



THE FIGHT FOR WOMEN RIGHT

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N200

Published by **Iva Valley Books**

2nd Floor, Labour House

Central Area-Abuja.

07037163465



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The Fight for Women's Rights

Introduction

Statistics on the oppression of women are horrific, but it has not always been like this and recent changes indicate that the future can be much better. But we have to struggle together to make it so.

Globally 800 women die daily in child labour, most of them in the Global South. Nigeria's maternal mortality rate is 8 per 1,000 live births, one of the highest rates in the world. One Nigerian woman dies in childbirth every ten minutes. These deaths are clearly linked to poverty; the poorest mothers are 6.5 times more likely to die than those in the wealthiest eighth of the society. This is part of the real terror of poverty – we need to fight against it.

Violence

One in three women and girls aged 15-24 has been a victim of violence. Violence is endemic in some public institutions, including the police and certain educational bodies, where an “entrenched culture of impunity” protects perpetrators of rape and other violence. Some women in Nigeria think it is reasonable for a husband to beat his wife if she burns the food, refuses sex or goes out without his permission. Nearly half of unmarried women in parts of Southern Nigeria have experienced physical violence. But it is only a minority of men who act like this – women and most men need to work together to make sure that all women gain their rights and that this violence is stopped.



Political representation

In the 2011-2015 National Assembly there were only 19 women out of the 360 members of the Lower House and there were just 7 women of the 109 members of the Senate. The number of women in the Federal Cabinet is below the 35% minimum requirement stated in the *National Gender Policy*. Only about 4% of local government councillors are women.

Discrimination at work

Women compose the majority of informal economy workers, but only about a third of workers in the non-agricultural formal sector are women. Women earn consistently less than men in formal jobs. Women occupy fewer than 30% of all posts in the public sector and only 17% of the senior positions.

The public sector should lead by example it should consider policies and incentives to ensure that women fill at least 50% of public sector posts. The public sector should identify measures to ensure that women fill at least a third of the new appointments for senior positions, judges and permanent secretaries, for example. The trade unions need to push for positive discrimination in favour of women to start to correct these injustices.

There has been a disappointing lack of progress with regard to women's reproductive rights. There are still high levels of unmet contraceptive needs, unsafe abortions, early or coerced marriages and sexual violence. Sexual exploitation is also common. The failure to realise the sexual and reproductive rights of African women is seen as one of the continent's weakest areas.

Education

Sub-Saharan Africa – and particularly West Africa – has the largest gender gaps in education in the world. Much has been achieved in primary education - the long-term trend shows a doubling of net attendance by girls between 1990 and 2010 in Nigeria. It is now only around 5% less than for boys. However, the gender gap persists and has even widened in secondary and tertiary education. In addition, regional differences can accentuate the problem. Hausa girls, for example, are 35% less likely to go to school than Yoruba boys.

Gender stereotypes continue to be reinforced by the agents of socialisation such as the family, schools, churches, mosques, and the media. These institutions continue to propagate gender stereotypes, prejudices and discriminatory cultures. Many girls and boys grow up accepting male superiority.

Teachers, religious & traditional leaders, parents, police officers and artistes often work to promote obnoxious customary beliefs and practices that violate the rights of women. Consequently, customary practices such as female genital mutilation, preference for the male-child and widowhood rites are still prevalent in many areas. We need

to campaign against all traditional practices which are against the rights of women.



Women have not always suffered this oppression and discrimination. Research shows that prior to the slave trade, colonialism and missionary incursion into Yoruba land, for example, women enjoyed a great role with equal privileges to men. The great kingdoms of Oyo, Ife, Ondo, Ekiti and Ijebu were all ruled at some points by women – if only as a regent. Similarly, in the 16th century, Queen Amina was a great Hausa ruler (see box below). Prominent women leaders also included Magajiya of Daura around the ninth century; Magira Aisa Kili and Magaram of the Safuwa dynasty in Ancient Borno (west of Lake Chad); Moremi of Ife, Madam Tinunbu of Lagos and Emotan of the fifteenth century Benin City.



Queen Amina of Zazzau (1576 – 1610)

The modern city of Zaria was founded in the first half of the 16th century, by a woman called Queen Bakwa Turuku. She had a daughter called Amina who succeeded her as Queen.

In 1576, Amina became the undisputed ruler of Zazzau, a Hausa city in what is today Northern Nigeria. She led campaigns within months of becoming ruler. Amina subdued the whole area between Zazzau and the Niger and Benue rivers absorbing the Nupe and Kwararafa states.

Queen Amina built a high wall around Zaria in order to protect the city from invasion and extended the boundaries of her territory beyond Bauchi. The people of Kano and Katsina paid tribute to her. She turned Zaria into a very prominent commercial centre. Amina's military campaigns extended the power and influence of Zaria rulers further than at anytime before or since.

For her exploits, she earned the epithet of Amina, Yar Bakwata san rana (Amina, daughter of Nikatau, a woman as capable as a man).

Recently women have begun to play more active roles in public life. Women have been presidents of both Liberia and Malawi. Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala was effectively the vice president of Nigeria in all but name, but implemented anti-working class policies like Margaret Thatcher did in Britain in the 1980s.

Women and men need to campaign together against oppression and discrimination. Together we can reduce the harassment of women, ensure that all women have adequate education, are able to choose when they wish to become pregnant and have fulfilling and well paid jobs. For men, improving the lives of their mothers, sisters, wives and daughters will also improve their lives. The fight for women's liberation is part of the fight for a fair and democratic society, the fight for socialism.

History of Women's Oppression

Women's oppression is the most deeply entrenched oppression. It is seen as biological, psychological, universal and age-old. This view impacts on how we understand and challenge oppression. Marxists approach this subject from a materialist perspective. Frederick Engels (the partner and supporter of Karl Marx in the 19th Century) explained:

According to the materialist conception, the determining factor in history is the production and reproduction of immediate life... On the one side, the production of the means of existence, of food, clothing and shelter and the tools necessary for that production. On the other side, the production of human beings themselves, the propagation of the species.

Human beings interact with their environment, changing the world

around them and in the process changing themselves. The thing that makes us different from other animals is our ability to consciously harness nature and the ways in which we can plan and work socially to meet our needs.

Engels argued that for most of human history the social organisation of people has not been class-ridden or defined by domination and oppression. Our earliest human ancestors appeared about two million years ago, while *Homo sapiens* have existed for about 200,000 years. But the earliest forms of agriculture, that allowed the possibility of significant inequality and class societies, appeared only about 10,000 years ago.

So for at least 95 percent of human history, “wealth” was not a concept that would have made any sense. People lived in small collective groups enjoying relative equality both in terms of wealth and power (and this broadly continued in some parts of Nigeria, for example in some areas of Igboland, until the arrival of the colonialists in the late 19th Century). Engels referred to this type of society as “primitive communism”. The concept of the nuclear family, with parents married for life and ‘owning’ their children, did not exist.

Engels contended that in these societies, while people played different roles, there was no structured domination of one group by another. Under primitive communism there was a division of labour between men and women, but this did not confer any significant privileges to men. Women, who tended to be the main gatherers, were often given authority over men—because their work provided the main source of nutrition for the group.



Olufunmilayo Anikulapo-Kuti (1900-1978)

Funmilayo was the daughter of a returned slave who was Yoruba. She had a Christian colonial education. The racism, sexism and economic violence of British occupation of Nigeria radicalised her.

The British introduced taxes as part of their colonial exploitation across different parts of Nigeria and to pay for the costs of their

administration. Where necessary, Warrant Chiefs were appointed to collect these taxes. By the late 1940s, the burden of taxation was becoming unbearable. A 'flat tax' was imposed on all people, including women, aged 16 and older. Like current day VAT it placed a greater burden of taxation on the poor.

Funmilayo was the head teacher of the Abeokuta Grammar School. From this position, she organized the Abeokuta Women's Union – uniting 20,000 working class, local market, and middle class women. This was designed to challenge both colonial rule and the dominance of men in public life (patriarchy). Two hundred thousand women joined the AWU's protests. It eventually led to the abolition of the flat tax by the colonial government.

From the initial demands for an end to the taxation regime, the confidence and demands of the Abeokuta Women's Union grew. It grew into a well organised and disciplined organisation. The response from the authorities was brutal as tear gas was deployed and beatings were administered. Funmilayo ran training sessions on how to deal with this threat.

The protesters employed all manner of tactics, such as abusive songs, jeers, sham funerals for the king and chiefs, taunting parodies of the Oro (male-only masquerade ritual) chants, unclad protests and physical assaults. They laid siege on the palace of the Alake (traditional ruler) for 24 hours, repeating their protest for a further 48 hours when their conditions were not fulfilled within a week.

Thousands of women stripped and stood outside the palace in full view of the king, demanding his dethronement. They removed their clothes, a traditional means of expressing removal of their respect for the Alake and cursing him. They then chased him out of the house, condemning him to exile.

Funmilayo was included in the National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroons delegation to London in 1947. While in London, she joined the Women's International Democratic Federation. She became the leader of the Women's wing of the National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroons in the Western region. She was subsequently associated with Maoist political leanings.

Funmilayo embraced the Yoruba heritage and worked to give pride back to the colonised, insisting that children at her school were registered using their African names. She abandoned her

Western style of dress, favoured by middle class women in the late 1940s, adopting the traditional wrapped cloth of the Yoruba.

In the early 1970s, when Fela, her iconoclastic son rejected “Ransome” as being a European name, adopting “Anikulapo” (the one with death in her/his pouch), she rejoiced and also changed her name.

Married to Rev Israel Ransome-Kuti, the pioneer president of the Nigeria Union of Teachers. Funmilayo bore a daughter, Oludotun and four sons. Oludotun was a radical and a nurse who died in 2006. One son died shortly after birth, the three who survived carried on her legacy of political activism. Olikoye, became an AIDS activist speaking out for those abandoned to the ravages of the disease; Fela, became a musician writing songs inspiring a generation of protestors and Beko was a leading human rights activist.

In 1978 angered by Fela’s criticism of the military as “zombies” who intimidated ordinary Nigerians while allowing corruption and the exploitation of communities to go unchecked, General Obasanjo stormed the Kalakuta Republic, an anti-establishment commune of Fela and his followers where Funmilayo Anikulapo-Kuti lived. She was thrown from a window and spent eight weeks in a coma before passing away. In defiance, her coffin was carried to the Dodan Barracks in Lagos, General Olusegun Obasanjo’s residence together with a new song, written by Fela, “Coffin for Head of State”.

It was only with the rise of class societies that women came to occupy an inferior place in society. In some places, for example, in the Benin Eempire this happened from around 1500, in other parts of Nigeria women’s oppression, in the modern sense of the word, did not start until the arrival of the colonialists in the nineteenth century.

The development of more advanced agriculture was the turning point. Heavy ploughing and the widespread use of domesticated animals changed this. The adoption of the plough gave the ability to produce more than was immediately needed by the group. It led to the development of elites who were able to control the “surplus” (especially in areas of high population density like much of Nigeria, where families could not just leave and establish another village in the

empty land of the next valley or across the river).

A pregnant woman or one with small children could not easily plough fields or tend domestic cattle, sheep or goats., These tasks increasingly became the responsibility of men. Agriculture also demanded labourers. Where hunter-gatherer societies had tended to limit the number of children so as not to deplete resources, agriculture could be more productive with more children needed to help in the fields. As men became mainly responsible for agricultural production, women saw their primary role shift to that of child bearing, cooking and looking after the children and the home.

Greater productivity benefited every member of the group. But once the surplus fell into the control of a minority, inequalities and class societies began to form.

One consequence was the division of society into “public” and “private” spheres—with women operating mainly in the “private” sphere. The private family became the mechanism by which private wealth could be passed on from one generation to the next. This entailed a final degradation of women’s influence. Men, because of their economic role, became heads of the household, passing their wealth on to their sons. As Engels wrote:

The overthrow of mother right was the world historic defeat of the female sex. The man took command in the home also. The woman was degraded and reduced to servitude.

So the family that we know was a consequence of the development of class— not an age-old “natural” hierarchy. As production was increasingly geared to exchange rather than use, the household became a unit of consumption rather than production. Engels’s argument shows how it was economic compulsion that led to class society and the associated inequality and oppression. However, with the wider social and economic changes throughout history, the role of the family also changed.



Mary Okezie (1906–1999) was the first woman from her Igbo clan to gain a Western education, and was teaching at the Anglican Mission School in Umuocham Aba in 1929 when the Aba Women's War broke out.

Around 10,000 women protested against warrant chiefs and the taxation of women. The protests included "sitting" on warrant chiefs until they surrendered their insignia & resigned. During the protests, the British troops killed about 50 women.

As a result of the War, the position of women in society was greatly improved. In some areas, women were able to replace the warrant chiefs. Women were also appointed to serve on the native courts.

Although she did not participate in the revolt, she was very sympathetic to the women's cause. She was the only woman who submitted a memo of grievance to the Aba Commission of Inquiry (sent in 1930). Today, the major primary source for studying the revolt is the Report of the Aba Commission of Inquiry. After the revolt, Okezie emerged as founder and leader of the Ngwa Women's Association and working for the rest of her life to support women's rights in Nigeria.

Capitalism and the “private family”

The peasant family, which existed before colonialism across most of Nigeria, was a productive unit. Men were heads of the household, but women and children produced goods in the home that contributed to the family income. They would tend the family plot and look after smaller domestic animals. Women had an important role in the collective life of the village, which was the central economic unit of society.

Colonialism ripped this way of life asunder. The labouring masses were torn from the land and thrown into the new towns and cities that sprang up. Capitalism created for the first time a class of workers who have no control over the means of production. Members of this new

class were forced to labour for someone else to earn a wage. Old social ties were broken with the weakening of the extended family relationships and control.

A similar process happened in Britain and other countries with the industrial revolution. Men, women and children all worked in factories, mines and mills, in horrendous conditions. Women were employed in huge numbers in the textile factories—by 1856 women formed 57 percent of the workforce in the industry, and children made up 17 percent. Women often did the hardest work in the worst conditions. One in eight women in 1850s Oldham (near Manchester) died between the ages of 25 and 34.



Margaret Ekpo (1914 – 2006) – was one of Nigeria's foremost women's rights activists and social mobilisers. Margaret set up the Aba Township Women's Association in 1953. She was one of three women appointed to the House of Chiefs in the 1950's (along with Olufunmilayo Anikulapo--Kuti who was in the Western Nigeria House of Chiefs). She was a pioneer politician during the first republic. In 1961, she won a seat at the Eastern Regional House of Assembly. She represented the Aba Urban North constituency for the National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroons (NCNC).

After the 1966 coup she retired from active political life. She was in the vanguard of women's liberation in Eastern Nigeria and also a front line leader against colonialism and for independence. Partial recognition by the establishment came posthumously when the International Airport at Calabar was named after Ekpo.

The barbarity of capitalism prompted workers to seek sanctuary— and at least a partial relief from drudgery—in the family. Workers began to campaign for a “family wage”, allowing men to cover the cost of maintaining their wife and children. Some feminists have argued that such demands were purely in the interest of men, who wanted to keep

women oppressed in the home. But it allowed a family to exist on the wages of one man, where previously three or four members of the household would have had to work to earn the same money. And it released women and children from hard labour.

In the harsh reality of industrial capitalism, isolation in the home was preferable to attempting to both work and raise children. For most women it seemed a matter of common sense to seek a “reliable breadwinner” as a husband as the best chance of security. But this “private family” characteristic of capitalism was not formed purely as a result of pressure from below. An ideological war was waged by the capitalist ruling class to instil “family values” into workers—and to force them to take on the burden of feeding and caring for the next generation of labourers for free.

Marriage, inheritance and divorce

The Nigerian systems of inheritance reflects the lack of responsibility of many men to their wives and children. If a husband dies, the woman often receives nothing, although the law entitles her to a share. If she has no children, the treatment is worse and women can never inherit property from their fathers.

Though many women are involved in subsistence agriculture and around two thirds of the rural work force is women, men are five times more likely than women to own land. The Land Use Act of 1978 nationalised all land and vested authority in the State Governor who holds it in trust on behalf of all. In practice however, the way land is owned and accessed varies from place to place and can be an amalgam of traditional, Islamic Sharia and other local governance practices. The Land Administration Act needs to be implemented and publicised, to expand women’s access and entitlement to land.

With divorce, again, men are not expected to take responsibility for their former wives or children. The wife is often expected to leave the home and may only receive a very small monthly sum which is inadequate to pay for the costs of looking after her children.

Housing was built for workers, which was a massive improvement on the hovels city dwellers had first been thrown into. But the homes were laid out according to the structure of the nuclear family. They would be just big enough for two parents and some children, with separate bedrooms and a kitchen, maybe a private yard or small garden with a fence around it. Phrases such as “An Englishman’s home is his castle” entered the vocabulary for the first time.

Of course, many working class women still worked outside the home, but now women’s primary role was seen as that of housewife. Along with this came the characteristics associated with a good wife and mother—caring, passive, submissive. Women’s contribution was devalued again. In a world which only values things in monetary terms, the work that women do for free in the home—cooking, washing, educating—is considered valueless.

It was not the case that working class men were the major winners in the creation of capitalism’s private family. The role of breadwinner was one in which it was all too easy for men to fail. If a man was unable to provide for his family, then he could lose their respect and that of society at large.

Out of the misery of industrial capitalism, the family took shape as both a haven fought for by workers and as an economic and ideological tool of the ruling class. However, the relationship between the family and the economic role of women has not been a static one. As capitalism developed it was to undergo profound changes.

Polygamy

Polygamy is a crucial component of many women's lives. Women depend on the other wives of their husbands to share the work. Younger co-wives took on many of the more menial household chores whilst the older wives retained the financial responsibilities. As women get older they at least have the comfort of knowing that the burden of their marriage does not fall solely on their shoulders. However, women expect very little from these relationships in terms of companionship, personal care, and fidelity. The relationship is purely functional and economic. For many other women, the ‘girl friends’ of their husbands do not even provide these meagre benefits.

Controlling women

Polygamy arose out of pre-colonial society's mode of production which was based on the exchange of cattle against women's capacity to produce and reproduce on the land, in the home and for society.

The material foundations of bride price, polygamy and other marital practices became established culture. This culture justified and legitimised the patriarchal (male dominated) order of many societies that kept women from being economically independent.

Men were the head of the homestead and controlled the livestock. Women were primarily responsible for social and agricultural production. The children were important. Sons could provide labour, expand the family's productive base and carry the family name. Daughters contributed through their labour and the bride price of crops, cattle or cash, obtained when they married. Polygamy enabled wealth accumulation by the elite who had access to larger portions of land and who needed the labour of several women. This is the main reason why polygamy existed primarily amongst the elite in the pre-colonial period.

Undermined by colonialism

Colonial-era native administration appropriated pre-colonial customary law in ways that kept women in a subordinate position. With less land available, the codification of customary law reduced the amount of land available under women's control.

Land came under the exclusive control of men, even if the labour was still primarily done by women and children.

Colonial imposition of Christian morality and land dispossession squeezed the space for polygamy. Rural African women also challenged the oppressive and exploitative foundations of such marriages.

Challenge conservatism

We have to create a progressive basis for the position of women in relationships. In questioning the basis of polygamy we must not be strait-jacketed into narrow conservative Christian or African traditionalism. Cultural practices are not static. They

change with the changing socio-economic circumstances in which we live.

Similarly we have to develop strategies to eradicate the practice of female genital mutilation. This should not be excused as a traditional, but should be exposed for the barbarism and violent oppression of women which it is designed to support.

The fight against oppression

If we want to get rid of capitalism and fight for a society in which human needs instead of profits have the highest priority, we can only do this together. Collectivism and solidarity are our strongest weapons. Capitalists therefore try their best to divide us in order to break any resistance against exploitation and to ensure undisturbed profit-making. They turn skilled workers against unskilled workers, essential services against non-essential services, indigenes against immigrants, ethnic groups against other nationalities, men against women and heterosexuals against homosexuals.

Ethnic discrimination, tribalism, sexism and homophobia are not just reactionary ideas. They manifest themselves in open oppression, which undermines our struggle for a better world. The rulers tell us that the only place of women is in the family, where their duty is to care for the children and the elders and fulfil the sexual desires of their husbands. They tell us that immigrants, non-indigenes and refugees are the ones responsible for unemployment and taking our land. All these ideas undermine our unity against the corrupt ruling elite.

Religion

According to Carolynne Dennis, writer of *Women and State in Nigeria*, "The religions of many Nigerian societies recognized the social importance of women by emphasizing the place of female gods of fertility and social peace".

Women held a basically complementary, rather than subordinate, position to men in indigenous pre-colonial Nigerian societies. The absence of gender in the pronouns of many African languages and

the interchangeability of first names among females and males strikes Niara Sudarkasa, author of "'The Status of Women' in Indigenous African Societies", as a further indication of the social de-emphasis on gender as a designation for traditional behaviour. She observes that "many other areas of traditional culture, including personal dress and adornment, religious ceremonies, and intergender patterns of comportment, suggest that Africans often deemphasize gender in relation to seniority and other insignia of status".

Today, in many cases, Christian churches and Moslem mosques may spread ideas which assist in the oppression of women. However, some churches and Islamic groups are led by women. This shows that the oppression of women is cultural and *not* a fixed religious belief.



Gambo Sawaba (1933-2001)

Gambo's father was an educated Christian from Ghana who converted to Islam in Zaria, Northern Nigeria. Gambo's mother was a widow when she married him. She had a total of 10 children. They lived in Sabon Gari and the family home accommodated visitors from many

places.

When young, Gambo was involved in street fights to defend the weak. She was also considered very truthful. She was sympathetic to the mentally challenged and could recommend local herbs as medicines

She went to the Native Authority Primary School when she was nine years old. But she was only to stay for three years as both her father and then mother died. She first married as a teenager and was to marry another three times.

To Gambo, oppression was unbearably revolting; hence she stoutly defended the rights of the weak. She did not brook undeserved wealth and shared every kobo of hers with the poor.

She was one of the early members of the Northern Elements Progressive Union (NEPU) in Zaria, when the party identified with the working class and poor (the Talakawa) that formed their

main support base. As a result, she was persecuted by both the colonial authorities and the native administration and was incarcerated more than a dozen times.

She met with Funmilayo Kuti after reading about her struggle against women's taxation. She also attended NEPU classes taught by leaders such as Aminu Kano and was elected leader of the women's wing of NEPU.

During the second republic, Sawaba was a member of the Great Nigeria Peoples Party (GNPP) and served as a deputy national chair.

Family planning

When a woman and a man have an intimate relationship it is the woman that may get pregnant and bear the consequences. As a result, it should be a woman's right to choose whether to have a child. All women should have access to free and effective birth control.

Only a minority of sexually active teenagers are using effective modern forms of contraception. As a result, for example, half of the school dropouts each year are girls of 12 to 14 years who have to leave school because they become pregnant. Very few schools allow pregnant girls or young mothers to complete their education.

Under Nigerian Law, performing an abortion is still a criminal offence, unless the pregnancy threatens the woman's life and penalties for the offence are severe. As a result, unsafe abortions are a serious health problem. However, there are an estimated 610,000 abortions in Nigeria each year and most women have had at least one by the time they are 45 years old. There has been an increased use of abortion by adolescent women with unplanned pregnancies who want to continue at school. Only around two thirds of women go to a doctor for an abortion.

We need to campaign against such legal restrictions. Effective contraceptives should be freely available to prevent unwanted pregnancies, but if necessary abortion should also be freely available at all public hospitals and clinics. All pregnancies should be based on a woman's right to choose. Pregnant women should be supported so that they are able to continue their education as

long as possible.



Kehinde Ola Oni (1943 -) was a member of a popular, famous, politically and ideologically oriented women's organization known as Women In Nigeria (WIN) where in the 1980's, she was actively involved in the activities of the organization at the Oyo State chapter. WIN was the foremost radical feminist organization

among hundreds of women organizations in the country. Its functions, among others, included: fighting for the rights of women from all walks of life, fighting to have a society where both men and women have effective access to education, health, transport, shelter, provision of pipe borne water, supply of electricity power and other basic needs; encouraging and protecting the human rights of women and frontally addressing the issue of political and economic marginalisation of women.

The organization was convinced, from its very beginning, that social structure is the major determinant of power and powerlessness. The organization therefore posited that the best way to empower women was to alter the class position of majority of women, limited by poverty and deprivation, and that both men and women had roles to play in winning this. The membership of WIN thus included both women and men that were radical feminists.

Appeal from Women Workers to Candidates in the 2015 Elections



The TUC Women's Commission of Edo State developed the following demands in October 2014.

Women make up at least half of the electorate. More women vote than men. Women will

decide whether you are successful or not in the 2015 elections. Women have a number of key problems. If you promise to address these issues we will vote for you. If not, we will vote for other candidates. If you do promise and are elected, we will be watching you to see that you keep your promises.

1. *Viable Positions*

Discrimination on the basis of marital status is widespread. Women will vote for candidates that promise to end all forms of discrimination against unmarried women workers. If any woman worker is found to be suitably qualified, she should be appointed for training, secondment or posts independent of her marital status.

There is a huge backlog of promotion for government workers across the state. Candidates should promise to ensure that they do what they can to address this issue.

Women are grossly under-represented in the Edo State House of Assembly, as Commissioners and Permanent Secretaries. There is only one woman member of the House of Assembly out of the 26 members. Only three women are members of the State EXCO (out of 26) and there are only 13 women out of the 35 Permanent Secretaries. Of the 20 Permanent Secretaries created in July 2014, only seven were women.

Similarly with local governments: all the chairs of local governments in Edo State are currently men.

Candidates should promise to try and correct this situation. At least two thirds of new appointments of Commissioners and Permanent Secretaries, for example, should be reserved for women. Candidates should promise to try and ensure more women are elected as chairs of local governments.

2. *Crèche and kindergarten*

There are no Crèche or kindergarten facilities provided for the children of government workers. As a result, many women have to bring their children to work. This disturbs the office environment and can be dangerous for the children.

Candidates should promise to ensure that high quality Crèche and kindergarten facilities are available for all children of government workers below the age of six years.

3. Action on Rape and Sexual Harassment

We are concerned about the level of rape and sexual harassment which is suffered by women. Candidates should make a clear statement that they will support women workers taking action on this issue.

Candidates should also promise to arrange for seminars to be held for all workers to explain the governments policies on rape and sexual harassment and to indicate that all alleged incidents will be properly investigated.

Candidates should promise to ensure that the Ministry of Women's Affairs establishes a section to deal with rape and sexual harassment, to provide support for any woman suffering from such attacks and to investigate all alleged incidents.

Special action should be taken at the two state colleges of education to ensure that all new teachers know that sexual harassment of students is wrong and will be punished. Any teacher found guilty of sexual harassment of students should be dismissed. The causes and the problems of rape and sexual harassment should be included in the curriculum of all teachers along with the importance of education for the girl child and ensuring all girl pupils receive high quality education.

4. More Primary Schools and Teachers

We are pleased that the current state government has refurbished many primary schools across the State.

Whilst there are now nearly 420,000 pupils in primary schools in Edo State, there are also over 350,000 pupils in private primary schools. However, it is estimated that perhaps as many as a quarter of school aged children are not attending primary schools in the State.

We expect candidates to promise to build more primary schools and employ more teachers to ensure that all children in the state are able to attend a good, local public primary school. We also

expect candidates to support the introduction of rural teaching allowances to encourage teachers to teach in rural schools.

It has been shown that the provision of drinking water and adequate toilets in schools encourages more girls to go to school. We expect candidates to promise to ensure that all primary schools in the state have proper drinking water and adequate toilet facilities.

5. Family Planning

Many women in Edo State do not have access to adequate arrangements for family planning. As a result, many women are having more children than they would ideally like. This may have a detrimental effect on their health and careers.

Candidates should promise to arrange to ensure that all women workers are offered seminars on family planning at least once a year. In addition, effective, safe and modern contraceptives should be made available to all women workers at no cost. We also expect Candidates to support the relaxation of legal restrictions on abortion.

6. Free Health Care

Free health care is essential for the well-being of all government workers and their families. We expect Candidates to promise to ensure that health insurance is extended to cover the husbands/wives of all government workers and their children.

Candidates should promise to ensure that the health insurance of all women government workers is extended to include, for example, all the costs associated with family planning, screening against cancer (cervical and breast) and the costs of anti-retroviral drugs for any worker who is HIV positive.

7. Extend Trade Union Rights

We are pleased that Edo State Government has provided significant additional employment opportunities, especially for women. This includes the Youth Employment Scheme, the Comrade Buses and the street sweepers. However, we are concerned that not all these workers are given the fundamental human right to be full and active members of a trade union.

Candidates should promise to ensure that all government workers are provided with the right to be active members of an appropriate trade union. This should include all workers in any government agency, employment scheme or government owned organisation including all temporary and part-time staff.

Candidates should also promise to ensure that all government contracts include the requirement for contractors to allow all their workers to join and be active in an appropriate trade union.

8. *Gender Sensitive Language*

We consider that gender sensitive language sends an important signal about government policies towards women. So such terms as 'headmaster' of a school, 'chairman' of a local government or a government board will tend to exclude women.

In addition, inclusivity and gender sensitivity require all government documents to be written appropriately to ensure that 'he', 'his', etc are not used to the exclusion of 'she', 'her' etc.

Candidates should promise to ensure that all official government documents are written in a gender sensitive manner.

Organising women in trade unions

According to the International Labour Office: "Unions are still not women-friendly and the inclusion of gender perspectives in all trade union policies and programmes far from being achieved."

Trade unions need to consider the following for their woman members:

- What special requirements and demands do women workers have?
- How can we ensure that more women can attend meetings etc?
- Does the women commission or unit have sufficient budgetary allocations?
- What form of positive discrimination or affirmative action is needed to ensure active roles for women trade union members?
- Should more regularly gender – biased educational programmes be organised for all our members?

Nigerian Labour Congress - Women's Participation

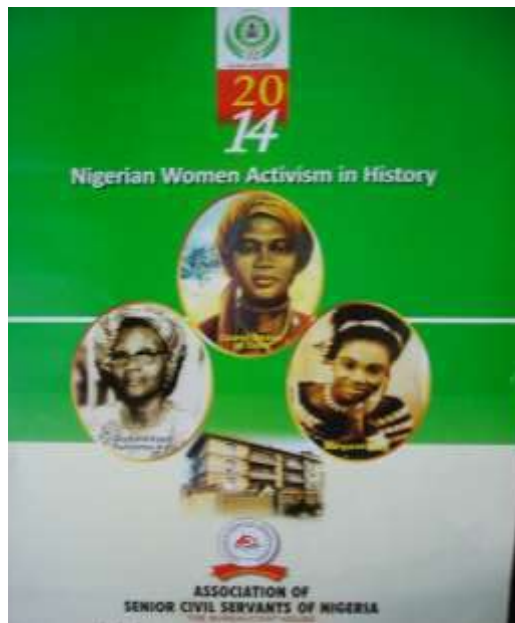


Since 1999, the activities of the women's wing have expanded dramatically. This has included education, internal agitation for reforms and advocacy. A gender unit was created in 2002. A *Gender Equity Policy* was adopted at the 8th Delegates Conference in 2003. The Chair of the National Women

Commission is a Vice President of the NLC. The Deputy Chairperson is a member of the Central Working Committee and the National Executive Council. All unions of the NLC are encouraged to make efforts to meet 30% representation of women in all leadership structures.

The ILO has argued for equal representation of women in trade unions in the following terms:

- women account for an increasing proportion of the workforce
- to be credible and strong, unions must address their potential women members
- to be credible to women, unions must demonstrate gender equality
- promotion of gender equality helps unions strengthen and reaffirm their key role as agents of social change



- promotion of gender equality provides common grounds for unions to forge alliances with other social actors.

Association of Senior Civil Servants of Nigeria – 2014 calendar



Bene Madunagu

Dr Bene Madunagu is a biologist and was the head of botany at the University of Calabar. In 1982, she was the co-founder, with Molara Ogundipe-Leslie, of the feminist organization, Women

In Nigeria (WIN). She was also the co-founder the of Girls' Power Initiative. This is an organization to promote self-esteem among young women and girls. She served as a member of the National Task Force on Sexuality Education and was a member of the committee to institutionalize women's studies in tertiary institutions.

She is the African Regional Coordinator of the DAWN Programme on Reproductive Rights and Population. Bene

Madunagu and her husband Edwin Madunagu, were thrown out of their university academic jobs for their feminist and socialist political activism in the 1970s.

Bene Madunagu discussed the role that radical women play in families, an interesting and rarely discussed subject:

“A radical woman is regarded as eccentric or she engenders condemnation or murder for being an embarrassment to a bourgeois husband. Where a radical woman is not stoutly opposed, she meets with a mixture of applause and surprise. In the latter case, derogatory explanations are offered for her activities. It is a historical fact that not only bourgeois men, but socialists and revolutionaries as well, justify and live these sexist stereotypes. This is a sad indicator of the level of consciousness within the revolutionary movement of our time.”

The Fight for Women’s Rights and the Future

There is now a long history of discrimination of women. Women were the property of fathers and men and in some areas still appear to be. Women earn less than men as they are usually confined to insecure, low-wage or part time jobs. As a consequence of material domination, men tend to dominate also in other aspects of the social relation between men and women. This ranges from taking control over women’s sexuality to sexual harassment, violence or the recent phenomenon of women murders called ‘passion killings’. Sexual harassment is common at the workplace. Managers consistently abuse women if they don’t respond to sexual advances.

But there is hope amidst the horror! With capitalist expansion and the integration of the African continent into global capitalism, women today are a solid part of an international working class. They possess more economic freedom, less dependence on their partners, feel less isolated within the house and family, are in the forefront of many strikes and are prominent speakers within the anti-capitalist movement. Women’s liberation can only be achieved through the common struggle of men and women. Working class men do not gain from women’s oppression. It is the bosses who gain by paying women less in their attempts to divide the working class.

The true liberation of women is also not a question of electing some women leaders as 'role models'. To press for demands, such as power sharing and political decision-making might be a strategy to liberate some women who are able to make it to the top competing with men. But socialists stand for the liberation of all women. Furthermore, women feel their oppression very differently. Rich women see nothing wrong with exploiting their "sisters" as maids on slave wages.

Poor and working class women can't expect anything from 'role models' such as Condoleezza Rice, who was responsible for the killing and ruining of thousands of women's lives in Iraq. Nor as Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala the Co-ordinating Minister of the Economy and Minister of Finance of the Federation. We also recognise that with the need to maintain the capitalist family there is the attempt to control and contain our sexuality. Heterosexuality is seen as the norm, as it is the basis for marriage and family, everything else is regarded as unnatural. But human beings are diverse. We respect that and are strongly opposed to sexual oppression of homosexuals, lesbians and transsexuals.

Women and men have to fight against the oppression and discrimination of women together. This includes the fight for gender sensitive language, so we should not talk about the 'chairman' of a local government, but the chairperson. We should not talk about freeing "our girls", but liberating the brave young women of Chibok.

The importance of education and the struggle against oppression in schools and universities

47% of Nigerian women are mothers before they reach 20. Nearly two thirds of Nigerian women with higher education have used contraceptives, whereas only 8% of women without education have done so.

There are two major reasons why girls drop out of school early. These are the cost of education and that many schools are not seen as friendly or safe places for adolescent girls.

Attendance rates can rise by as much as 30% when issues such as water and sanitation facilities in schools are addressed. However,

in 2010 the government admitted that one in three children of school age are not in school or had dropped out because of the cost.

In reality a wide range of levies are charged, which constitutes a significant obstacle to schooling. Girls from poorer families may be beaten for non-payment of school fees or other charges. Clearly this is humiliating and we need to campaign against all school's fees and charges. We also need to campaign against the increases in fees for colleges and universities. This discriminates particularly harshly against women and poorer students.

A recent account of sexual harassment of trainee teachers concludes that: "An institutional environment which has familiarised the country's future teachers to sexual violence against women and taught them to accept it as 'normal' helps explain why it is accommodated and perpetuated at the school level". All students and teachers need to campaign against sexual harassment in schools, colleges and universities.

This is an issue for men as well as women. For men, it is their sisters and future wives and daughters who are suffering. The quality of all our lives will suffer if women are prevented from gaining adequate education. We need to ensure that sexual harassment is not accepted in our educational institutions. The minority of men responsible should be challenged and punished.

Ten things men should do:

1. Encourage their partners to be politically active.
2. Try to ensure that their partners have their own income.
3. Do their fair share of the housework: cooking, cleaning and washing.
4. Do their fair share of looking after the children and carrying the baby.
5. Do their fair share of the shopping and fetching water.
6. Make sure their partner is able to attend political and trade union meetings.
7. Make sure they ask their partner's opinion on all important family and political issues.

8. Do not refer to women as girls or ladies.
 9. Be sure that their partner is happy/content every time they are intimate.
 10. Ensure that their relationships are between free and equal individuals.
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But as importantly we need to fight against the discrimination against women in every aspect of our lives. We need to ensure that women are not just seen as the servants at work, but have a valuable role to play in workplaces and the trade unions.

On the question of the future the Engels said:

That will be settled after a new generation has grown up. A generation of men who never have had occasion to purchase a woman's surrender either with money or with any other means of social power, and of women who have never been obliged to surrender to any man out of any consideration other than real love, or to refrain from giving themselves to their beloved for fear of the economic consequences. Once such people appear, they will not care a rap about what we today think they should do.

If you want to join the fight for women's rights and socialism contact:

socialistlabour.ng@gmail.com

See also – twitter & Facebook: @SocialistLabNg

Further reading:

1. Gender in Nigeria Report 2012: Improving the lives of Girls and Women in Nigeria
www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/67333/Gender-Nigeria2012.pdf
2. Analysis of the History, Organisations and Challenges of Feminism in Nigeria
<http://www.nawey.net/wp-content/uploads/downloads/2012/05/Feminism-in-Nigeria.pdf>
3. John Olusheye Obadiya: Nigerian Women and Development: Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow
<http://obadiyajohn.blogspot.com/2009/11/nigerian-women-and-development.html>
4. Norah Carlin: Women and the Struggle for Socialism (1985):
http://www.anu.edu.au/polsci/marx/contemp/pamsetc/women/ws_main.htm

5. Lindsey German: Women's liberation today (2004):
<http://www.isj.org.uk/index.php4?id=32&issue=101>
6. Judith Orr: Marxism and feminism today (2010)
www.isj.org.uk/?id=656
7. Sandra Bloodworth: An Anti-sexism Manifesto – the rights of women and responsibilities of socialist men
<http://www.mediafire.com/download/pi0641yt81jpxed/antisexism+manifesto%5B1%5D.pdf>
8. Federal Ministry of Women's Affairs and Social Development (2006): National Gender Policy - Federal Republic of Nigeria
http://www.aacoalition.org/national_policy_women.htm
9. Read the first part of the *The Gambo Sawaba Story* at:
<http://www.authorsden.com/SampleWorksPDF/24537.pdf>
10. *HeForShe* is a solidarity movement for gender equality that brings together one half of humanity in support of the other half of humanity, for the benefit of all.
See: <http://www.heforshe.org>