

WOMEN EDUCATION FOR SUSTAINABLE FUTURE DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA

Ibrahim Tela Fika and Musa Adamu Mshelia

Abstract

The paper dwells on the education of women in Nigeria generally. This comprises of definition of terms such as the concept of education and development. Briefly, history of education right from the period of Usman Ibn Fodio's Islamic teachings up to the western Christian oriented education has been discussed. The policy proceeding from 1969 curriculum conference as regarding women education and the 1986 creation of women education unit in Federal Ministry of Education together with its recommendations as regards women education have been highlighted. The factors affecting women education, 1985 UNESCO objectives of women education and the advantages of women education have been discussed. The paper also takes on suggestions on how to improve women education as well as women education and sustainable development. Bui (1999) strongly pointed out that the government needs to bridge the gap between policy and practice to improve women education.

Education is an indispensable tool for the development of any society and every society is made up of men and women who are complementary to one another. Therefore the education system of any country that excludes or neglects women education and that of girls, is an incomplete one and the system cannot be developed to the full. The continent of Africa is lagging behind in terms of formal education according to Gbamanja and Aboho (2006), Africa is still much behind other regions of the world in female literacy since illiteracy rate is about 60% for women in the continent.

According to United Nations International Children's Fund (UNICEF) report some 30 to 50% of children in developing countries never enter formal school system and majority of them are girls.

In another development, Bui (1999) pointed out that women constitute over 50% of the country's population, yet their literacy rate was about 39.5% compared to that of men which was about 62.3%. This call for urgent action by government as well as nongovernmental organizations to address the situation by bridging the literacy gap between male and female in terms of school enrolment which will make the Nigeria society a fair one. The 1969 curriculum conference led to policy formulation to address women and girls education. The 1986 creation of women education unit in the federal ministry of education was another bold step towards that direction. The United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (1985) also formulated some objectives for educating women and children in the country. Despite all the efforts by government and Non-Government Organization to improve female education, the situation is still lingering especially in the rural areas.

Definition of Education

The Nigeria National policy on Education (NPE, 2004) defines education as a process which helps develop the whole person to enable him function in whatever environment he finds himself. Obanya (1980) defined education in terms of its functionality. To him education is geared towards an all round development of the individual which includes intellectual, physical,

social, moral, emotional aspects. It also includes adoption, acquisition of vocational skills and aesthetics.

To Agawam (2010) Education is the all round natural harmonious and progressive development of an individual by drawing out the best in him. The dimension of this definition includes moral, social, physical, vocational, spiritual, emotional, cultural, intellectual recreational development of the individual.

Definition of Development

To Atteh (2012) development is a concept which implies a conscious and progressive transformation of a society it suggests a determined effort to bring about significant transformation of society, in a desired direction making use of available resources. Todaro (1982) opined that development is a multi dimensional process involving reorganization and reorientation of the entire economic and social systems. In addition to improvement on income and output, it typically involves radical changes in instructional, social and administrative structure as well as in popular attitudes and sometimes even customs and beliefs. Development is dynamic and never static.

Ajaegbo (2001) saw development as a multidimensional process by which a given society provides the majority of its citizens with the basic needs of life such as adequate food, housing, good health and water supply systems, functional and qualitative education, gainful employment, improved cultural and adequate infrastructural and communication facilities. It should also aim at eliminating such evils as poverty, disease ignorance, illiteracy; malnutrition hunger unemployment etc. In relation to this Atteh (2012) explained that with rapid changes in economic, political and social lives of people, it is significant to consider the need for women education as well as the impact of such education on development. To Osuman

(1997) development simply is the process whereby an economy under goes social and economic transformation geared towards improvement in quality of their lives. The participation in development can be in the economic sphere where women can help towards production of nation's wealth through economic activities. They cannot meet this requirement if they are not educated as education is an investment in human capital. Political participation involves holding positions in civil service, judiciary and the executive arms of government. This also can be achievable only through education.

Education should be a right not privilege of every citizen of any country, an effective instrument for development, a strategic tool for liberating masses of people from ignorance, disease, poverty, a dynamic force for enforcing and overall betterment of people. That equality of educational opportunity is the only guarantee for building an egalitarian society. It through the support of this background that access to education for women in this society would enable them to become good coordinators of both the home and society for sustainable development (Zaria, 2009)

A Brief History of Women Education in Nigeria

The history of education in Nigeria cannot be complete without mentioning the contribution of women be it in traditional education or formal A popular saying denotes that for every successful man, there must be a successful woman by his side. Ugwu (2001) pointed that the traditional Nigerian society provided the type of education which aimed at producing, honest, respectable, skilled and cooperative women who would conform to the social order. In another development Fanfunwa (1974) made mention that the objective of traditional education should include character

development and respect for elders. All the above apply to education for both men and women.

Before the coming of western Christian oriented education, Islam with its education was in west Africa and Nigeria as early as 11th century A.D In the early 19th century, a sterling example of encouraging women education was demonstrated in the teachings of Usman bin Fodio. He taught his wives and children both male and female Islamic education. A very good example was his daughter, Asma'u who was a well learned Islamic scholar. She wrote books on Islamic Education and was an Islamic preacher.

The Muslim north did not embrace western education at the initial stage due to fear of conversion from Islamic to Christian faith. The huddles on the way of education in the Muslim north in recent past and now are due to the ignorance of the majority of the Muslim families as regards their religion. Usman bin Fodio was following the directives of the muslim prophet that "education is compulsory for both male and female". That a "Muslim should travel as far as China to get educated". Then and now China was not and is not an Islamic country. This was about 1434 years ago (Ilorin 1981).

The Christian missionaries also came with their type of education. They established schools which included the following:

Methodist Girls High School, Lagos.
Wesleyan Girls high school, Lagos
Edgerly Girls Grammar School, Calabar
Kudeti Girls Secondary School, Ibadan

(Osinulu, 1994 in Atteh 2012). The government then was giving grants in Aid for the mission schools to pay teachers salary and also appointed commissions to look into their activities concerning education

In order to make education better for Nigeria the National curriculum conference of 1969 made the following recommendations

- i. The curriculum should be diversified to meet the need of both men and women, who would play their roles in the development of Nigeria.
- ii. All children should have the same access to the same type of formal education at all levels irrespective of sex.
- iii. Public enlightenment should be intensified by all means available for girls and women education. That there should be positive changes in societal attitude regarding the value of women education to enable parents invest in girls' education as profitable human resource development.
- iv. Remedial training through evening classes or adult education should be provided for girls who dropped out of school as a result of early marriage or any other reasons.
- v. Women organizations should be encouraged in both urban and rural areas to propagate the idea of National Policy on Education which emphasizes that ministries of community and social welfare and information should make special effort to encourage women to enter wider areas of technical education (FGN, 1981)

Several workshops as well as seminars were organized as efforts to promote women education. Many of these were in keeping with the recommendations of the 1969 curriculum conference which emphasized much on women education. A blue print and twelve ways for better women education was prepared in 1986 and twelve ways for better women education were arrived at and some of them are as follows:-

- 1 Mass mobilization and advocacy of equality of access to education for all children at all levels with particular emphasis on the benefit derivable for society from girls education
- 2 Legal provision of penalty for withdrawal of girls from school for marriage be enforced.

- 3 Legal years for marriage should be eighteen years for girls.
- 4 Free or universal primary education for all children including girls be guaranteed.
- 5 Female enrolment and completion at all tiers of the education system should be increased.
- 6 Facilities for second chance functional and literacy education should be expanded.
- 7 Education should be provided for women with special needs, gifted, and handicapped, nomadic women, women in riverine areas, rural area, drop outs, widows, career women, market women etc (Suara 1996 in Atteh 2012).

Objectives of Women Education

The United Nations education scientific and cultural organization (UNESCO), (1985) outlined the main objectives of women education as follows:

1. To enable women to improve their family wealth and diet.
2. To increase women productivity ability thus raising their families standard of living.
3. To give women access to appropriate technologies and management of cooperatives.
4. To enable women discharge their responsibilities more effectively. Help women fight their own fears and feelings of inadequacy and inferiority
5. Educate women in all round development, mentally, physically, socially, religiously, psychologically and economically.
6. Make women participate fully in all affairs of their nation and be at the center of sustainable development and
7. To make them acquire their own basic needs in the society like food, shelter, fuel, clothes, nurturing and to enhance national building in terms of economic and human development.

Factors Affecting Women Education in Nigeria

Despite the efforts being made by the Nigeria government, women organizations and

even international organization like UNICEF and UNESCO, women education still faces many problems some of such problems are considered below:

- (i) Preference for male children. Some families' prefer to send their male children to school to the disadvantage of the female children. They feel that educating the female is of less value since she will ultimately get married and leave the family.
- (ii) Early marriage. Some parent' especially in rural areas of the northern part of the country prefer to get their daughters married as early as possible. They withdraw them from schools at any stage of education to give them out in marriage. Some of such parents when asked, express their fear of unwanted pregnancy that would spoil family name if they allowed their female children to continue with their education for a long period.
- (iii) Jumoke (2008) pointed out that poverty affects women education in Nigeria negatively. In some societies especially rural areas, parent' still favor male education where there are limited resources to educate all the children in the family. This situation is very peculiar to polygamous families. The father decides to send only male children to school due to lack of resources and ask the girls to get married.
- (iv) In some cases parents especially mothers do not want to send their female children to school because they take care of the young siblings while the mother is busy doing farm work or house hold chores. Some do not want to send their children to school due to economic reasons. the daughters are involved in petty trading or hawking to support the family due to poor background

- of the family (Firtschel and Mohan in Obanya 2003)
- (v) Jatau and Devou (2000) reported that Islamic society especially the rural ones are usually associated with low female participation in formal schools, due to the ignorance of the parents as regards education in Islam. Some parents prefer to send their daughter to Qur'anic Schools as reported by Odogo and Heneveld (1995) due to the fact that western education promotes values that run contrary to Islamic cultural norms.
- (vi) Bui (1999) expressed her dismay that there is a gap between policy and practice because persistent withdrawal of the girl child from school there by frustrating her desire of getting educated for self reliance. The existing policy states that no girl should be withdrawn from school until she reaches the marriage age of 18 years. However, this policy is being violated in some states according to report on situation and policy analysis of Basic Education in Nigeria. (SAPA). This policy should be implemented to the letter if the desirable goals are to be achieved. This problem is abound in some rural areas in Yobe State particularly.
- (vii) What can be derived from women education in the family: The women provide the labour for food preparation, child rising and various domestic chores. When a woman is educated she would be able to produce balanced diet for the family through her knowledge of nutrition and hygiene thereby improving the health of the family.
- (viii) When a woman is educated, she will be more interested in the education of her children. She would spare her time to teach her children at home. This is an advantage over the children of an illiterate mother.
- (ix) Education helps women in getting involved in politics. Women are now coming up to oppose their male counterparts in contesting for political posts. Education has enlightened women about their civil rights especially the right to vote.
- (x) Women through education have formed part of the labour force; it also has inculcated in them, the leadership skills. There are now women managers, provosts, vice Chancellors etc (Atteh 2012).
- (xi) When a woman has her own income, she can help the husband financially when he runs into financial problem. In event of death of the father, a gainfully employed mother will boldly stand to take care of her children and train them until they finish their education and get employed.
- (xii) Education makes the woman not to forget her parents. She knows that the parents trained her before she got married. Therefore when ever her parents need her assistance she will be in a better position to help them. She can even convince her husband to give a helping hand to her parents, brothers or sisters, when they are in need.

Women Education the Way Forward

Bui (1999) suggested that boys and girls should be sensitized right from primary school by exposing them to history of women within and outside the country that have risen to greater heights in education in their chosen fields. This will encourage girls to compete with boys to reach greater heights in education in future.

In another development Jumoke (2008) clearly stated that government through ministry of education should redesign secondary school curriculum in such a way that basic vocational skills such as sewing, cooking, typing, knitting and tie and dye etc should be inculcated in the learners to enable them to be gainfully self employed after school. The government and private organizations or well to- do people should make efforts to aid the graduating students through loans to enable them set up private business.

There should be regular and continuous public enlightenment on the Importance of women education in the society. The three tiers of government together with community leaders should embark on mass campaign on the importance of women education to the family, the community and the nation in general.

Scholarship and bursary awards for women offering science oriented courses should be offered.

Government of the Federation and states as well as local governments should show good example in this direction, corporate organizations and private individuals should intensify their efforts in the areas of scholarship and bursary awards to female students especially those in science and technology. Such scheme should be well monitored in such a way that only deserving students benefit from the scheme.

This will encourage women to aspire to greater endeavor in science and technology (Jumoke, 2008)

Women Education and Sustainable Development

From what has been discussed so far, a well organized and implemented education results in the overall development of the individual mentally, physically, socially, morally and what have you. Women education of that nature can be a veritable tool for sustainable

development of Nigeria. The following are some ways towards that end.

- (i) Education provides educated women opportunity to fit in and be able to defend themselves and contribute their own quota to national development. An educated woman has an enhanced social Status in terms of economic empowerment, the type of husband to marry, the social class she will belong to and recognition given to her in the society. All these make her different from un-educated woman who is seen as a second class citizen in the eyes of men and other educated women.
- (ii) Though there are cultural differences in financial matters as it relates to women ownership of wealth and man's responsibility for the family up keep, a woman who secures a good job after graduation as mentioned earlier, may contribute financially for the up keep of the family including the education of her children. Through that, she can contribute immensely to the economic development of the nation. She can be supportive to the husband in all financial matters.
- (iii) Educated mothers are aware of their responsibilities to their children. Children of educated mothers learn faster and better than the children of uneducated mothers due to the environment they find themselves in. An educated mother can spare her time to teach her children at home or employ a teacher at home to give extra lessons to her children at home. The illiterate mother, on the other hand, cannot be financially buoyant to do as the educated mother. She can provide the children with whatever they may need at the appropriate time to enhance their education.

- (iv) The educated woman understands the need for national unity. She becomes member of many women organizations or associations. These associations cut across state, ethnic and religious boundaries. Through these associations she identifies with educated women class from across the country.
- (v) Many women voluntary organizations abound today. They contribute in different ways toward national development. Examples of such organizations include Better life for Rural Women, Family Support Programme, Family Economic Advancement Programme. They have contributed to the national development through their different laudable programmes. Uduigwomen (1999) asserted that the purpose of women education in Nigeria should include enabling women to contribute to life, fill the gap for those who did not go to school or those who dropped out of school, prepare young adolescents for work and family life, develop in women folk, social economic and political sophistication and the ability to understand, participate in life and family as citizens.

Conclusion

Right from the beginning of this paper, it is clear that women education in Nigeria has been suffering set backs due to various reasons. The Federal Government of Nigeria since the 1969 curriculum conference, through the ministry of education has initiated various policies to encourage women education. However as stated by Biu (1999), there is a gap between policy and implementation of the policy. The government right from the centre down to the grass root should make effort to put into practice those policies. This will go a long way in clearing the problems on the way of women education generally in Nigeria.

Recommendations

Osuman (1997) recommended that life of women should be improved through education. Those rural women are the most affected because they are the poorest due to illiteracy.

1. That the rural women suffer from poverty due to lack of funds to boost their agricultural production. Therefore they need to be educated through training in agricultural extension services. Women organizations should do everything possible in the field of education and employment to reduce the suffering of the rural womenfolk.
2. There should be continuous dissemination of information in rural areas by government, women societies and voluntary international organizations. Such organizations will sensitize the women both in rural and urban areas industrially, politically, economically, socially, agriculturally and health through education.
3. Scholarships should be given to girls in secondary and post secondary institutions to encourage girls to participate in various educational careers. This is to be more emphasized when the girls show special talent in science and technology.
4. When girls and women graduate, they should be employed immediately so that other girls and women will see value in being educated. But if government and private organizations leave graduate girls and women to be in the labour market for long, other girls and women aspiring to higher levels of education may be discouraged.

References

- Atteh, S. A. (2012): Women education for sustainable Development. *Journal of Teacher Perspective (JOTEP)* 6(3)
- Ajaegbo, (2001) in Ibadan E. O. & Ajaegbo D. I. (eds) (2001). *Reading in Political*

- Economy*, Onitsha West and Solomon Publishers Coy Ltd.
- Biu, H. (1999), *Maiduguri Journal of Educational Study*, 3(4)
- Ezeani, E. I. & Gbamanja SPT & Abohe D. A. (eds), 2006. *Emerging Issues in Education of Special Target Group*. Onitsha West and Solomon Publishers Coy Ltd.
- Fafunwa, A. B. (1974). *History of Education in Nigeria*, London and Allen Unwin.
- Federal Republic of Nigeria (2004), *National Policy on Education*, Lagos, NERDC Press.
- Igwe, I. F. (1997) in Gbamanja S P T and Aboho D. A. (ed) 2006. *Issues in Education of Special Target Group*, Onitsha West and Solomon Publishers Coy Ltd.
- Ilorin, A. A. (1981). *Islam in Nigeria (Arabic Text)* Muhammad Nasir Publishing House, Kurmi Market, Kano.
- Obanya, P. (1980). *General Methods of Teaching*, Lagos. MacMillan Nigeria Publishers Ltd.
- Omololu, A. A. (1992). *Education for Women. A Philosophy for Nigeria Education* (ed) by Adalaragbe Ibadan Heinemann Educational Books Nigeria Ltd.
- Osinulu, C. (1994). Women Education in Akinkugbe O. O. (eds). *Nigerian Education. The Challenges Ahead*. Ibadan Spectrum Books Ltd.
- Osuman, G. I.: *The Education of Women in Developing Countries*. Osuman and Co. Makurdi Nigeria Ltd.
- Jumoke, O. (2008): *Journal of Teacher Perspective (JOTEP)*.
- Jatau & Derou O. U. (2000). Low Attendance in Girl-child Functional Education Implication for Health in 21st Century. *Journal of Women in Colleges of Education (JOWIS)*.
- Todaro, M. P. (1982). *Economics for the Developing World*. United Kingdom Longmans.
- Zaria, J. T. (2004). *Women Education in a Developing Economy*. Ibadan Heinemann Educational Books Nigeria Ltd.

Ibrahim Tela Fika
Department of Curriculum and Instruction,
Federal College of Education (Technical),
Potiskum,
Yobe State.

And

Musa Adamu Mshelia
Department of Curriculum and Instruction,
Federal College of Education (Technical),
Potiskum,
Yobe State.