and the training of the would-be staff of the various organizations handling women's rights with particular focus on widowhood rites in Nigeria.
- ❖ There should be strong institutional framework devoid of any political weights that would truly address women problems- especially the socio-cultural and economic emancipation and the total liberation of women in Nigeria, especially in the area of widowhood practices for total eradications
- ❖ There is need for regular evaluation by having dedicated committee on ground for effective implementation.
- ❖ Government should continue to also endeavour to organize seminars, workshops and annual conference to accelerate the translating of those provisions on the Rights of women into concrete terms and application
- ❖ Making HRE part of curriculum development at all level from elementary to tertiary institution to constantly start at the grassroots level

CONCLUSION

The Conference Theme for the 6th International Conference on Human Rights Education, being on how to translate the inspired Roosevelt's speech on the Four Freedoms into today's world, it is no exaggeration that the plights of widows in the this part of the globe-Nigeria is real and keep assuming new dimensions every day, in spite of the provisions of human rights instruments at the international, regional and national level to protect and promote the rights of

women in all ramifications. Therefore, it would be an understatement for Nigeria to key into this inspired speech by Roosevelt on four Freedoms through HRE in order to actualize the implementation and the enforcements of the rights of women with particular focus to the plights of widows in Nigeria

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