

BEYOND RHETORIC'S, POMP & PAEGANTRY OF INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY CELEBRATION IN NIGERIA GENDER INEQUALITY & VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN PERSITS

by Lady Nkiru Celine Okoro

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LADY NKIRU CELINE OKORO

On March 8th 2016 as in previous celebrations marking the International Women's day(IWD) across the world, gender architectural structures including the various Ministries of Women Affairs & Social Development or Poverty Alleviation, Office of the first lady / Wife of the president and its counterparts in the 36 states of the federation will roll out drums to mark this day amidst pomp and pageantry.

Speeches on progress made thus far in achieving gender equality and the advancement of women in socio - cultural, economic and political spheres to bridge the gender inequality gap and empowerment of women will be made.

New promises will emerge without conscious effort to access the impact of previous promises by identify implementation gaps and using the opportunity of the day to celebrate incremental gains if any, in achieving gender equality and empowering women after another 365/6 days (2015 - 2016).

2016 IWD celebration is themed “Planet 50-50 by 2030:- Step It Up for Gender Equality” The questions that call to mind from this theme include but not limited to the following ;

Has Nigeria achieved the 30% affirmative action in women's political representation and governance as stipulated in the 1995 Beijing Platform for Action (BPFA) 21 years after?

Has Nigeria achieved and surpassed 35% affirmative action in appointive & Elective positions in Governance as stipulated in the 2006 National policy on Women and its revised 2007 National Gender Policy?

Who are women in Nigeria holding accountable for our collective inability in words and deeds to commit to gender equality and empowerment of women?

Beyond patriarchy are we as a nation and people taking serious interests in researching persisting causes of gender in- equality in our systems and structures with a view to finding lasting solution in line with Sustainable Development Goals?.

Have we as a people and country nipped in the bud all forms of discriminatory practices and violence against women in our homes, communities, states and at federal level, including within our administrative and governance structures?

If we claim that we have, do we as women in Nigeria know

Where the 219 school girls abducted on April 14 2014 at Chibok Government Secondary School in Bornu State?

The fate of Mr. Yunusa a.k.a(Yellow) that adducted for more than six months fourteen year old Ese Oruru from Bayelsa State in August 2015, took her to the Emirates palace in Kano, converted her to Islam and forced her into marriage under Islamic rites. Has justice been done and seen to be done on this?

The fate of three school girls abducted on Monday 29th February 2016 from Babington Memorial Secondary School in Ikorodu, Lagos State and N300,000,000.00 Million Naira ransom is demanded for their release? One week after, they are yet to be released to their families and loved ones to continue their academic pursuit.

As we mark the 2016 International women's day,

What gender machineries are in place to attract and release funds and grants for gender equality and empowerment of women? Where are the funds? Where are they domiciled? Who can access them? What are the criteria for its assessment and disbursement?

Furthermore, how many women are currently role models and mentors to younger women?

Where and in what platforms are older women sharing their experiences with younger women?

Are there on going inter generational dialogues and discussions between and among women 45years and above and girls 15 to 35 years?

Where are those conversations taking place and with who?.

I wish to submit through this medium that for IWD to be impactful in Nigeria for women, youths, persons with disabilities and the next generation, we must collectively move from talks to actions.

IWD should be for us an opportunity to access the concrete measurable progress and milestone we have achieved in bridging the gender gap and empowering more women and girls.

We must as a nation and a people specifically state to the global community how many girl children we have saved from child marriages and kept in school.

How enrolment of girls into primary and post primary schools has increased in comparison to boys,

How many girls and young women completed their primary and secondary education and are admitted into tertiary institutions for higher learning.

How many maternal deaths were prevented across the 36 states of the federation and Federal Capital Territory (FCT).

How many women secured grants to embark on women's right education, advocacy for increased women political participation through concrete life changing and life transforming empowerment programs.

Until we are able to develop concrete score card on the celebration of International Women's day and the progress we are making if any, we lose the essence and importance of the day.

Until as a nation and a people we provide adequate resources for gender equality and empowerment of women and girls in an open, transparent and accessible way we will continue to pay lip services to eliminating all forms of discrimination and violence against women and girls as well as achieving gender equality and empower women.

Thank you.

ABOUT LADY NKIRU CELINE OKORO

Lady Nkiru Celine Okoro is the founder and Executive Director of Centa for Organizational Development (COD Nigeria); a registered national gender proportionate and balanced non-governmental, non-political, not for profit organization In Special Consultative Status with the United Nations. She is the Country Co-ordinator of AfricaWoman - An International Media Charity and Regional Representative of African Sun Times - An Internet based Newspaper in New Jersey, USA. She is a 2010 Stanford University Fellow of Democracy, Development and Rule of Law and a Ph.D student in Gender & Development Studies at University of Abuja.

Africawoman published an Internet/intranet based newspaper by women journalists in eight African countries of Kenya, Tanzania, Malawi, Uganda , Zimbabwe , Zambia , Ghana , and Nigeria through the virtual newsroom. Themed “*For and about women in Africa*”, Africawoman sought to provide voice to women in Africa through community radios and news publications. Every month, ten women journalists from the above countries met through the virtual newsroom to exchange news, information and issues about women emanating from their various countries and regions. From this discussion, a newspaper is published. Africa woman until December 2005 was part of *World Woman* - a Scottish Media Charity. The British Council until December 2005 managed Africawoman. It received funding support from Commonwealth Secretariat, UK Department for International Development (DFID), Population Reference Bureau (PRB) and Global Fund for Women (GFW). In recent times, funding constraints has made the continued publication of Africawoman a challenge.

A seasoned journalist with vast experiences in local, regional and international women based issues; Lady Nkiru Celine Okoro is very active in most women’s human rights coalitions in Nigeria. She is a registered and financial member of West Africa Network for peace building (WANEP) in Nigeria. She was in January 2008 nominated the Nigerian NGO media representative to the 52nd Session on the United Nations Commission on the Status of women, to report exclusively the proceedings of the conference. She was also part of the Technical support team involved in “Engendering National Budgets: Impacts on Sectoral Plans and Policies” in four states in Nigeria, a project of the Federal Ministry of Women Affairs & Social Development Abuja Nigeria.

Before joining Africawoman in 2003, Lady Nkiru Celine Okoro doubled as the Advertisement / promotions Manager of Turning-Point Newspapers Ltd, publishers of "*The Comet* now *The Nation*". Her career in journalism dates back to December 1990, when with a Master of Science (M.Sc) degree in International Relations from Obafemi Awolowo University Ile-Ife, she joined "The Guardian" as a foreign affairs reporter covering South East Asian Countries. She pioneered the formal reporting of the activities of non-governmental organizations in Nigeria's vibrant and competitive Media Industry as news items, a sector she is very passionate about. She holds a Bachelor of Science degree (B.Sc.) in political science from University of Benin; Benin City with second Class Honours Upper division (2¹)

Between March 27 and April 3rd 2005 she attended Reuters Foundation training for Business reporters in Nairobi Kenya; African Social Forum held in Lusaka Zambia from December 6th to 10th 2004, the Commonwealth Heads of government meeting (CHOGM) held in December 2003 in Abuja and the 19th International Conference of Organization Development Practitioners (IODA) also in Abuja in September 2004, Nigeria. Also in 2003, she participated in Fredrich Naumman's Foundation International Conference for journalist in Gummersbach West Germany

COD Nigeria seeks to redress the existing imbalances in the socio - economic and political rights of women in Nigeria by providing for them cost effective and efficient human rights, organizational development and management training's, resources and networks needed to build their capacity to defend, protect and promote their socio economic and political rights in the patriarchal Nigerian society.

An active member of several civil society coalitions committed to the promotion of women's human rights in Nigeria, Lady Nkiru Celine Okoro is on the board of NIGERIAN NGO CEDAW COALITION and currently co-ordinates the 2014/15 Nigerian NGO CEDAW Shadow Report to UNCEDAW Committee. She was one of the six-member 2008 shadow report drafting committee that participated in the July 2008 Nigeria's sixth country report to the United Nations CEDAW committee in New York.

She worked with the Lagos State Ministry of Women Affairs & Poverty Alleviation (WAPA) to showcase the states Best Practices during the fifteen year review of the Implementation of Beijing Platform for Action (BPFA) in New York on March 09, 2010. She was the Nigerian Media representative to the 52nd Session of United Nations Commission on the Status of women (UNCSW52) and has participated in various UNCSW meetings from 2006 to date. She is currently working with 100

women lobby group and are following trends in women's active involvement in the forth coming 2015 general elections in Nigeria.

Lady Nkiru Celine Okoro is also a member of the management team of Civil Society Coalition for Poverty Eradication (CISCOPE), a coalition of over 80 civil society organizations working in the area of poverty reduction in Nigeria. CISCOPE envisions a poverty free Nigerian society where the rights of all people especially women are protected and respected. CISCOPE since 2004 is a co-convenor of the activities of Global Call for Action against poverty (GCAP) in Nigeria. OXFAM GB significantly supported activities of CISCOPE in Nigeria. It has also received additional support from Action Aid International (Nigeria office) for research publication and the European Union (EU) for April 2007 general elections in Nigeria. With support from Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), Lady Nkiru Okoro from January 2008 to April 2009 directed and co-ordinated a CISCOPE initiative on Monitoring and Evaluation of 2008 Federal Government Budgets in Agriculture, Health and Education in Cross River, Bauchi and Enugu States in Nigeria.

She is married to Sir. Kelechi Clifford Okoro. They both have three Children.

Lady Nkiru Okoro is committed to women's socio - economic and political empowerment especially among the poor and lower middle class as sine qua non to the promotion and protection of their fundamental human rights.