

THE IMPACT OF WOMEN EDUCATION AND EMPOWERMENT ON NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract

Women education is the process through which Female individuals are made functional members of their society. Education is a means of preserving, transmitting and improving the culture of the society. In every society, education connotes acquisition of something good or something worthwhile. This paper makes use of secondary data to review the impact of women education and empowerment on National development. Women education is important as it reduces women's fertility rates, lowers infant and child mortality, lowers maternal mortality, protects against HIV/AIDS infection, increases women's labour force participation rates and earnings among other factors that enhance national development. Recommendations were made and concluded that Education is the right of every girl everywhere and key to transforming her life and that of her community. Without education, women are denied the opportunity to develop their full potentials and to play a productive and equal role in their families, their societies and their countries.

Women's education does not merely create one-off benefits for child health. Apart from being an important objective in its own right, it helps to overcome wider gender-determined inequalities and creates human development and poverty reduction. Education is a process of teaching, training and learning especially when it goes on in the school. It is equally referred to as schooling. It is the process by which the society deliberately transmits its norms, values, knowledge and skills from one generation to another (Ukeje, 1976). Education enable the recipients attain intellectual, physical as well as emotional

progress thereby enabling the individual live happier and fulfilled life.

Generally, education is viewed as a process of bringing about positive changes in the way people feel, think, speak, and act. It is an inevitable and powerful tool or weapon that can be used to surmount ignorance, poverty and disease and to produce functional citizens with positive attitudes towards loving what they ought to love and hating what they ought to hate. Without mincing words, a nation that neglects education is due for extinction from the world's map. Sticht (2009), rightly stated that education is one of the stimulators of the growth and development of any society and it enhances the development of the potentials of human beings hence every society gives it priority.

Most governments in developing countries recognize the principle that education is a fundamental human right. Many enshrine that in constitutional provisions. In practice the right to education is universally enjoyed by the rich, but not by the poor. In education, as in other areas of social development, wealth matters. Differences in income shape opportunities for education, which in turn shape future patterns of wealth distribution.

Education is the process through which individuals are made functional members of their society (Ocho, 2005). It is a process through which the young acquires knowledge and realizes her potentialities and uses them for self-actualization and to be useful to her and others. It is a means of preserving, transmitting and improving the culture of the society. In every society, education connotes acquisition of something good or something worthwhile. Education is one of the fundamental rights of

individuals. Article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in December, 1949 stipulated that:

1. Everyone has the right to education. This shall be free at least in the primary stages.
2. Elementary education shall be compulsory while technical and professional education shall be made generally available
3. Higher education shall be equally accessible to all on the basis of merit.
4. Parents have a prior right to choose the kind of education that shall be given to their Children.

There is an adage that says “educate a man, you educate an individual, but educate a woman, you educate a nation” This adage summarizes the essence of education of the girl –child and indeed of every educable human being. This then calls for special attention to be focused on education of the girl-child. No nation can afford to toy with the education of her citizen, especially, the child, who will be the future of tomorrow, because education is the bedrock of all facets of development.

Girl-child education is one of the most important investments that could be used for the future of any country. It could make an enormous difference to a woman’s chances of gaining well-paid work, raising a healthy family, preventing the spread of diseases such as HIV and AIDS etc. (UNICEF, 2004)

Statement of the Problem

In some Nigeria Societies, they believe that it is an abomination to train a female. The beliefs are that women are supposed to be good cooks and mothers. Education of women is seen as a threat to male chauvinism. Some men believe that once a woman is educated, she will be difficult to control and she could become loose, immoral and promiscuous (Nwanekezi and Onyido, 2010). The Society most of the time sees the girl-child as a second fiddle; as a result,

little or no effort is made towards her education especially when the parents are made to make a choice between the male –child and girl- child. Mwangi (2004), stated that the traditional society gives little or no recognition of the efforts or contributions of women to national development. They believe that the girl-child is inferior to the male-child. The female sex has always been regarded as weak, sometimes unintelligent, inferior and often emotional.

However, some parents discriminate against the girl child in terms of training, role models and skills. The parents, teachers and other members of the society see the girl-child’s place as to be curtailed. This sex-typed experiences and orientation is given to the girl-child right from birth. Research findings have shown that both sexes are equal in most abilities. According to Murzi (2003) it was stated specifically that both sexes are equal in most abilities.

The parents at birth give the impression that the girl-children is inferior to their male counterparts and this makes them prefer training the boys first. The home background of the girl-child determines the accessibility to education. Obanya (2003), stated that 46.2 percent of girls between the ages of 15 and 19 have already begun child bearing. This early marriage into which the parents force their girl-children, prevents them from having formal education. In muslim dominated societies in the core north, women education is not taken as a necessity. Some muslim parents believe that when they send their female children to school they could become promiscuous and would not respect their husbands and might even deviate from the practice of their religion. The result is that there is social inequality and gender discrimination which are problems faced not only in Nigeria but worldwide. Some believe that positions of authority are the exclusive preserve of men. Some people believe that women have low

Intelligence quotient (IQ) and as such are not expected to venture into some courses like medicine, engineering, etc.

Schmitz-Robinson (2006), who cited UNICEF report of 2008 said that 10, million Nigerian children of school age are currently out of school. A breakdown of the figure shows that 6.2 million are girls while the remaining 3.8 million are boys. This also is an abnormal situation which government policies therefore should aim at correcting.

Significance of the Study

The study will be beneficial to the parents, teachers, and the policy makers. The entire society will benefit from this study which will help to change the position and the orientation of women in the society. This will assist the policy makers in terms of taking women into consideration in reducing poverty in the nation and accelerate national development.

The Aims of Education

Education aims at imparting an intimate sense for the power of ideas and a particular body of knowledge which has peculiar reference to the life of the person possessing it. It sharpens the mind for use. It produces men who possess both culture and expert knowledge in some special direction. Education addresses life in all its ramifications. It enables one use the knowledge of the past to equip people for the present.

Ways of Acquiring Education

There are three main ways through which the society educates its young ones. They include:

1. The informal way – through interaction with members of the family, peer group, society and things around (environment). This is the first form of education available to human society.

2. The formal way – through the medium of organized learning, i.e school or institutionalized learning.

3. The non-formal way – through deliberate and systematized efforts to organize learning outside the regular school activity, example, the National Youth Service Corps, Scout Movement, functional or adult literacy campaigns, apprenticeship system, correspondence course, mass media sensitization etc., all of which are change agents.

When women are involved in any of these processes it will go a long way in enhancing the standard of living not only in their various families and communities but also the nation at large. These efforts put together refer to what is now termed “Education For All” (EFA) and Education For Life” (EFL). This projects education as an instrument par excellence for effecting national and international development.

Development

Development can be defined as an increasing attainment of one’s cultural values. The conceptualization emphasizes the following notions. First that development is a process and not a state and the process here ultimately refers to values and values referred to are those of the people involved not the value of western world or any other world. Hence development is the qualitative self improvement of man. This equally applies to the whole society and people. Development also implies creating the skills and capacity to do things, greater freedom, self confidence, creativity, self discipline, responsibility and management.

The Impact of Women Education and Empowerment in National Development

The importance of education can be appreciated against the background of education

as a process, as a product and as a discipline. As a process, education is the means by which “man” can realize the civilization of the past and is enabled to take part in the civilization of the present to achieve that of the future. In this context civilization is the totality of culture as a means of developing man to enable him live effectively in the society. This enables women to have the positive change that is needed in the society that will lead to national development.

As a product, education is the means of bringing changes in man’s behaviour. It enables man to acquire power in the environment he lives in; power to contribute positively in the society where he lives and the power to be of higher value. In this education can make women participate in politics and engage in gainful employments that will not only empower them financially but also empower them socially in the society. This will lead to the national development since poverty will be reduced when most women are educated and empowered. Since education is very important instrument for transformation and reconstruction of the environment.

Education as a discipline, is the total process of human learning by which knowledge is imparted in tertiary institutions, people are trained and skills developed (Farant,1980) women who read any course in the university or in any tertiary institution come out as professionals and that helps in empowering them.

An educated woman is 50% more likely to have children immunized against childhood diseases (Onigbo, 2003). Education is essential for the improvement of women and enables them to exercise greater say in decision making in the society (Inoma, 2001). Basic literacy and other basic skills are absolutely vital to women’s empowerment and without the skills acquired through education women cannot obtain better pay.

Investment in education benefits the individual, society, and the world as a whole. Broad based education of good quality is among the most powerful instrument known to reduce poverty and inequality. Women who are care givers at home when educated will no doubt improve the health of their family members, and this will strengthen the nation’s health and lays the foundation for sustained economic growth. Women’s education is the key to creating and applying knowledge and thus to the development of dynamic, globally competitive economies.

Women education reduces inequality. Education is a great “leveler”, illiteracy being one of the strongest predictors of poverty. Primary education plays a catalytic role for those most likely to be poor including girls, ethnic minorities, orphans, disabled people, and rural families.

Women’s education lowers maternal mortality rates. Women with formal education tends to have better knowledge about health care practices, are less likely to become pregnant at a very young age.

Women with formal education are much more likely to use reliable family planning methods, delay marriage and childbearing, and have fewer and healthier babies than women with no formal education. Lower population growth will also generate advantages for education. Slower growth in the school-age population will reduce pressure on the education system, and enable the government to increase spending per pupil and provide a better quality education. It follows that investing in girls’ education today is one of the most effective strategies for progressing towards universal primary education in the future.

Mother’s education is a significant variable affecting children’s education attainment and opportunities. A mother with a few years of formal education is considerably more likely to send her children to school. In many countries each additional year of formal education completed by a mother translates into her

children remaining in school for an additional one-third to one-half year. That is to say educated mothers ensure their children enrolment and learning better than non educated mothers' children.

The multiple benefits of female education are cumulative, in that they become mutually reinforcing over time, with the advantages transmitted across generations. It is not just that educated children are likely to be more productive and healthier, with attendant benefits for poverty reduction. They are also more likely to educate their own children.

Conclusion

Education is the right of every girl everywhere and key to transforming her life and that of her community. Without education, women are denied the opportunity to develop their full potentials and to play a productive and equal role in their families, their societies and their countries.

Women need to be identified and trained to enable them carry out the female functions with a difference that will lead to national development. Her involvement in formulating and implementing policy and programmes in this regard are critical as the need for education and advantages associated with being educated are enormous. Non- educated woman can hardly equate with a well educated one within the intellectual arena and in the social world.

Recommendations

The following recommendations will help to improve the education of the girl-child to have women that are educated to enhance the national development.

1. The intervention actions should be focused on the mother of the girl-child since she is at the center of the upbringing of the children.
2. The Nigerian people need a re-orientation through advocacy, sensitization and policy education. If the people are not re-orientated,

they are bound to either ignore or frustrate efforts made; therefore, the media can be a strong tool for national re- orientation and education. The entire populace needs gender education if women are to be empowered.

3. The government should provide girl-child friendly infrastructure that will motivate them to go to school.
4. The government should organize skill acquisition and training programmes in the communities which would empower women to be independent.
5. Data base for women should be created at both the local and national levels to monitor their involvement in the national development.

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