

Research Article

Re-Examination of the Concept of “Human Life” in The Nigerian Society

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Abstract: Many Nigerian citizens have been violated in terms of human rights, and this has made many to lose out in their rights and privileges. This has made the concept of human life to be undermined by the government, organs of government and few citizens in the country. This paper reviewed the re-examination of the concept of human life in the Nigerian society. The study used secondary sources of data to examine the concept of human rights, infringement of human rights and action plan for the re-examination of the concept of human life. The study recommended the structure of the Nigerian justice system should be committed to safeguard, enforce and comply with the provisions on Nigerian citizens' rights. Nigerians must be involved wholly in seeking to know about their rights as stipulated in the Nigerian constitution. Nigerians should be patient when it comes to pursuing their rights. Nigerians should be resistant to any form of violation that is against their rights as stipulated in the constitution. There should be a collective agreement by all agencies responsible for the protection of human rights to protect human lives and properties effectively.

Keywords: Human Life, Human Right, Nigeria.

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INTRODUCTION

Human resources are one of the most significant resources owned by countries of the world. Their importance in nation-building cannot be overemphasized. Human resources, when adequately harnessed give the best in terms of productivity in any sector of human endeavours. It is to get the best out of human resources that the majority of the countries all over the globe put in place policies that would ensure the dignity for human life. These policies are organized in such a way that every need of humans is catered which makes them give their best in any venture. It can also be observed that despite the uniqueness of human life that some countries do not value them, and this is evident in how they are being treated when it comes to their welfare and wellbeing.

The concept of human life is held sacred by some, and it is not held by some, and this makes it difficult for a consensus to be reached globally as to the conclusion that human life is being valued. In the Nigerian context, it can quickly be concluded that human resources are not given the necessary attention in terms of the treatment received from leaders and fellow humans. It is disheartening to know that the welfare packages of workers in the nation are not

commensurate to their level of output at workplaces, and this means that human life is not valued and respected. Although the constitution of the federal republic of Nigeria chapter four of 1999, had several binding that covers protection of human rights, it has not been fully respected as human are still being exposed to inhumane treatment evident in harassment, security challenges, armed robbery, terrorism, prostitution and drug abuse.

It is painful that despite the existence of democracy, governance and acceptance of the global declaration of human right in Nigeria, that the country is still witnessing the violation of human rights; this is because the country is practising an authoritarian system of government that claimed to be democratic in operation (Akhaine & Chizea, 2011). It was also observed that there are cases of infringement of human right as McCully (2013) pointed them out to include the destruction of property, illegal detention and extra-judicial killings by security forces which show that little or no value is attached to human life. Other forms of human right infringement in Nigeria include; motorist' harassment and extortion by security personnel, political assassinations, the undemocratic imposition of candidates in leadership and threats of political

opponents; rape, child abuse, education denial and domestic violence (Adesupo, 2013).

For a consensus to be reached and for a better value to be gotten from the human resources in the nation, there has to be a re-examination of the human life to understand the values of human life, and until this is reliably done, the human life would continually suffer. It is, therefore, the concern of this paper to carry out a re-examination of the concept of human life in the Nigerian society.

Human Right: Concept, Origin and State in Nigeria

The origin of Human right in Nigeria is traceable to the colonial regulation. Fundamental human rights and freedom are being recognized by the Nigerian traditional society. The concept of right was not birthed in the modern parlance. The human rights are made up of the following values; freedom of thought, speech, belief, association, kin and clan membership, right to family, right to enjoy the personal property and right to be involved in governance and affairs of the society (Agwunobi & Onyedolapo, 2012). In the north, where sharia law is practised, human right and fundamental freedoms were held in high esteem in respect with the tenets of Islam that respects justice (Nwafor & Ogbuka, 2019).

Aremu (2012) cited in Nwafor and Ogbuka (2019) stated that colonialism had reduced traditional values, and the political and economic rights of the citizens have been denied. The movement for improved political involvement gave birth to political rights in the pre-independence constitutions by early Nigerian nationalists and was an improved version concluded in the Lyttleton Constitution of 1954. The enthronement of fundamental human rights in Nigeria in the modern era is traceable to the 1960 independence constitution and those afterwards (Akinola, 2013). The constitution of 1960 and that of 1963 have sections that made provisions for the protection of fundamental human rights.

Akhaine and Chizea (2011) stated that the 1979 and the 1999 Constitutions provided a bill of rights. Fundamental Objectives and Directive Principles of State Policy in Chapter II also gave priority to economic, social and cultural rights. The enthronement of human rights provisions in the constitutions was aimed at making provision to guard political freedom as well as the social and economic wellbeing of the citizens.

With the certainty of fundamental rights and freedoms in the Nigerian Constitutions since 1960, it was still observed that there had been military disruptions. These disruptions have adverse effects on the values placed on human life and human rights (Adesupo, 2013). Before the beginning of democracy in

Nigeria in 1999, successive rules set by the military disrespected the rights of the citizens with the exemption. The significant infringement of human rights in Nigeria was grievous between November 1994 and June 1998. This infringement of human rights under the military government had made Nigeria a bad force to be reckoned with at the international scene which made United Nations Commission on Human Rights held on for five years (Adetoro, 2012 cited in Nwafor and Ogbuka, 2019). This led to the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1999 and the enthronement of democracy and democratic institutions in 1999.

Human rights can be defined as civil liberties that place all human beings on rights such as the right to life, dignity of the human person, personal liberty, fair hearing and freedom of thought, conscience and religion (Adetoro & Omiyefa, 2014). They made provisions for common standard of actions among other countries of the world. They are normal, cogent, unbreakable, and unchangeable, which, when not followed, would lead to infringement of one's sense of justice. Rights can be defined as moral-political claims which by present agreement, is possessed by a human being and are recognized as of right and not by love or grace or charity (Adishi & Oluka, 2018).

Human rights as viewed by Abbah (2013) are more than an aggregation of formal norms; they are known as vibrant political, social, economic, juridical, as well as moral, cultural and philosophical circumstances which showcase the intrinsic value of humans and her self-esteem. Tracing back to the colonial era, the human rights provisions of the Nigerian state has continuously been inadequate and not encouraging. A situational analysis of IDPs in the North East in July 2016 by Ngozi Okonji-Iweala (NOI) Polls, a Nigeria research organization revealed that 66% of the total 400 people displaced in Adamawa, Borno and Yobe states revealed that camp officials sexually abuse and the evacuated women and girls. This is a sign that human lives have undergone several violations of their rights and this call for a re-examination of the concept of the human lives in the Nigerian society.

Women and girls maltreated by members of the security personnel working with the government in their fight against Boko Haram informed Human RightsWatch they feel helpless and fear revenge if they report any form of the abuse. There was a case of a 17-year-old girl that after a year after she escaped the continual attack of Boko Haram in Dikwa, a town 56 miles west of Maiduguri, a policeman came to her for "friendship" in the camp, and then he raped her. "One day he requested to have sex with me," she said. "I refused, but he forced me. It happened just that one time, but soon I realized I was pregnant. When I informed him about my condition, he threatened to

eliminate me if I inform anyone else. So I was frightened to report him". The Boko Haram struggle has led to the death of more than 10, 000 since 2009; the seizures of at least 2,000 people, mostly women and children and large groups of students, including from Chibok and Damasak; the forced enrollment of hundreds of men and the displacement of about 2.5 million people in Northeast, Nigeria (Nwafor & Ogbuka, 2019).

Infringement of Human Rights

A human right which is also referred to as natural right or fundamental rights is linked to certain freedoms or privileges that are known to be part of the human which cannot be denied by the society (Tunde, 2006). Every citizen is expected to enjoy these rights without infringement of any form. Agwunobi and Oyedolapo (2012) opined that human right is the right which supersedes the ordinary law governing the land, the predecessor to the political society and a disorder to a refined existence. Saqib (2015) defined human rights as those rights which a person possesses by being a human. He went further to say that human rights are rights which are available to a person and which protect the person's interest, freedom, dignity and other fundamental rights against the infringement by security personnel.

Akinola (2013) noted that the duty of human rights in the world today can be likened to the view of J. J. Rousseau that man though born free is everywhere in chains. Nowadays, there is a growing concern on how best to protect human from continual violation, and this has made human rights a talk on everyone's lips, but the contradiction, inconsistency, confusion, misinterpretation and vagueness of the term is confusing (Vance, 2001). This has made it possible for the infringement of human lives as they are being denied of their rights and privileges. This denial comes in the form of security challenges, crime, kidnapping and the likes. Like in the case of Nigeria, Boko Haram terrorist organization has been affecting the right to life, peace and security of the Nigerian citizens in the Northeastern zone of the country negatively. Nigeria, therefore, is under the attack of terrorists.

Adeniji (2008) cited in Nwafor and Ogbuka (2019) stated that the modern-day Nigerian state had become a home of death as a result of the activities of the Boko Haram Islamic settled by its leader, Abubakar Shekau. The terrorists continued to cause havoc on the citizen in the northeastern region. Since 2009, the group has created deadly threats to lives and properties, especially in the Northeastern States of Nigeria.

Adetoro and Omiyefa (2014) were of the view that respect for human rights is sacred not as a result of its intrinsic element of effective counter-terrorism or counter-insurgency but because it is a fundamental,

constitutional and international legal obligation. The government of Nigeria does not respect the rule of law and respect for human rights. Impunity has become the order of the day within the government. The government has only paraded a few individuals to justice for abuse of human rights and corruption. The government did not also make necessary investigations of the alleged cases of police and other security agency's abuse of human rights or punish any offender over the years while combating Boko Haram terrorists in the northeastern region and the country. This is observable in the summary execution, assault, torture and other forms of abuse against the citizen (Mohammed, 2015).

Mohammed (2015) stated that the security personnel in Nigeria made some unnecessary arrests and detained several suspects without fair hearing and trial. They also tortured, killed suspects without necessary investigations and also harm the citizens they are meant to protect. This now makes the citizens to be left helpless and hopeless. It was also observed that the Nigerian military personnel in the northeastern region of the country had committed crimes against the citizen in the same way Boko Haram terrorists have done (Amnesty International, 2017).

Mohammed (2015) further asserted that the Nigerian government is a part of the formulation of International Humanitarian Laws (IHL) like the Geneva conventions, their protocol and other customary international law. Even with all of that involvement, the government and its security agencies infringe against the provisions of the international human right law like unusual detention, denial for fair public trial, abuse of citizens' rights, denial of freedoms of speech, denial of freedoms of press, assembly, religion and movement, child abuse, violence against women, sexual exploitation of children, trafficking in persons, forced and child labour among others. These are all issues that call for re-examination if we must live in a society where the lives of the citizen are respected and held in high esteem.

Action Plan for the Re-examination of Human Life

Human life in Nigerian society has suffered a lot of abuse and violations that it must be addressed. It is for this reason that there is a need for an action plan for the re-examination of human life. The National Action Plan for the Upgrade and Defense of Human rights (NAP) is put in place by the government of Nigeria as a result of the recommendation of the Vienna Announcement and Program of Action, approved at the World Conference on Human Rights in Vienna Austria in 1993 (Ezeanya, 2010). This calls for each state to come up with a national action plan that would make the state progress for the defence and advancement of human rights.

Tunde (2006) stated that the Vienna Declaration and Program of Action stated that all human rights are worldwide, inseparable, symbiotic and interconnected and that democracy, expansion and reverence for human rights and fundamental freedoms are mutually dependent and mutually strengthening. According to Oyewale (2010), governments with the National Action Plan are expected to:

- Evaluate the current practices in place to defend and endorse human rights
- Classify parts that need adjustments
- Obligate them to refine the defence and advancement of human rights.

Oyeweso (2013) was of the view that the Nigerian National Action Plan is an incorporated and well defined national policy to help understand the progress of human rights in Nigeria. It is:

- An audit of the human rights condition in our country, recognizing areas in need of protection and upgrading.
- A pledge to robust methods that can be implemented to build and uphold a culture of human rights for the benefit of all.
- A background for continued and organized ways for the country as a whole to protect and endorse human rights in the next three years.

The NAP presented a prospect that recognized and agreed areas of support between government departments, the private sector, civil society in general and other groups of actors so that the participants can collectively advance the defence and advancement of human rights in the country. It was meant to be revisited by the government and the arms of civil society to monitor and measure the adherence of human rights and to evaluate the backing of the government to the improvement and protection of human rights.

The Federal Government of Nigeria has embarked on sharing, counselling and cooperative strategy to develop the NAP. The process began in November 1999 when the National Human rights commission (NHRC) and British Council initiated a visit to South Africa to get firsthand knowledge of the process that led to the development of the South African National Action Plan on Human Rights. The study team was made up of legislatures from the NHRC, the Ministry of justice, the media and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) (Onwuazombe, 2017).

In April 2000, the Chambers of the Attorney-General and the Minister of Justice of the Federation requested that the NHRC initiate discussions with civil societies explain the tenets of the NAP. Between July and October 2000, the NHRC held diverse meetings with civil society groups across Nigeria. At the end of these meetings, another process for a broad conference was planned, which gave way to the process of

initiating NAP (Obioha, 2009). The first outing took place in October 2000, when the NHRC, in collaboration with the Senate Committee on Human Rights, the House of Representatives Committee on Justice and Human Rights and the Legal Resources Association, organized a governmental hearing on the state of the promotion and protection of human rights in Nigeria. The purpose of this hearing was to intimate members of the National Assembly, Government Ministries and Service Chiefs and organized private sector with the concept of NAP. In November 2000, the NHRC with the support of the Australian Embassy to Nigeria hosted a workshop on district and international human rights tools.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The human life is so important that it has to be protected at all times. For the human lives to be valued and given the best, the following recommendations were made:

- The structure of the Nigerian justice system should be committed to safeguard, enforce and comply with the provisions on Nigerian citizens' rights.
- Nigerians must be involved wholly in seeking to know about their rights as stipulated in the Nigerian constitution.
- Nigerians should be patient when it comes to pursuing their rights.
- Nigerians should be resistant to any form of violation that is against their rights as stipulated in the constitution.
- There should be a collective agreement by all agencies responsible for the protection of human rights to protect human lives and properties effectively.
- Civic Education should be enforced to educate the populace about their rights and obligations to the nation.
- There should be prompt access to legal services all over the country.
- There should be the formation of human right societies in schools to intimate students about their rights
- The security personnel should be enlightened on the best ways to carry out their operations.

CONCLUSION

The society that cares for the citizen would go a long way to protect her citizen's lives and properties. The success of any government can be likened to their ability to monitor the affairs of their citizens' and effectively admit justice accordingly to its citizens. Nigerian constitution has made provisions for citizens' fundamental rights, and these provisions must be respected. It is, therefore, noted that most times, these rights are violated in Nigeria and this call for effective safeguarding, enforcement and compliance by the Nigerian government and society as a whole; there is a

need for a re-examination of the concept of the human life.

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