

WOMEN EDUCATION IN NIGERIA: ISSUES, PROBLEM AND PROSPECTS

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Abstract

The paper looks at education of women as an instrument of empowering them towards contributing to national development and reformation of the Nigerian society. It also highlights issues on women education, barriers to education of women and what prospects the future holds as far as women education in Nigeria is concerned. Finally, some suggestions were offered which if adhered to, would contribute immensely in salvaging the situation

Women Education in Nigeria: Issues, the Problem and Prospect

The National Policy on Education (2004) defines education as a process which helps to develop an individual fully so that he can function effectively in whatever environment he finds himself. Also Ezeani (2006) explained education as a body of knowledge and organized experience to be accommodated by an individual. This is designed to be learnt by individuals in the society so as to guide them in the right and proper direction as well as enable them achieve their set goals, needs and aspiration for their overall individual development.

To other people like Suara (1996) education is seen as an important tool for the attainment of social justice and equity, it is also a sure means of improving the quality of lives of individuals in the Country. To support this statement, the National Policy on Education (1981:5) rightly puts it thus: education is the greatest force that can be used to bring about redress, it is the greatest investment that the nation can make for quick development of its economic, political, sociological and human resources.

From all that has been said, one can conclude that, education means so many things to many people and education applies equally to both men and women as none speaks specifically of separate education for the women, but the cry about women education arises because of the second class position given to women earlier in the scheme of things.

What is Women Education

There is no provision made for women education be it in National Policy of Education or anywhere else to warrant its definition. This is because whatever applies to man equally applies to women in terms of all forms of education in Nigeria. However, Afebedeugbe (1996) attempted a definition of women education when he

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considers women education as that education capacity to exploit their environment. Women education involves training women in literacy and vocational skills so as to become functional members of the society.

Why Woman Education

A close look on the position of women in the past may help give an insight as to why the much emphasis on women education in the present day Nigerian society and culture which portrayed them as people who should be seen but not heard.

Ezeani (2006:11) reported that, the assignment given to any women by culture is not bear and rear children and to take care of the home. The home and family occupy a central place in the women's life. Woman hood and family affairs were considered the idea role of women in the traditional Nigerian society. They were not allowed to hold leadership positions or participate in decision-making of any kind because that would amount to claiming equality with men. In effect, women appeared to have occupied inferior position in all spheres of life.

Man had always been portrayed as a rational being, strong, educable and independent while women were seen as opposite of all these qualities of man. However, women later became conscious of their marginalization by men. With education, their eyes were opened, they sought for opportunities to express their feelings over their humiliation and neglect by men. There is no woman now, the desire to be highly educated and close the gap between them and the men in areas of life including education, career choice and contributions to national development. Therefore, women education was seen as an avenue for women liberation, for women empowerment and for the attainment of quality with men. Women education is also a means towards women liberation from cultural, social and political marginalization they had since suffered at the hands of men. It is said that "if you education a man you are educating an individual, but if you educate a woman, you are educating a family, and a nation.

Issues in Women Education

Before any tangible progress could be made in the area of women education, certain issues have to be identified and managed. The issues among others include, cultural barriers, discrimination in the areas of employment against women, types and level of education.

Adeyanju (1995) opined that for women education to progress, women must be aware of the role assigned to them in the traditional society and should try or endeavour to get out of such roles. The traditional society considers the woman a second class citizen whose responsibilities are confined within the domain of the family.

However, in recent times according to Adeyanju (1995), many women have started shaking off the shackles of the bonds of cultural roles and belief about what they are supposed to be and how to achieve greatness in those areas hitherto regarded as man

prerogative. She noted however, that in spite of the improvement in the enlightenment of women, the roles assigned to men still envelope other roles they might wish to play in the society. Thus, cultural barriers to women education are still considered a great hindrance or barriers to women education.

Women are also discriminated in the areas of employment and types/level of education to attain. A woman is denied management position in the ministries and parastatals. There is no doubt that evidences of discriminations against women abound in all areas of human endeavour. It is not surprising to find in many organizations including institutions of learning preference of men to women no matter their level of education when it comes to appointment and employment. However, the wind of change which has already set in due to awareness already created concerning women education has started doing away with all these.

Barriers to Women Education

Women education in Nigeria and indeed world over is besieged with a lot of problems. These among others include home-background, cultural and regulations and social sanctions. Others problems according to Akujuo (1989) are early marriage and religious injection, economic factors, teenage pregnancy etc. All these constitute barriers to any meaningful and effective women education in Nigeria.

Home background can hinder women education. For example in the northern part of Nigeria, a woman at the early stage of her life may be intelligent and promising academically but may be pulled back from school in order to get married in keeping with the demand of her religion or culture which form part of her home's background.

Other problems according to Ajayi (1989). are social-cultural religious factors, economic factor such as the cost of acquiring education, school organizational patterns which locate school far away from homes, discriminatory practices against women in labour market which confine women to low paid jobs. All these discourage parents from investigating much in their daughter's education.

There was also the problem of fear concerning the outcome of women education which stemmed from the belief that there would be a breakdown in the social system if women were allowed to be educated. People believed that with higher education, the woman would refuse to perform her traditional function of caring for the home.

Some societies are not so much interested in women education so as to spend their resources on that. They feel that the ideal place for woman is the home and not the school. The traditional Nigerian society looks at educated woman as a threat to man though, feel it is better to spend money on men than on women education. This is due to the fact that many educated women, including men are unemployed and this derived away girls from school to learn other trades.

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There is the problem of poor funding from the government, lack of adequate and reliable statistics, inadequate personnel, uncoordinated services and lack of facilities for women education (Ugwu, 2001). All these, in addition to other problems not mentioned became a major impediments to the provision of any effective and meaningful women education in Nigeria.

Prospect of Women Education

Despite the numerous problems facing women education mentioned earlier, still there is hope. Nowadays, the government has shown interest in the education of women in Nigeria. Similarly non-governmental and international agencies have also risen to the challenge to save the situation from total collapse. Many activities have been put in motion to salvage women education.

Some of the efforts made in order to sustain women education are:

A women education unit was created in 1986 in the Federal Ministry of Education with the objective of promoting public awareness on the need for women education. This provides more opportunities for both formal and non-formal education for women. According to Igwe (1997), the total female enrolment as a result of this awareness rose from twenty nine percent to thirty five percent in Kano and Kaduna states respectively in 1984 and forty percent and fifty percent in 1988.

A workshop on Women Education in Nigeria was also conducted in 1986 which came out with a blue print which was presented and adopted by the National Council on Education (NCE). This was intended to serve as guideline for women education units.

Also, a National Association of Women in Science Technology and Mathematics (NAWSTEM) was formed through which many female students have been encouraged to get into science-based courses and career which hitherto had been considered the exclusive reserve to men.

The Federal Ministry of Education created Science Technology and Mathematics (STM) Award for deserving science students especially the females. The exercise was a big encouragement for women education leading to healthy competition among female students.

Also, the Women Education unit of the Federal Ministry of Education in collaboration with Nigeria Educational Research and Development Council (NERDC) initiated the development of curriculum for women education in Nigeria. The unit in September, 1987, equally participated in international women programmes such as the Commonwealth Science Technology and Mathematics (CSTM) workshop held in China and also the International Women's Day Celebration. There was also the Women Initiative Programme launched by the Nation's First Lady Mrs Dame Patience Goodluck and the recent promise by Mr President Dr Goodluck Ebele Jonathan that thirty five percent of the federal appointments would be reserved for women. All these were designed to boost the education of the Nigerian women.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are put forward for better, effective and meaningful women education in Nigeria.

The governments at all levels and other non-governmental agencies should embark upon aggressive mass mobilization and advocacy of equality of access to education for all children at all levels with particular emphasis on importance of women education to society.

Enforcement of legal provisions of penalties for withdrawal of girls from school for marriage and existing laws prohibiting hawking and street trading by girls should be enforced.

Female enrolment and completion at all levels of the education system should be increased. Non formal education programmes should be reinforced to provide selective type of learning for adult women and secondary schools drop outs who wish to further their education. Education should also be provided for women with special needs nomadic women, women in purdah, market women e.t.c.

Women education in Nigeria is besieged by so many problems and has suffered a lot of neglect in the past. These problems if left unsolved would prevent any meaningful progress in the education of women. These problems emanated from the different types of societies we have in Nigeria with different and varying cultures and religions which made provision of education to women in Nigeria a collective responsibility.

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