

Promoting cultural shifts: A humanistic focus on practices that undermine women dignity, rights and societal advancement

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Abstract

This paper explores the need for cultural shifts in Igbo society where cultural practices perpetuate gender-based discrimination, violating women's dignity and rights which in turn hinder societal advancement. These practices, often rooted in patriarchal traditions and societal norms, perpetuate gender-based violence, limit access to education and economic opportunities and reinforce harmful gender stereotypes. Using Igbo examples, this paper explores the impact of these cultural practices on women's lives, challenging the notion that cultural tradition justifies human rights violations. It argues for nuanced approach that respects cultural diversity while promoting gender equality, women's empowerment, and human rights in Igbo society as it challenges the inaction in implementation of already reformed gender-based policies. The goal is to spark further critical conversations, inspire collective action, and catalyze Igbo cultural revolution that values gender equality, justice and human right.

Keywords: *cultural shifts, harmful practices, Igbo cultural revolution, societal advancement, justice and human rights*

Introduction

A people's culture is their method of doing things. It has to do with "the common practices and beliefs of a specific group of people at a specific time" (Weiner and Simpson 342). According to this definition, something that is culturally significant to a group of people at one point in time may become obsolete later on for the same set of individuals. Culture can also be seen as "The practices, discourses, and material expressions which, over time, express the continuities and discontinuities of social meaning of life held in common" (Magee 53). The focal points of this social domain are the restructuring of tradition, culture and custom which will in turn become the new national and global identity. This invariably means that culture, tradition and custom are dynamic. They are never static. However, this resurgence needs to be grounded in a human right, democratic, and equitable society.

The subject at hand is not entirely new. It has long been a prominent topic in discussions about inhumane behaviours. The issue examines how we continue to live in a world of discrimination and occasionally create new harmful cultural practices against women in the name of culture, and how these impact women's sense of dignity and societal development. It is also no secret that Nigerian women endure a variety of dehumanizing and oppressive treatment in our society, which starts with the different ways male and female children are raised in our various homes and the societal expectations of them, to the well-being of married women, the allocation of

socio-political and economic power, the division of family estates, widowhood and more.

Over the years, the woman question has continued to be one of the most problematic issues facing Nigerian people as well as the entire globe. The reason it keeps coming up is that women have been egregiously "misrepresented, devalued, and consequently excluded from the world's affairs" (Udebunu 55), and this has not given them the much-needed critical attention and handling they need and desire. This issue has persisted despite the affirmative action laws prohibiting various forms of discrimination, the damaged dignity that results from these acts, and the efforts to make gender inequality a viral topic that has, in some cases, become a regular topic of discussion on any issue pertaining to humanity. In the same effort to tame the effects of these harmful practices on women, The Protocol to the African Charter on Human and People's Rights on the Women's Rights went further to clarify that "all behaviours, attitudes and /or practices which negatively affect the fundamental rights of women and girls, such as their right to life, dignity, education and physical integrity" (Ibezim 174) should be jettisoned via the legal instruments. Nevertheless, this fully developed consciousness hasn't done much to address the bothersome problems of the inhibiting cultural practices and so the practices persist.

Given the persistent sexual divide, women keep experiencing immense oppression throughout history, and this has been a long-term death knell to their autonomy and

consciousness. The situation resembles a male-led plot to maintain women's permanent subjugation by elaborating on sexual differences and the ensuing inequalities, loss of dignity as well as their rights. Some concerned women acknowledged that the sexes are different but they were unable to comprehend why these divisions persist in society without the other sex being perceived as less valuable. It is as if the earth and people were created only using the male psyche, and everything that does not conform to that ideal is not human.

Consequently, as the men perceive themselves as the superior humans, they therefore possess the ability to dominate and subjugate all other creatures, including women. In line with Oguejiofor's thoughts:

...the historic subjugation of women in almost all cultures was possible first because on a balance, men are physically stronger. Additionally, some natural endowments like ability to bear and raise offspring implied some weakness, if only temporarily, which historically was a hindrance to the exercise of power like men. It is, however notable that the superior strength of male animals does not necessarily lead to the subjugation of their females (29).

Morality serves to perpetuate this subjugation also: Genesis 3:16 states "Your desire shall be for your husband and he shall rule over you". In the koran, Sura 4:3 also states "Men are the managers of the affairs of women for Allah has preferred in bounty one of them over the other" . Interestingly, 1 John 4:12

clearly notes “No man has seen God at any time”. One wonders the point in time the writers of these met with God for these inhuman assertions. Still in Romans 10:12 of the Holy Bible, “For there is no difference between the Jew and the Greek: for the same Lord over all is rich unto all that call upon him”. The contradictory ideologies in one book cannot be over-looked.

Notably, the narrative of superiority and inferiority has spread to the social media space, where our young people are engaged in a kind of conflict over a variety of gender-related problems, such as which sex is entitled to have more spouses in a marriage. The males argue that they may have as many spouses and concubines (side chics) as they want since they are inherently polygamous. While doing so, they ignore the existence of a term like polyandry in their ignoble and illogical argument. The existence of the term, ‘polyandry’ implies that women have, the same freedom to choose to wed as many spouses as they like, even to choose to keep ‘side cocks’ as well for a balance.

With its origin in Hebrew culture, our Bible partially let us down when it says that God created "man" in His image. The woman is obviously made invisible by this biblical assertion. The common explanation that "man" is a generic term is part of the patriarchal ploy to subjugate women. It remains to be seen, though, if the word "woman" were to have the same function or would the Bible and other texts lose their significance if 'man' is substituted with a neutral word? What would men feel if the term "woman" was used instead? Given that all of these have a

detrimental psychological influence on women, the golden rule is advocated in this case.

The Question of Gender and Equality of Human Rights

We will start this phase of the conversation by looking at the concept of human equality. The principle of human equality holds that each individual is entitled to the same opportunities, rights, and value regardless of their socio-economic condition, age, ability, gender, race, or ethnicity. It implies that everyone ought to be accorded dignity and respect as well as equal possibilities for growth and success. Treating everyone equally is not the only aspect of equality; it also involves acknowledging and addressing the various needs and experiences of individuals and groups, as well as striving to remove bias, discrimination, and structural obstacles that keep people from realizing their full potential. Among the crucial facets of human equality as stipulated by the United Nations include:

- Equal access to opportunities in healthcare, education, and the economy;
- Equal legal protection, irrespective of a person's gender, colour, or other attributes; (Women and children are often lumped together in health care provision)
- Equal involvement and representation in politics; (Are women equally involved?)

- Equal acceptance and acknowledgement in society and culture; (Are women equally accepted and acknowledged in our society and culture?)

Equal chances for development and personal improvement. (Is this the same with women as it is with men?)
<https://www.un.org/global-issues>(The brackets are mine)

All things considered, human equality is a core principle that is necessary to build a more just, equitable, and fair society for everybody. Importantly, we all are God's children, and the Bible assures us as Christians that God does not treat His children differently (Acts 10:34). Everybody is a "first born child and citizen of heaven" in the heavenly Jerusalem, where we are all citizens (Hebrew, 12:22). Nigeria, like other developing countries, is "still grappling with enforcing equality and creating an egalitarian society," as Mustapha, in Akachi Adimora-Ezigbo correctly noted (27). Nevertheless, women in our male-dominated society can no longer remain silent in the face of the ongoing marginalization, subordination, and oppression they have endured. They have persisted in demanding reform and balance in all spheres of human experience, including political, legal, familial, economic, and religious.

The political landscape of developing nations has therefore changed over the past few decades due to the concept of inalienable human rights. Women's rights advocates have played a vital role in reviving human rights, striving to tackle gender

disparity in many cultural contexts while avoiding divisive ideas. George "observes that these changes are evident across the African continent, where the languages of human rights have become integral to international declarations, regional treaties, national legislation, and grassroots activism" (Marrie 9).

Surprisingly, little research has been done on how African males have seen these developments and how African masculinities are related to them, despite the fact that women's rights in Africa are becoming a more important problem. The result of a research I came in contact with recently discovered that greater women's rights were welcomed by the majority of males but their acceptance was conditional; provided that this does not interfere with their ultimate power over women, particularly in the home. According to these viewpoints, women's rights should have a restricted scope and should not be synonymous with men's equality. Personally, I view this as playing God by men and as going against God's ordinances as stated clearly in Galatian 4:6 &7, about His children's equality where it insists that "Wherefore thou art no more a servant, but a child, and if a child, then an heir of God through Christ".

A declaration known as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was created by the United Nations General Assembly on December 10, 1948. This proclamation established the basis of freedom, justice, and peace, thereby recognizing the fundamental rights of every member of the human family. None will be subjected to discrimination on the grounds of race, colour, sex, language, religion, political opinion, national or social origin, property, birth, or any other status as a result of

these circumstances.... There is no such thing as a slave or slave master.

Despite this proclamation's excellent objectives, many nations, leaders, and influential individuals ignore its terms. We recognize the widespread violations of women's rights that go unchecked, perpetuated under the pretext of cultural practices in Nigeria, particularly in the Igbo region, where culture has been exploited to justify gender-based oppression. A stark example is the oppressive widowhood customs that subject women to degrading and inhuman treatment. Widows are coerced into undergoing humiliating rituals to prove their innocence in their husbands' passing or to appease the deceased's spirit. As a result, most widows are dispossessed of their husband's assets and forcefully evicted from their homes, which they may have helped build and nurture over the years, along with their minor children. Furthermore, widows are compelled to shave their hair as a symbol of respect to their deceased husbands, a practice that perpetuates gender-based violence and discrimination.

In the same vane, and as recorded by Ibezim, The Protocol on the African Charter on Human and People's Rights on the Rights of Women, based on Article 66, endorses and expands the protection of women's rights. It deals exclusively with women's rights and defines discrimination against women as any distinction, restriction, or differentiation based on gender and whose objectives or effects compromise or destroy the recognition, enjoyment, or exercise by women, regardless of

their marital status, of human rights and fundamental freedoms in all spheres of life.

In some situations, young girls were forced into marriages with men old enough to be either their grandfathers or their fathers. These behaviours essentially rob women of their remaining dignity. There is no rational reason for these degrading practices imposed on women, yet they continue to thrive, particularly in rural regions. The most startling thing is that widowers are never exposed to these demeaning customs in any part of Igbo society.

Some Harmful Cultural Practices in Nigeria, Igbo Example

Caroline Kimew (East African Global Development Correspondence, May 15, 2024) investigated discriminatory family laws across parts of Africa, which in certain cases impede the advancement of women's rights. Although there has been progress in recent decades, according to the human rights organization Equality Now, there are still disparities in marriage, divorce, child custody, inheritance, and property laws in 20 African nations. The paper identified problems with pluralistic legal systems, which can be challenging to interpret and apply since statute law coexists with customary and religious rules.

Most nations have ratified the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women as well as the Protocol to the African Charter on the Rights of Women in Africa, which both provide robust rights and

safeguards for women. Nonetheless, rape in marriage is legal in some nations, as it is in other regions of the world. In other nations, women cannot file for divorce and are not assured of inheriting property upon the passing of a spouse. Women inherit less than men do in countries like Nigeria, Algeria, and Cameroon. According to the research, there have been some achievements throughout the continent, such as raising the legal marriage age to 18. A number of nations have outlawed child marriage, including the Democratic Republic of Congo, Kenya, and Mozambique but Tanzania, Senegal, and Cameroon still permit it. Nigeria and other nations banned child marriage in 2003, but the practice is still prevalent in the country's north, where 50% of girls get married before turning 18.

Women in Igbo culture, face a plethora of harmful traditions that deprive them of their rights and dignity. These traditions are frequently the result of their ideologies. Notably, Gramsci asserts that "ideology is tied to action" (324) and that they are judged according to their social outcomes rather than their truth values. A few instances of harmful practices that rob Igbo women of their rights and dignity and hinder their growth are listed below:

1. Male-child Preference

Man was made by Igbo society to be autonomous, superior, and the ideal entity from birth. Cultural preference favours the boy-child who is expected to carry on the family lineage over the girl-child, who will eventually be "sold" to another family and

expected to work tirelessly throughout her life to propagate the image of the man and the new family. Despite her labours, she is not eligible for an inheritance because she is considered an inheritable "property". The male-child preference is demonstrated by the names we give our male children. Emenyi accurately described this condition of affairs when she claimed that women are merely viewed "as part of men's estate" (44). This eventually leads to biased and unequalled attention and treatment for both sexes. In the home sphere, where all parents prefer male offspring, girls are already at a disadvantage before they are even born. The preference extends to the disparate upbringings of the two sexes' children: the male is raised to be the head of the family and will undoubtedly inherit his father's wealth and status, while the female is merely kept in waiting to be married off for a pitiful sum in exchange for a meagre bride price. Sometimes, parents are eager to marry their daughter without waiting for her to reach adulthood.

She is trained in the roles of covert servitude, docility, biddability, passivity, submissiveness, and meekness in order to become a "good wife," and her mother will be greatly praised for having raised her daughter successfully in these areas (Ezenwa-Ohaeto, 26). She shares her husband with other women in addition to not having received any inheritance from her father. In addition, she has to cook, clean the house, bear and raise her husband's children, and generally pamper him as a wife— tasks that are often rewarded with various forms of physical violence.

2. Widowhood Rites

While some Igbo communities have modified their customs to be more inclusive, it is crucial to emphasize that widows continue to experience horrible practices in some communities. Issues such as inheritance deprivation, being compelled to shave one's hair and wear mourning apparel, social isolation, forced levirate marriage, movement restrictions and stigmatization continue to exist. While referring to decisions taken at Beijing on widowhood practices, Ibezim described such practices as violence that “stems from discriminatory cultural patterns and is perpetuated by the lack of access to legal information and protective laws or inadequate efforts to enforce existing laws...” (173).

3 (a). Linguistic Factors

Language is a major medium of propagating a people's culture. It usually embodies such a people's ideologies which are expressed and ingrained in the linguistic repertoire of the people's world-view and serve as an instrument for sustenance and transfer of the culture over generations. In Igbo culture, their stance on women is ingrained in proverbs, idioms, inuendoes, cliches, ‘wise-sayings’, and maxims and other linguistic expressions. They value proverbs and describe them as “mmanu e ji eri Okwu” (oil with which discourses are eaten). They so

appreciate them to the extent that one who is versed in them and applies them appropriately is held in high esteem. Such a man (It must be a man as women are believed to lack critical minds, and do not possess the ability and capacity to apply them in discourses) is seen and described as wise. Those linguistic expressions, obviously, contain the values of a society. Few examples suffice here:

Such expressions as:

‘Ugwu nwanyi bu di’ (Husband/ Marriage is the dignity of a woman)

‘Nwanyigafeeonye muru, a juba onye na-anu’ (If a woman attains maturity, the question becomes who is the husband)

‘Nwanyi bu mbalaka enwero mgborogwu’ (A woman is a tree branch that is devoid of roots).

‘Nkita nwanyi zuru na-ata akwa’ (A dog trained by a woman consumes egg).

‘Nwoke nwanyi na-afuru oja na-eji ukwu amana be ndi mmuo’ (A man under the influence of a woman charm may act impulsively).

As ridiculous and illogical as these statements are, they are still in use in this century even among the elite, despite the fact that they are completely obsolete, irrelevant and disappointing. They continue to impose them on society's mentality because of the simple reason that a part of the genders benefit from them.

(b) Naming in Igbo Culture

Igbo people also use names to convey their beliefs, life experiences, philosophy, and other ideas. They convey their principles for the children they bear through their names. The names given to the men suggest that males are valued more than females in Igbo society. For example, names like ‘Obiajulu’ (I am consoled), ‘Mbilitem,’ (My emergence) and so forth. One prominent character named Mazi Laza in Chukwuemeka Ike's novel, *The Porter's Wheel*, have five daughters in succession and named them Uzoamaka (the road is excellent/promising), Njideka (the one I have can be managed), Nkechinyere (Whichever God gives), Nkiru (that which is to come is greater), and Ogechukwu (God's time is the best). These names which have a harmful impact on the individuals who bear them and strip them of their dignity, reveal a deeply ingrained gender bias and a mindset that values one gender over the other. Such names perpetuate harmful gender stereotypes and reinforce damaging social norms, causing psychological distress and undermining the self-worth of those who bear them.

In stark contrast, the sixth child, a male, was given five names that explicitly convey his perceived superiority and greater value compared to his older sisters. The male-child was named: Ezenwa (The child king), Obuechina (May homestead/heritage not get lost), Nwokenagu (I crave for a male child), Obiano (I have found solace), and Onyibo (A

companion). This naming practice clearly illustrates the direct link between deeply ideologies and and the way they in which they manifest in concrete actions.

4. Exclusion from family Estate

The Igbo custom systematically excludes women from inheritance based on the assumption that they will eventually marry into another family and therefore should not inherit from their own. Similarly, in their husbands' family, women are viewed as outsiders and are denied a share in the family estate, perpetuating their displacement and disenfranchisement. This practice not only perpetuates gender-based poverty but also violates women's fundamental rights, denying them their rightful places as equal members of their natal and marital families.

Connectedly, a person's physical, emotional, and mental health may suffer grave and long-lasting consequences if their fundamental human rights are violated. Mental and physical health disorders, social isolation, loss of dignity, societal instability, economic poverty, political dis-empowerment, intergenerational trauma, erosion of trust, and perpetuation of inequality and injustice are a few of the consequences.

5. Virginty Testing

Virginty testing is a harmful cultural practice that still persists in some remote areas of the region, despite its declining

prevalence. This invasive and traumatic practice causes fear, anxiety, and feelings of violation among girls, and can lead to long-term sexual dysfunction and other severe consequences. It is equivalent to sexual assault and is as morally reprehensible as female genital mutilation. The double standard is striking as boys are not subjected to similar testing, despite also being sexually active. This practice is not only discriminatory against girls but dehumanizing to anyone who undergo it, regardless of gender.

6. Kola nut Ritual

Igbo culture places a great deal of importance on kola nut. It frequently shows up in almost any kind of gathering where men are present. It is given to every male in attendance, regardless of age or origin, before the nut is broken. On the other hand, regardless of age or background, it is never offered to women. However, the woman's son, servant, or protégé may receive the kola nut. Remarkably, the presentation will be delivered in a way that will permanently embed in the lady's mind the belief that, as a lesser breed, she is undeserving of ever "seeing" the nut. Thus, the entire process is obviously contradictory: women are usually the ones who plant, manage, and harvest the nuts, and some of them are even the ones who trade on them.

In spite of all, she is not allowed to participate in the last ceremony before the fruit of her labour is consumed, and it is hidden beneath the couch of a society that subtly celebrates

motherhood. How unjust! As a result, the kola nut has come to stand for prejudice, insensitivity, insults, and denigration of women. This aspect of Igbo culture instructs our male children to disguise themselves under the guise of culture in order to quietly offend and disrespect their mothers, grandmothers, sisters, aunts, female relatives, and nieces and wives. It raises the issue of how to establish a society of propriety in such an atmosphere where discriminating behaviour is so commonplace. Men can still celebrate and enjoy the kola nut ritual without attaching the debasing aspect of it about women.

7. Intra-gender Oppression

The term "intra-gender oppression" describes prejudice, marginalization, or oppression that takes place inside a gender group. Surprisingly, it is often women themselves who perpetuate harmful traditions, enforcing oppressive widowhood rites, virginity testing, dropping of money on the floor for a widow at the burial of her husband and female genital mutilation among others on their fellow women. By so doing, women have ironically become instruments of oppression against their own gender. This internalized misogyny is a complex challenge to address, as it requires a fundamental shift in mindset and behaviour among those who have been socialized to uphold these harmful traditions. To break this cycle of gender-based violence, it is essential to engage in nuanced and context-specific interventions that address the root causes of this

internalized oppression. Research has proven that it is a common phenomenon that oppressed individuals or groups sometimes turn against each other, perpetuating harm and oppression among themselves. According to Meta AI, these can be attributed to some factors:

Internalized oppression: When individuals internalize the negative messages and beliefs imposed upon them by their oppressors, they may begin to believe they are inferior or deserving of the mistreatment. This can lead to self-directed anger and frustration, which may be misdirected towards fellow oppressed individuals

Horizontal violence: Oppressed groups may lack access to the same power and resources as their oppressors, leading to a sense of powerlessness. As a result, they turn against each other as a misguided means of exerting control or power.

Survival strategy: In institution where resources are scarce, individuals may compete against each other for limited resources leading to infighting and conflict.

Divide and rule: Oppressors often use tactics like divide and conquer to maintain control by pitting marginalized groups against each other, exploiting existing tensions and biases.

Lack of support system: Without access to adequate support, resources, and safe spaces, oppressed individuals may turn against each other due to feelings of depression, hopelessness, and frustration (2024).

7(a) Mothers-in-law/Daughters-in-law/Sisters-in-law Menace

In Igbo society, conflicts and mistrust between mothers-in-law, daughters-in-law, and Sisters-in-law are prevalent. Often, daughters-in-law enter their marital homes with preconceived notions and biases against their mothers-in-law, and vice versa. These negative attitudes and stereotypes lead to animosity, mistreatment, and unjust practices within families, perpetuating a cycle of toxicity and strife. This highlights the need for greater understanding, empathy, and communication to bridge the gap and foster more harmonious relationships among the female gender, the families and Igbo society in general.

7(b). The Case of ‘Umuada’

Most disturbing are cases of ‘Umuada’ (The daughters of a village or town including married and spinsters, young, old, widows, divorced or separated women) with their socio-political responsibilities often misapply their powers mostly against widows. They often insist on those dehumanising cultural practices that demand that a widow should shave her hair at the demise of her husband, drink the water used in bathing the body of her dead husband to prove her not-guilty of the killing the husband, dropping of money on the floor for her on the day of her husband’s burial among others. Sisters-in-law hide under the cover of the ‘Umuada’ to take revenge on the widow over any

sensed issues against the widow. These circumstances compound the dehumanizing patriarchal norms that women already experience.

When combined, the above points have, not only destructive effects on women but also restricting, discriminatory and non-progressive, which in turn not only impede women's ability to fully explore and harness their individual and collective potential, they equally savagely shred their self-worth and dignity. To establish a more inclusive and equitable society for all people, regardless of gender or other social identities, it is imperative to recognize and confront intra-gender oppression, which can be just as harmful as inter-gender oppression.

Shaping the Future

The goal of this paper was to investigate the effects of cultural norms that violate the rights and dignity of women. During the process, we have come to understand that the cultural traditions that are discussed here and elsewhere are tools used to violate the fundamental human rights of women including intra-gender oppression. We asked why such disgusting and oppressive cultural traditions still exist in an era of globalization, urbanization, migration, and feminist movements that have rendered them outdated. It is obvious that women's participation in public life is negatively impacted by these cultural norms. After a certain point, women's representation in the political, business, and professional arenas becomes problematic. The

advancement of a society requires that all segments of the population must participate fully.

It is acknowledged, also, that some women are happy to put off, postpone, or even give up on their professional career movement due to natural endowments and necessities. In reality, a just society should be able to support such essential services as maternity. However, this is not to suggest that women's involvement in public life will ever equal that of men due to the natural physical strength men are endowed with and the socio-cultural roles of each gender. Given the number of women in Igbo society, our backwardness is evident in their minimal participation in upper and decision-making echelons of public life.

We therefore oppose the arguments for these practices while demanding their immediate dismantling through official and informal education as well as the institution of legal action against those who uphold such a culture. We also advocate full women involvement in public life if societal advancement must be attained. We have also shown that women's status is improving steadily in our day and age thanks to the work of a few non-governmental organizations and the UN. However, given that old habits die hard, solving difficulties of this kind may undoubtedly be challenging because our society has accepted and tolerated this unfair treatment of women for such a long time that everything appears 'natural', normal and acceptable. The oppressors use even the oppressed to keep up and extend their oppression. A scenario in which views along sexist prejudices are propagated by our religious, educational,

and governmental institutions... patterned behaviour from our unwritten but ever-present cultural files of 'what females do' and 'what males do'.- We have become "...gendered persons living in a gendered world, thinking gendered thoughts..." (Hess, et all in Emenyi 10), as against being human persons, living in human world, thinking human thoughts.

Lastly, the majority of Igbo people are Christians, and love is the cornerstone of Christianity. Additionally, Igbo people praise the golden rule in their sayings : E mee nwata ka-emere ibe ya, obi adi ya mma (Fair and equal treatment for all), and Egbe bere Ugo bere (Let and lets live). As rightly stated by Oguejiofor: No one has ever achieved peace and progress by trampling on justice. The true requests are for justice, equity, fairness, and men's honest assistance and commitment in regaining the dignity that God has freely given us which you have, through some demeaning cultural practices, taken away from women.

We must note that cultural norms are ever-evolving. Many customs that were considered repugnant in the past—like the twin birth, among others—are acceptable today. The secret to knowledge and progress is to recognize what is better and hold unto it.

Nevertheless, women have always had a lot of power in Igbo society. About Igbo women, anthropologist Sylvia Leith Ross said in 1935 that "politically and economically they are the equals of men". My question remains, why this discrimination we witness today? Why the subjugation and demeaning treatment against women? May I emphasize the fact that in

many ways women are more useful to their families than males; to providing succour their parents especially at their old age and society.

On a final note, though this ideal of equality is a very old teaching and belief but inconsistency in our life and practice leads to the neglect of such decisions and recommendations made in, for example, the Beijing Conference. Among others, the conference recommends that:

actions should be taken by various governments to promote and protect the human rights of women by fully implementing all human rights instrument, especially the Convention on Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women and to ensure equality and non-discrimination under the law and in practice (173).

It should be understood that our development or advancement is determined by how much we recognize the importance of equality and how much we give up on the numerous negative practices against women. To attain notable progress in Igbo society and by extension, Nigeria demands multifaceted approach. Such approach include instituting all forms of education and awareness creation, which will entail educating individuals and communities formally and informally about the negative repercussions of particular cultural behaviours, as well as the necessity of gender equality, human rights, and social justice. Community leaders, elders, and members in general should be engaged to discuss and address

these concerns, thereby establishing an inclusive decision-making process. In addition, women and youth empowerment programmes, and all marginalized groups should be targeted with the aim of improving their economic, social, and political position. Cultural revival should be considered and adopted as an effective tool for promoting positive cultural values such as respect, equality, and justice. If government agencies focus on all these as they install machineries for policy reforms and support legal frameworks designed to promote human rights and gender parity, we would have made some positive result-based efforts geared towards achieving formidable advancement in our society.

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