

An Excerpt of Sanusi's Speech

The whole problems of gender in Africa society, gender in the work place are issues of how do you behave; how do you treat your secretary? How do you treat your female colleagues? Simple things like that are so important to the health of an organisation and the great of a nation.

When you look at the...Gender report of 2012, we are among the 30 most unequaled countries as far as gender is concerned; we still have maternal mortality of 828/100,000 live births and 951/100,000 infant mortality. You'll see that there are strong correlation between girl child education and infant mortality, girl child education and maternal mortality and so on. So, focusing on education, especially for the girl child is extremely important in reducing those statistics I have quoted. And little do we realize that the issue of gender inequality plays a role in other areas of the society. I come from the northern part of the country and part of the reason we've got so much violence in that part of the country and, the Niger Delta, has a correlation to the issue of girl child education, because those areas do not focus very much on girl child education. And if the woman is not educated, she doesn't bring up a child who is educated, they end up frustrated and prone to all sorts of irresponsible ideas. A combination of poverty, a sense of marginalization, a lack of opportunities, lack of prospect, these combinations leads to violence. Some of the ways of dealing with this, including the use of the military force and state of emergency, which is part of the short term solution, the long term solution is educate your female child, educate the mother and child and provide an enabling opportunity for them.

I have a strong position on this

Norway has done this, the government ordered all registered companies to have 40-50% of women on their boards and initially they did not comply, and the Norwegian government said you have two days to comply and if you don't comply, you will have to wind up stop doing business in our country. And Spain has done it.

I don't know about Cameroon, but in Nigeria, there was an attempt to have a law to give about 30% of all positions to women and it was shot down. It was shot down on the grounds that it was unconstitutional. I don't know what is unconstitutional about it, but

it was shot down by the national assembly where maybe 90% of the members were men.

Food for thought: we need to actually try to get more and more women into the legislative process so that they can see and they can arrive at an interpretation of the constitution that makes it mandatory to do this in line with the principles of equality and non-discrimination based on gender.

Even in Nigeria, when we count female members of the boards of companies, we have to go back and count and ensure that we are not double counting, because we often have one woman on the board of 3, 4 or 5 boards and you are counting the same woman. There are some soft issues am not hoping to come here and talk about. Issues like child marriage, female genital mutilation, all those things are discussed in the public.

Some progress has been made in different parts of the world, but certainly, we have a long way to go. And this is not say that Africa is not doing well.

It's important for us as Africans to make this.....I do hope that as you have the unique combination of being lawyers and women, that you'll support the making of laws that protect women. I encourage you to continue to work with people to make sure that we have laws that are women-friendly.

thirdly, back to my point; if you need to address issues surrounding women, you need to partner with men. In every society that has changed, change has always come, even in class societies, from the so called upper class who want to help the poor. You need men to fight other men to create space for women. I think we need a strategy to fight the men. A very good strategy is to make sure you get women-friendly men to line behind them and defeat the non-friendly men so that they become the marginalized parties in this struggle.

Finally, we need to continue to breakdown those barriers, not just for us, but for those millions of sisters out there who are silent, who are voiceless, who are uneducated. One of the profound things I read about poverty is in a book by.....somebody who said

poverty is lonely. 90% of Africans are poor, 70% are below the poverty line, but the most frightening thing about poverty is its loneliness. The poor don't go to our schools, we don't see them. They don't go to our hospitals, they don't trek on our roads. They are born in one village, they live in the village and die in the village. No friends, no social network to call on with someone I went to school with, they didn't go to school. Think about your friend who is a minister....