

EDUCATION: A CATALYST FOR RE-ENGINEERING WOMEN FOR EMPOWERMENT AND SELF-PRODUCTIVITY: IMPLICATION FOR COUNSELLING

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Abstract

This paper examined the place of education as a catalyst for re-engineering women for empowerment and self-productivity in Nigeria. It also discussed the need for educating women and highlights the fact that education aids them not only to discover themselves, but also enhance their contributions towards the economic, social and political development of the country. The paper goes further to discuss the purpose and problems militating against women education in Nigeria, the implications of non-empowerment of women, counselling techniques and services needed to assist women.

The problem of educating and re-engineering women is a general problem throughout the country; women are unequal to their male counter parts in various positions such as education, income, politics and work e.t.c. In advanced economies, like the USA, such inequalities do exist; it is so because the women are not as educated as men. In all the countries all over, education is recognized as the cornerstone for sustainable development. According to Okeke (1990) Education is a fulcrum around which the quick development of economic, political, sociological and human resources of any country revolves. To buttress this fact, the Nigeria's National Policy on Education (2004) indicates that education is the greatest investment that the nation can make for the quick development of its economic and political empowerment. Having recognized education as "an instrument per-excellence for effective national development" as well as "a dynamic instrument of change", it is also the basis for the full promotion and improvement of the status of women.

The United Nations (1991) reported that 50% of women represents the world's adult population and one third of the official labour force, they perform for nearly two-thirds of the world's working hours and receive one-tenth less than 1% of the world property. In Nigeria, the picture as depicted by the United Nations holds true. Although, it is believed that women constitute more than 50% of the entire population. Yet the potentiality and contribution they make for the betterment of the society have not been fully mobilized (Hauwa, 1994). The education of women has been very much neglected and therefore has been backward; however the education of women has been receiving priority attention particularly within the last few years.

Education empowers women by improving their living standard. It is the starting point (*the termus aquo*) for women's advancement in different fields of human endeavour. Education is the basic tool that should be given to women in order to fulfill their roles as full members of the society (Nairobi Forward Looking Strategies, 1985).

Olawoye (1985) described Nigeria women as a crucial factor of production. According to him, they assume this status because they are largely responsible for the bulk production of crops, agro-based food processing, preservation of crops and distribution of yields from farm centres to urban areas.

Awe (1990) perceived the importance of women from their roles as managers of homes. She noted that the peace and stability at homes depend largely on the managerial abilities of women folk. She stressed further that women, especially the mothers, plan, organize, direct and co-ordinate all the members of the family including their husbands.

Effective management of the homes promotes national development but whenever, this is lacking the contrary is usually the case. Infact, the educational empowerment of Nigerian women is the spring bound to every other form of empowerment e.g. political, social and economical. In

Nigeria, the women are expected to contribute their own quota as citizens of this great nation, for this therefore to be possible the girl child and female adults need to acquire formal education.

It has been observed that, despite, the laudable goals and objectives of education in Nigeria, as much as 61% of the women's 44 million population (1991, Census) suffer from intellectual poverty (Ojuolape, 2000). It is also remarkable and significant to note that the early educational curriculum was designed to train women as teachers, nurses and clerks. They were not commonly found in fields like medicine, politics, law, engineering, agricultural studies and environment studies.

Alao and Ajayi (1989) observed that over twenty years of the existence of the women's education section in the Federal Ministry of Education, women's education is still in dire need of improvement it is on this note that this paper, therefore, seeks to achieve the following objectives:

- (i) To encourage for the re-introduction and nurturing of educational programmes which will help to empower the women of all categories in Nigeria, irrespective of creed or religious beliefs and cultural inclination?
- (ii) To highlight those factors militating against women's education in Nigeria, and
- (iii) To proffer suggestions to these identified problems.

An Examination of Terminologies

- (a) **Education:** Okafor (1984) defined education as a process of acculturation through which the individual is helped to attain the development of all his potentialities and their maximum activation when necessary, according to right reason and thereby achieve his perfect self-fulfillment. Education is the aggregate of all the processes by which a child or a young adult (male or female) develops the abilities, attitudes and other forms of behaviour which are of positive value to the society in which he/she lives. It is a process through which a person acquires knowledge, skills, habits and values that enables him to function effectively as a member of the society. Education helps one to maximize his physical, mental and emotional capabilities which are useful for him and his society. In this sense, women education means the process by which women acquire the knowledge, skills, norms and values that are necessary for their development and that of the society.
- (b) **Re-Engineering:** Re-engineering is the radical redesign of an organization's processes, especially its business processes. Rather than organizing a firm into functional specialist (like production, accounting, marketing etc) and looking at the tasks that each function performs. Re-engineering also according to (Aldana 1998) makes the programme what they were originally intended to be. It also means to demonstrate the value which as health promotion programme can add to a business or pattering with others to improve the sense of ownership.
- (c) **Women Empowerment:** According to Sako (1999) empowerment is defined as the process of strengthening the existing capacities and capabilities of disadvantaged groups in the society so as to enable them perform towards improving themselves, their families and the society as a whole. Empowerment involves the provision of enabling environment for their productivity and intellectual abilities to be realized.

Nigeria Women and National Development

Nigeria women have excelled in various disciplines both within and outside the country and have contributed immensely towards our socio-political development in this great country. For example late Mrs. Maryam Babangida and Mrs. Maryam Abacha both ex-first ladies have worked so tirelessly towards improving the welfare of the Nigerian rural children and women. We have other women contributors in the National Development like Hajia Laila Dogon Yaro business tycoon and Former National President of NCWS. Professor Alele Grace William, Former Vice Chancellor University of Benin, Ambassador Judith Attah, Minister of Women Affairs and Social Welfare, the First Woman Major General in Nigeria Major General Aderonke Akale, Late (Mrs) Christy Essien Igbokwe, Lady of Songs and woman activist, Late Dr. (Mrs) Doyin Abiola (Former Editor), Mrs. Chinyere, Nigerian First Female Pilot, Mrs. Patricia Etteh, First Female Speaker House of Representative, Prof. Dora Akinyili, First Female Minister of Communication and D. G. NAFDAC,

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Dr. (Mrs) Okonja Iwaela First Female Minister of Finance and Director in World Bank, Mrs. Esther Nanadi Usman Former Minister of Finance, Mrs. Farida Waziri EFCC, Mrs. Dezieam Allison Maduekwe Minister of Petroleum, Fedella Njeze Former Minister for Aviation and a host of others have made immense contribution to positive development of this Nation as a result of their educational achievements.

Contributions of Educated Women in National Development

The contributions of an educated woman cannot be over emphasized, hence, if the vast majority of our women folk are educated, it will enhance the quality of living-healthful living shelter,, communication, entertainment and gainful use of leisure time. Moreover, their personal development can be enhanced remarkably. Also children and husbands stand to gain tremendously. Women are more likely to have more confidence in themselves and ability to contribute their quota to national development.

Education helps a woman in the fulfillment of her marital obligations. As a married woman she is expected to take good and proper care of her home, husband and children. She is expected to use whatever knowledge and skills she has to cook, clean and rear her children, and so there is no doubt that if a woman is literate, she will be able to read about healthcare, nutrition, body changes and use of modern household equipment will be performed creditably well. Moreso, an educated woman will be able to look at the school work and performance of her children, assist them in their home works/assignments and monitor their works and activities at school, cheek to be sure they are doing what is expected of them at school. She will ensure blissful home, well-educated, harnessed, and well-behaved children with contented husband and an endowed nation.

A mother's level of education is the single most important influence on the survival rate of her children and of their achievement in school. Education is the strongest variable affecting women's sense of well being. And so, failure to improve women's access to education limits family income and impedes the well-being of their families (Sivard, 1985).

Health Wise: Mothers help in no small measure in securing perfect health for the children and by so doing the entire community and nation will as basically save. Basic Education provides women with an understanding of basic health, nutrition and family planning, giving them choices and the power to decide over their own lives and bodies. Attaining good health starts from the womb, as a pregnant woman knowing and taking what constitutes balanced diet; abstaining from damaging drugs and actions inimical to the health of the baby; and this can only be made possible if the woman is educated. If women are educated they will have knowledge of basic healthcare and will be in a position to help others to maintain and improve their own health.

Agricultural Development: Half of the world's populations are women and two-third of the work is done by them. About 75 percent of agricultural output in Africa is produced through women's efforts (Adeyeye, 1987). Ironically the people that participate most in agricultural production are the least educated. Therefore, provision of basic literacy and skill acquisition for illiterate females will no doubt ensure better agricultural production.

Poverty Reduction: Educating girls and women is an important step in overcoming poverty. Inequality and poverty are not inevitable. "The focus on poverty reduction enables the right to education to be a powerful tool in making a change in the lives of girls and women. Poverty has been universally affirmed as a key obstacle to the enjoyment of human rights, and it has a visible gender profile. The main reason for this is the fact that poverty result from violations of human rights, including the right to education, which disproportionately affect girls and women. Various grounds of discrimination combine, trapping girls in a vicious downward circle of denied rights. Denial of the right to education leads to exclusion from the labour market and marginalization into the informal sector or unpaid work. This perpetuates and increases women's poverty" (Rinehard, 1988).

Economic Development: In the economic sphere, most women engage in small scale or large scale businesses. Also, women who are married to entrepreneurs and big time businessmen will be able to help such husbands if educated; they will be able to converse with such husbands intelligently and offer useful advice to them concerning their jobs. Such women will be able to deal with their husbands' business partners, friends and other highly placed associates without the slightest feeling of inferiority or shame. Furthermore, if women are educated and are gainfully employed, they can assist their husbands in financing the home and the education of their children.

Benefits/Objectives of Women Education in Nigeria

Some of the objectives of women education in Nigeria as identified by the 1969 National Curriculum Conference include:

- (1) To enable women to make contribution to life.
- (2) To enable women to be good citizens.
- (3) To develop women spiritually, mentally and academically.
- (4) To develop the total personality of women.
- (5) To develop in the women folk social, economic and political sophistication in their ability to understand, participate in and contribute to their community life.
- (6) To help free women from the shackles of male domination.

Factors Responsible for Low Level of Women Education in Nigeria

Many factors have been identified as being responsible for the low participation of girls and women in education. According to Ajayi (1989) these problems are: school organizational pattern, early marriage, ascribed roles of women, cultural restraint, poverty, attitude of parents/husbands towards girl child education, effective of polygamous system and ignorance.

- (a) **School Organizational Pattern:** Schools are located far away from homes), opportunity costs of formal education to parents in terms of forgone earnings and forgone traditional learning by children, discriminatory practices in the labour market which confine girls and women to low paying jobs thereby discouraging parents from investing in their daughters education, time constraints which compel girls to spend more and more time on domestic activities and less time on their studies.
- (b) **Early Marriage:** In the Northern parts of Nigeria especially, girls marry early, especially after primary education. In some cases, parents even go to the ridiculous extent of withdrawing their daughters from school for marriage purposes this contributes drastically to the retardation of women education.
- (c) **Ascribed Roles of Women:** It is believed by many people in the society that women are meant to bear and rear children and carryout domestic duties. Hence such people do no regard women education as important.
- (d) **Cultural Restraint:** Some women are secluded from mixing with people in the society, such women include those from ignorant Muslim homes where purdah is misunderstood and abused. Many conservative parents insist that girls should not learn under the same roof with boys, while some go to the extent of not allowing their daughter's formal education.
- (e) **Poverty:** Many parents cannot afford to send their children to school because of high fees. Most parents (illiterates) prefer to send their children/wards to hawk wares, to make a living.
- (f) **Attitude of Some Parents/Husbands Towards Girl Child Education:** Some husbands especially illiterates ones, are not progressive, hence according to Abubakar (1996) would do every thing possible to discourage their wives from going to school. On the other hand, some parents regard their female child's education as a wasteful venture because they believe that no matter what education given to a girl, one day she would leave the family to join another family. Hence, such parents give priority to the male child's education.
- (g) **Effects of Polygamous System:** According to Adaralegbe (1992) children from polygamous homes compete for the limited resources at the disposal of the father, who is the household head, such persons usually neglect girls education in particular and their children education in general.

- (h) **Ignorance:** Cultures and sub-cultures in Nigeria give preference to male children as they are usually regarded as the heirs or the pillars of the family, female children are usually less privileged and consequently not given adequate opportunity to acquire education and formal training. Umar (1996) noted that the girl-child is valued not for who she is, her potentials or achievements but for her services, submissiveness at best good looks. He further stated that in any traditional Nigerian community it is believed that the place of the girl-child and subsequently women is in the kitchen or at home. He further emphasized that women in Nigeria are socialized into accepting the traditional roles of bearing and rearing children and of maintaining the welfare of the family. Thus, in most parts of Nigeria, particularly the rural setting, the education of the girl child does not go beyond when she needs to bear children and keep the home.

Sometimes, it is a combination or single of these or more factors that brings about the effects.

Implications for Counselling

Most Nigerian women are still being denied the opportunity of enjoying full political, social and economic rights. This cannot be divorced from the obstacles facing Nigerian women some of which had earlier been discussed.

The counsellor can also work with the optimistic and knowledgeable women in the same community, who are beneficiaries to girl child education to come as protagonists and educate their people on why the education of a girl-child is very important. These constraints have some implications for counselling. These include:

- (a) Nigerian women who are denied some rights and privileges need assistance to obtain these.
- (b) Some Nigerians who deny women of their rights and privileges need to be re-oriented.
- (c) Women who are unable to demand for their rights need assistance in order to achieve self-actualization.
- (d) Group and/or individuals who have the potentials to assist Nigerian women to have equal rights and opportunities with their male counterparts need to be sensitized.
- (e) Nigerian women need to work for her rights.

In order to assist Nigerian women, therefore counsellors could adopt any or (some) or all of the following:

- (a) **Cognitive Restructuring:** Parents who refuse to provide equal opportunities to their female children and females who have no confidence in themselves could be assisted through the use of cognitive restructuring technique. Here, the counsellor assists his/her client to think rationally, to address real issues and avoid trivialities. The need for women to acquire functional education, necessary to political, economic, and social emancipation should be stressed to clients.
- (b) **Assertiveness Training:** Clients or females who are unable to demand for their rights, due to shyness or low self-concept can be assisted to do so through the use of assertiveness training technique. This involves acquisition of some useful skills by clients to develop self-confidence and seek for their rights without necessarily being aggressive.
- (c) **Guidance Service:** Counsellors should make guidance services, such as group and individual counselling and information services, available to all the people in their community. These services will bring into focus the benefits that are imbedded in the provision of equal rights and opportunities to all irrespective of sex, religion, age and other differences. Seminars, symposia, career talks, development programmes and workshops could also be organized to sensitize and motivate government and non-governmental organizations to provide the necessary assistance of empowering the Nigerian women. For instance, provision of educational opportunities to females by these organizations would have give them access to employment opportunities, enable them to expand their roles, occupy important positions and contribute to the political, economic and social development of their country.

Conclusion

Education is recognized world wide as the fulcrum around which the quick development of any nation revolves. It is also the basis for the full promotion and improvement of the status of women. However, a cursory look at the pattern of women's involvement in education in Nigeria reveals abysmal low levels. In spite of all the laudable goals, objective and benefits derived from education women still suffer a lot of constraints and inhibitions which militate against their personal and national development. The need to empower women cannot be over-emphasized particularly in a democratic society like Nigeria which recognizes the need for individuals to develop their potentials and contribute to the overall development of the nation. It is therefore imperative that counsellors create awareness on the benefits that could be derived from women empowerment as well as assist Nigerian women to be self-productive assert their rights and contribute meaningfully to the development of the nation.

Recommendation

There should be intensive enlightenment programme on women education in the mass media, (electronic and print), by religious organizations and in social gatherings.

As a matter of urgency, the Federal Government should set up a special court (women court) to protect women against men's victimization of any kind in our educational systems. More women tertiary institutions should be created legislate against early marriage, especially of girl. 35% affirmative action to be raised to 50% and girl child education should be made free and compulsory at all levels.

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