

# The Place of Women in Nigeria Change Agenda As Exemplified By Biblical Deborah and Esther

Olatunji Samuel AKINWUMI (Ph.D)

*Bamidele Olumilua University of Education, Science and Technology Ikere-Ekiti, Ekiti State Nigeria*

**Abstract:** The development of any society is measured by good change manifested in increased capacity of the people to have control over material assets, intellectual resources and ideology, ability to procure the physical necessities of life (food, clothing and shelter) access to adequate education, gender equality, sustainable development and peace. Since the required development as itemized above is not so realistic in Nigeria, there is therefore serious need for change that will pave way for the needed development. The work examined the contributions of Deborah and Esther to national development with the aim of presenting Nigeria women as having the ability to bring the necessary change that Nigeria needs. The paper however suggests two conditions that would make the desired change to happen which include objectives and subjective conditions. Objective conditions exist when situations are evidently abnormal with huge contradictions which can only be resolved by change. The subjective conditions involve making available organizational preparations requires to bring about awareness and consciousness for change. The findings however revealed that conditions needed for change are made possible by utilizing some virtues and potential resident in Nigeria women such as commitment, self –control, sense of direction, courage and wisdom as exemplified by Deborah and Esther in the Bible. Being an historical essay the work employed historical frame work in its analysis. The paper however recommended that the change Agenda should take cognizance of the Social, Economic, Political and educational sectors.

**Keywords:** Development, Change Agenda, Women, organization and Society.

## I. INTRODUCTION

Man from time immemorial has always developed strong desire for change. He is therefore not comfortable when things remain stagnant. Any life that is not experiencing change is considered a retrogressive one. The call for change by the citizens of any country is therefore a call for progress and development. Any nation that considers change as optional will soon fixzzle out and cease to exist.

It is probably the realization of the above submission, which made millions of Nigerians to vote for General Muhammadu Buhari as the President who they consider as an agent of change. However, “change” appears to be a bi-polar phenomenon, there are agents of change in one hand and the beneficiaries of the change on the other hand. Consequent to the general mentality of the masses that women play second fiddle in the society, they are in most cases side-lined in the scheme of things and relegated to the background when, in all reality, they have the potential for change. In this paper, we

shall therefore examine the following: An overview of Nigeria change Agenda; the necessity of change in Nigeria; conditions for change; the scope of the expected change and the place of women in Nigeria change Agenda: biblical Deborah and Esther as exemplars.

### *An overview of Nigeria change agenda*

The change agenda as explained by Buhari is an attempt to build a new Nigeria which requires patriotic zeal. [1] The change agenda will involve government’s intervention by providing physical and economic infrastructure as well as social policies that would provide opportunities and succor for the extremely poor Nigerians. [2] It entails aiming to consistently generate 5,000MW of power daily by early 2018 which is a modest target from what is already available. Change agenda means government will make frantic effort to complete a variety of outstanding power related-projects to remove existing pitfalls and lay the foundation for the generation of 10,000MW and 15,000MW in the short and long terms. [3]It will make government to pursue a long overdue reform in the hydrocarbon industry and reorganize the NNPC and holding the officials accountable for past revenue losses.

The capacity of the country’s oil refineries to reduce the over 37 percent of foreign exchange applied to the importation of the refined petroleum products [4]. It will involve the production of Rice, Wheat and Cotton. The production of Rice, Wheat and Cotton will help reduce the foreign exchange requirement for the importation of the same item as rice importation alone gulps about \$4billion annually. According to Buhari, [5] Seven rice –producing states are working in concert with the Federal Government to map out the pathway to self-sustenance in rice production within 30 months [6].

The change agenda will involve government’s plan to create a friendly and efficient environment for investment by removing bureaucracies and red tapes in approval process so that the incentive regime in the country would also be reviewed. Government will return all garment and textile factories to full production within the shortest time possible. To address youth unemployment, government would invest in infrastructure, technology, agriculture and mining while the one-meal-a-day programmed for primary schools would also create many jobs and business opportunities. Government would implement social intervention scheme to make no fewer than 110 million extremely poor Nigerian to participate in the new Nigeria .The experiences and exposure of

Nigerians abroad would be tapped to build a thriving economy as obtained in other nations, such as India, Japan, China, Korea which attained global status following the contributions of their nationals abroad [7].

#### *Why is change necessary in Nigeria?*

Obviously in Nigeria, sustainable development appears to be a mirage because of corruption, crime and problem of public safety, unemployment, women marginalization and oppression. Environment degradation and public health issues have continued unchecked, there are problems in Nigerian's education system, and infrastructures are inadequate. [8] Change is however necessary since these challenges have hindered the much needed development.

#### *Corruption*

Corruption which is at the root of many of Nigerian problem takes many forms and infiltrate all political institutions and economics sector to the extent that Transparency International in 2013, described Nigeria as one of the most corrupt nations in the world, [9] ranking as 144<sup>th</sup> in corruption perception index out of the 177 countries measured. Corruption doesn't only exit in government, but is persuasive in society.

#### *Crime and Problem of Public Safety*

Crime and Terrorist attacks are on the increase every day in Nigeria. Bombings, Kidnapping and other violent activities of Boko Haram prevent many Nigerians from feeling save. Citizens in this country experience sleepless nights. Public safety is the most fundamental responsibility of any state, and Nigeria has failed in this regard. There is therefore need for change.

#### *Unemployment*

Unemployment is a serious challenge in Nigeria. Many people are frustrated with widespread joblessness. Official Nigeria statistics say 38% of those under 24 are unemployed, but the World Bank estimates this number to be closer to 80%. [10] In March 2014, 16 people were killed in stampedes when 500,000 desperate job-seekers rushed to apply for under 5,000 vacancies at the Nigeria Immigration service. [11] No nation can witness meaningful development when people are unemployed. This ugly scenario makes change inevitable.

#### *Problems in Nigeria's Education System*

The Nigeria educational system suffers in many ways. Facilities in Nigerian universities for instance are not adequate. Libraries are not well equipped, irregular supply of electricity and water are constantly witnessed by students. These students occasionally go on rampage whenever the situation appears unbearable. Since the school academic calendars are no longer reliable, students can no longer predict when they will graduate. All these frightening developments in Nigeria tertiary institutions call for change.

#### *Inadequate Infrastructure*

The power sector is corrupt and mismanaged, and many workers in the electricity sector are not equipped with the proper skills or training. Domestic production suffers in these conditions, but many foreign companies also find it difficult to conduct business in Nigeria because of frequent power failures. This problem affects a Third World country like Nigeria every year. Nigerian roads are not motor-able, road accidents are persistently witnessed on daily basis. For this ugly trend not to continue in Nigeria there is an urgent need for change.

#### *Environmental and Public Health Issues*

In 2013, Amnesty International reported that Nigeria experience hundreds of oil spills per year in the Niger Delta, largely due to pipeline destructions, erosion, sabotage and neglect by oil companies. [12] Oil spills weaken the micro-organisms and the soil nutrient and this weakening harms communities and the overall economy. The Nigeria health system is poorly funded, and this lack of resources creates a "brain drain". Talented doctors and nurses find jobs in developed countries, leaving Nigerian hospitals in the hands of their less-talented colleagues. In view of the numerous challenges confronting Nigeria as itemized above, there is need for change.

#### *Condition for change in Nigeria*

For change not to remain a mere illusion, certain conditions must be fulfilled. These conditions can be classified into two namely: objective and subjective conditions.

**Objective conditions:** The conditions exit when situations are evidently abnormal with huge contradictions which can only be resolved by change. The various terrible challenges been faced by the nation as pointed out above are the objective conditions that call for change.

**Subjective Conditions:** By subjective conditions we refer to organizational preparation required to bring about change awareness and consciousness which include preparing and building the organization, leadership training and development. Since general insecurity and insurgency had caused extreme human hardship and destruction of lives and livelihood, the subjective conditions that will make change possible should be designed to equip the security personnel and persistent training must be given to them.

Devastation and environmental degradation must be attended to. The government needs to play a bigger role in providing proper waste disposal systems and better health care, particularly in neglected rural areas. Environmental sustainable disposal practices, like recycling, should be adopted. That vandalizing oil pipeline should be pursued more aggressively and punished for causing oil spills. Hospital need better funding. As part of the subjective conditions needed for change, citizens should cherish the goods manufactured in Nigeria, and wealthy Nigerians should invest their money in

local industry to encourage development. The youth should be given more opportunities to participate in governance and economic activities. Youth empowerment should also be encouraged.

More power and better roads remain part of the subjective conditions for change. The workers in these sectors should be paid well and those with good skills and strong ethics should be rewarded. Both the government and the individuals should work hand in hand to reduce unemployment. In all reality, when the above subjective conditions are persistently taken into consideration, Nigeria will no doubt witness unprecedented transformation.

As part of the subjective conditions needed for the change, the media should inform, educate and entertain the public. The media should reflect and project the dominant view in society. The civil society must be ready to organize and act collectively towards the public good; fostering interaction among citizens, other associations and institutions reflect the will of the people and are accountable to them.

#### *The scope of the Expected Change Agenda*

The expected change agenda in Nigeria must be comprehensive and must cover the following political, Economic, social and educational sectors.

#### *Political Change Agenda*

The political change agenda must also include the following:

- *Reform of INEC:* Independent National Electoral Commission must be reformed. Changing the leadership of the commission is not enough, there should be total reformation that will touch every aspect, and policies that would enhance meaningful development must be formulated.
- *Building of democratic culture:* The democratic culture must be revisited and restructured in such a way that will bring about sustainable development and progress.
- *Financial regulation of every party:* The political parties should be given financial regulations. Government should also ensure that each party complies with the regulation.
- *Building of institutions and mechanism:* Government should create enabling environment for the emergence of relevant institution.
- The change agenda should include review of the 1999 constitution.

#### *Social Change Agenda*

Over the years, as observed by Igbuzor, [13] the social fabric of the Nigerian society has been destroyed. A lot of people become rich overnight without anybody questioning them about the source of their wealth. Those who embezzle public funds are honoured and in most cases rewarded by their communities with chieftaincy titles. As Igbuzor succinctly put

it, there is brazen display of wealth in the midst of widespread poverty. There is, therefore need for change in the following areas:

- *Re-orientation on social values:* people should be sensitized and given proper orientation on our social values.
- There is need for complete re-orientation on work ethic.

#### *Economic Change Agenda*

The economic change agenda should also take cognizance of the following aspects:

- *Diversification of the economy:* It is fact that cannot be disputed that Nigeria dependence on oil has seriously affected the country's economy. The economy therefore needs to be diversified.
- There should be promotion of transparency and accountability
- As suggested by Igbuzor, there should be promotion of policies that will lead to good macroeconomic environment, improve access to financial service, improve governance and increase access of the poor to basic infrastructures and social service.

#### *Technological Change*

- Technological training that will enhance development
- Building and provision of technology infrastructure
- Use of technology to promote transparency and accountability

#### *Education*

- Improvement in the literacy level
- Proper funding of education
- Adequate supply of facilities in schools

#### *The Place of Women in Nigeria Change Agenda: Biblical Deborah and Esther as Exemplars*

Womanhood is such a wonderful and challenging experience, the woman was created by divine plan to fulfill a unique, definite purpose.

As recorded in Genesis 2:20-22

... *But for Adam there was not found a helpmeet for him. And the lord caused a deep sleep to fall Upon Adam and he slept; and he took one of his ribs And closed up the flesh instead thereof. And the rib Which the Lord hath taken from man, made a woman.*

The woman was created out of necessity and not by accident, every woman, without an exception, is expected to live a purposeful, meaningful and successful life. Though, there is unimaginable discrimination against women in the past, yet, evidences abound that Nigeria is blessed with influential women who have affected the country and its image in one

way or the other. Such women include: Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala who holds the record of being the first woman to serve as the managing director of the World Bank as well as the minister of foreign Affairs and finance, Obiageli Ezekwesili as a co-founder of transparency international, a global anti-corruption body. Others include: Faridah Waziri, Stella Okoli, justice Aloma, Mariam Muktar, Christianah Anyanwu, Florence Ita Giwa, Zainab maina, Abike Dabiri , Erewa Erelu Abiola Dosunmu, Folorunso Alakija and so on. These women were outstanding in their approach and attitudes towards problems and challenges that faced their nation. Instead of casting aspersion on the values of women, Nigeria women can be managed effectively to participate in the development of the nation. We shall therefore explore the extraordinary courage and doggedness of two of these biblical characters that can further serve as role models for Nigerian women.

### *Deborah*

The name ‘Deborah’ means “a bee” and is emblematic of industry, patience, sagacity and usefulness.[14] She was the only woman in the scripture elevated to a high administrative position by the choice of God (Judge 4: 4-5) . Known simply as “the wife of Lapidoth” she appears as a simple homemaker, not from any aristocratic lineage. [15] She described herself as “a mother in Israel (Judge 5:7) .She was raised up by God to deliver the people from the bondage their idolatry had caused them. It was a time when everyone did what was right in his or her own eyes. The civil court was inept, the military was too weak to defend national borders, [16] normal life was no longer possible. She fulfilled her role as a “judge” She was first a counselor as she displayed in her leadership by suggesting solutions to people with problems. She had a fearless and unsolicited devotion to the emancipation of God’s people.

She was an inspiring, patriotic fighter. Her compassion had been awakened by the atrocities against her people and she arose to make herself available. Deborah together with Barak went out in battle against Sisera, a mighty man of war, who had terrorized Israel for many years. With her formidable army, she suggested the strategy and the canaanites’ army was vanquished. Thus Deborah became known as the female warrior who rescued her people from their cruel foes.

Though Nigeria as a nation recognizes the importance of women in development, hence the creation of ministry of women affairs at the Federal and State levels to support the creation of pet programmes to enable women contribute meaningfully to the development of the nation, the grassroots women just like Deborah can still be managed effectively to bring the much needed change to their community.

As we can see from our text (Judges 5:7), Deborah was raised when the civil court was inept, and normal life was no longer possible. Instead of relegating women to the background in the scheme of development in Nigeria, women of integrity that have the potential to bring change like Deborah should be involved in the change agenda.

Inspiring, patriotic fighters like Deborah among Nigeria women should know that the era of looking down upon women as a piece of article to be kept at home is gone. They should be awakened by the atrocities meted against the people and arise to make themselves available.

### *Esther*

Esther has been described as one of the seven great Bible women who changed and shaped the course of events in their generations. Although the odds weighed heavily against her, she emerged a queen and the rescuer of the people from the throes of death. Esther grew up in the care of her great cousin, Mordecai, following the demise of her parents. She grew up as well-behaved, well-groomed, attractive young lady, attractive enough to win the heart and attention of the king of the empire. [17] King Ahasuerus had deposed his queen , Vashti, in a fit of rage, and replacement was necessary. Ahasuerus from his exalted position saw the outstanding qualities in Esther and chose her to be his queen. The king loved Esther above all the women, and she obtained grace and favour in his sight more than all the virgins so that he set the royal crown upon her head and made her queen instead of Vashti (Esther 2: 17).

Esther was however faced with a great challenge when her enslaved nation, the Jews, came under the threat of execution by a royal decree passed just to show the bruised ego of Haman, the chief of the king’s officers. Haman had felt insulted by Mordecai’s refusal to pay him obeisance at the gate of the king’s palace. [18] As a result of Modecai’s perceived insubordination, himself and all the Jews were to be annihilated in a matter of weeks. Esther when she was informed of the development promptly identified with the plight of her people. From safe confines of the king’s palace, she planned the salvation of her people even at the risk at her life. Queen Esther made her people to seek the face of God as they fasted and prayed for three days. God intervened and the situation was reversed. The king reversed the death order through Esther’s petition and saved the Jewish nation but had Haman hanged upon the gallows he had prepared for Modecai.

From the story above, it is obvious Esther presented herself as an agent of change and national preservation. The following virtues and qualities however assisted her: These include:

- *Commitment and self denial:* Esther was committed to her people. She was ready to sacrifice her life to save the lives of her people. She set aside her personal interest and put the collective interest of her people in focus. Just like Esther, there are lot of Nigerian women with this sterling quality, if given the opportunity, can also act as change agents, bail out the nation from the present political and economic mess.
- *Humility:* She was humble enough to identify with her people in their plight and to fast along with them “... I also my maidens will fast likewise... “ (Esther 4:16)

through Esther's humility, she was able to attract the king's favour and hence, delivered her people from destructions. There are numerous Nigerian women with this quality, if they are involved in governance; they can even perform better than men.

- *Self - control*: The virtue of self-control helped Esther to know the right time to table her request before the king. Even when she organized the banquet and the king suspected that she had a request she kept quiet until the pendulum of time was in her favour. Women with this virtue abound everywhere in Nigeria; Nigerians will only see the manifestation when these women are involved in the scheme of things.

Sense of direction: Even though she was confronted with serious challenges, she rose up to be an agent of change and not a victim of circumstances. There are women who would not allow situations to control them in Nigeria, just like Esther, who could not flee the country because of economic problems, these women should be allowed to participate in political, economic and educational issues.

## II. CONCLUSION

The change agenda of the present administration in Nigeria, though laudable, has been misinterpreted by various people. For U.S and allies for instance, change means "regime change" disguised in the façade of promoting democracy. [19] The U.S is interested in replacing a liberal democracy with a jackboot dictator, and horrible human rights record simply because General Buhari has been projected as a strong man who will fight corruption [20].

Whichever way people look at General Buhari's change agenda, it is obvious that the change Nigerians desire is the one that will bring progress and development. This kind of change is not optional. In this paper, therefore, we have been able to examine an overview of Nigeria change agenda; the

necessity of change in Nigeria; conditions for change; the scope of the expected change and the place of women in Nigeria change agenda using biblical Deborah and Esther as case study. For the desired change to be realistic in Nigeria, all hands must be on deck. It is the collective efforts of the leaders and the follows that will make the needed change inevitable.

## REFERENCES

- [1] Vanguard News, htm, August 25, 2015.
- [2] Vanguard News, htm, August 25, 2015.
- [3] Vanguard News, htm, August 25, 2015.
- [4] Vanguard News, htm, August 25, 2015.
- [5] Vanguard News, htm, August 25, 2015.
- [6] Vanguard News, htm, August 25, 2015.
- [7] Vanguard News, htm, August 25, 2015.
- [8] Igbuzor, O. "Nigeria Change Agenda" [www.centrerelsd.org](http://www.centrerelsd.org). retrieved on 7/5/2015
- [9] Darwinek "Challenge in Nigeria and solution on how to solve them" *Wikimedia common* retrieved on June 7, 2015.
- [10] Darwinek" challenge in Nigeria and solution on how to solve them" *Wikimedia common* retrieved on June 7, 2015.
- [11] Darwinek" challenge in Nigeria and solution on how to solve them" *Wikimedia common* retrieved on June 7, 2015.
- [12] Igbuzor, O. "Nigeria Change Agenda" [www.centrerelsd.org](http://www.centrerelsd.org). retrieved on 7/5/2015
- [13] Igbuzor, O. "Nigeria Change Agenda" [www.centrerelsd.org](http://www.centrerelsd.org). retrieved on 7/5/2015
- [14] Igbuzor, O. "Nigeria Change Agenda" [www.centrerelsd.org](http://www.centrerelsd.org). retrieved on 7/5/2015
- [15] *Christian Women Mirror, The Magazine for Building Godly Women: "Women of purpose"*. August 2007.
- [16] *Christian Women Mirror, The Magazine for Building Godly Women: "Women of purpose"*. August 2007.
- [17] *Christian Women Mirror, The Magazine for Building Godly Women: "Women of purpose"*. August 2007.
- [18] *Christian Women Mirror, The Magazine for Building Godly Women: "Women of purpose"*. August 2007.
- [19] Igbuzor, O. "Nigeria Change Agenda" [www.centrerelsd.org](http://www.centrerelsd.org). retrieved on 7/5/2015.
- [20] Igbuzor, O. "Nigeria Change Agenda" [www.centrerelsd.org](http://www.centrerelsd.org). retrieved on 7/5/2015.