

# A CONTEXTUAL ANALYSIS OF THE BIBLICAL TEACHINGS IN GENESIS 1:26-28 AND ITS IMPLICATIONS ON NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

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## ABSTRACT

Varied interpretations have been given about Genesis 1: 26-28 concerning gender roles, of which the interpretation either supports or debunks patriarchy. Using contextual analysis, descriptive and historical methods, the study gave convincing interpretations to the passage from feminist perspective, which emphasized the equality of both sex and the implications for national developments in Nigeria. The woman and man in the passage are depicted as standing side by side, head erect in the work, and it is over this world they are conjointly assigned to rule. Meanwhile findings from field study in Nigeria revealed that there are gender imbalances in all sectors of governance and it is influenced by different cultures and beliefs. Although few women have been mentioned in the paper to have been given opportunities to serve the nation and in that little space given to them did well, much would have been achieved if the country transformed completely from the patriarchal culture to a complete state of gender equality. This was said to have been confirmed by the latest review of the international monetary fund (IMF) that closing the gender gap is key to achieving higher growth in the economy, enhancing productivity and greater economic stability. By implication, women have the potential and the influence power to make things happen, run well and perform excellently. Drawing upon the above, the paper recommended that drastic measures must be put in place to ensure women's full participation in religious, political and socio- economic decision making processes for national development. This calls for affirmative action by the government that would encourage females' access to resources available in the country to further strengthen the country's national development.

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## **1. Introduction**

When there is a lack in understanding and interpretation of Biblical text and messages, there is always negative of sometimes chaotic effects or resultant effects. The reading of Genesis 1:26- 28 has been interpreted misleadingly to mean the right of domination by the male gender over the female gender. This has led to a major mental orientation of male dominating the female gender in almost all spheres of life rather than scholars taking a second look at this passage to begin to reconcile the gender war tussle in the society. It is rather used to promote and forment gender inequality and extremity in society. When matters go thus, the society is at the receiving end of this anomaly. Looking at the western world, the implications of this mismanagement have affected numerous institutions especially marriage and family. The proper study of this passage did not give authority for one sex or gender to dominate the other rather it gives the obligation of dominating the earth to boy male and female.

The creation story or account did not separate the man and the woman in creation rather it only affirms that God made humanity rather than male or female. Hence, it is expected that males and females work together with the orientation of collaboration in their obligation to till the earth to subdue to their benefits. Interpretations of domination in Genesis 1; 26-28 is an aberration or slide from the main course and this has led the same humanity to numerous upheaval or mistakes. This work therefore aims at correcting the orientation or age- long mentality of the masculine duration even in the famine world. It is against this background that this paper aimed at discussing the importance of gender equality for national development.

### **Contextual analysis of the passage: Genesis 1:26-28**

The creation story of Genesis 1: 26-28 shows that the creation of man and woman by God was not a mistake but purposeful and not accidental. It reads:

*Then God said, "Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals,[a] and over all the creatures that move along the ground. "So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them God blessed them and said to them, "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground.*

### **What does the passage imply?**

The passage above has been interpreted by different scholars' especially feminist scholars and all of them seem to agree that the passage's emphasis is on gender equality and complementary roles of both genders in their bodies and psychology. In other words both men and women in that context are noted to be equally made in God's image as God said, "Let us make (the human) in our own image, in the likeness of ourselves. Both males and females are given dominion mandate over every creature, the authority not ascribed to just one gender in other words in every facet of lives, they are to work together to get things done. It also connotes that both the male and female originate from God. The passage is also what reformed theologians referred to as cultural mandate meaning that accountable dominion or stewardship over the earth is part of that image.

Also as observed by Alabi, being created in the image of God, it shows that there is also equality in the social realm. The personhood of a woman according to him is glaringly brought out through the creation by her "sameness" with the man in origin. The passage equally means that woman is not given a secondary role to play in society, as the patriarchal stratum wants us to maintain According to Oswalt, the two Hebrew verbs used, "rule over" basar and 'subdue' rada are imperatives. Using these two verbs to address both "male and female" connotes that woman is neither a weakling nor weak in nature. She can conquer and subdue the creation just as man can.

Further, she is blessed to be fruitful and multiply in other areas she ventures into. The woman is not to be subjugated or caged in all areas of life, she is also to dominate and exhibit her God-given potential. As Usman rightly noted, the blessing God pronounced implies that the woman here finds her mandate to rule or lead the society alongside men. Therefore it could be said that the right to govern nature belongs to the man and woman in order to make appreciable progress.

### **The current state of Nigeria's development**

Comparing the current state of Nigeria to what it used to be in the past, one can see that there is appreciable development in terms of infrastructure, socio-economic development, technological developments, and computer literacy. However, one would expect that by now the country ought to have overcome some teething problems due to her interactions with other world powers and level of literacy but the reverse is the case as the country is still battling with constant provisions of basic necessities for her citizenry. How would one explain the erratic power supply, lack of good and portable water, bad roads, insecurities of lives and properties, the decline in the standard of education, and the failure being experienced in the health sector in recent times? With the rate at which Nigerians are educated, one would have expected a better performance in all areas but instead of a better life, most average Nigerians are living in abject poverty, the gap between the rich and the poor is still very wide and this is largely due to the high rate of corruption in the land.

So, it is not out of place to say that the current state of Nigeria's development is devastating; instead of the country making appreciable progress there is a downturn in everything. It is painful that Nigeria as far back as 2003 is rated by United Nations as one of the poorest countries of the world with 70% (over 91 million Nigerians) living below the poverty line, which is one dollar per day. It should be noted that the condition remains the same today and this means that the majority of people live in abject poverty. The rate of unemployment is alarming; Nigeria is in a challenging and deteriorating economic situation with lowered growth projections.

It has been observed by economic analyst that to reduce Nigeria's vulnerability to crisis and rise to its potential, Nigeria has to choose among markedly different paths. Policy reforms are available to help the country overcome the current challenges and set the foundations for rising to its potential. These reforms are needed in three key areas: restoring macroeconomic stability; boosting private sector development and competitiveness; and expanding social protection to protect the poor and most vulnerable.

### **Why is the country underdeveloped?**

Reviewing the lecture delivered by Gambari' the work traced the problems of national development in Nigeria to be:

- *The challenge of history*
- *The challenge of socio-economic inequalities*
- *The constitutional challenge*
- *The challenge of building institutions for democracy and development*

He further noted that colonialism has been a good example of how a country's nation-building can become a security threat to another. The colonial rule he said, divided Nigeria into North and South with different land tenure systems, local government administration, educational systems, and judicial systems. While large British colonies like India and the Sudan had a single administrative system, Nigeria had two, one for the North and one for the South. It was almost as if these were two separate countries, held together only by a shared currency and transportation system. Beyond the challenges created by colonialism and its attendant, Nigerian political leadership since independence has contributed immensely in exacerbating the problem of nation-building. Among the five challenges mentioned by Gambari, aside the historical challenge, the challenge of political leadership remains the main issue on which other challenges revolve.

In addition to the above, information gathered from different sources and interactions revealed many other factors that impede the growth of Nigeria. Most people interacted with expressed mixed feelings on the political, social, and economic development of the nation over the years. A Political Scientist, who went down memory lane, said Nigeria had demonstrated promising traits of greatness in its early years after independence. The country was said to be competing favorably with the developed countries of the world, because of the accelerated growth from the emerging Northern, Eastern, and Western regions due to the healthy competition among them.

He said that the parliamentary system of government, which Nigeria practiced at independence, allowed powers to be devolved to the regions and they controlled and managed their resources for their respective development. It was explained further that the system of government, however, gave way to a confederal system of government which the nation adopted when it became a Republic in 1963. The political scientist explained that the fortune of the nation took a downward turn when the military rulers who took over the reins of power after the Jan. 15, 1966 coup suspended the Federal Constitution and began to rule by decree. He noted that the states, which were created by the military government to replace the regions, became weak and subservient to the center and there were no longer checks and balances. “Nigeria made meaningful progress in its first five years of independence, but the gains could not be sustained by the military dictators who took over from the founding fathers of the nation,”

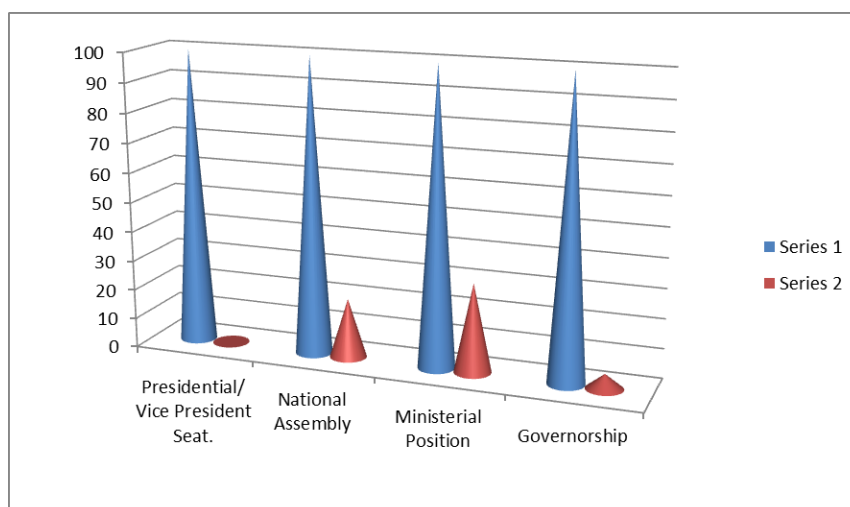
Another interviewee said that the inability to manage resources from the discovery of oil was a major setback for Nigeria nation. He said that “with the advent of the oil money, the leaders abandoned agriculture, mining and other sectors which were the mainstay of the economy,” Also, the bad leadership has been noted to be responsible for other problems like infrastructural decay, epileptic power supply, corruption, bad health and educational systems and insecurity. Nigeria’s population was the only thing that had continued to experience steady growth while other important areas of the country had remained stagnant. It was also observed that the successive governments had veered from the vision, path and legacies bequeathed to them by the founding founders. Consider the fact that the Naira which in the 1960s and 1970s, was stronger than the dollar and many other currencies, has now become so low in value, because of

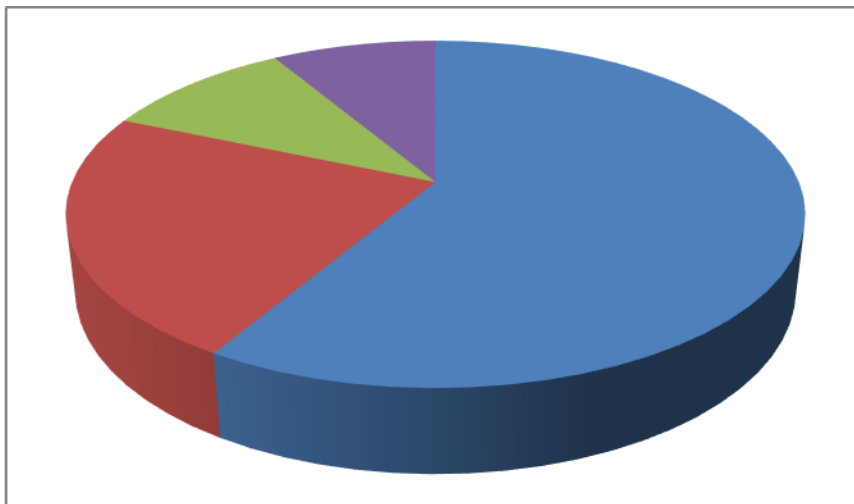
bad managers of the economy Our roads and other infrastructure are nothing to be proud of, because successive governments have abandoned them as they pursued after ringworm and leaving out leprosy.

Another reason given for the underdevelopment of Nigeria is the security problem in the country. Nigeria is noted not to be doing much in the pursuit of securing the lives and properties of citizens. Insecurity in the country has hampered the growth of Nigeria's wealth. Lastly, it has been observed that our core values have gone down the drain, while our political, religious, traditional, and other leaders watch and do nothing. "In some cases, it is pathetic to observe that the same leaders and elders, who should be the custodians and protectors of these once cherished values, are the ones destroying them. A society whose core socioeconomic values, education and healthcare services are destroyed, is in itself destroyed; that explains where we are now,"

### A glimpse at the level of women's involvement in socio-religious and political spheres

Figure 1.



**Figure 2.**

The figures above give us in a glance the true picture of gender imbalance in all spheres of Nigeria. Many factors have been given to be responsible for this ranging from uneven access to education, lack of employment equality, job segregation, lack of religious freedom, lack of bodily autonomy lack of political representation, societal mindsets cultural beliefs, wrong interpretations of biblical; teachings on gender roles, women against themselves, patriarchal culture and the likes. However, it should be emphasized that in recent times due to women's emancipation and feminist struggles, education of girl-child and the empowerment of women, there have been a noticeable improvement. But the fact remains that the imbalance is still there, the discrimination against women and the conservative attitude of some men and women have not given room for close range in the gap between males and female.

### **Dominion Mandate of both male and female: A Prerequisite for National Development**

Here in this paper, the dominion mandate would be seen in terms of both males and females exercising equal rights and opportunities to be in different positions of human endeavors. In other words, both males and females are to serve in different capacities in



all spheres of life without any restrictions and segregation. Be that as it may, it should be noted that, ever since the dawn of humanity men are the ones in power and most importantly the pinnacle of authority in Nigeria. Only a few women are given opportunities and they only serve as Ministers. In the little corner they were, they served the country and there were notable marks left behind; the more reason why women should be given the chance to work at the same par with men. Women like Dora Akinyuli, Oby Ezekwezili, and Ngozi Nweala cannot be forgotten so easily in Nigeria's history. They were women like men who had really proved the worth of women in Nigerian society. Besides, they have shown that if women are given equal power of dominion as reiterated in our passage, the country's development is unprecedented. Nigeria has a number of exemplary female politicians and women's rights leaders who have distinguished themselves on the national and international stage.

It is not out of place to say that, Nigerian women have taken tremendous strides and have contributed immensely to the development and growth of the country in all facets of life in the areas of education, politics, religion, socio- economic sector and other specialized fields. Women of substance who have initiated the emancipation of Nigerian womanhood and contributed to the building of the Nigerian nation, that readily come to mind include Chief (Mrs) Funmilayo Ransome Kuti , founder of the Abeokuta Women's Union and mother of the late musical icon, Fela Anikulapo-Kuti, is regarded as one of Nigeria's feminist pioneers, as well as a leading figure in the anti-colonial movement, Queen Amina of Zaria. Queen Kambasa of Bonny and Lady Olayinka of Lagos, all of blessed memory. In the political terrain, we have the frontline position of the late icon Chief (Mrs) Margaret Ekpo and the effective contributions of the late Adama Nwapa cannot be controverted. Also women politicians like ', Hajiya Gambo Sawaba, Leila Dongoyaro, Serah Jubril, Titi Ajanaku and the likes

Other contemporary figures who have made their mark in national and international politics include Amina J. Mohammed, the current deputy Secretary-General of the United Nations and Nigeria's former environment minister; Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala, the former Finance Minister who became the Managing Director of the World Bank from 2007 to 2011; Oby Ezekwesili, also a former Education Minister and coordinator of the Bring Back Our Girls campaign; and the late Professor Dora Akunyili, the former minister of information and communication who made her name as the Director General of National

Agency for Food and Drugs Administration and Control (NAFDAC) in her crusade against fake drugs. Mrs Nnenadi Usman is also not left out. The contributions of these women led the former President of Nigeria, Chief Olusegun Obasanjo to label them as the winning women of Aso Rock.

Clearly, one of the major challenges facing this country's development is the continued marginalization of a highly competent and effective segment of our population unable to contribute to national development because of the physical, social and cultural restrictions placed on them. Women have been most adversely affected by this phenomenon, and unless the situation is changed, this country is unlikely to achieve true integrated national development.

Having said that, this paper holds the view that the best approach is to do an analysis to explain why gender equality is critical to national development and to show that gender equality is actually a pre-requisite to national development aspirations, and the men in power should promote this rather than disregard it. The argument being put up here is that men in our society are real patriots and in actual sense they desire the progressive growth and development of this country, then they should be at the forefront of those championing gender equality rather than working against it. Men seem to be working against women's aspiration in the sense that the necessary support needed by women is not given to them in most cases. Even though, it would appear that people generally believe that women are being done a favour when gender equality is promoted, however, it should be noted that it is for overall national development interest, and to firmly propose that no real progress can be made by any country that ignores gender equality.

The reason being that women when given opportunities perform much better than men in that; they are not only strict but they ensure things are done properly to prove men wrong that they are never a failure. It is high time our society ensure that the natural balance created by God be strictly adhered to. When women are in a gathering or a place, there is always this natural flow of ideas and thoughts, their absence make the atmosphere incomplete. Gender equality is simple construct that ensures that men and women are represented equally in social, economic and political spheres of life. Gender equality ought to be a natural expectation since the scriptural verses discussed earlier on showed that God in His wisdom bestowed on the world a near equal sex ratio, and also ensured that both sexes have the same mental capability and socio-psychological fitness. Actually,

one may say that in some human capacities, males could be said to be superior to females, there are also several capacities where women are inordinately superior to men. However, nature has provided for both sexes to be equal in the totality of skills needed to navigate the social corridor of human existence. It needs be emphasized here that it can never be in the interest of any country if one part of the gender equation is ignored or relegated to the background in terms of representation in various aspects of endeavors.

Gender development index means the extent to which a country promotes equality in achievements between its men and women. Countries with high gender development indices (which mean that achievements between men and women are near equal) have been known to do better in overall development. This is because ideas are not only coming from one segment but from both sides and this makes things work better. On the contrary, countries with low gender development index (those with wide disparity in achievement between men and women) have continued to remain at the bottom of the development ladder. Why because the knowledge and ideas that they need to be tapping from each other is one sided. Another construct is the gender empowerment index, which means the extent to which women are represented in social, economic and political spheres of life. Again, countries with high gender empowerment index are those with high rates of representation of women in economic, political and social domains, and they often fare better in overall development and human living indicators.

It is therefore sufficing to say that neglecting women in socio-political representation can never be in the interest of countries or communities. It is only in the interest of individuals who chose to do so. A common phrase is that “no one can clap with one hand”. By contrast, clapping with both hands is the physiological normative, and it often results in a better outcome. The poor representation of women in key areas of national development is similar to a country trying to clap with one hand. The results can only be predictably not good for that society.

Another key aspect to take into consideration is that when appointments to positions are based on merit, it enhances national development. In other words, if appointments are based on merit, the best persons will be selected to lead key positions, and this would result in better developmental outcomes. This is what happens in developed countries, which accounts for their higher rate of development. Women are not really asking for affirmative action to get women into positions, because if affirmative action is used, it

often results in the wrong women being put in positions. What is being argued is that if appointments to these positions are based on merit, women will naturally do well as compared to men. The situation where most positions are fought for and most often given based on connections can only lead to the marginalization of women who do not have the power and agency to fight for those positions the same way that men do.

The major issues with Nigeria's democratic experience has been the total enthronement of “man-know-man” politics, the exclusion of a high-performing segment of the populace, the marginalization of the marginalizable, godfatherism, an ethnic bigotry. In all of these, women suffer more than men because they are inherently unable to deal with the situations as men do. To prove that the social and political exclusion of women is not just a result of socio-cultural disaffection for women, even the fight between men and men for socio-political space has become fiercer. At the end, only the highly muscular with greater physical assets wins the fight, with little room for thoughtfulness, high reason, and astuteness. Indeed, over the years it has become increasingly evident that brawn rather than brain has taken over Nigeria’s socio-political firmament, and being physically assertive, militant and noisy has become a highly celebrated national ethos. By contrast, those who are internally reflective, thoughtful and brilliant and who have considerations for orderliness, dedication to duties, integrity, honesty, high intellect and reasonableness are being increasingly excluded from all spheres of our socio-political life. No wonder in Nigeria things are getting worse and worse by the day.

## **Conclusion**

This paper is therefore concluded with the assertion that if it is the concern of the government to “see to the development and good governance of the country”, then it must immediately reverse its stance on the gender equality bill without further delay. Where there’s more gender equality there’s more peace because it is a more reliable predictor of peace than a country’s GDP or level of democracy. This is in view of the fact that generally most women are very peaceful and peace loving. Countries with lower levels of gender inequality are also less likely to resort to the use of military force. Advancing and promoting gender equality will add billions to the economy of the country; this is because it would boost business performance. Women are very creative and are a very

good manger of economy if given chance to display their God- given talents. There is need for us to note that when household works are shared, it often leads to happier relationships and completion of tasks on time, gender imbalance can lead to friction and increase the likelihood of divorce, and thus the same thing goes for our nation when the dominion mandate given to both male and female is not strictly adhered to and the consequence could be unfavorable for national development. The cooperation and complementarity between the sexes for growth and development should not be compromised now and in the nearest future.

#### **Disclosure statement**

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

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