



## **Cedaw And Women's Rights: Assessing Knowledge And Practice Among Women In Makurdi, Benue State, Nigeria**

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### ***Abstract :***

*This research assesses women's knowledge and practice of principles on the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). A total of one hundred and seventy – nine women participated in the survey. A self – developed questionnaire measuring women's knowledge and practice was used to collect data. Three hypotheses were formulated and tested using Pearson  $r$  and one – way ANOVA. The results indicated no statistical relationship between women's knowledge and practice  $r = .128$ ;  $p > 0.05$ . Further analysis revealed that there was significant difference in educational qualifications and level of practice  $F = 8.615$ ,  $df(2)$ ;  $p < .05$ . This implies that level of practice of women's rights may not necessarily be a function of exposure to the CEDAW document but other source of information sharing on women's rights. It was recommended that domestication of CEDAW and using advocacy, media, government and non – governmental organizations to intensify more effort in the area of information dissemination about CEDAW and all it represents would make the goal realizable.*

## **1.Introduction**

The term “Rights” consists of a moral power to claim something as one’s own (Chukwudozie, 2000). It usually points to general good – will and conscience. Even when the individual lacks the physical force to enforce claims, his/her rights are not invalidated. Rights are therefore something that are applicable to every person and should not be discriminatory nor restricted or even denied persons. The general law of right is to be a human being respecting other humans. A person’s rights give her/him moral and inviolable powers, and the same token charge everyone to respect and refrain from infringing upon the rights of others. This lends credence to the cliché that your rights stop where the rights of others begin.

Human rights therefore have universal application. They are irrespective of circumstances of birth (for example, female or male; rich or poor), race, colour, political, cultural and religious differences. The overall guiding principle of the declaration of human rights of the United Nations and others is to respect and protect the rights to life, the liberties/freedoms and dignity of every human person no matter her/his race, colour, creed, status or circumstances (Chukwudozie, 2000).

However, looking at presentation of our social life, there are many cases of injustices meted out to individuals and groups. Worthy of mention is women’s rights abuse as well as children’s and other underprivileged groups’ like the disabled, prisoners and detainees, and other sub – groups. For instance, Nigerian women like their colleagues elsewhere have been subjected to various forms of domestic violence throughout history (Genyi, 2005). There have been efforts made internationally and nationally over the years to stall and reduce issues of discrimination against women and give equal opportunity to thrive. One of such moves is the initiation of the document promoting rights and equity of women popularly known as the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW).

## **2.CEDAW**

The Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) is an international standard-setting document that establishes the universally accepted principle of equality of rights between men and women and makes provisions for measures to ensure equality of rights for women throughout the world in all fields. The 30-article convention sets out in legally binding form internationally accepted principles and measures to achieve equal rights for women everywhere.

It reflects the depth of the exclusion and restriction practiced against women solely on the basis of their sex, by calling for equal rights for women, regardless of their marital status in all fields – political, economic, social, cultural and civil. It provides for adoption at the national level of legislation prohibiting discrimination and recommends the adoption of special temporary measures to accelerate the establishment of de facto equality between men and women including changing the paradigms and models of socio-cultural behaviour patterns that perpetuate discrimination. (CIRDDOC, 2008)

### **3. Brief History of CEDAW**

The International Bill of Human Rights, combined with related human rights treaties, thus lay down a comprehensive set of rights to which all persons, including women are entitled. However, the fact is that women's humanity proved insufficient to guarantee them the enjoyment of their internationally agreed rights. The inception of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) has sought to define and elaborate the general guarantees of non-discrimination in these instruments from a gender perspective. The effort of CSW has culminated in a number of important declarations and conventions that protect and promote the human rights of women. Initially, established in 1946 as a subsidiary of the Commission on Human Rights, it quickly gained the status of a full Commission as a result of the pressure exerted by women activists.

The mandate of CSW included the preparation of recommendations relating to urgent problems requiring immediate attention in the field of women's rights with the object of implementing the principle that men and women should have equal rights and the development of proposals to give effect to such recommendations. Between 1949 to 1965, the Commission elaborated on series of conventions; Convention on the Political Rights of Women (adopted by the General Assembly in 1952), Convention on the Nationality of Married Women adopted in 1957, the Convention on Consent to Marriage Minimum Age and Registration of Marriages adopted in 1965. These treaties were very specific and considered strictly areas of perceived vulnerability while the bulk of women's rights remained within the embers of the general human rights treaties.

Although these instruments reflected the growing sophistication of the UN system with regard to the protection and promotion of women's human rights, the approach they reflected was fragmentary, as they failed to deal with discrimination against women in a comprehensive way. In addition, there was a concern that the general human rights

regime was not, in fact, working as well as it might to protect and promote the rights of women.

This led to the resolution of the General Assembly in 1963 inviting the CSW to prepare a draft declaration that would combine in a single instrument international standard articulating equal rights for men and women. This move was supported through out by women activists within and outside the UN system. The drafting of the Declaration began in 1965 with the Declaration on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women adopted by the General Assembly in 1967. The Declaration, a statement of moral and political intent without a contractual force was considered for a treaty following the emergence of a new consciousness of the patterns of discrimination against women and a rise in the number of organizations interested in combating the effect of such discrimination in the 1960s. In 1974, the Commission decided, in principle to prepare a single, comprehensive and internationally binding instrument to eliminate discrimination against women. The instrument was to be prepared without prejudice to any future recommendations that might be made by the United Nations or its specialized agencies with respect to the preparation of legal instruments to eliminate discrimination in specific fields.

Between 1976 to 1979, different working groups within the Commission prepared the text of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and were adopted by the General Assembly in 1979 by votes of 130 to none, with 10 abstentions. At the special ceremony that took place at the Copenhagen Conference on 17 July, 1980, 64 states signed the Convention and 2 states submitted their instruments of ratification. On 3 September, 1981, the Convention entered into force – faster than any previous human rights convention had done, thus bringing to a climax United Nations efforts to codify comprehensively international legal standards for women.

The document which is in six (6) parts has Part 1 (Article 1-6) covering definition and condemning discrimination against women while promoting the principle of equality of men and women as enshrined in national constitutions; emphasizes legislative measures to modify or abolish existing laws, regulations, customs and practices which constitute discrimination against women calling for general development and advancement of women so that they exercise and enjoy human rights and fundamental freedoms on a basis of equality with men.

- Part 2 (Article 7-9) emphasizes women's rights to political participation and representation.
- Part 3 (Article 10-14). Here, accesses to education, economic, social services are highlighted. These include health, social security, programmes, information and services in family planning, housing, sanitation, electricity, transport and communities are issues of concern and are addressed.
- Part 4 (Article 15-16). This is on legislature, marriage and family rights.
- Part 5 (Article 17-22) makes statement on implementation, rules and procedures.
- Part 6 (Article 23-30) is on adoption, domestication and review. (CIRDDOC, 2008).

#### **4.Statement of Problem**

Sequel to CEDAW, in 1985, there was a conference in Nairobi, Kenya to formulate strategies for advancing women's rights. This was followed by a "plan of action" defined in 1995, in Beijing. The goals of the Beijing conference then was to reflect on promised provisions of equality, development and peace for all women everywhere (Shah, 2010). The concerns highlighted in the conference by the many organizations in attendance included issues of

- Women's reproductive rights
- Abduction of girls
- Child soldiers and armed conflict
- Poverty and Economy
- Education and training
- Health
- Violence
- Decision making
- Institutional mechanisms
- Human Rights
- Media
- Environment
- The Girl – child (Shah, 2010)

How far have these concerns been met? In the Nigeria CEDAW NGO Coalition Shadow Report submitted to the 41<sup>st</sup> session of CEDAW in 2008, highlighting the peculiar nature of women rights concern in Nigeria and suggesting measures to accelerate and advance equality between men and women were stated. In spite of these measures, there are challenges in the various areas articulated. The CEDAW document is over thirty (30) years. How well have the provisions been achieved? Do individual women know of these provisions? How have they been applying and protecting them? This research takes an approach looking at the women themselves. Are they aware of the provisions of CEDAW. Have they any opportunities or avenues at equipping themselves with the knowledge of these rights through conferences, seminars or workshops? Education is a key factor in women empowerment (Mishra, 2005). Are the more educated women more conversant with women's right issues than the less educated? Is there a difference between knowledge of the CEDAW provisions and its practice by women? Do religious affiliations of women play a significant role in the practice of the CEDAW provisions? These are some of the questions this work will attempt to answer.

## **5.Hypotheses**

To assess women's knowledge and practice of the CEDAW document, three hypotheses are being postulated:

- (1). There will be a statistically significant relationship between knowledge and practice of CEDAW document among women
- (2). There will be a statistically significant difference between educational qualifications and knowledge of CEDAW document among women
- (3). There will be a statistically significant difference between educational qualifications and practice of principles of CEDAW document among women.

## **6.Method of Study**

### *6.1.Design*

It was a cross – sectional survey but targeted at women's knowledge and practice based on the CEDAW document.

### *6.2. Participants*

Participants were mainly women drawn from various fields of work and are residents of Makurdi, Nigeria. Participants aged 15 years and above were sampled in market places, schools, homes, offices and shops. A total of 179 women participated in the study. They are of different ethnic groups and also of varied religious groups and educational qualifications. Among them were married, single, divorced, separated and widowed women.

### *6.3. Instrument*

A self – developed questionnaire with two scales – one on knowledge and the other on practice of women’s rights based on the CEDAW document was used. The CEDAW knowledge and practice sections contain 16 statements each with a range of response options fashioned after the Likert Scale with a five – point response range of degree of agreement. The Cronbach alpha reliability index for items on Knowledge is .73 while that on the Practice is .83. The preliminary section of the questionnaire is for collection of demographic variables such as age, ethnic groupings, sex, religion, marital status, educational qualifications and occupations.

### *6.4. Procedure*

With the aid of assistant researchers, copies of the questionnaire were distributed to women in public places – market, offices, schools, shops, and hospitals in Makurdi town.

### *6.5. Statistics*

The statistics used to test the postulated hypotheses are Pearson correlation and Analysis of Variance (ANOVA)

## **7. Result**

The result of table 1 shows that the entire participant were female (n= 179; 100%); age range 25-34; (n= 61; 34.1%). Many of them are singles and married with equal value, Single, (n=75, 41.9%); Married (n= 75; 41.9%). Also, many of these women were secondary school leavers and B.Sc/HND holders. Secondary education (n=56; 31.3%); B.Sc/HND (n=51, 28.5%). Majority are civil servants followed by trading. Civil servants (n=67; 37.4%); Business/trader (46, 25.7%).

<b>Sample Characteristics</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>%</b>
<b>Sex</b>		
Female	179	100
<b>Age</b>		
15-24	52	29.1
25-34	61	34.1
35-45	54	30.2
46 and above	07	3.9
<b>Marital Status</b>		
Single	75	41.9
Married	75	41.9
Divorced	03	1.7
Separated	02	1.1
Widow	13	7.3
Others	3	1.7
<b>Educational Status</b>		
Primary education	09	5.0
Secondary education	56	31.3
Diploma/nce	38	21.2
Bsc/hnd	51	28.5
Msc,M. Ed & M.a	16	8.9
Phd	04	2.2
Missing data	05	2.8
<b>Occupation</b>		
Business/trader	46	25.7
Civil servant	67	37.4
Farmer	04	2.2
Housewife	05	2.8
Others	32	17.9
Missing data	25	14.0
<b>Ethnic Group</b>		
Idoma	54	30.2
Igede	17	9.5
Tiv	79	44.1
Hausa	02	1.1



Sample Characteristics	N	%
Igbo	17	9.5
Yoruba	02	1.1
Others	04	2.2
Missing data	04	2.2

Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of Respondents (N=179)

Variables	N	df	r	p
Knowledge & Practice	179	1	.128	NS

Table 2: Pearson Correlation table showing relationship between knowledge and practice of CEDAW.

\* NS – Not Significant

In the first hypothesis which was to measure relationship between knowledge and practice of CEDAW principles, the results indicate no statistical relationship  $r = .128$ ;  $p > 0.05$ .

Source (practice)	SS	DF	MS	F	P
Between Groups	342.943	2	171.471	2.622	NS
Within Groups	11182.189	171	65.393		
<b>Total</b>	<b>11525.132</b>	<b>173</b>			

Table 3: ANOVA table showing the difference between educational background and knowledge of CEDAW among women

Note: SS= sum of square; df= degree of freedom; MS= mean square; F= calculated for ANOVA and P= significant level

Source (practice)	SS	DF	MS	F	P
Between Groups	1979.35	2	989.68	8.62	<.05
Within Groups	19529.93	170	114.88		
<b>Total</b>	<b>21509.283</b>	<b>172</b>			

Table 4: ANOVA table showing difference between Practice and Educational Qualification of Women and CEDAW

Note: SS= sum of square; df= degree of freedom; MS= mean square; F= calculated for ANOVA and P= significant level.  $F = 8.615$ ,  $df(2)$ ;  $p < .05$

Further analysis revealed that there was significant difference in educational qualifications and level of practice  $F = 8.615$ ,  $df(2)$ ;  $p < .05$ .

### **8. Discussion**

CEDAW was ratified in Nigeria in 1985 without reservations. Consequently, it is bound to fulfill all obligations stated towards the promotion of the principles of CEDAW. The situation of women's rights in Nigeria signifies that Nigeria carries out its obligations as is required by CEDAW. Domestication is important but aside this basic knowledge on what CEDAW represents is essential. Knowledge to a large extent informs practice. Since women are not aware of the principles as outlined in the document, exploring its contents becomes elusive.

In the first hypothesis which seeks to identify if there is a significant relationship between women's knowledge and practice of the CEDAW document, shows no significant relationship ( $r = .128$ ;  $p > 0.05$ ). In expressing grief over the inability to domesticate CEDAW in a retreat organized by Civil Resources Development and Documentation Centre (CIRDDOC) in 2009, the then Deputy Chairman of the House Committee on Human Rights blamed it on lack of knowledge of the document (CIRDDOC, 2009). For a major breakthrough in fulfilling the demand and intents, public knowledge of CEDAW is important.

When educational qualifications of women in the study were marched with practice of CEDAW principles, there was a significant difference. This goes to reiterate the age – long knowledge that education makes a difference. The more educated, the more exposed to information and the more likely the individual stands to practice that which is learnt.

However, since there was no significant relationship between women's knowledge and practice of the CEDAW, it could be reasoned that women with appropriate practice of women's rights is not primarily a function of exposure to the CEDAW document but could be informed through other sources. One thing seems obvious; women are not aware of the knowledge and information on CEDAW. There is poor mobilization of women especially at the grassroots towards meeting the goals and aspirations of CEDAW. It would require that facilitators of the process go back to the drawing board and re – strategize on effective mobilization.

### **9. Suggestions / Recommendations**

To achieve the purpose for the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), the approaches must be holistic involving and revolving round the target group at all levels. Civil societies, government and non –

government are stakeholders. For effectiveness, the approach must be bottom – up rather than top – down. The government should be last on the rung of consultation. The women at the grassroots must be facilitators of the change process. This can be achieved if they know what CEDAW represents. The bottom – up approach initiates and sustains ownership by which not only domestication but implementation will be made easy.

Civil societies working on human rights should aid in creating structures for continual education to ensure sustainability while acting as advocacy instruments with law makers and the policy implementers to mainstream the provisions of CEDAW. They must carry the target group along while doing so. Abridged version of the CEDAW document should be made available to the public continually.

Periodic meetings of women can be held with focus on the document and suggestions collated for national report before being made available to review committees at international level. The views sent forth should be those generated at the grassroots.

## **10. Conclusion**

The Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) is the central and most comprehensive human rights treaty on the elimination of violence against women. It is the leading modern document on Women's rights. CEDAW entered into force as an international treaty since September 3, 1981 barely two years after it was adopted on December 18, 1979 by the United Nations General Assembly. The Nigerian government became a state party to this important Convention when it was ratified in 1985 without reservations and then ratified in Nigeria in 2004 (CIRRDOC, 2009).

However, domesticating CEDAW has remained an elusion largely due to lack of understanding and the issues surrounding it. The women that are the focal point of the document have problem knowing of its existence and implementing its principles. To this end, civil society organizations (CSOs) should work assiduously towards raising awareness and domesticating the document while encouraging women participation in politics especially at parliament. This is essential as women are more likely to legislate and implement policies that affect women and children than men irrespective of how gender sensitive the men may be.

Domestication of CEDAW is key to popularizing the principles and its practice. If women's rights are seen as beneficial to men and women, the various strata of government and civil society would see its legacy of posterity beyond its current use.

That perspective should be an energizer to popularizing CEDAW and making its precepts viable. The will of the people if not engendered is endangered. In general, the public not just women require accurate and comprehensive information and education on CEDAW so that it can be taken as a public document rather than being sectionalized.

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