

VISION AND MISSION OF WOMEN FORESTRY EDUCATION IN NIGERIA IN THE 21ST CENTURY

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Abstract

Education is a vital and powerful tool that can liberate people, women inclusive from inhibiting and debilitating factors such as low income, ignorance, disease, inferior social status and low level aspiration among others. Education, therefore, is a precursor that can accelerate the fulfillment of the vision and mission of women forestry education in the 21st century. Forestry education is a specialized vocational training in which women have not been faring very well. This has impacted negatively on their managerial ascendancy in the forestry profession and/or service. This paper assesses the reasons why this is so and consequently proffers measures by which these perceived bottlenecks could either be removed or abated.

Introduction

Education is a precursor to change and development. It moulds the total man who in turn impacts the nation positively. Education brings to the fore the intellectual, physical and social changes in the life of individuals and nations who are committed to it. According to Igwesi (2004) no nation can develop above its education. Consequently, individuals and nations who desire to rise above the present deplorable levels of development must wholeheartedly embrace education.

Wehmeier (2000) defined education as a process of teaching, training and learning, especially in schools, to improve knowledge and develop skills. Education can either be formal, informal or no-formal. It is pertinent to state here that women forestry education falls under the ambit of formal education which takes place in formal institutions of learning.

Forestry education is a specialized and fundamental vocational training that requires the acquisition of the necessary skills and knowledge that could be deployed into managing the forest on a sustainable basis. Women forestry education is obtainable either at the technical level which culminates in the award of Ordinary Diploma (OND) and Higher National Diploma (HND) in forestry or the professional level which results in the award of Bachelor's or post-graduate degrees in Forestry. The technical forestry graduates constitute the middle level manpower in forestry work and they serve as a link between the labour and the professional staff. The forestry professional manpower constitute the managerial cadre and are policy initiators in the forestry service.

The status of women in forestry education is of grave concern. Their low level educational output has affected their managerial position profile in the forest service. This shortcoming, therefore, calls for the enhancement of women forestry education. This is in line with Obi (2001) who said that education strives to reduce or eliminate completely the inhibiting factors on women such as low income, inferior social status, superstition, ill health, dogmatism, cases of early marriage and low-level aspirations. In essence, education is a vital and powerful tool that liberates people from ignorance, poverty and disease. If you educate a people, you give them the potential to improve themselves.

The objective of this paper therefore, is to assess the reasons for low level women forestry education; its corresponding impact on their managerial status in the forestry profession and consequently proffer measures by which these perceived bottlenecks could either be removed or abated.

Women Forestry Education Profile and Its Impact on Their Managerial Status

It has been shown from studies that about 90% of African women living in rural areas depend on the forest for their survival (Dankelman and Davidson, 1994) and it has also been observed by Oiuwashola (1998) that women in sub-saharan Africa including Nigeria provide about 70% of the total staple food supply in the region. However, despite all this, Ozo-Eson (2002) pointed out that women are still largely excluded from managerial positions in the forestry profession in Nigeria.

Certainly, the occupation of managerial position and professional authority in any profession has to be backed up with adequate knowledge and training in that profession. This knowledge can only

be acquired through formal education, requisite skills, expertise and experience to be able to function effectively. Women, generally in Nigeria are at the periphery of forestry practice- the labourers, nursery hands, seedling planters plantation weeders and farm hands. Women indeed constitute a large labour force in field forestry operations. However, according to Amika (2003) from time to time, their faces show up in management, policy and decision making levels as isolated ant-hills in the savanna.

Table 1 shows the number of females and males that enrolled at the Federal College of Forestry, Ibadan between 1940 and 1999 to pursue courses leading to Ordinary National Diploma (OND) and Higher National Diploma (I-IND).

Table 1: Enrolment of Students at the Federal College of Forestry', Ibadan between 1940 and 1999

Period	Male	Female	Total	% Female
1940-1949	84	6	90	6.7
1950-1959	76	5	81	6.2
1960-1969	166	15	181	8.3
1970-1979	1132	144	1276	11.3
1980-1989	1066	138	1204	11.5
1990-1999	1330	270	1600	16.8

Source: 60 Years of Excellence in Technical Manpower Training, M.O. Soladoye (1999).

Table 2 portrays the enrolment of both males and females for forestry post-graduate study at the University of Ibadan to undertake courses leading to either Master of Science (M.Sc) or Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) degrees in forestry.

Table 2: Students Enrolment for Forestry Postgraduate Programme at the University of Ibadan Between 1994/95 and 2003/2004 Academic Sessions

Session	M.Sc		PhD		Total		M.Sc		PhD		Total	
	Female	Total	% Male	% Female	Female	Male	Total	% Male	% Female	Total	% Male	% Female
1994/1995	N/A	N/A	-	-	-	N/A	N/A	-	-	-	-	-
1995/1996	N/A	N/A	-	-	-	N/A	N/A	-	-	-	-	-
1996/1997	21	05	26	80.8	19	2	N/A	N/A	-	-	-	-
1997/1998	N/A	N/A	-	-	-	N/A	N/A	-	-	-	-	-
1998/1999	N/A	N/A	-	-	-	N/A	N/A	-	-	-	-	-
1999/2000	14	05	19	73.7	26	3	N/A	N/A	-	-	-	-
2000/2001	15	04	19	78.9	21	1	32	07	39	82	1	17.9
2001/2002	16	03	19	84.2	15	8	39	07	46	84.8	15.2	
2002/2003	10	05	15	66.7	33	.3	28	08	36	77.8	22.2	
2003/2004	09	02	11	81.8	18	.2	36	09	45	80.0	20.0	

Source: Department of Forest Resources Management, University of Ibadan.

In both Tables land 2, it could be seen that female enrolment is dismally how compared to their male counterpart. This scenario is a mirror of what happens in most other institutions in the country which offer forestry as a course. This low percentage of female enrolment which has become endemic is really very worrisome. The government and other stakeholders would need to brace up in order to address this situation.

Tables 3, 4 and 5 show few staff of women professionals employed at the headquarters of Forestry Research Institute of Nigeria (FRIN) and Federal College of Forestry, Ibadan; gender distribution of key job titles in the Federal Department of Forestry, Abuja and academic teaching positions at the Department of Forest Resources Management, University of Ibadan respectively.

Table 3: Statistics of Professional Women Foresters at the Forestry Research Institute Nigeria (FRIN) Headquarters and Federal College of Forestry, Ibadan

Year	FRIN Headquarters			Federal College of Forestry			
	Male	Female	Total % Female	Male	Female	Total % Female	
1990	26	3	29	5	-	5	0
1991	33	4	37	5	-	5	0
1992	31	4	35	5"	3	8	37.5
1993	29	5	34	7	3	10	30.0
1994	30	5	35	7	3	10	30.0
1995	28	5	33	8	3	11	27.2
1996	27	5	32	8	3	11	27.2
1997	23	3	26	6	3	9	33.3

Source: Forestry Research Institute of Nigeria, Ibadan.

The professional position occupied by women in both FRIN and the college is low. However, (he trend appears better in the college though not the best.

Table 4: Gender distribution of key jobs titles in the federal department of forestry Abuja

Job Titles	Grade Levels	Percentage Male	Percentage Female	Total in Post
Director of Forestry	17	100	0	1
Deputy Director	16	100	0	3
Assistant Director	15	80	20	5
Chief Forest Officer	14	100	0	5
Chief Superintendent	14	100	0	1
Asst Chief Forest Officer	13	100	0	5
Asst Chief Superintendent	13	100	0	5
Principal Forest Officer	12	90	10	20

Source: Federal Department of Forestry, Federal Ministry of Environment, Abuja.

At the Federal Department of Forestry, Abuja, Ozo-Eson (2002) opined that indeed, no female had ever occupied the position of Director of Forestry since its establishment. This is the trend in virtually all the slate forest services in Nigeria (Alao, 2005).

Table 5: Academic Teaching Position at the Department of Forest Resources Management, University of Ibadan

Male	Female	total	% male	% female
J4	1	15	93.3	6.7

Source: Department of Forest Resources Management, University of Ibadan.

The low academic teaching position as shown in Table 5 is a fall out of the low level of women forestry education.

The very low percentage of enrolment by females in forestry education has greatly impacted negatively on the position they occupy at the top echelon of the forestry profession. This has made them to be far below the rung of the ladder in forestry managerial decision making process. Indeed, something needs be done to address this unpalatable trend.

Militating Factors Against Women Forestry Education

The militating factors against women forestry education though not exhaustive are stated below;

- Non- challant attitude of women to forestry both as a course and as a profession.
- Lack of awareness of forestry as a discipline.

Forestry is seen as a non-lucrative course /profession.

- The phobia to science subjects which are central to choosing forestry as a discipline of study.
- The wrong notion that forestry is only all about the forest.
- Generally low literacy level of the women folk also mitigates against their ability to enroll in forestry education.
- General apathy on the part of the women despite glaring evidences of their "backwardness"¹ in the forestry career and professional managerial positions.

Intervention Strategies for Women Forestry Education

These are strategies needed to address and bring about acceptable solutions that will improve on women forestry education which will subsequently enhance their status in the forestry profession. The suggested intervention efforts are:

- Sensitization of girls at the secondary school level so as to create awareness in respect of the forestry profession.
- Incentives like special scholarship grants to females willing to pursue forestry education programmes either at University or technical level.
- Employment guarantee at the end of their courses. This could be either direct absorption by various government agencies or by way of job creation through self employment.
- There should be enhanced emolument for forestry graduates.
- The cultural norm as practiced in some parts of the country, which assumed that women need not be educated in order to fulfill their traditional roles as wife and mother, must be jettisoned. The priority need in this country is to provide education and skills training for women so as to be able to improve generally on their low standard of education. A conscious- and deliberate re-education so as to modify the values customs and beliefs of the people is therefore very important.
- Women should generally be encouraged to participate at higher levels of forestry¹ administration for a more effective sustainable forestry development.

Conclusion

The women themselves can only make improvement of women position in forestry good; They must have an attitudinal change. If women want to be in management positions and decision-making level of forestry, they must consciously make effort to choose forestry as a profession. The starting point would be for the women to take appropriate courses at the secondary school level, which will guarantee them a place in the many tertiary institutions in Nigeria and even abroad. There is therefore, the need for all stakeholders-government, international donors, non-governmental organizations and researchers to harness the enormous resource potentials in women.

In a nutshell the vision and mission for women forestry education is the quest that these yawning gaps in both forestry education and managerial status profile should be bridged in this 21st century.

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