For at least a quarter of a century, equal opportunity issue in education has caused educators across the globe to focus their thoughts and practices in ensuring that girls are provided with opportunities to succeed in their education. Effort is focused on sciences and mathematics and more recently, technology which open doors to opportunities in the world of work in a fast changing scientific and technological world. It therefore becomes crucial that Nigerian women should be part of the new wave of learning, which propels women to do that which was looked upon as the male world. Based on the foregoing, the writer proposes that among other things that women education in the 21st century should gear towards making them achieve success in the economic, political and social integration.

Introduction

Education, per se, is a leeway for economic, political and social enhancement. For the nation to move forward, there should be no gender discrimination in the education of its citizenry. Women should not be viewed, as they were seen in the past as being born to be submissive, soft-spoken, feeble and to hide behind their husbands in all matters. All the potentialities of an individual (woman) should be developed, be it knowledge, skills, attitudes as to enable her operate effectively in any environment she. The society can only be improved when individuals that make up the society are developed. Development cannot be achieved if women education is not seriously addressed. Education embracing. For the man to succeed in his endeavour he needs the contributions of his wife whether form of bringing up the children, in keeping the home to be presentable: in financing children and family expenses when the need arises. When a woman is adequately supported in form of education she could perform her task excellently and that makes work lighter for the man in the house. Education broadens the horizon of the man/woman thereby, making it easy for the woman to perform her task without supervision or waiting for an order from the husband. This supports the views ? Goethe (in Hostrop, 1975: 178) who said that:

If you treat an individual as he is, he will slay as he is, but if you treat him as if he were what he ought to be and could be, he will become what he ought to be and could be.

Ohachen’u quoting Perez de cuellar (1991:5), stated that, "although there has been some improvement for women education over the past twenty years, the majority still lags behind men. Women are expected to achieve results, and in order to do that, they should be empowered: repositioned through education. Because of the position of women in African society, women become extra careful about erring their views in the presence of men. At times, women look up to husbands to be their mouthpiece. Is this the way to achieve even and faster development in the 21st century? For women to participate actively in economic, social and political development, they should not sit on the fence: but work hard to embrace functional education, which will make them amazons in their various fief: (Amanchukwu, 2005). Women are seen as good managers both in the home front and in their place of work: whether in civil service or in private sector. They are adequately moulded to bear several burdens at the same time. It is only natural that women education should be given a glaring boost so as to make women contribute effectively and always in the affairs of the nation. It is an obvious fact that men in Africa are the head of families but women are good managers who can turn around the little resources she could gather for the betterment of the family. In a country where about 50% of the families are illiterate in spite of several attempts in recent years to achieve education for all by the year 200". (Okckc, 2002), how can one think of fast development without the women; development in what direction? An illiterate of the 21st century, should not be a woman who can only read and write bur someone who could apply scientific reasoning in solving her daily problems.

Issues

(a) Segregation of Women

Women are segregated and relegated to the background and if a woman shows that she can perform certain tasks, which men feel it is their exclusive area of authority, such a gesture earns that woman a bad name. Women are partners in progress and it is proper to involve them when important decisions, which concern them, are being taken. To buttress this point, (Hostrop 1975: 174)
emphasized that:

Those individuals who have to carry out the decisions are brought in to participate in the decision making process at the development of alternative stage the decision is one which helps these people to achieve objectives, to assist them in their work, to contribute to their performing better, more effectively, and with a greater sense of achievement.

(b) Education of Women for What

The population of women is increasing on a daily basis. A look at the classrooms in the Nigerian primary, secondary and tertiary institutions will testify to it. Women need functional education to enable them operate in a scientific world of which they are a part. The neglect of women in many fields of endeavor had made a renowned African statesman, Julius Nyerere, in United Nations economic commission for Africa, UNECA, (1989:4), to say that;

...national economic development is dependent upon the women of Africa and cannot easily take place without them. A person does not walk very far or very fast on one leg, how can we expect half of the people to be able to develop a nation? Yet, the reality is that women are usually left aside when development needs are discussed, and also when the methods of implementation are being decided upon...

It is essential that African men think and make use of the second leg (women) so as to work faster and develop faster. In a world of accelerating change and shifting values men really need the second leg (women) so as to reach those vital areas, which could not be easily reached using one leg.

(c) Set Back in Women Education

Women education is for maximum development. No country has been developed without their women. An educated woman in a family is readily available to represent the husband in crucial matters when the husband is not around. Her wide range of exposure, knowledge and interactions with people will surely qualify her in any eventuality. Many Nigerian women are educated, but compared to the population; the percentage is minimal as cited earlier. Recently, Mrs. Laura Bush and her daughter, represented President Bush, during her recent tour of some West African countries. If she is not well exposed and educated in current affairs, she would not have been asked to perform the task. Dr. Condoleezza Rice, the United States Secretary of State, is occupying that seat because of her education, doggedness and her readiness to serve her nation. The First elected African woman Head of State, Mrs. Ellen Johnson – Sir leaf of Liberia, made her journey to that seat because of her exposure and other qualities, which she possesses, that endeared her to her people.

Insights

(a) Progress of Women in Nation Building

In Nigeria, education has helped the nation to produce seasoned women professionals who have either served in government or are still serving; such persons as Dr. (Mrs.) Chinwe Obaji - Minister of Education; Dr. (Mrs.) Ngozi Okonjo - Iweala, Minister of Finance; Hajia Maryam Ciroma, Minister for Women Affairs and others. The importance of women education cannot be over emphasized and that is why Mrs. Bush, spoke of her country’s scholarship scheme for mainly girls and extended to the boys too. (THISDAY, vol. 11, #3927 P.18).

(b) Integrity and Women Education

Women are not only needed in governance, they are equally important in socio - economic development. Without adequate education, women cannot perform the above tasks squarely. An educated woman should be able to tap the resources and channel it to the areas of need. When resources are being mismanaged, women will be the first group to start talking and calling the culprit to order. Lack of proper education ushers in ignorance and misplacement of priorities. Functional education gives a woman a sense of direction, which propels her to an enviable height. Some women are looked upon as generators of income, which helps them put food on the table when the men or husbands are unable to do so or lost their jobs. Women get involved in petty trading and it is obvious that if they are encouraged by providing education for their upliftment, their output would be more encouraging. This point can be buttressed more by Ekejiuba (1990: 9), who sees women as both procreators and income generators:
A woman who successfully combines reproduction with production enjoyed a higher status than one who merely reproduced but was too lazy to contribute her productive labour to ensure the survival of the family and lineage. The women who contributed, and this ensured the survival and reliance of others on them, were more respected than the lazy and/or barren wife.

One could see that a woman's role does not end in doing domestic chores but are extended to other areas where she can perform excellently. The contribution of women in the society is priceless and Obermaier (1990: 7), with reference to the first United Nation's World Conference on women emphasized that, “Women are the main economic providers of families as well as society as a whole and development opportunities”.

(c) Women Education for Social Development

Women interact with the children more often than men because they stay most of the time with their children. A traditional woman is expected to be a good wife and mother. It is expected that the role of socializing the child is hers. When a man is provided with adequate tools to work in the farmland, he will make adequate use of them to achieve the expected results. For adequate social development, women education should be hastened up. It is believed that an educated mother is able to adopt strategies, which maximize the life chances of her children by taking decisions in the marital, reproductive, economic and medical areas (Levine, 1980). She is more likely to have fewer children, thus, improving the quality of life for her children by allowing more resources (time, money, influences etc.) to each one. She is in a better disposition to provide a healthy diet, seek proper medical help, and follow medical advice in the treatment of her children, leading to lower infant and child mortality. An educated woman is anxious about the children's academic performance and this makes her seek for the best teacher; go extra kilometer to purchase educational goods and services for her children such as toys, books and arrange for travels with them, knowing very well that travelling is part of education.

As a product of social change, she is better equipped to socialize her children in the new socio-economic order concomitant with development Educations, as we can see, does not only prepare women for participation in development but enables her prepare her offspring for participation (Levine, 1980). We should not lose sight of the adage that says that when you educate a woman, you educate a nation through the socialization process.

Men cannot claim to have solutions to all the problems surrounding the family and beyond. Women are so articulate that they can contribute their own quota towards preventing or solving the problems as they arise. This is in line with Wipper (1972), who said, "let the women... solve their home social problems with their husbands and parents and men solve the public problems with the government, politically and socially." But women will be more equipped when they are empowered through functional education.

Observations

In low-income families, the male child is willingly sent to school leaving the female child to tend a helping hand in household chores. In the school system, some teachers still have the notion that girls are very weak in mathematics and other science subjects; therefore they should not bother encouraging them. Even the boys in the class are ready to make fun of any girl that shows some proficiency in any of these subjects. Huport (2000), to buttress this point, asserted that girls tend to opt for more arts subject and boys for scientific and technical ones. He further stated that while girls predominate in secretarial, nursing, home economics and commercial courses, the great majority of students in engineering, electronics, technical education and others are males. Hence, inequality of access to education usually puts female at a disadvantage in contributing their own quota in educational technological and national development. Therefore, there is need to eliminate gender disparity in teacher technical higher education.

Can the Nigerian women purse for a while and think about the future of the country without seasoned and educated women to assist in taking decisions? What happens to many female children that are abused while hawking around the streets? What happened to our young girls who dropped out of school? Nigerian educated women should not rest on their oars until justice is meted out on those areas cited. With proper education, Nigerian women could be seen operating at vital positions and even vie for the highest position in governance. Dr. (Mrs.) Okonjo - Iweala, Dr. (Mrs.) Oby Ezekwesili and others have proved that transparency is a panacea for fast development (Amanchukwu, 2005). The slogan should be ‘Radical Change’ both in the school curriculum and governance. Political office holders should bear in mind that public interest should supersede their personal interest and in this case, the public interest is that women education should be emphasized more both at the rural and urban sectors. Schools should be more enterprising than what it is today. Once more, the national policy in education (2004), stated that all sons and daughters of Nigeria irrespective of where they reside should have access to quality education. Women education in the 21st century should be designed to seek the
needs of the century by making women education compulsory and functional. Efforts should be made in providing adequate infrastructure for effective teaching and learning and outlets will be provided where the products of this education would practice and participate actively for the development of the nation. A girl-friendly curriculum with methodologies, which promotes the interests of girls should be the norm in general classroom practice and where single-sex education is available. Amanchukwu quoting Ajag (2005:21), stated that the twenty first century women is certainly not to be shoved aside and treated as second fiddle. Development and progress of any society, Africa in particular, can only be effective when all individuals irrespective of gender are given a level playing ground to maximize their opportunities for advancement and positive impact.

Recommendations

Many steps can be taken to empower women through education. Some of these steps are:

Women should be seen as the second leg in a family so their education is vital for efficient delivery of their duties in the family and in the society at large.

There should be no discrimination on what an individual can do in this country whether male or female. If a female candidate is found fit to run this country, she should be given maximum support to enable her execute the task effectively and efficiently.

Since two-thirds of the 960 million illiterate adults in the world are women, (courtesy Beijing Platform for Action, paragraph 69). Effort should be made to decrease or eliminate illiteracy totally by providing suitable educational program for the women.

Early marriages, pregnancies, lack of suitable classroom climate for effective learning should not be a barrier to women education.

There should be a radical change in school curriculum and governance so as to enable the need for female education. A girl-friendly curriculum with methodologies which promote the interest of girls should be the norm in general classroom practice and where single-sex education is available.

Since women are the main economic providers (Obermair, 1990) of families as well as society as a whole, there should not be a debate or an argument whether women should be empowered through education. Empowering them will help them excel in different fields of endeavor.

There should be more of Dr. Okonjo-Iweala, Dr. Obiageli Ezekwesili, Prof. Alele Williams, Prof. Dora Akunyili, Hajia Usman etc to help give this nation a sense of belonging

A proper social orientation on wealth, social position, education etc is necessary to enable the women succeed in different endeavors.

More women should be involved in taking decisions in vital matters concerning this country and this can be achieved when women are empowered through functional education.

There should be no discrimination on who goes to school or not Both boys and girls should be given equal opportunity to exercise their talent in any field if endeavor.

Women need to contribute their own quota in educational technological and national development; therefore, gender discrimination should not rear its ugly faces when science and technical subjects are being offered in schools.

The Blueprint on women education (NCE, 1986), should be carried out to the letter so as to enhance fast and balance development in Nigeria.

Conclusion

In conclusion, women have learnt that in order to compete with men and to be given credit for their efforts, in a man's world, they must be as good as or better than their male counterparts. To obtain sponsorship, potential applicants for beauty competitions are now expected to demonstrate that they have 'brains and all round qualities as well as beauty'. The educated woman too understand that sacrifices have to be made and that they must leave the domestic scene if they are going to contribute to the financial upkeep of the home and get their concerns addressed by local and central governments.

References

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