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FEMINAL RIGHTS, EMPOWERMENT AND PROTECTION

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ABSTRACT

The rights of the girl child, her empowerment and protection have always been a major deliberation in the world – especially in Africa. The African cultures and traditions have greatly affected feminism; the woman's rights and her protection. Women and girl children residing in some northern parts of Africa are more affected because they have little or no protection at all. They also don't have access to education – whether quality or otherwise. There is the socioeconomic need to continually uphold the rights of the girl child and the average woman in Africa. My paper, above all, tries to emphasize the important values, roles and inputs the girl child can add to one's country, continent and the world at large.

FEMINAL RIGHTS

These are the basic rights ascribed to the woman and girl child all over the world. They are formed consensually from women's rights movements in different parts of the world. In some countries, these laws are carried out as they are enshrined in their laws, local customs and day-to-day behaviours. But in some other countries, women and girl children are either ignored or suppressed usually because of inherent, historical and traditional practices. In these kinds of settings, there is a bias against the exercise of rights by women and girls – in favour of men and boys.

Issues commonly associated with feminine rights include the right to vote, right to hold public office, right to enter into legal contract, right to fair wages, right to own a property, right to work, right to bodily integrity and autonomy to be free from sexual violence, right to education and reproductive rights.

FEMINALEMPowerMENT

I would like to state the fact that women empowerment is a basic right which is paramount for the promotion of human development and growth especially in developing African countries. Women empowerment inspires women to take charge of their circumstances, drive impactful actions and be leaders to support themselves, their families and communities. It does not just increase women's access to income and assets – it also instills in them discipline and control over themselves and their needs in all aspects of life. That dictum comes to mind, if you empower a woman, you have empowered a nation.

FEMINAL PROTECTION

This is about preserving and cherishing what is most delicate and easily destroyed. Upholding that which is mostly needed and deeply felt. A woman should be protected – the girl child should be supported. Every conscious individual would speak up and stand for feminine values.

FACTORS THAT AFFECT AFRICAN WOMEN

Today in Africa, different factors impede the rights and development of the girl-child whilst affecting the older women. Let us consider some of these factors:

1. Lack of Education and Skills Development Trainings: The role of education and skills building in empowering women cannot be overstressed. Despite growing evidence of the positive outcomes of women's economic empowerment, many young girls and early-aged women across the continent continue to experience unequal access to education and skills development. They also face barriers to securing decent employment and opportunities to thrive as entrepreneurs.

2. No Access to Quality, Decent Paid Work: Training force offers a number of skills programmes to help skill unemployed or under-skilled individuals so that they can leverage existing opportunities and sustain long-term employments. This will undoubtedly improve their quality of life and help them become active members of the family and economy. However, the issue of sexual harassment – that is, women seen as sex tools – has made many women settle for less paid jobs so as to keep their self-respect and dignity.

3. No Access to Property Assets and Financial Services: A viral decades-old statistics based on sketchy research says “women are half of the world's population, working two-thirds of the world's working hours, receiving 10% of the world's income, owning less than 1% of the world's property”. Traditions and cultures have discriminatorily stopped women from owning properties and assets – whilst also making women's access to finance and financial services constantly behind that of their male counterparts. Women's financial inclusion thus requires bold and sustained action to advance women's economic opportunity and rights to ensure that they can meaningfully participate in their economies without undue constraints and barriers that limit their progress.

4. Collective Action and Leadership: Despite the outcome and success of women in economic and social development in Africa, most African traditions and cultures still frown at women empowerment. Rather, these traditions insist that women should stay in their place in the kitchen and bedroom – as President Muhammadu Buhari of Nigeria implied in an international function.

5. Social Protection: The lack of social protection of African women has led to the high rate of sexual harassment and rape in Africa. Whilst the government tries to encourage women empowerment, education and finances, some highly-placed individuals and officials still use this as a medium to sexually harass women – convincing them to concur with the notorious saying: “Use what you have to get what you want”.

6. Gender Norms and Discriminatory Social Norms: Gender inequality has become too brutal to humanity. It births certain terrible norms like Female Genital Mutilations (FGM), child marriage, girl-child and women illiteracies. These barbarisms have taken away the voices of women in the society, led to premature deaths, fostered incurable diseases from female genital mutilations, and brought about early child births.

OBSERVATIONS BY RESEARCH

According to a research on African women, cases as women empowerment, rights and protection are more severe in the northern regions of most African countries. Under the guise of religion, different treatments have been meted towards women. Some cultures and traditions have also allowed men to marry as many wives as they can afford to have. Some see their wives as sex tools, child bearing machines, slaves – constrained strictly to house chores. There is also that erroneous belief that the more wives you have capable you are as a man. But how does the number of wives relate to a man's wealth and prowess?

Many women are seemingly abused, insulted when they fail to give birth to a male child – and this in turn brings shame to her family. Other young girls are betrothed or engaged at early age or even child birth.

ARGUMENT

It is argued that trying to allow women empowerment, rights and protection paves room for the abandonment of the “ways of their fathers” – that have been preserved from generations past until now. It is also argued that empowering women with rights and certain protection make women lose respect for their husbands and families – which also allows the increase in divorce and women not marrying at all because of career drive.

I am not saying that the traditions should be thrown away – but they can be amended in favour of everybody with equity. If well traced, we will realise that many traditions have been amended in some ways – common to all is the change in dress code following colonization. The best option will be to amend the traditions in favour of all.

SUGGESTION AND WAY FORWARD

Solutions to most problems are implemented gradually. There is no denying the fact that many African countries and governments are already working towards this... From my stand, the solution to this is actually the reorientation of the mind-sets. A reorientation or orientation has to be done for traditional rulers in rural areas across the African continent. This can be implemented by government agencies – and best by Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) and Civil Societies because they have no barrier to where they can reach. Projects like LEAD INDIA which was initiated by an NGO in India is doing well to sensitise the entire Indian people. Something similar can also be replicated in African countries.

These traditional rulers – when reoriented – can use their authority to, in turn, sensitise their people and impose on their men, elders, fathers, kinsmen, and the entire community an amended tradition which will gradually pave way for change we want in Africa. This is how we can also realise The Africa We Want.

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