



## Human Rights, Equality and Its Moral Implication in Nigeria

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### Abstract

The quest for equality is gaining ground today in Nigeria, as different cases of inequality is apparent in our dear nation. Individuals and groups are clamoring for equal treatment. This issue of inequality is obvious in religion and discrimination, gender inequality, social inequality, economic inequality, political inequity, age discrimination, etc. Which the causes are not far fetch, from poverty, native, disability and health status, patriarch religion beliefs ethnicity and tribalism. These have serious moral implications in Nigeria such as corruption, religion intolerance, growth of militia groups, and low level of women participation in political and business ventures, falsehood, and social injustice. In a bid to authenticate this fact, the researcher consulted books and other related materials print and online material and also conducted interview of some individual in Nigeria To this, the researcher discovered that there is no absolute equality in creation even though all men are to have been created equal in dignity and in worth. There exist inequality among Nigerian, showered equality can result to greater achievement for Nigerians, yet inequality violates human rights, inequality can be curtailed and equality can improve the moral upbringing of Nigerians. In the light of the above, the researcher suggest that equal treatment, opportunities and a level playground should be given to all Nigerian to maximize their dignity and worth.

**Keywords:** Human Right, Equality, Inequality, Moral Implication & Nigeria

### Introduction

Human rights and equality are different phenomena which complements one another. The foundational principle of human rights is that all human beings are equal in rights, dignity and worth. This cardinal principle informed the declaration of fundamental human rights by the United Nations in 1948 and the French declaration of human right and African character on human right and people rights (Yamin 2).

More so, that, this suggest some moral implication to nations that neglects these principles. Yet we live in a world ravage by social inequalities both within and between countries which have profound moral implications for distribution of basic necessities of lives, as well as the unequal enjoyment of economic social rights and humans rights generally.

Notwithstanding the 16 and 17 centuries Glorious Revolution of 1688 in England, the America declaration of independent of 1776 and French revolution of 1789 which help in the course of equality.

Today the demand or quest for equal treatment among many disadvantage groups is on the increase, people, both women and men are clamouring for political, economy, civic, legal, social and their natural rights which are imperative for enjoyment of the fundamental rights and social justice (Towney, 2003).

The ideals of equality does not contemplate that all material goods, the entire national income or all educational opportunities available in society should be equally distributed among all members of the society. What it means is that men who are different from one another in their physical and mental capacities, aptitudes, skills, talents and energies should be given equal opportunities for the development of their personal qualities and capacities, in the shape of material goods, comforts, education, training etc., this also imply that the provision of different rewards for different services does not violate the principle of equality provided discrimination is made on rational ground.

The problem of equality and inequality had figured in political thoughts since the earliest times in Greek philosophy, two tradition emerged; one tradition represented by Plato and Aristotle and this group supported inequality, the other tradition represented by Pericles, the sophist, Antiphon, Lycophron, Euripides and stoic supported equality among men. Aristotle discovers that equality was a cause of rebellion in many states. Hence he define justice as treating equal as equal, the stoic

philosopher gave the idea of universal brotherhood and citizenship which was based on natural law and reason: hence equality before the law and equality by birth were the main features of the demand for equality (Barker 386). Moreover, the natural and physical inequalities consist in the different privileges which some men enjoy to the exclusion of other such as inequalities of wealth; prestige and power. This man made inequalities emanated from social order more deliberately designed by men themselves to the detriment of the fundamental human rights of the people.

Nigerian citizen are being face with different sort of discrimination or inherent inequalities, such as gender discrimination, ethnicity, religious discrimination, regionalism, health discrimination, economic, social, political marginalization etc. which constitutes a major threats to existence of Nigeria as a nation. These informed the constant quest and demand for equal opportunities among aggrieved groups in Nigeria from the south, north-west and eastern part of Nigeria.

### Statement of the Problem

The issue of human right and the quest for equality is on increase in the countries of the world due to certain inequalities which are natural and some are man-made which are detrimental to full enjoyment of the fundamental human rights. Nigeria as a nation is not an exception to this certain inequalities and unjust treatment based on age, sex, gender, race, ethnicity, power and wealth in display, in economic and social life, different ethnic groups are calling for equal representation and distribution of the “national cake”, religious groups are demanding for freedom of worship, civil societies organization and nongovernmental

organization are working hard to ensure justice and full implementation of the rule of law etc. to no avail. These demands made by these different groups (militia) are cardinal to human rights.

### Objectives of the Study

The main aim of the study is, examine the quest for human rights and equality in Nigeria. The specific objectives of the study are as follows:

- a) This study shall investigate the causes of inequalities in our society.
- b) It shall examine the extent to which inequality constitutes a violation of the human rights.
- c) It will evaluate some past and current display of inequalities or discrimination prevailing in Nigeria.
- d) It shall assess why individual and groups are demanding for equality.
- e) It shall also examine the moral implication of inequality in Nigeria as nation.

### Research Questions

- a) What causes of inequalities in our society?
- b) What is the extent to which inequality constitutes a violation of the human rights?
- c) What are some of the past and current forms and examples of inequalities or discrimination prevailing in Nigeria?
- d) Why individual and groups are demanding for equality in Nigeria?
- e) What are the moral implications of inequality in Nigeria as nation?

### Concept of Human Rights

In an attempt to discuss this concept of human Gasiokwu in his famous work “human rights, History, Ideology and Laws” look at a multifaceted form in which the Human rights is understand. He claimed that “in the study of Human rights, one encounters in relevant legal acts, constitutions, statutes and international instruments, various terms and notion other than human rights to him his include fundamental rights, fundamental freedom, civil liberties and civil right, individual and collective human rights as well as people rights.

Moreover, he also buttress that amongst these various terms of human right seem to be the most general notion encompassing rights attributable to individuals, groups of individuals, people and even mankind

More so Gasiokwu is quick to observe that because of the scope and width of the concept of human rights there is no general acceptable definition by both legal and political writer hence tried to avoid general definition, notwithstanding he was able outline some fundamental definition of the concept base on differing philosophical view, school that such author represent.

### Classification of Human Rights

In afford to describe the right and duties of man, Vidya Dllor Hahojan in his work “political theory” give a comprehensive classification of rights as:

- a. Natural rights Hahojan see rights from ancient times to imply the fundamental rights based on rationalism and universal divine law. The jus Gentium of the Romans was based on natural rights.

According him writer like Hobbes, Locke and Rousseau the chief advocates of natural rights with some noted difference in their conception of the state of nature.

- b. Moral rights, “moral rights” are those rights which are recognized by the moral sense of the people. Their existence is due to custom; long usage and the force of public opinion. Here, there is no sanction of the state to enforce them. While no legal action can be taken against those who violate moral rights, the force of public opinion is so strong that it is difficult for an individual to violate them.
- c. Legal rights: legal right according Leacock, right is a privilege or immunity enjoyed by a citizen against any of his fellow citizens granted by the sovereign power of the state and up held by that state. Legal rights are recognized by the state and the police and the courts ensure their enforcement. Legal rights are embodied on the law of the land.

Moreover, he further categorizes legal rights into political, civil and economic rights.

- i. Civil rights includes right to life, right to personal safety and freedom, right to family life, right to freedom of speech and expression, right to freedom of public meeting and association, freedom of religion and conscience, right and freedom to own property.
- ii. Political rights includes: right to vote and be voted for, right to petition and seek redress.

- iii. Economic rights: Hahojan maintains that the importance of economic rights has been recognized just in a recent time, it is felt that without these rights, political and civil rights have no meaning. He believe that life will have no meaning for a person whose very existence is precarious-economic rights are in three numbers; the right to work, the right for adequate wages and the right to reasonable hours of work.

The constitution of the federal republic of Nigeria (1999) as amended stipulates the fundamental Human right as:

- ✓ Right to Life
- ✓ Right to dignity of Human person
- ✓ Right to personal liberty
- ✓ Right to fair hearing
- ✓ Right to private and family life
- ✓ Right to freedom of thought, conscience and Religion
- ✓ Right to freedom of expression and press
- ✓ Right to peaceful assembly and association
- ✓ Right to freedom of movement
- ✓ Right to freedom from discrimination
- ✓ Right to acquire and own immovable property anywhere in Nigeria (-)

### Concept of Equality

According to Vidya Dllor Hahojan in his book, “Political theory” tries to make distinction between equality, and somewhat confused word with identical, same, similar and equitable, but in political terms, equality

as a concept is different from all of them and it is very difficult to define it as an abstract concept. Laski writes “no idea is more difficult in the realm of political science than equality”. T. F. Stephen observes, “Equality is a word so wide and vague as to be by itself almost unmeaning” to Towney the word equality possesses more than one meaning (equality 35).

Hahojan behold that equality is multifaceted phenomenon that can easily be define hence is been understood in different ways. To some it is nothing more than equality before the law while others have a wildest sense understanding under the heading of political equality, social equality, civil equality and economic equality. More so, Giovanni Sartori rightly say that equality has so many faces and so by implications that after we have examine it from all direction we are left with a feeling of not having really mastered it (theory 326).

Moreover, Harold J Laski views equality as a fundamental leveling ground or process. Equality broadly is a coherence of ideas each of which need special examination, undoubtedly it applies fundamentally a certain leveling process it means that no man shall be so placed in society that he can over reach his neighbor to the extent which constitutes a denial of the latter’s citizenship it connotes that, that realization of best selves. It must involve as it logical result the realization by others of their best selves. More on this, Laski see equality as a social force as will balance a share in the toil of living with a share gain. More over equality therefore; means first of all absent of special privilege to this effects it suggest adequate opportunities are laid open to all. (Politics 153 – 154). J. A. Corry observes that “the ideal of equality has insisted men are politically equal, that all citizens are equally

entitled to take part in political life; the exercise the franchise, to run for and hold office. It has insisted that individual shall be equal before the law, that when general law confers rights or imposes duties, these rights and duties shall extend to all or conversely that law shall not confer special privileges in particular individual groups” (Politics 33)

Hohojan in Afford to explain the concept of equality liked equality with liberty which are both instrumental for justice. He see equality as mean to achieve social justice, hence he further buttress that political, social, economic and other inequalities, result in injustice to million all over the world. He so much believe that in any atmosphere of inequality only few enjoy special privileges and the rest of the people suffer and that is why there is a demand for removal of special preference and privileges (376).

### Types of Equality

Ogundu asserted that the principle of equality may be applied in different sphere of social life; such as political, Economic and legal social sphere (39) moreover, Hahojan included the natural equality (384):

**(a) Legal Equality:** this kind of equality describes the equality before the law. It is generally held that the principle of equality was first put forward as demand for legal equality that is grant of equal legal status to all individuals in society irrespective of their birth, physical and mental capacities or other differences (western 19). In light of this, Rosseau opines that extension of equality to all citizens was the primary characteristic of civil society. He observes “it is that instead of destroying natural equality, the fundamental pact..... Substitute a moral and lawful equality for the physical

inequality, which nature impose upon men, so that although unequal in strength or intellect, they all become equal by convention and legal rights (339). The idea of legal equality in a pluralistic society thus emanate from moral consideration and serves as the basis of equal rights of men.

Agreeing with this barker argued thus: the state which vests us with legal personalities or 'masks' vest us all with equal masks, partly because it simply cannot distinguish our differences even if it would, but ultimately for the far deeper reason that we matter equally before the law, whatever our differences may be.

**(b) Political Equality:** political equality denotes the equality of political rights of the citizens in a pluralistic society. It implies the right to be represented in decision making bodies on an equal footing. It also postulates that nobody will be barred from holding political office on grounds of birth, religion or sex etc. This means there will be no privilege classes in the society entitle to rule and that the ruler will not accord any special consideration to will or interest of any particular individual or group in society. Hence this doctrine is derived from general belief that man as such is a rational being, capable of political judgment irrespective of his physical and mental capacities, education and wealth etc. (Wolff 122). Sharing in the same thought, Raphael observed that "the French revolution arise in demanding equality were demanding a removal of arbitrary privilege such as that which confined political rights to the rich and the will-born (78).

- a) **S(c) Socio-Economic Equality:** the term socio-economic equality embraces both social equality and economic equality. It signified a further development of the concept of equality. While the idea of legal –

political equality arose as a cry of early liberalism, the concept of socio-economic equality was articulated as a goal of socialism (Ogundu 40).

Hobbeshause maintains that "the term 'social equality' has been adopted by socialist largely to distinguish their objective from the earlier egalitarian ideals of French revolution. The nineteenth century Republican on whom their mantle descended, sought "political equality". To socialist, these ends by themselves seen inadequate; they are at best ways to achieving "real equality or social equality" (95). So socio-economic equality therefore postulates the rights to equal satisfaction of basic needs which implies state provision of all social amenities and essential human needs intended to serve the cause of socio-economic equality in the society.

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**(d) Natural equality:** About natural economic, Plato wrote that "all men are equal; made of same earth and by one work man and however. We deceive ourselves as dear into God as the poor peasant as the mighty prince" similar view were express by Rousseau. (Hahojan 384).

### Form of Inequalities in Our Society

**a. Economic Inequality:** Bohoslausky, hold that severe economic inequality frequently affects the effective enjoyment of particular human rights, both civil and political rights as well as social, economic and cultural one. It may also lead to forms of discrimination that are prohibited under the international human rights law. Human rights law therefore imposes certain legal obligation on states to address economic inequalities affecting the enjoyment of human rights and bestows effective guideline for reducing inequalities including

the prioritization of policy responses in this field. It was observed that, it is in this effort to reduce economic inequality within and among countries that the goal 10 of the sustainable development goals was enshrined. The international community sees economic inequalities as a major contributing factor to the emergence of debt crises.

**b. Health inequality:** Alicia Ely Yamin, depicts that applying Human rights framework to health is of utmost importance. Yamin holds that, the foundational principle of human rights is that all human beings are equal in rights, dignity and worth, health is a human right in and of itself, and at the same time, the condition of health reflects the enjoyment of many other human rights. This, in a human rights framework, Yamin views not only health inequality, rather, the

concern, that bothered after the year of declaration of human rights. The realization that the world is ravaged by inequalities in power, money and resource both in and between countries which have profound implications for distribution of population health as well as the unequal enjoyment of economic and social rights and human rights generally.

**c. Religion inequality and discrimination:** Arcot Krishnaswami, featured "the study of discrimination in the matter of Religious Rights and practice" hinged on the UN Declaration on freedom of thought, conscience and Religion. In this regard, He posits that great Religions and beliefs are based upon ethical tenets such as the duty to widen the bounds of good-neighbourliness and obligation to meet human need in the widest sense. He believes the precept to love one neighbor is central

to Christianity, Judaism, Islam as well as the various branches of Buddhism, Confucianism and Hinduism and even some teaching of non-religious beliefs are imbued with the sense of the oneness of mankind, history probably records more cases of man cruelty to man than example of good-neighbourliness and the desire to satisfy the needs of the less fortunately placed. He points out, horrors and excesses committed in the name of religion or belief. More so, he pictured certain times in history where organized religions have displayed extreme intolerance, restricted or even denied human liberties, curtailed freedom of thoughts and retarded the development of art and culture.

### Research Methodology

This study with its peculiarity and significance, will employ the use of both primary sources and secondary sources of data collection. On this ground the researcher will write and administer questionnaire to some group of people male and female, both young and aged, and also the use of interview was also employed in gathering data.

### Findings

The researcher seeks to ascertain the inherent inequalities that are seen in different individuals in Nigeria and which nature have made. According to Mr Joseph Audu, God even though created all human beings equal in dignity and worth, as mortal beings with the same and equal standing before Him, both male and female. There exist some forms of inequalities in human. To him "As our fingers are not all the same, so also are we human. His opinion seems to correlate with what Kojan depicts in his book" "political theory That all men are born equal but absolute equality can never be realized, as a matter of fact, nature made

men unequal some of them with great strength, some of them endowed with great intellectual power, some with extremely handsome textures and some rear gifts More he further attest that "every individual has his own point of weakness and strength peculiar to his own personality. (377).

Moreover another interviewee Ms. Sabina John claim that human being are create by God but human being are the architect of inequality which is champion by deterrent discrimination which they designed to satisfied their selfish interest. There seem to be some clement of truth in her opinion because of some man made inequality that exist in our society today, ranging from political, economic, social, gender and religion inequalities etc. from the above, one can see that from creation made us equal but with certain difference which though if supposed to be maximized for our advantage but is often to our disadvantage

This researcher seeks to know whether Nigerians enjoy equality of rights or privileges that is meant to be theirs as citizen of the nation. To Mr. Bello Inusa, he believes hut Nigeria is face with different inequality and discrimination. In the area of religion, he sincerely claimed that there exists religion discrimination in Nigeria between Christian and Muslim. Moreover he claimed in most Christian state of the federation Moslem are given different derogate names, exclusion in most aspect of their social life, and hen freedom to freely practice two religion, franchise, assembly is limited. These opinion is likely seen too popular among many Muslim in fact the Nigeria supreme council for Islamic aliair in response to Kukah's claim that an denied worship place in some northern tertiary institution said "Muslim face more discrimination in Nigeria an listed alleged

cost of discrimination and marginalization of Muslims. To them "Islam is reduced to the status of unwanted visitors kill no breathing space, treated like lepers and there ramshackle place of worship are routinely destroyed in the south-cast and south and some part of south west (Premium time 16 August)

Whereas, Mr. Benshak Daknum present what the minority Christian experience in the co-north's; he claimed that there right to freely practice their religion is limited, Christian religion procession are not allowed: Christian gathering most be permitted, likewise he said it is difficult to secure a land to build churches there. More so, this religion inequality manifest itself in the employment opportunities, as Muslim have more advantage over there Christian fellows, the indigenous immorality Christian can only vote but cannot be voted for in political position even though they are very educated and more competent they are only reluctantly given appointment, as Special Assistance sometimes Commissioner.<sup>1</sup> think in the light of the above fact Kukah made the above claim "that as i'm talking now in Bayero University, Usman Danfodio University, most of the tertiary institution and universities in the Northern Nigeria Christian don't have a place to worship alter over 40 years of the existence of these universities and these are the areas where the intellects, those who are going to govern Nigeria this 1s where they are. In the light of the above it is pertinent to note that, there exist religion discrimination in Nigeria, in states where either Christian or Muslim are in the majority and this have a way of overheating the Nigeria polity as religion 1s use as panacea to attend political ambition and use by politician to fight their personal wars.



Besides these, a woman considered this question from her position as a woman that men displayed certain discrimination against them as girl and also woman. By given more priority to the male child and subsequently the man. She gave instance to portray the challenge woman faces as follows:

- I. Men claimed headships and bear authority over the family which she believes is right.
- II. Men opinion most often than not supersede the women opinion in most cases.
- III. Women opinion and were not often consulted when it came to community discussion.
- IV. Politically men considered women as weak and cannot contend the pressure of governance.
- V. Most women are denied the right to inherit their parent's property etc.

These to her is unfair as it made many women to grow up with low self-esteem or feel inferior to their men counterparts indifferent facet of living

Moreover Chubuzo Kenneth and Babatunde Ishaq opine that politically their exist inequality in Nigeria. These fellows claim to be born and breed in the north yet they can only be allow to vote and not to be voted because they are not indigenes more so, their children in the state tertiary institution are made to pay extra school tee charges compare to the indigene. The question they raise is that it Nigerians are equal such unequal treatment should have been discarded to no avail this likewise is What is obtainable in the south and western region of Nigeria the minority the physically challenge, the poor are often discriminated socially,

As is been noted in this research that Nigeria citizen are on their feet to demand for equality indifferent facet of their living: Mr. Abednego Salisu and John Idi believed that a more equal societies experience less problems with health and crime, they better unity, are more trustful, less stressed and anxious and mentally healthier.

Another important benefit of equality as suggested by Mr. Sale Audu is equality can result in tangible benefits in reducing crime and conflict, secondly it engineer a more effective work force, increase the competency self-love and right self-esteem among it citizen poor.

Beside, Omaru Sati is of the opinion that equality will results in closing the gap between the rich and the poor. Because of equal opportunities that is available to all citizen of the society in the light of the above I will suggest that Nigeria should seek equality because it benefits are urgently needed for proper functioning of the nation?

Consequence of inequality is the fact it cause our society to become more individualized and he quality of social relation are weakened, the reinforcing and confirming force for our identity and value from family and close friends is reduced more sensitive to our social status and other forms of affirmation (Lahdenpera, 2006).

- I. In Nigeria the consequences of inequality are many fold Lahdenpera (2006) opines that inequality breed violence and crimes, distrust Today Nigeria communities are fill with different Violent and crime, terrorism army robbery, kidnapping, ethnic and religious crisis champion by distrust and other reasons

- II. Moreover, Allen Godge and Mosa Tbrahim opine that inequality breed poverty among Nigeria. As the poor in Nigeria get poorer and the rich get rich because of low income, low wages, unemployment, lack of subsidy for former, and social amenities to rural area etc these they see as detrimental to growth of the poor and hinder their ability to rise to a new social class. (Starvation, diseases and malnutrition)
- III. To Ruth Audu and Hannatu Musa, held that inequality by necessity makes a part of the population relatively subordinated. That it bring with it a subjective feeling of inferiority which leading to a set of adverse effects, most noticeable it affects the performance within the educational system
- IV. In Nigeria they believe that inequalities lead to segmentation and absolute deprivation, areas are created for the poor and the rich. People growing up in poor areas tend to inherit the values and mentality that is prevailing within that society which in turn can diminish their chances of improvement.

Those who despite this manage to prevail well move to better areas while those who fail in more affluent areas will move to the less regard ones.

Nonetheless, Joel Amechi and Roseline Peter both businessman and woman sees inequalities in positive light. To them they believe that it create the ground for competition Given example with themselves as test case to that, they hold, the come from a poor background but they

take that as challenge that change their future in life. Today they can boast of comfortable life.

From the forgone, one can attest to the fact that the consequences of inequalities have so much adverse effect upon our country Nigeria. It a known and obvious fact that this issue discussed in the interviewed are to a good extent a true experience that Nigeria past through

### Summary of Findings

It is a known fact that the foregone discussion that human beings created equal in worth and dignity, however, they exhibits different talents, aptitudes, behaviour etc. That makes them usual not withstanding this; Nigeria is bedeviled by different inequalities ranging from political, economy, health, social, age, and religion which necessities demanding for equal treatment.

Equality is discovered to content basic ingredient that can result to greater achievement to Nigeria as a country since it can reduce crimes and conflicts, it can ensure a more effective work force, increase competency and self-worth or right self-esteem in its citizens etc. Nonetheless the consequences of inequality are enormous such as.

Moreover, it is also obvious that certain man made and conventional inequality can be curtailed because inequality is considered to have some moral implications on its citizens. By and large equality when properly incorporated in a society like Nigeria, it can improve or enhance the moral upbringing of Nigerians

### Conclusion

An important thing to conclude with is the fact that equality is relevant and cogent for

proper development of our great nation. Because inequalities and discrimination to Nigerians is to the disadvantage of our great Nation considering the fact that is a violation of human right ,In the twenty first Century, that international communities are considering human rights as a very crucial factor to Realization of the truth worth of human beings Moreover, inequality is the social ill as it have negative consequences on every individual human being and their relationship with one another. It also has a way of affecting one relationship with his maker.

Nevertheless, it is the creator's design that all human are created equal dignity and worth; consequently, violating it does not only deprive human beings of their being but also distorts the purpose of God in creation. However, it is worthy to note that though human being are created with some obvious inequalities, it is important to note also the creator never used such inequalities to the detriment of their being as give them the level plain ground or rather the same opportunities to exhibits their dignity and worth in relation to him and their fellow humans.

### Recommendations

The following are the recommendation by the researcher

- a) Equality should be imbibed by Nigerians and the government
- b) Government institutions, religious bodies and individuals should be united in challenging cases of inequalities perpetrated against all Nigerians
- c) Unequal treatments should not only be factual and rational but relevant.

- d) Government should also have a way of amending part of its law and policies that give room to inequality to breed.
- e) Nigerians should learn how to live and tolerate one another as human beings and people created by the same God.

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