

Re-Reading Numbers 27:8 on the Protest of Zelophehad's Daughters in Light of the Challenges of Inheritance in the Contemporary Patriarchal Society.

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Abstract

Ancient Israel was predominantly a patriarchal society where men are in total control of every aspect of the community, and they are regarded as the sole authority within the family, and in which power, inheritance or successions are transferred from the father to son. Women are almost totally relegated. The rights of women were very limited in the aspect of property distribution in ancient Israel, though they can get some token through diaries whenever they intend to marry. It was against this, the Zelophehad's daughters had to protest, not against the law, but against the tendency to deny them their rights to their father's estate. In an attempt to curb the excesses of patriarchalism as against justice in the distribution of patrimony, the paper explores the style used by the Zelophehad's daughters in navigating the intricacy in a patriarchal community as ancient Israel and became victorious. The paper adopted historical and exegetical methods in its approach. The paper is of the view that there is always justice for women, girls and widows who decide to challenge any denial of inheritance to their deceased parents' property or estate because equity will always aid the vigilant

Keywords: Zelophehad's daughters, Patriarchalism, Ancient Israel, denial of inheritance, equity

INTRODUCTION

The book of Numbers is called Be-Midbar, בְּמִדְבָּר in Hebrew, meaning 'The desert.' This can be seen from the first verse of the book. Generally, the book contains the history of Israel from the time of their departure from Sinai, in the second year of the Exodus till their arrival at the borders of the Promised Land in the fortieth year of their journey (McClintock 97). Pentateuch's perspective must be applied to the book of Numbers because it reflects many of its primary issues the. Thus, demonstrating the durability that subsisted amidst the books of the Pentateuch, Numbers plays a significant purpose as it recounts the shift from the

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earlier generation that left Egypt and transgressed in the wilderness to the fresh generation that settled on the brink of the Promised Land (Dillard and Longman III 33)

Numbers is replete with nearly every type of biblical literature; various literary works that indicate various original source. F.E. Carpenter suggests that the book's original impetus was because of the record of much of the materials that were from Moses. It indicates numerous times that Moses received instructions from God (Carpenter 112). It normally did not indicate whether Moses recorded these instructions in writing (Num. 33:2), but only shows that the writing took place at Moses' command. It is believed that Moses must have written some or much of the material himself or he may have had others to record the material or probably both (Carpenter 112). The Book of Numbers, as one of the Pentateuchal narratives in the OT, covers a period of thirty-eight years of Israel's aimless wandering in the desert and their subsequent preparation for the conquest, which includes two censuses, of which the first one was to serve as a guide for land allocation. (Num. 26:1-3, 52-56). Thus, Number 27 becomes a sequel to the second census and provides a scenario of its possible application in the nation (Ndekha 35). L. Ndekha argues that the customary law of ancient Israel at that time required that inheritance rights belong to sons, only men from the age of twenty years were counted in the two censuses. Thus:

If a man had died without a son during the desert wanderings, after the second census his name would be blotted out of memory (Ndekha 34).

The content and style in the book of Numbers reflect more than a priestly imbalance. However, most of the content is believed to be creative exegesis texts from priestly corpus and Deuteronomic traditions. There is the possibility that Number 27:8 is characteristically Deuteronomic from the beginning. Reason being that it might have been edited by a Deuteronomist and included it as a salutary to balance the excesses of the priestly tradition that is clouded with male-biased genealogies and the divine origin of patriarchal customs and traditions (Ndekha 35). The book of Number is generally approval of overall priestly assistance in the chapters that follow: 1-9, 15, 17-19, 26-31, 33-36. Priestly contribution also had a substantial imprint in the following chapters: 10, 13-14, 16, 20, 25 and 32. Scholars

have proposed that JE sources are linked to chapters 11-12 and 21-24 that do not correspond with the priestly source (P source). However, it is a herculean task and very difficult to differentiate J Source from E Source in the book of Numbers. R.B. Dillard and T. Longman III (83) posit that D Source simply plays a little part in the narrative in Numbers when viewed from the perspective of critical reconstructions (Dillard and Longman III 85). The narratives of the Book of Numbers is a significant transition record of deliverance as it chronicled the fatalities of the initial wilderness generation which is the subject of the First twenty-Five Chapters and its replacement by the second generation (Num. 26-36).

Exegesis of Numbers 27:8

Original Text and Translation of Number 27:8

8. וְאֵלֶּיךָ בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל תִּבְרַךְ לֵאמֹר
אִישׁ כִּי יָמוּת וְכֵן אֵין לוֹ וְהִעֲבַרְתֶּם
אֹת נַחֲלָתוֹ לְבָתוֹ.

RSV Translation of English version of Numbers 27:8

11. You shall also say to the Israelites, “if a man dies, and has no son, then you shall pass his inheritance on to his daughter.

KJV Translation of English Version of Numbers 27:8

11. And thou shalt speak unto the children of Israel, saying, if a man die and have no son, then ye shall cause his inheritance to pass unto his daughter.

NASB Translation of English Version of Numbers 27:8

11. Further, you shall speak to the sons of Israel, saying, ‘if a man dies and has no son, then you shall transfer his inheritance to his daughters.

Considering the literary reading of the various versions, we shall now make detail inquire into the meaning of the following words:

i Inheritance יֶחֶק It is use frequently as **haleq** – הֶלֶק, a “part” or fortuitous bestowal; which is usually use in form of the verbs יָרַשׁ **yarash**, meaning to possess; or נָחַל - **nahal**, meaning to possess (McClintock and Strong 98). The main or the most popular terms used in Hebrew are the verbs נָחַל, **nahal** and the noun נַחֲלָה. Detail applications of these terms refer not only to an estate received by a child from his parents but also the land received by the children of Israel as a gift from

the Lord (Edwards and Harrison 304). The English word ‘inheritance’ represents, in the OT in these four terms: מוֹרָשָׁה יְרֵשָׁה הֶלֶק **and** נַחֲלָה - **hahaq, yeroshah, morashah and nahalah**. Out of these four terms, however, the first is more frequently (and properly rendered portion’, while the second and third are rare usage (Hastings 470). The last of the terms occurs nearly two hundred times in the OT including Number 27:8. Moreover, the common term for the expression of the idea of ‘inheritance’, property or estate, which descends to the heir of the last holder, נַחֲלָה signifies possession generally in ordinary biblical usage (Hastings 470). The use of the word נַחֲלָתוֹ which is derivative from the noun root נָחַל could by application mean to possess, possession, inheritance or to inherit a property which is ‘real’ in nature. Real property is immoveable property such as land.

In the OT the ordinance of patrimony as founded by the practice of theocracy for many years in ancient Israel indicates that the Land belongs to the family rather than the individual because of the way it was distributed through divine command. Canaan Land was considered as patrimony of the Lord in a specific way (Wood 692). Personal belongings of a departed person in early Israel was normally allocated in conformity to the precept or customary ordinance. It is rare to see a written Will being used. Customary inheritance law was the prevalence cultural practices at that time. The real (which is the immoveable property) and personal property of a father was usually divided among his sons. A larger portion is normally shared to the eldest son, who assumed the care of his mother and unmarried sisters (Lockyer Sr. 507). Customarily, it is believed that daughters in ancient Israel receive their portion in the estate of the Father through dowries when getting married. In the Hebrew belief system, the word patrimony had powerful non-material and public connections, stressing far above the property of the family. Canaan land was considered as a patrimony that was given by the Lord due to the assurance God made to Abraham as well as his offspring (Num. 33:53). The Lord ordered Moses and Joshua to partition Canaan Land amidst early Israel tribes “as a patrimony”, (Num. 26:52-53; Josh. 13:6) and this was distributed through lot according to the population of each tribe (Lockyer Sr. 507). Each family in ancient Israel was in turn given a piece that was to endure in the hands of the family. With the above arrangement, no parcel of Land should be apportioned out of family

possession according to ancient Israel's custom. This might have been the reason why Naboth refused to part with his vineyard to Ahab the King, for he said: "*The Lord Forbid that I should give the patrimony of my progenitor to you* (1Kings 21:3)"

In other cultures, such as ancient Greek, who depended more on wills for allocating patrimony than early Israel, if a person dies without a will, his sons in good standing inherit the estate or property of the deceased in equal parts. The eldest receives the same as his brothers. If the daughter divorces or remains childless the dowries will revert to other heirs (Lockyer Sr. 507). A man who had no son usually adopted one to continue the family. If the man had daughters, he would arrange for one of them to marry the adopted son. In that instance, the larger share of his estate or property is given to that daughter and her husband. Moreover, if a man departs lacking bequest and leaves nothing to human or adopted inheritors, his close male siblings take his belongings. In contrast to Greek custom, the Roman statute of inheritance stipulates that the property or estate of a man who departed lacking a bequest is bestowed to his children as well as his spouse. On the other hand, female children who are married and are with their spouses or children who had the freedom from the authority and dominion of their father will not get allocation from the patrimony. If there are no children and spouse, the estate or property is passed to his male relatives (Lockyer Sr. 507).

PATRIARCHY IN ANCIENT ISRAEL AND THE PROTEST OF THE ZELOPHEHAD'S DAUGHTERS

Patriarchy is a social practice in which a man is in total control of any given community or society, and they are regarded as the sole authority within the family, and in which power, inheritance or successions are transferred from the father to son. Women are almost totally relegated. In ancient Israel, Land which is a real property is generally redeemed by a male relative if a man dies without male heir apparent. The demand of the Zelophehad's female children and the question of a female's right to take possession of her departed father's immoveable property is, very strange and had no basis in existing legislations and customs in ancient Israel. Since existing legislations and customs cannot be apply to the demand of the

Zelophehad's daughters including the levirate rights (Deut. 25-10), it has to be decided through the oracle and divine pronouncement which eventually went in Favour of the Zelophehad's daughter (Walton, Matthews and Chalvalas 82). Thus, a decision was made and laws were proclaimed giving the Zelophehad's daughters the rights to inheritance in ancient Israel when there is no male heir apparent.

The proclamation also established a law of procedure in cases of inheritance (Walton, Matthews and Chalvalas 86). However, some ancient Israelite neighbours had existing precedents for such issues. For instance, the Mesopotamian legal documents, such as the Sumerian text, Gudea Statute, and Nuzi text, contain some procedures for women or daughters' rights to property. However, to avoid a potential loss of a family's land if the daughter marries out of her tribe and causes confusion to the newly established legislation, the law in Num. 27:8 and the preceding verses has to be amended or modified later with additional enactment. Thus, the command in Num. 36:6-9 is a further legislation or statute that female children who take possession of land from their father will have to marry in their clans that have their tribal affiliation.

The established, prevailing custom and tradition in ancient Israel is that the land belongs to the Lord (Lev.25:23-23), the Israelites cannot apportion or dispose of it just the way they like. Also, the maintenance of inheritance from one generation to another was so significant to each family and to the tribes to which the families belong. Ancient Israel was a patriarchal nation just like her neighbours, and the customary practice is that fathers leave their estates to their sons. The eldest son did receive seventy per cent of the property or inheritance (Deut. 21:15-17). Thus, if a man did not have a son, his estate was taken into possession by the deceased's closest relative, who must be a male, and not to a daughter because they were excluded from the customary law of inheritance practice of ancient Israel (Wiershe 48). It is customary in ancient Israel that a daughter can only receive an inheritance from her father when she gets married. This could be done from the dowry she received from her father, and she would no longer live in the family home. The dowry she received is believed to be her inheritance (Wiershe 48).

The protest of the Zelophehad's daughter to Moses and the people of ancient Israel at that period could have been regarded as absurd and ridiculous, because the

Jews had not come into Canaan land as promised by God, and they had not yet defeated their foes. However, they used Moses' confession to support their demand, acting as though they were entitled to the peaceful takeover of their prerogative right then. They were not ashamed that their father's death was a result of his transgression and the consequences of receiving public ignominy for such an awkward demand. The Zelophehad daughters, of the family of Machir, were fully aware that their request for a portion of inheritance might go against the accepted norms and practises of ancient Israel at that particular period. The decision about this request may have been difficult, but God's declaration has cleared any doubt (Calvin 110). In the customary precept of inheritance of ancient Israel, no name is given to women, or it would be accurate to say no account of them is taken into consideration in the land that was partitioned and this was established by God as a public precept (Calvin 110). God did not give or command this general rule to discriminate or deny any individual the right to inherit the land which he has promised rather it was for orderliness, fairness and to eradicate any form of injustice that may arise. There is possibility of injustice consequent upon a strict adherence to social traditions which the Zelophehad's daughters might have foreseen.

Moreover, the general principles on which the Canaan Land would be allotted have been given to Moses by God. There was great expectation and anticipation on how to assert its shares by every Family in ancient Israel at that time. The Zelophehad's daughters knew very well that their deceased father had been covenanted to the land. They knew that their deceased father did not die of sin of rebellion which could have denied him of any portion in the land in perpetuity. There is an assertion that the sons of Hephher were only too ready to reckon the daughters of their brother Zelophehad as outside any right to the land that would fall to Hephher's children. It is possible that the Zelophehad's brothers told their nieces that they had no claim to inherit. Since it is a settled custom and tradition in ancient Israel that inheritances can only go to sons and women or daughters should be satisfied with marriage into some other family (Spence and Exell 135). This demonstrates how some people will stop at nothing to violate natural relationships out of greed. The law became dynamic in this issue of the Zelophehad's daughters. It was a strange request, and the law had to be made to accommodate their request

so that justice would not be perverted. Where a known custom, norms, traditions and laws go contrary to the path of justice and equity in any given community, the best thing to do is to avoid such path. Justice and equity should be the pillar of every community that wants to avoid chaos. Justice is seen as:

Justice is fairness, impartiality, reasonableness, honesty, integrity, uprightness, justness, and fair dealing. It is fairness or reasonableness, especially in the way people are treated or decisions are made. Justice primarily had to do with the conduct with others, especially about the rights of others. (Encarta Dictionaries).

The consequence of the Zelophehad's daughters protest was that they were made heiresses to the estate of their departed father on the promise they must only marry within the same tribe as their father to avert the danger of tribal possession being lost to another tribe. (Num. 36:1-9). The case of the Zelophehad's daughters indicates that God is interested in justice, fairness and equity. Law is made to regulate and guide the conduct of people in any given society or community. If the path of any given law, customs and tradition is going to be in collision with justice, the best thing to do is to amend such law or in the alternative enact another law so that justice can prevail. The daughters of Zelophehad are right; you shall give them possession of an inheritance among their father's brethren and cause the inheritance of their father to pass to them. And you shall say to the people of Israel, 'if a man dies and has no son, then you shall cause his inheritance to pass to his daughter... (Num.26:33; 27:1-11)

Zelophehad's female children's action demonstrates how, throughout history, different communities have dealt with the natural human desire to deny legitimate beneficiaries of their parents' estates. Louis Ndekha (37) is of the view that women in the ANE were generally victims of gender-based rights abuse. Among these rights-abuses that women faced was the lack of prerogative of patrimony should her father departs leaving behind only daughters (Ndekha 38). However, Louis Ndekha(38) suggests that there is a little leverage for women or daughters inheritance in ancient Israel's neighbours such as Lipit Ishtar's kingdom of Isin, Babylonian cities of Lagash and Nipur, whose inheritance law allowed daughters to become heir undisputable among others (Ndekha 38). There exists

some level of diversity in the legal position of inheritance rights of women among ancient Israel's neighbours which showed that where property issue is concern, women invariably are always the victims.

Coffman J. Burton argues that, though there may have been no definite customary law of inheritance in ancient Israel that bestowed rights of inheritance upon daughters, there existed such legislation long before the narratives in that text (Coffman 3) He noted that:

A father, even if he had a son or not, is authorized to set apart a portion of his belongings to his daughter, in which case her spouse is wedded into her lineage, rather than she into his; and the lineage through which the property came, either before his death or at the point of death...(Coffman 4).

An instance of the above narrative from the biblical perspective is Machir, who is of the Zelophehad's progenitors. Machir gave birth to a son named Gilead; he left a patrimony to his female child, Hezron's wife, whose tribe is Judah. As a result of this, their offspring which included Jair, were counted as part of Manasseh's tribe (Coffman 5). Coffman (5) is against the idea that this chapter (Num. 27) was a late interpolation into the Pentateuch after the exile. Coffman argues that such postulation and its acceptance is an error that is based on false premise. Coffman further argues that the idea that there was no trace of customary law of inheritance rights of female, (that is the prerogative of daughters to take possession) before the banishment cannot be said to be accurate. That in Egypt, where the Israelites stayed for more than 400 years, inheritance can be transferred through mother which can be under a mitigating circumstance and that is what is being allowed in this text (Coffman 5). (Num. 27:1-11).

The daughters of Zelophehad (Malah, Noah, Hoglah, Milcah and Tilzah) took counsel together; that is, they were unified by one single demand and were energised by a strong collective voice. For justice to be achieved, it requires a collective voice, otherwise their request could have been brought to ruin if they had a divided voice or opinion. As stated earlier, ancient Israelite society was largely patriarchal, and the issues of land, inheritance, succession, and power were in the domain of men. But this can cause a big challenge and problem when a family is without a male child or son as noticed in the biblical narrative of Zelophehad of the

tribe of Manasseh (Adeyemo 91). Their mother was conspicuously not mentioned here presumably because she was also deceased (Brown, Fitzmyer and Murphy 115). She may well have suffered shame because of her failure to produce a male heir. However, she may have been proud of her daughters who were strong enough to stand against injustice which led to their names being recorded in the biblical narrative alongside those of men (Adeyemo 91). They knew they were to work together if they were to bring a change to the system that was bias against them. Similar instances exist in the biblical narrative such as the Egyptian Midwives (Exo. 1:15-21), the mother of Moses and her daughter Miriam (Exod. 2:1-4), Naomi and Ruth (Ruth 1:1-20) Deborah and Jael (Jud. 4:14-21) and so on.

However, the daughters of Zelophehad's courageous act may have been emboldened by their knowledge about all that had happened to the Israelites on their wilderness journey. They were aware that plans had been made for land allocation and that no law covered them as representatives of their family since there was no male child. These women knew that God's relationship with the Israelites as a community was not restricted to only males and as such they were entitled to share in the gift of a new land (Adeyemo 91). Moreover, the daughters of Zelophehad knew very well that even the offspring of the rebellious Korah would still be given a land, for Korah's lineage was not totally obliterated (Num.26:11). This provided them the confidence, though in a humble and polite manner. They were aware that, unlike Korah (Num. 27:3) who perished as a result of his disobedient deed, their father died as a member of the generation that was rejected by God because of their faithless attitude.

However, the most outstanding consequence of the protest of the daughters of Zelophehad was that they fought against the status quo and ensuing injustice and left us with a legacy which provides a paradigm for human rights movement against disinheritance of infants and minors male children who are supposed to be the beneficiaries of their deceased parents' estate.

WOMEN AND THE RIGHTS OF INHERITANCE IN SELECTED CUSTOMARY LAWS IN NIGERIA.

Yoruba Customary Law of Inheritance

Yorubas are predominantly presents in South Western part of Nigeria, western part of Kogi in North central and Kwara State. Customary ordinance of patrimony and succession follow the paternal lines of descent in the allocation of property of a departed individual among the Yoruba. The paternal lines of decent in the property distribution among the Yoruba have two methods which include *Idi-Igi* or *Igi Kan Kan* and *Ori Ojori*. Obilade (86) is of the view that the system of *Idi-Igi* method of distribution is a tradition where a deceased person property is shared among his children (beneficiaries) per stripes. That is, the estate is first shared among the number of wives, and this property which is distributed to each wife will then be subdivided to the children equally. Obilade (87) describes the *Ori-Ojori* mode of sharing of estate in Yoruba customary inheritance ordinance as a system that enables the deceased estate to be distributed to the number of children alive at the time of his death. This mode of property distribution allows each child to receive equal share irrespective of the number of children born by each wife (Obilade 86).

The Yoruba mode of distribution' of property of the deceased person appears not to discriminate against any gender. The customary law of inheritance and succession respect gender equality and it is general among Yoruba constituent states though there are few distinctions among sub-ethno cultural groups (Abikoye 35). Okany (105) suggests that the *Idi-Igi* mode of sharing of estate in Yoruba customary inheritance ordinance will always tends to bring conflict among the family members of a deceased person because it will amount to injustice to the children of a particular wife who has more children than others. Interestingly, a wife or a widow of a deceased has no rights of inheritance to her husband's property. Her rights to the estate of her deceased husband are almost non-existence in the customary law of inheritance of the Yoruba.

Bini Customary Law of Inheritance

The principle of primogeniture is the most prevalent rule in Bini customary inheritance precept as well as succession. Thus, the position of the eldest male child

is very significant. Inheritance is premised on the rule of primogeniture in the native law and custom of the Binis. The son who succeeds his deceased father to the inheritable estate and succession to the throne strictly followed an age-old custom and tradition. When a person dies, his eldest surviving son together with the other children performs the burial ceremonies known as *OTON and IKPOWIA* (Osemwowa 37). After that, the family then gathers together in a family meeting to distribute the estate to the exclusion of the wives, if there is no valid will. The rule of “Igiogbe is very sacred in customary law of inheritance of the Binis. It is pertinent to note that a Bini man under the customary law of inheritance cannot devise or bequeath in a will the house where he lived during his lifetime to any other child other than his eldest surviving son.

Igbo Customary Law of Inheritance

The Igbo customary inheritance law does not allow daughters and wives to inherit a deceased's estate. Wives and daughters do not have inheritance rights under the Igbo native law and custom. However, if a daughter chooses to remain in her father's house unmarried with the intention of raising children in the father's home which is known as ‘Idagbe’ institution, the rights to inheritance may avail her in the circumstances (Alade 24). Nwogugu (401) is of the view that the nucleus of the customary law of succession and inheritance in Igbo is primogeniture. That is succession and inheritance is by the first-born of male descent. This is known as ‘Okpala’ ‘Diokpala’ or ‘Diokpa’. However, the type of primogeniture which is commonly practised in Igbo cannot be said to be good example of primogeniture because the family's eldest male child does not have absolute ownership rights over the family property rather he (the eldest male child) just has some form of management rights, representative and caretakership rights for the benefit of all members of the family including himself. The rights to inheritance of the estate of the deceased actually devolve on all the male members of the family who has joint ownership and not the head alone. Obviously, the rule of customary inheritance law that prohibits widows from the rights to take possession of their late husband's estate is said to be blind to the contributions of the wives to the acquisition and development of such properties (Tebi 14). In many instances, the property may be jointly own by a deceased person and his surviving wife or wives. It is a great

injustice to disinherit the wife or wives of a deceased person who contributed to the ownership of the property under whatever disguise.

Igbo customary law of inheritance is not uniform, though certain similarities can still be identified. When a man dies, his property passes to *Okpala*, who is the eldest son. If the deceased has many wives, the eldest son of each wife inherits jointly and the eldest among the sons manage and administer the estate on behalf of the family (Animashaun and Oyeniyin 16). The sharing of the deceased personal estate in Igbo customary law of inheritance depends on the specific Igbo community where the deceased lived (Animashaun and Oyeniyin 17).

Idoma Customary Law of Inheritance

Among the Idoma ethnic group of Benue State, North Central Nigeria, the native law and custom that governs inheritance allows the deceased brother who is next-of-kin to inherit the estate of the deceased including the wife and children. This is called levirate marriage (Animashaun and Oyeniyin 17). The customary law of many communities in Nigeria allow levirate marriage just as it is practised in early Israel. The dissimilarities is that, in early Israel any child born in levirate marriage bears the name of the deceased while in Nigerian communities where levirate marriage is practised, any child born in the process bears the name of the man that consummate the levirate marriage. Moreover, in communities where levirate marriage is practised, the custom is to mitigate the economic hardship that the deceased wife and children may likely encounter. This is not like the ancient Israel where the practised of levirate marriage was mainly to preserve the name and genealogy of the deceased.

Tiv and Igala Customary Law of Inheritance

In Tiv ethnic group of Benue State and Igala tribe of Kogi State, Nigeria, the customary law of inheritance is premised on patrilineal, that is, succession and inheritance follow the male line decent. This has aggravated the traits of discriminatory practices to the inheritance of land and the main victims here as in other customary law practice in Nigeria is the female members of the family (Tebi 16). The implication of this is that female has no rights of inheritance among those ethnic groups.

CONCLUSION

There are many communities in Nigeria today where gender-based rights abuse including issue like disinheritance, remains a significant challenge, deeply rooted in cultural and societal norms where women, widow and girls, in particular, face discrimination in multiple forms, limiting their access to their parents and husband's estate. Similar to ancient Israel, disinheritance is a glaring example of gender-based abuse, where women, particularly widows and daughters, are often deprived of their rightful inheritance due to patriarchal traditions or law that is out of tune with reality. Despite various provisions of the laws or statutes such as the Nigerian Constitution and the 2011 National Gender Policy, which is to promote gender equality, cultural practices continue to hinder the full realization of the rights of women, widow and girls to inheritance. The result is very obtruse.

Gender-based rights abuses in Nigeria such as denial of inheritance rights could be tackle through a combination of strong reforms in Nigeria's legal system, compulsory execution of our laws that are already in force, a genuine change to our social construct to challenge deeply embedded cultural norms such patriarchy, and public awareness campaigns in sensitizing people about their rights. Women, girls, widows and even the male who have been disinherited can take similar action like the Zelophehad's daughters. There is assurance they will get justice. *Equity aids the vigilant not the indolent*. Any person who reasonably believes that he has been deprived or disinherited must act swiftly to recover and preserve their rights.

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