

**NATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION, CITIZENSHIP EDUCATION AND  
THE PROSPECTS OF CITIZENS' RIGHTS PROTECTION FOR PEACE AND  
STABILITY IN NIGERIA**

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**ABSTRACT:** *Human rights are critical to sustainable livelihoods. This is why most states established human rights institutions to prevent the violations of rights by individuals and states. This paper explores the relevance and oversight functions of the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) in addressing Nigeria's poor human rights protection complexities. The paper establishes the linkages between citizenship education and necessity for human rights protection with emphasis on the legal framework of the NHRC, the mechanisms for rights protection by the commission and the performance of the NHRC so far. The paper concludes that having people well informed about their duties as citizens of Nigeria, and the effectiveness of human rights monitoring would sustain the capacity of the state to reduce human rights abuses in the post-COVID-19 era, when individuals and governments are struggling to address development and economic challenges.*

**KEYWORDS:** NHRC, human rights, Nigeria, Citizenship education

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*Let us create the social space that brings truth, mercy, justice, and peace together within a conflicted group or setting. Then energies are crystallized that create deeper understanding and unexpected new paths, leading toward restoration and reconciliation.*

Prof. John Paul Lederach, University of Notre Dame

## **INTRODUCTION**

Human Rights remain highly critical in the life of every modern state in the international political system. This makes the safety of all citizens an obligation for policy makers and law enforcement agencies. The regulatory framework of protecting the rights of everybody is enshrined in the constitutions of nations and various international instruments or protocols to which sovereign states are signatories through ratification. The menace of human rights violation with the attendant lethal violence led to the establishment of the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC). According to the NHRC (undated):

The Commission serves as a mechanism for the enhancement of the enjoyment of human rights. Its establishment is aimed at creating an enabling environment for extra-judicial recognition, promotion and protection and enforcement of human rights, treaty obligations and providing a forum for public enlightenment and dialogue on human rights issues thereby limiting controversy and confrontation.

Prior to the establishment of the National Human Rights Commission in Nigeria, there was no agency or commission established with a legal framework to protect the rights of citizens. This was apparently due to series of political instability and coups that made the nation witness autocratic rule by successive regimes. Rather, panels of enquiry were only set up without implementation of their reports. In fact, public hearing was not even considered, as such regimes were shrouded in secrecy like cabals. For instance, some students' unrests during the military era led to clash between them and the security forces, climaxing in the death of many students. According to Ajayi (1982:134), the students protest over cafeteria services at the University of Ibadan on February 1, 1971 led to the killing of Kunle Adepoju who was a year-two student of Agriculture.

Human rights can only be protected in a society where the rule of law is given adequate priority, with respect for democratic norms. But Nigeria lacked this before 1999, when a democratically elected government set up the Oputa Panel to investigate the cases of rights violation by the successive military regimes most of which adopted autocratic style of leadership which denied people their rights.

Human rights in the country were further relegated by series of state-sponsored terrorism which manifested in various forms, with different motivations. These included arrest of innocent citizens as well as harassment and proscription of media organisations, especially during the transition to civil rule, which witnessed the annulment of the June 12 1993 presidential election. Series of events thereafter cumulated in the emergence of Interim National Government that was later toppled by General Sani Abacha. It was argued that some politicians and human rights activists motivated General Sani Abacha to topple the Interim National Government of Shonekan, with the belief that he would initiate and complete the expected transition that never materialised.

According to The Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders (2010:6) the groups and individuals saddled with the responsibility of defending the inalienable rights of people were targeted by the successive military regimes which tortured those arrested, charged them for treason and imprisoned them, while some unlucky ones were extra-judicially executed. This created an atmosphere of defending human rights in a corrosive or volatile environment, with incessant arrests recorded in that period.

Furthermore, it is the violation of seemingly economic and environmental rights that led to the phenomenon of oil companies and lethal violence in Niger Delta region of Nigeria (Okolie-Osemene, 2015). Consequently, social groups emerged to call oil companies to order and also to attract the attention of government and the international community to the plight of the

residents of oil-producing areas, where sources of sustainable livelihood had been destroyed, leading to food insecurity and humanitarian crises.

Youth movements have made terrorism hotspot. Although the government is making efforts to protect Nigeria's economy, it does not incorporate the support of society. Therefore, the efforts do not lead to real change. The real change will happen when government joins forces with society. Winning the trust and confidence of society will require citizenship education. This is because not all citizens understand their civic responsibilities and areas where they are required to contribute their quotas to constructive peace and nation building.

The history of modern Nigeria is traceable to the 1914 amalgamation of the Northern and Southern Protectorates by Lord Lugard in 1914, which prepared the ground for more uniformed colonial administration of the country, constitutional development and active involvement of Nigerians in managing their affairs (Odafe, Mordi and Etemike, 1997; Osaghae, 1998; Amodu, 2000;). The nationalism that characterised politics in Nigeria also paved the way for political participation at various levels. Such transformations motivated the adoption of various constitutions, from Clifford's Constitution to the present 1999 Constitution that still requires amendment by lawmakers.

Education is described as "the major instrument of modernisation and social change in colonial African society, and was largely responsible for creating the forces which developed into the nationalist movement, and on to independence" (Ofuately-Kodjoe, 1976:241). Before the coming of the British, the country was made up of various ethnic groups which had economic relations, socio-cultural exchanges, and intermarriages. Most of the ethnic groups had their unique patterns of political organisation (Etemike *et al.*, 1997). Notably, politics is believed to mean "power relations within states, involving individuals and groups that organise to pursue their divergent and often conflicting interest" (Osaghae, 1998:13). In any political setting, "to be a citizen is to carry unique sense of identity of that society" (William, 2012:1). The problem that arises is not the relationship or the conflicting interests but the approach adopted by groups in pursuing their interests.

The most central promise of any religion, whether western, Oriental or African, is peace between man and God or amongst human beings (Albert, 2017:50). Thus, religion has always been an integral aspect of Nigerian history, especially in promoting social change and intergroup relations. There is hardly any group that does not identify with one of the three major religions in the country, namely African Traditional Religion, Christianity and Islam. Odafe, Mordi and Etemike (1997:18) aver that:

All Nigerian ethnic groups without a single exception have a notion of God as the supreme being. Their knowledge of God is expressed in proverbs, songs, prayers, names, short statements, stories, religious ceremonies etc. Many societies like the Yoruba, Edo, Igbo, Tiv, Igala, Idoma, among others refer to God as the 'Great One', the 'Great King' or the 'Great Spirit.

In addition, other ethnic groups, such as Jukun, Ogoni, Ika, Ibibio, Aniocha, Itsekiri, Urhobo, and Ijo, strongly believe in the existence of a deity. Religion, according to Awe (2002:124), is “man’s expression of his acknowledgement of the divine, a system of belief and practices relating to the sacred.” The religious character of the Nigerian state manifests in the building of mosques, proliferation of churches, and existence of shrines across the country. This is sustained by strong belief in the supernatural and desire to walk in the supernatural. The multicultural and multilingual nature of Nigeria also present unique diversity of language competence, as most groups intermarry and learn one another’s languages as part of acculturation.

## **OBJECTIVES AND METHODOLOGY**

The aim of this paper is to establish the linkages between citizenship education and the relevance of human rights protection through the National Human Rights Commission, which was established to revive Nigeria’s poor human rights records. The article provides answers to the following questions: What is the legal framework of the NHRC? How is the nature of citizenship education relevant for human rights protection? What are the mechanisms for rights protection by the commission? What are the potential strategies to integrate human rights dimensions more intricately into public administrative reform efforts in the post-Civil War period and the prospects of the Commission’s operational/communication oversight?

This study is significant as it explores the value of protection of citizens’ rights for the promotion of peace and stability in Nigeria. Scholarly works have explored human rights education (Pitsoe, 2012) and the role of extra-curricular activities in citizenship education, particularly active citizenship perception, social accountability, awareness of democracy and human rights, and research skills (Keser, Akar and Yildirim, 2011). Existing academic works have not given adequate attention to the need to use citizenship education as an instrument for strengthening rights protection in the country, where various groups and non-state actors have engaged in acts that undermine a peaceful society. Focusing on how the National Human Rights Commission to advancing the significance of citizenship education makes the study relevant. Primary/ qualitative data were generated from observations and study of existing literature. The secondary sources of data included, books, journal and media reports.

### **Potency of Human Rights Documents**

The United Nations defined human rights as the rights meant for humanity to the extent that such rights when recognised would guarantee the survival of humans (Pate, 1997). Some of the rights that guarantee greater equity in resource distribution and fairer trade-offs are the “right of indigenous people, the right of internally displaced persons to compensation and return, land rights, livelihood right, such as food security and water use, right to development, right to life and access to justice” (Mohamed-Katerere, 2011:6). The foregoing indicates that failure to provide such rights would amount to injustice, which remains the trigger of various violent conflicts. The international community must always work towards ensuring that these rights

are protected because injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere as far as global stability is concerned.

These rights are conferred on individuals by natural law and are entitled by virtue of being rational. The universalist theory explains the rights of humans as universal and they should not be withdrawn. Such rights make mankind human, rational and moral. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) makes provision for the protection of rights of individuals irrespective of race, religion or culture. The rights which are absolute under the UK Human Rights Act of 1998 are contained in various internationally recognised documents. These include the Bill of Rights (1971), the International Convention on Civil and Political Rights (1966), the European Convention on Human Rights (1950), the American Convention on Human Rights (1969), the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CAT), the International Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Racial Discrimination (CERD), and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) are part of human rights instruments.

The violation of human rights is also triggered by armed conflicts and crimes against humanity in areas prone to natural disasters. These also aggravate human suffering and hunger, which kills people in some African states.<sup>1</sup> Proper comprehension of the rights of vulnerable groups, such as women, children and indigenous people, can empower government agencies to implement or enforce international principles and mainstreaming those obligations in projects design to actualise the purpose of human rights.<sup>2</sup>

There are notable attributes of human rights which must be put into consideration; these include the safety needs of the masses and equality before the law in a state. According to Agi (2006), independent judiciary is very important to enable people to enjoy human rights. The judiciary needs to uphold the tenets of truth and justice. This is the institutional perspective of rights protection.

The character of a state and regime types greatly determine the patterns of implementation, potency and future of human rights. The potency of the rule of law greatly determines the place of human rights in a state, especially in making political office holders recognise it.

Across the world, legal frameworks for initiating and implementing human rights principles are paramount and highly critical in the quest for regulating the activities of humans whose proclivity for wanting to dominate and marginalize others usually makes them descend to the level of aggravating human sufferings. This desire is one of the sources of the nasty nature of life in most societies. The legal provisions for inalienable rights also create ethical justification

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<sup>1</sup> Adegbanigbe, Ademola. Nigeria's Food Crisis. *Post Express*, October 27 (1997, p.6).

<sup>2</sup> Mohamed-Katerere, Clare J. Human Rights: An Opportunity for Making Adaptation Conflict- Sensitive. In Bob, Urmilla and Bronkhorst, Salome eds. *Conflict Sensitive Adaptation to Climate Change in Africa*. South Africa: ACCORD. (2011).

for governments to enforce to the letter all documents ratified to guarantee the safety of all citizens in a state irrespective of age, race, gender identity, language, as well as ethnic and political affiliation. This gives room for freedom of thought, conscience, religion, association and movement.

### **Citizenship Education in Nigeria**

The idea of citizenship education in Nigeria is traceable to the colonial period. One of the innovations of colonialism in the 1900s in Nigeria was the introduction of Western education. This was, however, recorded as part of civilising missionary activities of the colonial authorities. The emergence of political institutions in the country marked a watershed in the history of leadership, good governance and cultural diplomacy, which inspired the desire to evolve a democratic culture across the country. This undoubtedly prepared the ground for citizenship education which has been a general course in tertiary institutions since the 21st Century when it was introduced by the National Universities Commission (NUC).

According to Marshall (1949:74), “citizenship is a status bestowed on those who are full members of a community. All who possess the status are equal with respect to the rights and duties with which the status is endowed...” (cited in William, 2012:4). Some of the objectives of citizenship education are the need to socialise students and youths against juvenile delinquency, disrespect for elders and all sharp practices that often metamorphose into full-blown crimes (Anumba, 2013:38).

The significance of citizenship education has been outlined, thus:

Citizenship education will enable members of a society acquire full knowledge, not only of the state, but also of their duties and obligations to the state, their rights and expectations from the state, the necessity of total conformity with accepted ways and standards of life of the people, the need for full compliance with rules and regulations and total allegiance to the state (Anumba, 2013:37).

The Citizenship Foundation identified the elements of citizenship education. These include knowledge and understanding, skills and aptitudes, values and dispositions (crucial issues on justice, democracy, human rights, conflict management, critical thinking, equality, sustainable development, rule of law, tolerance among others) as well as character formation and development.

The 1979 and 1999 Constitutions of Nigeria are said to have undermined the citizenship of the people, while indigeneship further created some level of discriminatory practices between various ethnic groups (Salisu, 2011:39). Most of these loopholes require the attention of policymakers to address the challenges through people-oriented constitutional amendment.

Education is seen as agent of “social change” (Ofuatey-Kodjoe, 1976) and liberation, as it transforms the mind. Education is the foundation upon which every advancing society is built. In fact, it is the bedrock for modern advancement and development. It is based on this view that this paper argues that any society which lacks educational values is already gradually witnessing decline. In fact, such society should not expect any form of social change. It is the

importance of this concept that necessitated the discourse on citizenship education in Nigeria. According to Lewis (1962), based on the ideology of social change, “education is the preeminent instrument for promoting desirable social and economic change” (cited in Ofuately-Kodjoe, 1976:241). Education remains the reliable channel through which effectual political culture and human resource development can be achieved in Nigeria.

Olarinde and Onifade (2010: 82) see education as “a dynamic instrument of social change that can bring about rapid development of a nation’s total resources, hence the need for constant evaluation of the educational system to ensure its adequacy and continued relevance to national needs and objectives.” Urevbu (1984:1) is of the view that education “describes the total process of human learning by which knowledge is imparted, faculties trained and skills developed.” Leadership and the quality of education have significant implications for sustainable development in the country. Making education more relevant, equitable and inclusive is crucial to achieving sustainable development.

Citizenship education also has some linkages with environmental and peace education. Gumut (2006:165) views peace education as, “the deliberate attempt to educate children and adults in the dynamics of conflict and the promotion of peacemaking skills in homes, schools, and communities throughout the world, using all the channels and instruments of socialization.” Just like peace education involves all “processes that facilitate inculcating the culture of peaceful co-existence in individual or groups formally or informally” (Lawal, 2005, cited in Okolie-Osemene, 2012:4), citizenship education prepares youths for civic nationalism and positions them for appreciation of ways of carrying out their responsibilities.

The peace education that is necessitated by the spate of kidnapping and other forms of criminal activities, including festering ethno-religious and identity-based conflicts in various parts of the country that stakeholders need to explore is achievable through citizenship education in tertiary institutions. In this context, new digital media technologies are critical to addressing the increasing wave of internal security threat which not undermines free flow of economic activities and creates an atmosphere of hot peace rather than positive peace (Okolie-Osemene, 2012:2). There is the need to mainstream the peace culture of armless self-defence into citizenship education. This provides ample opportunity for Nigerians to contain what Johnson (2014) sees as indigeneship and citizenship crisis that threatens national stability and human security. Through citizenship education, people learn how to protect the Earth and live peacefully with others in the polity. Similarly, citizenship education gives students the foundations required for future engagements as responsible citizens and transforms their minds to participation in the development of their society.

The idea behind the colonial education was the inculcation of Western moral values and the development of the intellect of the African. With time, Western education became a condition for white-collar employment in the area. At independence, the educational policies of Nigeria were still regulated by the British curriculum, especially because most of the schools at that time were mission schools. Nigerians are, today, more enlightened in their cultural socialization

and Western education which have been made more demanding as a result of the opportunities created by global technology.

Nation building is a significant aspect of citizenship education. It is the process of constructing or structuring a national identity using the power of the state for the purpose of creating unity, stability, and harmony in the state (Salisu, 2011:37). It presents citizens and leaders the opportunity to cooperate in various areas, including developing higher education, raising the standard of living across a nation, reducing costs of living and maintaining socio-cultural interaction and economic exchanges (Onyeocha, 1994). Nation building becomes rewarding and transformative when everybody works together, with good intention, to actualise sustainable human development. Although nation building is a task that is worth embarking upon (Sanusi, 2010), it demands not only mutual trust and understanding among various ethnic nationalities, but also intergroup tolerance. Nigeria's national integration efforts have been very challenging since independence in 1960 despite foundation anchored in unity by the founding fathers.

Onyeocha (1994:13) maintains that "nation-building involves mutual understanding between the people and the leadership." This much desired mutual understanding is sometimes missing in the polity, as leaders and citizens are enmeshed in controversies on crucial national issues that would take the nation to the next level when properly managed. This disconnect between leaders and citizens (especially those in the opposition parties and civil society) heightens intergroup tension across the country. In addition, the failure of the leadership class to call some aggrieved groups to order without taking sides aggravates mutual suspicion, leading to hostility perception. Comprehending more humane approaches to actualising nation-building will engender harmonious intergroup relations across the country. Focusing on nation building through democratic and good governance will facilitate inclusive peace.

Students are expected to be cognisant of the several constitutions that formed the basis for governance in the history of Nigeria (Osuntokun and Nwokike, 2002:181). Nigeria has had various constitutional experiments. A course on this will enlighten students and all citizens on the benefits of a democratic process characterised by joint problem-solving attitude and behaviours such as compromise, cooperation, collaboration, understanding, peaceful settlement of differences, respect for due process and the rule of law, transparency and accountability. Culture is the entire way of life that a people adopt as a social group. "There can be no people without a culture; for to say that there is a social group not having a culture would be tantamount to saying that the group has managed to survive without any form of social organisation" (Etuk, 2002:13).

Cultural diplomacy recognizes the inevitability of cultural diversity in a multi-cultural society but calls for interaction between cultures in a manner that produces a more united nation. Leadership plays a significant role in making this dream realizable. Therefore, leader must pursue policies of cultural acceptance and tolerance.



An aspect of citizenship education that requires attention is the creation of states in Nigeria. Apart from the structure of Nigeria's federalism, this was motivated by successive regimes' responses to agitations in various quarters, especially those of the minority ethnic groups that felt marginalised in the scheme of things. According to Ikime (2006:137), "the creation of states in 1967 and 1976 satisfied various groups that felt ill-used up to that time." In the past, one of the notable arguments in support of state creation was the need to bring development nearer to the people at the grassroots. However, much was not done by the new leadership that emerged after the creation of such states. Many groups still clamour for creation of new states today to give them a sense of belonging in the polity. For instance, various sociocultural groups in the South-east and South-south geopolitical zones still clamour for creation of "their own states" to salvage their people from what they describe as lingering socio-economic and political marginalisation by the seemingly majority ethnic groups. Nigeria's Fourth Republic has been characterised by clamour for presidency and agitations for equity in the representation processes.

Chapter III (25-28) of the 1999 Constitution highlights the ways of acquiring citizenship: Citizenship by birth, citizenship by registration, citizenship by naturalisation. It is possible for some Nigerians to have dual citizenship, meaning that they are also recognised as citizens of other countries. .

Section 23 of the 1999 Constitution outlines the national ethics, which include discipline, integrity, dignity of labour, social, justice, religious tolerance, self-reliance and patriotism. It further highlights the duties of every Nigerian citizen to:

- (a) abide by the Constitution, respect its ideals and its institutions, the National Flag, the National Anthem, the National Pledge, and legitimate authorities;
- (b) help to enhance the power, prestige and good name of Nigeria, defend Nigeria and render such national service as may be required;
- (c) respect the dignity of other citizens and the rights and legitimate interests of others and live in unity and harmony and in the spirit of common brotherhood;
- (d) make positive and useful contribution to the advancement, progress and well-being of the community where he resides;
- (e) render assistance to appropriate and lawful agencies in the maintenance of law and order; and
- (f) declare his income honestly to appropriate and lawful agencies and pay his tax promptly.

Chapter IV (33-43) of the same constitution also outlines the fundamental human rights which are the inalienable rights of citizens:

- 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 the 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.

### **NHRC's Mechanisms for Rights Protection**

Before explicating the mechanisms for rights protection, it is crucial to identify the notable functions of the commission as outlined in the National Human Rights Commission Act, 1995. This Act states that

it is expected to handle all issues relating to the protection of human rights as guaranteed by Nigeria's Constitution, and other international instruments namely, the United Nations Charter, the African Charter, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights as well as all treaties that Nigeria ratified to promote the protection of social, economic and political rights.

Patel and Tyrer (2011) assert that:

In addition, the Commission is also expected to conduct investigations on allegations of human rights abuses in the country with the aim of recommending possible actions and prosecutions to the Federal Government; assist the victims by seeking redress for them, policy formulation and timely research on human rights related issues, publication of reports and planning of seminars/conferences to advance knowledge development in the field of human rights protection. Also, the Commission was empowered to carry out all responsibilities as contained in the Act establishing it.<sup>3</sup>

According to the Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders (2010), the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) of 1995, has a responsibility of monitoring the respect for human rights and investigating all allegations of cases of abuse in the country, though it has a limitation of being set up by a military decree and short of the UN Principles on Independent National Human Rights Institutions which refer to the Paris Principles. The NHRC's Monitoring Unit was established in June 2001 in order to gather information for verification on violations of human rights, including information about incidents, observe events and visit sites where violations occurred (Network of Human Rights Violations Monitors, 2007).

The Act has also been backed by other human rights-related instruments, such as the Child Rights Act of 2003, which outlined the rights and responsibilities of a child in line with the Chapter IV of the 1999 Constitution of Nigeria, which empowers every child with the right to survival and development, freedom of thought, association, conscience, and religious freedom, among others, that prioritise the interest of every child in all actions of the institutions in the state, groups, society, and family members. The foregoing indicates that acting contrary to these provisions endangers the livelihood of children, and would subject them to misery when

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<sup>3</sup> Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1995. Official Gazette, Vol. 82, No. 28, National Human Rights Commission Act No. 22, A 583-A 589.

they are separated from their families by coercion or through deceitful means. It shows why there is prevalence of human trafficking in children and associated child abuse.

The menace of human trafficking continues to thrive in Nigeria despite the ratification of Protocol on Trafficking attached to the UN Convention against Organized Crime, signed by 80 countries and the European Union in December 2000, the establishment of the Compact Coalition Pact by the Nigeria Police, the Immigration Service and National Agency for the Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons (NAPTIP) and Other Matters, and the passing into law of the Trafficking in Persons (Prohibition) Law Enforcement and Administration Act of 2003. The need to curb child abuse led to the establishment of the Women Trafficking and Child Labour Eradication Foundation (WOTCLEF) in Nigeria during the Obasanjo administration. This created the need for National Human Rights Commission to closely partner all these institutions in addressing all cases of human rights abuse in all the states. The emergence of the NHRC added value to Nigeria's global image which was already battered by the poor human rights records of successive autocratic regimes most of which did not give any room for social mobilisation and freedom of thought.

The NHRC set an institutional platform for people to express their grievances and press their demand for redress. According to Ewubare, the Commission is Nigeria's institution mandated to uphold the safeguarding of human rights in the country, thereby creating a platform for the defenders of human rights to carry out their legitimate tasks.<sup>4</sup> The commission has a Governing Council which manages its affairs, although it has a lot of limitations, especially insufficient institutional back-up and the right to compel the government to act on its recommendations. This inadequate capacity hampers the operational oversight of the commission as far as the promotion of inalienable rights is concerned.

It investigates every case or allegations of violations, that range from denial of rights, unlawful seizure of property, confiscation of legal goods, unnecessary prevention of movement and attack on innocent civilians by security operatives.

A notable case in point is the emerging tradition of forcing civilians to frog-jump at some roads by soldiers for alleged indiscipline. The National Human Rights Commission called on those culpable to stop such reprehensible act or face the wrath of the law.

The NHRC organises roundtable meetings and engages media practitioners using their platform to enlighten the general public on their basic rights. However, calling people, groups or institutions to order must not begin and end with petitions without proper investigations. The

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<sup>4</sup> Ewubare, Roland. Statutory Report of the National Human Right Commission for the Year 2009. Paper Presented at the 2009 Annual Bar Conference of the Nigerian Bar Association, (16-21 August, 2009).

commission receives memos and petitions from government officials and individuals who want it to investigate allegations of planned attack on innocent citizens or alleged killing of or violence on people. The commission organised public hearing and issued a report on the well-publicised “Apo Killing” of six innocent Nigerians in Abuja, where it found the army and State Security Service (SSS) culpable and awarded ₦135 million in favour of the families of the deceased and those that survived the attack.

The NHRC disclosed that it recorded over 2000 cases of abuses in Borno State. This state is also the hotspot of insurgent violence in Nigeria, where rape, destruction of property, torture, police/military brutality, domestic violence and violation of child right by parents.<sup>5</sup>

As an institution that aims at guaranteeing the safety of citizens, the NHRC condemns kidnapping and armed banditry and cautions parents against entrusting their children to strangers. It also calls on government to promote human security. The commission also threatens institutions and individuals with lawsuits or court actions whenever there are cases of violation, physical or environmental, that threaten the lives of people in the country. This shows that NHRC is interested in addressing all threats to human security and human development.

When Governor Ayo Fayose of Ekiti state was alleged to have placed an advert in two national dailies, the NHRC reviewed it and described it as ‘hate speech’ and insensitive advertorial which violated section 95 (1) and (2) of the Electoral Act with implications of sanctions against the governor.<sup>6</sup>

### **A Critique of the Performance of National Human Rights Commission**

The NHRC has achieved a lot by regulating the activities of government agencies in human relations. When it became highly operational during the Obasanjo administration (1999-2007), it could not probe the mass murder committed by Nigerian soldiers in Odi and Zakibiam. There have also been some allegations of torture and mass murder in the North which demand the commission’s attention.

Apart from corrupt practices, radical Islamism has been a source of human rights abuses in most parts of the North, where the security forces currently counter the activities of insurgents. The involvement of the military in managing or confronting radicalised groups provides opportunity for large-scale human rights violations’. An example is what obtains in Rivers State, where the Joint Task Force further aggravated the security situation in high-density

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<sup>5</sup> National Human Rights Commission. Borno Recorded 2,000 Human Rights Violation Cases in Four Years – NHRC. (March 5, 2015), available at <http://www.informationng.com/2015/03/orno-records-2000-human-rights-violation-cases-in-four-years-nhrc.html>

<sup>6</sup> Ugwuanyi, Sylvester. NHRC to Sanction Fayose for Putting up Buhari ‘Death’ Advert. *Daily Post Nigeria*, (January 22, 2015). <http://dailypost.ng/2015/01/22/nhrc-sanction-fayose-putting-buhari-death-advert/>

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neighbourhoods of Marine Base and Port Harcourt owing to the lack of training in policing or human rights (Ugwu, 2008:69). The situation is not different from that of Borno State, where there have been conflicting reports on the military's involvement in human rights violations. For instance, there is the view that violation of human rights is always in response to security situation, because security forces are usually the targets of attacks and are not adequately compensated.<sup>7</sup> Such volatile situation exposes lives of security forces and civilians to danger because it is not always easy to identify terrorists in civilian-populated areas when they are not armed. An international fact-finding mission report released by the Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders (2010) revealed that the state and non-state actors within the country have been implicated in the abuse of people's rights.

Some soldiers attached to Dangote Cement Company were alleged to have killed seven indigenes of Tse-chuka and Yandev communities in Gboko and wounded others. This led to the intervention of NHRC, which settled the case in which the company paid of ₦5 million to each of the families of the dead and ₦2 million each to those injured.<sup>8</sup> There was also an incident where the commission visited Benue State to investigate the alleged use of chemical weapons by suspected gunmen on civilians in March 2014. It described such development as direct threat to human existence (Daniel, 2014).

The commission has identified unwillingness of victims to report cases of abuse so as to bring culprits to book, especially parents of victims being reluctant to support the NHRC in prosecuting people accused of rape in courts of law. Some of the political elite also contribute to the commission's ineffectiveness in probing cases of violation. They do not honour invitations to either defend themselves or give evidence that may help in such cases.

The state of affairs in the Niger Delta needs to be revisited by the NHRC. It has not really done much to probe the cases of sexual harassment in some Niger Delta communities, like Odi and Ogoni, where women and innocent girls were abused with impunity at the peak of militancy in Niger Delta, between 2005 and 2010.

In the area of promoting professionalism and managing highhandedness in the security sector, the commission has not really done much. Police brutality is an issue that requires the commission's attention. Unlawful and unjustified attack on innocent citizens, especially drivers and passengers along roads within and outside cities, subject them to trauma. The commission has to investigate, within its powers, the emerging tradition of brutality in Nigeria, where some

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<sup>7</sup> A Animasawun, Abdul-Jelil G. Rethinking Hard-Power Responses to Radical Islamism in Bauchi, Nigeria. In Albert, I. O. and Eselebor, W. A. Eds. *Managing Security in a Globalised World*. Ibadan: John Archers Publishers Ltd. (2013) p.408.

<sup>8</sup> Daniel. Gboko: Dangote Cement Pays N49M Compensation for Extra-judicial Killings by Guards, *Information Nigeria*, October 17, 2014. available at <http://www.informationng.com/2014/10/gboko-dangote-cement-pays-n49m-compensation-for-extra-judicial-killings-by-guards.html>

officers in the security sector seem not to be unprofessional; they molest and embarrass people by demanding bribes and inflict pain on those that refuse to cooperate with them.

The NHRC should begin to sanction organisations or individuals that initiate unnecessary retrenchment of workers without prior notice or proper remuneration/severance package. The victims of such acts usually suffer from poverty, depression, heart attack and sudden death. The NHRC has the capacity to promote freedom from fear of abuse and denial of rights by political office holders.

### **Why Does Niger Delta Need Citizenship Education?**

The Niger Delta needs citizenship education owing to the history of instability in the region. The Niger Delta also has a lot to benefit in the area of teaching people environmental justice and decent ways of responding to situations that affect human rights. With citizenship education, it is easier for youth violence to reduce, as a result of youth awareness, experiences and motivations that are related to peace and social justice education. Consequently, young people will value conflict transformation and engagement in dialogue with the government and multinational oil companies and take actions for peace.

It is not easy to contain the imbroglio in the region and sustain the peace only through the military option and the amnesty programme. People need to be engaged through citizenship education. There are two bases of Nigerian politics that are noteworthy, namely “the nature of society and its relations with the state as well as the character of the Nigerian state” (Osaghae, 1998:16). Civic nationalism will go a long way in transforming hostility perception, hateful incitement and violence diplomacy that threaten intergroup harmony. In terms of social activism, the fact that “heroic activism of a few people is not adequate for bringing much desired change” (Oladipo, 2000:129) makes it crucial for all citizens to be committed to the “Nigeria agenda” to achieve all national goals despite party differences. Through citizenship education, students have a lot to learn about the country; education leads to the transformation of the mind. Citizenship education helps people to understand ways of being responsible citizens and doing the right thing at the right time in the interest of their society. It will help Nigerians to appreciate the importance of fairness, justice, and giving people a voice and representation so as to guarantee right to peace. This is why education targeting peace and development is needed in the Niger Delta.

### **Citizenship Education and Human Rights Protection in the Post-COVID-19 Era**

The Coronavirus has caused a lot of disruptions that threaten human development, peace and security. Most states and governments in the country are currently struggling to meet up with the demands of human capital development, human security and sustainable livelihoods. This has also worsened crime and insecurity in the country. There is no better time than now, the post-COVID-19 period, when citizenship education and human rights monitoring are important. This will consolidate the efforts towards human security of state governors like Nyesom Wike of Rivers State and Godwin Obaseki of Edo State, who worked tirelessly to

provide palliatives and monitor the implementation of lockdown and other necessary steps to curb the spread of the pandemic and the economic crisis associated with the health crisis. The press statements of the Rivers State Commissioner for Information revealed that the Governor was almost everywhere on daily basis, especially the hotspots, for intervention, where he monitored the activities of citizens and those of the state officials within the security sector and the task forces, to ensure full compliance with government's directives and health emergency protocols. The significance of citizenship education is that it will create the opportunity for people to learn and understand survival strategies during health emergencies, as seen during the COVID-19 crisis. Despite the situations and restrictions affecting the rights to freedom of movement and association, such government's actions actually protected people's right to life, which is the greatest right as far as human rights are concerned.

The main research implication of this study is that, with the study exploring the aforementioned gap, scholars and students are expected to comprehend how teaching and learning of citizenship education could enhance the level of peace in many parts of the country. This is particularly important because the youth have been negatively influenced by acts of violence and restiveness. Proper education will engender the social space that creates justice and understanding.

This study shifts the focus of stakeholders to citizenship education and rights protection. This is crucial for the prevention of conflicts that were features of the Nigerian society, especially among the youth in the post-COVID-19 era characterized by uncertainties in daily life.

## **CONCLUSION**

This paper explored citizenship education and the involvement of NHRC in protecting the rights of Nigerians in different sectors of the economy by first situating the antecedents of human rights in the country. The argument of this paper is that a combination of human rights monitoring/protection and citizenship education teaching and learning will reduce the threats to peace and stability of Nigeria. The nation has become fragile owing to human rights abuses by non-state and state actors as well as the weaknesses of the institutions that are supposed to promote civic responsibilities and uphold human rights. Human rights protection and citizenship education cannot become an entrenched attitude of the populace until the rule of law regains its status.

The NHRC needs to engage with various stakeholders in the public and the private sector by signing more memoranda of understanding in order to increase the awareness of citizenship education and human rights monitoring and protection. Such groups should include religious and educational institutions as part of the bottom-top approach.

If Nigeria desires to guarantee human security in this era of instabilities, it must first consider and give adequate attention to citizenship education, human rights monitoring and protection so as to discourage lawlessness in the country, especially in areas with history of violence, such as the Niger Delta, Northcentral zone, Igboland and Northeast zone. This will discourage those

known as merchants of violence from engaging in deviant acts, especially when they realise the sanction that awaits them for violating other people's rights.

Not only government officials have the tendency of violating the rights of citizens. In fact, private institutions, groups and political parties also have a way of violating people's rights. They deny people their entitlements and freedom of choice or expression of ideas and interest. It is violation of rights when organisations fail to give people their necessary positions for which they are qualified and as required by the law. It is also an abuse if people that work diligently are denied their wages as expected.

The emerging tradition of coercing the electorate and members of political parties to vote for selected candidates does not facilitate the transition to mature democracy which Nigeria aims to achieve. Media reports revealed that during the 2015 and 2019 general elections, some polling units recorded cases of intimidation by supporters of political parties who were determined that voters only cast their votes for their candidates, while others had to issue some money from ₦500 and above to voters to influence their decisions.

The foregoing areas of abuse demand the attention of the NHRC to ensure that culprits are brought to book no matter how highly placed. This is because violation of rights promotes elite corruption, rascality and impurity. This is urgent considering the current anti-corruption campaign championed by the President Buhari administration. Transforming Nigeria into nationhood requires strong and credible institution, replacement of ethno-cultural loyalties with national identity, resolving all national violent conflicts and internalizing the values of nationhood through patriotism education.

No matter the challenges Nigeria faces today, Nigerians must remain selfless in service, patriotic in action and focused on nation building. Definitely, serving with honour, dignity and love will facilitate peacebuilding.

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