

GENDER ISSUES IN THE POPULATION/FAMILY LIFE EDUCATION AND DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

The study examines gender issues in population/family life education and development in Nigeria. This paper therefore intends to explain to educator and educationists in Nigeria that (1) there is now a shift from Women in Development (WID) to Gender and Development (GAD). (2) to enlighten the society that the core message in gender approach remains the fact that men and women play different but complementary roles to promote the well being of the family and society. (3) That fairness or equitable treatment of males and females is the underlying principles in gender issues, therefore, roles should be defined in terms of ability, interest, age and equity. This is because, gender stereotypes are harmful to both men and women. (4) To highlight that education is the only way to development, therefore, an empowered woman is not a rebellious woman, but an active person in the development, that a man who is empowered becomes aware that women are also human beings with feelings, they get tired, thus, have to be helped with household chores and need to be given opportunity to excel. Finally, to ensure that when a population/family life education programme is at the design stage, there is need to consider ensuring a gender balanced design. From the baseline or needs assessment, instruments, efforts must be made to seek for both male and female issues that need intervention.

Introduction

The inability to address equality has been identified as a major setbacks in the development effort of the third world countries. This stems from lack of attention to lack of gender awareness among those that plan and implement development projects. (Lengwe: 1991).

Gender issues in Nigeria have become areas of national concern in the past few years because of the need to redress social and gender inequalities. Consequently, the national population/family life education programme is responding to these critical issues by developing explicit programmes and strategies for population and development. For instance, there is now a shift from women in development (WID) to Gender and Development (GAD). The differences between WID and GAD can easily be illustrated in this table.

Table 1: From WID to GAD

<i>Issues</i>	Women in development (WID)	Gender and development (GAD)
The approach	Approach which views women as the problem	An approach to development
The focus	Women	Relations between men and women
The problem	The exclusion of women from the development process	Unequal relationship of power that prevents equitable development and women's full participation.
The goal	More efficient, effective development.	Equitable, suitable development, with women and men as decisionmakers
The solution	Integrate women into the existing development process.	Empower the disadvantaged and transform unequal relations
The strategies	Women's projects, women components integrated projects/income/ability to look after the household.	Identify, address practical needs determined by women and men. Address women's strategic needs of the poor.

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With this distinction done, it may be necessary to ask what difference there is between sex and gender. In everyday language, most people think that 'sex' and 'gender' are synonymous and if there is any difference at all, it is that the term gender, is the more "politically correct", these days. For instance, sex differences in child bearing and in physical strength have often been used as criteria for determining the division of labour and also the distribution of resources in many societies. **Sex**, in a nutshell is any difference in human beings that is biologically determined e.g. giving birth/breast feeding a baby are sex (biological/natural) role etc (Ikegutu, 2002). On the other hand, **gender** is any difference that is based on socio-cultural beliefs that have evolved over time, for instance, society is more at home when boys play

football than girls. Infact society dictates certain kinds of labour for women and other kinds for men.

Nwafor (1994), defined gender studies as a course in any field or disciplines which through practice and theories, seek to recognize and analyses gender inequalities with a view to eliminating them for equitable development and empowerment of the sexes. Sex difference between males and females are essentially unchangeable and universal throughout all human societies while gender differences are socio-culturally determined by human beings and are variable between cultures, and changeable over time.

The Concept of Gender Approach to Development

The society as a cultural custodian, by its 'dos and donts' pre-maps gender routes and consequences for adherence or otherwise. Thus, Ukpong and Inaja (2005), emphasized that "many children are programmed from the onset to believe that they cannot succeed in certain fields of life or beyond some practical limits".

The gender approach therefore seeks to understand the imbalances between females and males within the framework of important factors and determinants such as education, health, law, economy, culture, power, policy etc, and therefore to design appropriate interventions.

This approach seeks to empower men and women to contribute their quota to the betterment of the society and tries to eliminate all obstacles and practices that discriminate against girls and boys and impede their contributions towards the developmental processes. The main core message in gender approach therefore is that men and women play different but complementary roles to promote the well being of the family and society. (Ikegulu, 2000).

Other core messages in the gender approach are as follows:

- Opportunities for further educational training and development of skills help men and women to move upwards in the employment and social ladder.
- Traditional roles assigned to males and females, promote gender imbalance, roles should be defined in terms of ability, interest age and equity.
- Gender stereotypes are harmful to both men and women.
- Boys and girls should be given equal attention.
- Fairness or equitable treatment of males and females is the underlying principle in gender issues.
- Equal participation of women and men in all areas of family and household responsibilities will promote gender equality.
- Men and women should be treated equally in all spheres of life.
- Boys and girls must have equal educational opportunities to enhance their status and contributions they would make to society and
- To promote national development, there should be no demarcation of the labour market into masculine and feminine occupations by employers

Gender Issues in Nigeria

Maduewesi (2005), emphasized that with recent publicity on gender issues, women are no longer regarded as decorative accessories and objects to be moved about like before.

The need to address gender issues and concerns in population and development arises from the recognition that women and men play different but complementary roles in the family and society. The gender issues include; high school drop out rate for girls, and in some states, for boys, gender stereotyping, adolescent pregnancies and decision making, child abuse, rape, single parenthood, wife battering, sex preference, female genital mutilation, child marriage, high bride price, prostitution, low selfesteem, lack of role models, early marriage and the teachers attitude.

School Dropout for Girls (and Boys)

According to various studies and data from the Federal Ministry of Education (2002), more girls dropout of school than boys, except in few eastern states where the dropout rates of boys is getting very worrisome. There are a number of factors, which contribute to this trend. These include:

- **Poverty:** Lack of economic resources to support the girls.
- Negative attitude towards education
- Lack of proper counselling and guidance at home and school.
- Lack of role models as there are too few successful women for girls to emulate
- Premarital pregnancy
- Early marriage
- Conferment to domestic chores e.g. looking after children at home, cooking etc
- Quest to make quick money for boys.

Gender Stereotype

Ukpong and Inaja (2005) opined that despite the fact that women constitute a very high percentage of the population of Nigeria, and their crucial role as the first teachers and character moulders, be it in respect of male or female, they have continuously suffered a great deal of disadvantage in developmental matters be it political, educational that would help them discover their potentials, rights and utilize them.

There are traditional roles assigned to females and males e.g. for girls: preparing food, cleaning the home, fetching water and firewood, looking after children.

For boys: constructing houses, herding animals, hunting, fishing, clearing the bush etc.

In the work place, there are some tasks which are considered to be for women and others specifically for men e.g. for females secretarial work, nursing, housekeeping, baby sitting and primary school teaching.

For males: engineering, army services, religious leadership. A critical analysis of these role and duties shows that there are no special qualities to warrant some of them being exclusively assigned to either boys and men or girls and women.

Adolescence Pregnancy

There are increasing number of cases of adolescence pregnancies in Nigeria. Most of these cases are a result of the following:

- Lack of proper information on reproductive health
- Lack of proper guidance and counselling
- Poverty - most girls get into casual relationships in order to get economic supports.
- Rape - the increasing number of rape cases is resulting in adolescence pregnancy.
- Causal-relationships - the breakdown in morals has led to most adolescents getting into casuals relationship, which involve unprotected sexual activities. These relationships are either between peers or older men and women.

Women's Rights

Women's rights are enshrined within the Nigerian constitution. Nigeria as a member of the United Nations has ratified various conventions that relate to the rights of women. For example, there is the convention on the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women. In Nigeria, the rights of women include the following:

- Right to regulate fertility
- Right to inheritance of property
- Right to marriage.
- Right to education
- Right to equal employment

- Right to access to equal economic opportunities
- Right to be protected from all forms of cruelty, discrimination and exploitation.

Gender Relations and Decision-making

An analysis of gender relations in decision-making in the family reveals that in most cases, women do not make major decision on their own. For example, most women have to get the consent of their husbands or parents, and sometimes even the approval of other key members of the family for them to practice contraception. Ukpong and Inaja (2006), pointed out that this position is enforced and perpetuated by the oppressive, discriminative and other harmful practices meted to a girl child who from the beginning, is socialized to be at the receiving end.

Child Abuse

There are increasing incidence of child abuse in Nigeria. These includes:

- Child labour - most young girls and boys are employed as domestic servants as well as workers on farms and industries and many have turned to be street children.
- Sex abuse - some of the young girls are sexually abused by adults.
- Child neglect and battering - some parents/guardians use excessive force or extreme measures to discipline children.

Rape

Rape is increasingly becoming a problem affecting the girl child, women and families. Rape is a violation of the rights of the victims. The effects of rape include:

- Physical, social and psychological damage
- Risk of contracting sexually - transmitted diseases including HIV/AIDS
- Risk of conceiving unwanted pregnancies.

Single Parenthood

The increasing rate of divorce, death and premarital pregnancy has resulted in many households being headed by single parents. In cases of divorce and premarital pregnancy, the children are left under the care of the mother. This places women at a disadvantage, as very often, they do not have economic resources to maintain themselves and their children.

Wife/Husband Battering

Many families today are faced with the problem of wife/husband battering. Wife/Husband battering is taken as a way of resolving conflicts in a family. However, there are other more amicable ways of resolving family conflicts without resorting to violence. Wife/Husband battering can lead to a number of adverse effects such as:

- Physical injury or death
- Psychological damage to the wife/husband and children
- Divorce.

Sex Preference

In patrilineal societies, there is a tendency to prefer boys to girls. This is because succession is traced through the father. On the other hand, in matrilineal societies, there is a tendency to prefer girls over boys. This is because succession is traced through the mother. In either case, the preferred sex has distinct advantages over the other one.

Consequently, sex preference can lead to large family sizes when couples are under pressure to have children of the preferred sex. This may result in divorce or polygamy if the results are not favourable.

Female Genital Mutilation (FGM)

FGM is practiced widely by Hausa, Yoruba, Efik, Ibibi, Ibo and several other ethnic groups in Nigeria. The type that is common is clitoridectomy where the clitoris and the adjacent parts of the labia minora are removed. Culturally, the major reason is to ensure that women are not promiscuous.

However, female circumcision has a number of negative consequences according to WHO (1999), such as:

- Infection
- Severe shock
- Haemorrhage
- Difficulty in passing urine and menstrual blood.
- Vesico vaginal fistulae
- Genital infections
- Excessive scarring
- Keloid formation which leads to very severe problems during childbirth
- Infertility.

Child Marriage

When girls in their teens are given away to very old men, this is called child marriage. This is used in correcting relationships between families. Ikegulu, (2005), emphasized that in the process, teenage pregnancies occur and many of the girls are physically destroyed through having vesico vaginal fistulae (VVF), many die during or after childbirth. Those who wriggle out of unwanted pregnancies through abortion may have abortion-related complications viz bleeding to death, perforated uterus that can lead to infertility.

High Bride Price

This practice, common in some parts of Nigeria emphasizes money, rather than love for each other as the reason for marriage. This could eventually lead to divorce or broken homes. A related practice is that of couples holding on to marriages as status symbols while in fact, the marriages have collapsed. The couples recognize that their relationship is sore but reasons of care of children, bond of relationships with in-laws, material wealth etc keep them together. The traditional activities of helping to mend fences sometimes deepens the crisis, yet the couples keep living together or dramatizing their relationship as normal happy family life.

Teachers Attitude

The attitude of the teacher to the learner's behaviour is important and the teacher must be conscious of it. There is need for the teacher to mirror an attitude of help, for building up of learners. This can be done through the teacher's calm, trust, acceptance and supportive and facilitative disposition. Because of culturally biased treatment of girl child, her developing ego is seriously bastardized and needs to be protected as further threat in school by the teacher can increase the damage already done. The teacher's behaviour must be such that can convince both male and female learners of his interest in them as unique individuals (Ukpong and

Inaja, 2005).

Policies and Programmes on Gender Issues

There are a number of polices and programmes which address gender issues in Nigeria. The polices include:

- National population policy
- National policy on HIV/A1DS/STD Control
- Policy and plan of action for women
- National economic policy.

Some of the programmes intended to implement the above polices include:

- Family planning programme
- Population/family life education programme
- Expanded programme on immunization
- National AIDS/STD control programmes

Apart from the programmes, there are also project which address gender issues e.g., the Women’s Education Project of the Federal Ministry of Education.

Gender Responsive Education and Empowerment

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Ikegulu (2002), emphasized that it is through education that people can be empowered to critically analyse and change dominant value systems and myths in society. The concept of gender responsive education suggests the direction in which we have to think. This concept is based on the needs of the people i.e, women and men, boys and girls must understand that such an educational programme has practical significance in the society. It is a powerful tool for changing their lives in society, making them participate as active partners in development. The central issue in this education is equality and equity of human beings, what philosophers might term as an ethical issue.

Gender education is a development process, it is indeed a humanizing act. Narratively speaking, such education is a process that:

- Liberates individuals from dominant traditional myths;
- Promotes critical and logical thinking;
- Provides opportunities to make choices and to take decisions and
- Address needs which are specifically unique to girls and women, boys and men.

Such education therefore, empowers individuals to wake up to realities about gender issues. An empowered woman, for example is not a rebellious woman, but an active person in the development process, not only at family level, but also at national level. She becomes aware of her capabilities to contribute constructively to developmental matters. She rightly fights for, not only welfare, but also for participation and control of situations and resources and benefits which accompany the two.

At the same time, a man who is empowered becomes aware that women are also human beings with feelings, they get tired, thus, for example, have to be helped with household chores, and need to be given an opportunity to excel in different careers just as men. Such men do not have ‘feminine’ hormones nor are they ‘sissies’; they have just overcome gender biased traditional myths.

The relationship between gender responsive education and empowerment, particularly of women, could be better understood if it is compared with conventional (tradition) education = schooling = socialization.

Table 2: The Balance Sheet of Education

S/.N	Traditional/Conventional Educations, the Socio-cultural Perspective.	Gender Responsive Education: the Narrative Perspective
1	Education as it is gender insensitive	Education as it should be gender responsive
2	Gender biased	Promotes gender equality
3	Promotes passivity	Liberates
4	Indoctrinates	Empowers
5	Erodes confidence and freedom	Builds confidence and gives options
6	Tends to favour men and promotes stereotypes	Promotes gender equity and awareness
7	Tends to be an end in itself •	Is a means to an end
8	Dehumanizes	Humanizes

Gender Sensitivity in Population and Development Activities

The importance of gender equity and equality having been established, there is need to critically analyze the advantages derivable from a gender sensitive programme: This will cover the planning, through implementation processes and evaluation. When a POP/FLE programme is at the design stage, there is need to consider ensuring a gender balanced design. From the baseline or needs assessment instruments, efforts must be made to seek for both male and female issues that need intervention. The bias of the gender - type (man or woman) that is conducting the research must not be allowed to tilt the instrument as well as the administration, data collection, analysis and the writing of the report. If the report takes care of both male and female, the intervention strategies will simply fall in line.

For example, if a survey on the rate or degree of condom acceptance, demand and use is to be done to cause some intervention both men and women, boys and girls must be interviewed in equal numbers. Though majority of the users are male, they use it along with the female.

Secondly, if it is the female condoms that are referred to, they cannot be used without the men. Another case is that of wanting to investigate the drop out rates in schools with a view to finding out what can be done, both male and female students needs to be interviewed, a comparative analysis will then be possible.

Another crucial gender issue is that of the personnel that implement a programme. Both male and female need to implement on equal numbers. The number of male for seminars, workshops, meetings, training workshops etc must be equal. Again, it would not be advisable or gender sensitive to address a group of men separately without women in a community about teenage pregnancies, early marriage, school drop outs, abortion, substance abuse, street children etc. Each problem would be caused by or they will affect both men and women. The solution to these problems lies in both groups of people. Even when there are female specific problems e.g. vesico vagina fistula, female genital mutilation (FMG), unwanted pregnancies, abortion, fistula, wife battering, prostitution (commercial sex working), etc. men need to know and appreciate what they go through. Segmentation of audience into male or female is never in the interest of an intervention programme. It would rather pull the programme down because it would serve as a wedge between two sets of people who are supposed to jointly move the programme forward.

The use of language in all documents and tests for programmes implementation is very important. Language in use is one of the most subtle ways of expressing gender biases through conventions of speaking and writing. Each programme has a set of texts, radio and television programmes that are interventions, aimed at change in *status quo* or change for positive or acceptable behaviour. For example, Kisekka (1985) wrote on **circumcision**, which in today's literature is called **Female Genital Mutilation (FMG)**. While the first title gives the impression that circumcision is normal or culturally acceptable, FMG sends an immediate message of rejection and calls for a change. He; she; his; hers; etc and words such as 'man' for both man and woman, chairman for both man and woman instead of chairperson in texts shows some gender biases. Care must be taken and deliberate efforts made towards ensuring that men and women are distinctly identified and so treated.

In the content of texts, certain ideas that could further promote obnoxious cultures must be removed. Kisekka (1985) writes as follows on circumcision. (Culturally, female circumcision is rationalized as a way of safeguarding pre-marital chastity and virginity by reducing pleasurable sensations in the female).

Statements such as this instead of making people do away with this practice can encourage them to keep up the practice. This culture is so widespread in Nigeria that there is need to wage a serious war against it considering the many disadvantages associated with it. Some of these are ...difficulties in passing urine and menstrual blood, virginal fistula, genital infections, excessive scarring and keloid formation, which may lead to severe problems during childbirth, or worse still infertility, (Kisekka 1985).

The radio and television programmes must also attempt to be gender balanced. Both male and female cast members must be seen to do justice to the other. Where for instance there is wife battering in a drama presentation, the husband must be made to suffer for this barbaric act in the course of the drama. Therefore teachers, researchers, artists, illustrations, programme managers, radio and television workers need to analyse their scripts to remove gender biases.

It would be useful to dwell on illustrations in texts and posters for programme management. The presentation of illustrations matter in terms of cultural relevance and gender sensitivity or balance. There could be series of questions:

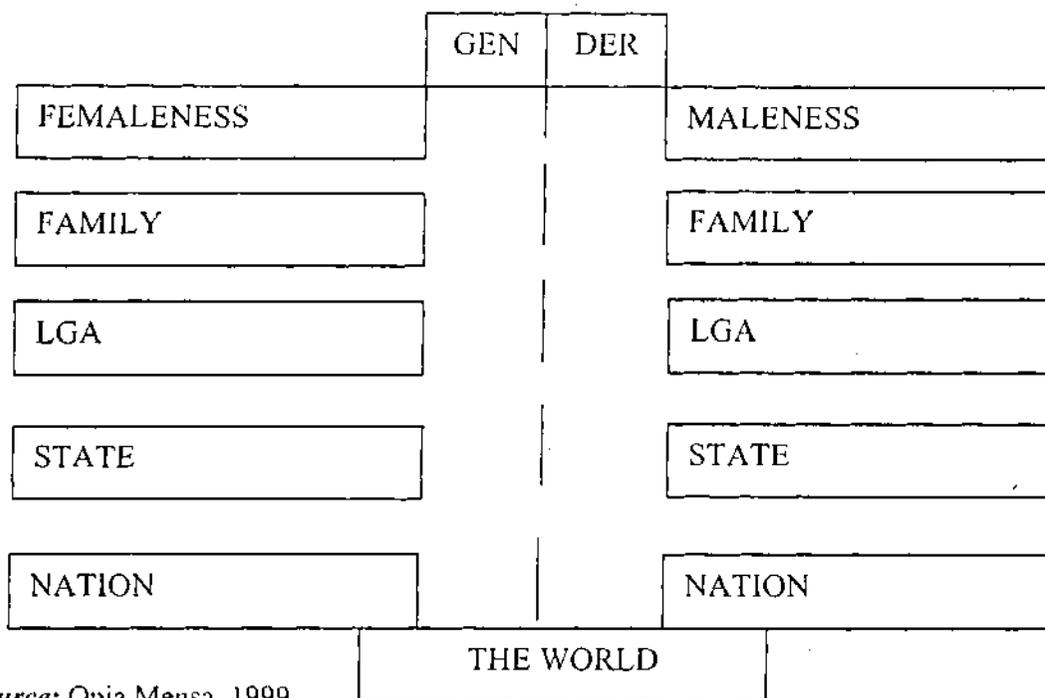
- Is there any gender stereotype?
- What actions or activities enhance prominence of one sex over another
- Which activities belittle the performer?
- Is there a hierarchy that makes women superior to men or vice versa? (Kabira and Masinjila 1995).

Neither women nor men must be given any special preference. All it takes is the consciousness and one will have the gender lens on.

One very important exercise that could help programme planning and implementations is the evaluation of programmes specifically from a gender view point. When programmes are evaluated and reports circulated, it would be helpful to other programme managers. In a Pop FLE programme within the school system, the subject curricula, pupils text, teachers guides, poster films etc, need be analyzed and subjected to gender balance tests. Since, they form the basis for instruction for the curricula and co-curricular teaching and learning transactions, they are crucial. The balance in personnel can then be looked into, lit either a boys' or girls' school, it may be extremely difficult to have a gender balanced institution. The views of both teachers and students could be tilted to their own gender-type. Culture sometimes assists to stamp the values as the right one.

When gender sensitivity is established, the advantages derivable become very apparent. The programmes becomes acceptable to both men and women, boys and girls. When such programmes become acceptable and popular, the implementation will be effective. The constraints of the programme will be reduced to the berest minimum.

Table 3: Gender Equity and Equality Pendulum



Source: Opia Mensa, 1999

Note: Any tilt in this pendulum would set a gender imbalance, which affects developments at these levels.

Conclusion

Marginalization of women in decision-making and participation in developmental activities has had a negative effect on national development. Gender bias and gender disparities have perpetuated exploitation of women, for centuries. The socio-cultural and economic barriers that have traditionally kept women out of the mainstream of development must be removed in order to give women the chance, the option, as well as the opportunity to actively participate in not only developing themselves, but also developing their societies. This can only be done through instituting gender responsive education. This is because gender education liberates and empowers. Critical analysis and understanding of the existing education theories on gender and development can make those who are **gender blind** or **gender neutral** question and even change the commonly held assumptions about sex differentiation in development. However, **gender sensitive educationists** can take the lead in eliminating the emphasis on sex differences. The past assumptions that women's subordination is a sex issue is fallacious, it is a gender (social) issue concerning men and women in society.

The major objective of changing the traditional gender relations is to liberate both men and women through gender responsive education. This is because, as Mbiliniyi (1992) points out

Men are also oppressed by (traditional) gender relations. They strive to provide for their families according to the stereotype that men ought to be the chief bread winners. A sensitive tender person may be ridiculed by other men for being feminine regardless of a gender orientation, simply because he does not behave in a stereotype macho way. (some) male students major in science, not because they necessarily enjoy these subjects or hope for better life chances but because to do otherwise would be 'sissyish', only girls take arts subjects.

With empowerment in mind, we shall be able to conceptualize correctly the concepts of gender, education and development. These are Human Oriented Terms (HOTs), concepts, which should be the basis

of development. Through gender sensitization, we need to emphasize that mainstreaming gender in education is of great significance to growing nations in Africa.

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