

# EDUCATION: AN IMPERATIVE FOR WOMEN EMPOWERMENT AND IMPACT IN NIGERIA DEVELOPMENT

*Ojeh, Mary E-N.*

## **Abstract**

Knowledge is power and education is a sure means of acquiring that power. Studies have shown that a women's education beyond primary school is a reliable route to economic empowerment and long-term change in the status quo, as well as a determinant of a family's health and nutrition. Therefore, qualitative and sufficient education for Nigeria women is an imperative and a gateway to national development. The write of this paper reviews the problems of women education over the years; the benefits women stand to gain by acquiring formal education and the developmental roles of educated women in nation building. Copious recommendations that will affect the present status of the education of women in Nigeria arc part of this paper.

## **Introduction**

Women all over the World and Africa in particular beginning from the pre-colonial period have made immense contributions in the development of their families and communities. Their roles apart from being mothers, taking care of domestic sector, include fanning alongside their husbands and children. They were dominant in trade and distribution through a network of local and distant markets. They engaged in local crafts and industries such as cloth weaving, pottery making, food processing etc

The pre-literate education equally equipped the recipients for political participation, spiritual and moral values through ceremonies, rituals, initiation, and demonstration. Mannahein and Stewart (1970:19), reiterate this when they recognized that:

Education enhances adaptability of learner to the demark made by the society of which one is a part and implicit within this concept is the recognition of deliberate and generalized influences generated by that society.

All these helped significantly, to shape the mental and attitudinal infrastructures of our pre-colonial past. However, as the complexity of social relations became intensified by the dynamics of civilization and modernity, societies began to witness the evolution of the institutionalized process of formal education and appearance of schools. The acquisition of common skills and the natural identification of individuals, women inclusive with great learning and leadership in differentiated societal functions became essential characteristic of formal education.

Women by virtue of their natural potentials, influence, number and indispensability in any functional society, need sufficient formal education that will equip them to face challenges posed by modernity and civilization. Education of Nigerian Women therefore, would undoubtedly result in self-development and fulfillment, happiness, service to the state, change and process that would in turn, bring about the much desired economic, political, social and religious development of the Nigerian nation and contribute immensely to world global growth and development.

## **A Review of the Problems of Women Education in Nigeria**

Many scholars and researchers have engaged in intellectual examinations of the problems of women education in Nigeria. These attempts have resulted in educative textbooks, journal and newspaper articles made accessible at different locations and the Internet. The writer has reviewed some of these scholarly works with a view to making useful contributions to human knowledge as well as guiding Nigeria women in particular and the nation at large, in identifying and solving various problems that are militating against women education and empowerment. In this research the following problems of women education in Nigeria have been reviewed.

### **1. High Level of Poverty**

A great factor that militates against education in Nigeria is the excruciating level of poverty in the country. Many authorities national and international have claimed that 70% of Nigerians in the 21<sup>st</sup> century live below the poverty line. This unpleasant situation results in more serious cases of child

labour and the choice of a male child to be trained at school rather than both sexes. The understanding, which is greatly influenced by poverty in African rural homes is that, the female children will eventually become the property of the men they marry. Second, a male child has the potentials to propagate the family name and so the meager amount budgeted by the families on education is better spent on the male child who would assuredly yield dividend. It is for this flimsy reasons informed by poverty and ignorance that such parents give encouragement and financial support to only male children to go to school at the expense of female children.

More so, female children mostly are given out to rich homes as unprofessional housemaids to bring returns to their poor parents. This wide spread and growing global phenomenon has become worrisome to all well meaning individuals, governments and international bodies. Over 10 million children mostly girls are engaged in this hidden form of exploitation often involving abuse, health risks and violence. Mr. Juan Somavia, the Director General of the International Labour Organization speaking during the Third world Day against child labour laments that millions of children work night and day outside of their family homes, toiling as domestic child labourers. Nearly all are exploited, exposed to hazardous work and subject to abuse. Female children constitute a greater percentage of this number. Poverty therefore, is a deadly disease that has hampered the chances of many women acquiring formal education.

## **2. Religion/Harmful Traditional Practices and Belief System**

Some traditional customs have helped to discriminate against women especially in terms of education. In the 19<sup>th</sup> and up to mid 20<sup>th</sup> century, women from cultural backgrounds favourable to women education and whose parents can afford it are encouraged and motivate to acquire sufficient formal education. While their counterparts especially in the northern Nigeria, who are either kept in purdah or out of ignorance on the part of parents, did not understand fully the Islamic law and its position for women, prevented their female children from going to school and acquiring western education. Instead, these girls are either encouraged or forced into early marriage at an age as low as 15.

Segun (1995), explored this issue in her central theme of a collection of short stories, the relationship between men and women and the overwhelming influence of culture, which results in inequity as certain culture, provides an ample ground where women are subjugated and marginalized by men. The fact remains that Islamic religion or culture irrespective of levels of understanding, tends to forbid women from being heard.

Apart from the experience in the north, we also have related cultural backgrounds in some other parts of Nigeria where traditional homes still believe that women need not go to school, as their primary roles do not necessarily require formal education. Others maintain that women should not go beyond secondary school. No wonder a World Bank higher education report in 2004 observed a low enrolment of women in higher education worldwide. This group argues that extending higher education to women might not only disastrously alter their perception of their role in the sexual division of labour but could do them irreparable damage if they engage in intellectual pursuits..

### **Women and the Problem of Complex**

It has been observed that many women are made to feel inferior to their male counterparts as a result of the patriarchal society in which they are bred. The females are made-to see themselves as not having the same performance capability as males. Consequently, a good number of these women do not develop the guts to go beyond the secondary school level. A World Bank higher education report in 2004 observed a low enrolment of women in higher education worldwide and Nigeria is no exception. This complex tends to explain why women concentrate in traditional fields of study such as nursing, teaching and clerical professions, leaving scientific or technical courses such as engineering, medicine. Architecture etc. where they could develop better skills to secure better-paying jobs for men. The World Bank report identifies access and narrow selections of field as the problems affecting women at higher level of education.

### **I Goo-Political Problem**

It is undeniably true that women education in Nigeria has not attained the expected level that will fully equip more women both in the urban and rural areas to match national and global productively. The case is more serious in far northern region-Sokoto, Katsina, Taraba and Zamfara States where enrolment of girls in school is comparatively lower than other regions. This is occasioned by historical experiences of colonial era influenced greatly by geographical location of the north. Going down the history lane, while the coastal towns of the southern Nigeria-Calabar, Lagos,

Port Harcourt and Abeokuta imbibed the principle of education as early as 16<sup>th</sup> century through trade contact and missionary activities, their northern counterparts encountered Europe fully in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. By the time this contact was made, European education was already a way of life in the south. This resulted in the wide gap in education between the southern and northern Nigeria. Both men and women were affected but the percentage of women even at present is alarming. Governments have introduced some incentives and campaigns in the north to control this but the result is relatively low.

in this paper we have defined and emphasized the benefits of education to any human society. In addition, it is important to encapsulate here that education is the bedim!., for national development in terms of human resources, economic: advancement, scientific and cultural endeavors. With the above definition, education is not tied to men alone hut an open challenge to both sexes

In view of this, the United Nation Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) in 1981, recognized the dynamic potential of educated women in the third world countries and has. declared education for women, a development priority. UNESCO summarizes the imperative for women education as:

- a. Education enables women to improve their family health and diet
- b. Education increases women's productive ability thus, raising their family standard of living.
- c. Education gives women access to appropriate technology and management of co-operatives and the use of loan facilities.
- d. Education enables women to discharge their responsibilities more effectively. Every woman wants to be associated with women achieves who made a mark in the sands of their time.

These women include managing director, NAFDAC, Prof. Dora Akunyili, former minister of finance, Mrs. Ngozi Okonjo-Iwela, Executive Director of Women Aid Collective (WACOL), Chief Joy Ezeilo, first female Vice Chancellor, Prof. Grace Alele Williams, Kenya environmentalist and human rights campaigner Wangari Maathai, the first African women President, Mrs. Helen Sirleaf of Liberia etc. Therefore, any woman whose dream is to become first lady, medical doctor, engineer, minister, commissioner etc. must pass through good educational process.

In recognition of the underlying importance of women education to national development, the former president of Nigeria, Chief Olusegun Obasanjo emphasized that one of the objectives of Universal Basic Education is to ensure that female children all over the country are not prevented from getting a proper and functional education by out-dated conventions and prejudices. He stressed that education is a crucial weapon against poverty. The UBE programme is meant for all sexes but focuses mainly on girls to help prepare them for their role as mothers and also as teachers. Here, a woman is taught how to take care of herself when she is pregnant and basic things to do for a child when it is born. This will reduce the cost of preventative medicine, improve basic health and deal with the diseases. Agboro (2001), quoted the necessity of women education as:

Increased schooling has similar effects on the incomes of males and females, but educating girls generates much larger social benefits. Because of what women do with the extra income they earn... because of the direct effects of great knowledge and awareness, female education has an enormous social impact.

In summary when women are empowered by education they will undoubtedly take Niger a to greater heights through:

- a. Reduction of Poverty.
- b. Increase in economic advancement of the nation.
- c. Better health condition in the country,
- d. Increase in women participation in politics and decision-making in government.

### **Recommendations/Conclusion**

1. Government should increase its financial commitment in the education of women by way of

extra scholarships and equipping government owned libraries with sufficient recommended quality academic textbooks and journals to enable women from under-privileged homes have access to these materials. Again, teachers at various levels of education should not destroy the effort of government at encouraging women education by making them drop out of school simply because of their inability to buy recommended materials.

2. Government should actively implement and monitor laws that will abolish child labour. Formal training should be made available for girls who are interested in making a career in house keeping. The laws should specify the rights of employers and employees in this circumstance.
3. A comprehensive approach must be taken by government through involving more women in policy-making and administration. This will help in removing the socio-cultural, economic and legal constraints on women.
4. In order for more women to reach the same high positions as men in various field, more focused education and socialization are needed (Through public campaigns and inclusion of gender equality in the school curricula) for better burden-sharing and a fairer division of labour between the sexes in the home and society.

5. Non-Governmental organisation such as WACOL should increase their roles by organizing

6. more enlightenment programmes, conferences and seminars and adopting in some cases, local Languages in their campaign-; at making women understand their rights and importance of women education.

h Gender budgeting should be made an important issue in Nigeria's yearly budget. This will enable government earmark reasonable funds for women education and development in all the ministries. Remedial courses should be made available for the unfortunate girls who dropped out of school and are above the age of normal post primary education. Adult education centers should be extended to very remote areas to make education accessible to rural women.

## References

- Agboro, P (2001). Women empowerment and the theory of natural selection. In Eruvbetine, A. (ed). The humanistic management of pluralism: A formula for development in Nigeria. Lagos: Martha Press, 421-422.
- Dnpemu, E and Igwe I.O (1997). Gender disparity in education: Causes and solution. In Bichi Journal of Education, 1. (I) 45-49.
- Hzeigbo, A (2001). Rebellious victims the case of gender conflict in Mabel Segun's Short Fiction. In Eruvbeline, A. E. (ed). The humanistic management of pluralism: A formula for development in Nigeria. Lagos: Murta Press. 403.
- Mannheim, K. and Stewart, W.A.C. (1970). An introduction to the sociology of education, London: The humanities Press: 19.
- (O)suala, E.G. (1999). The foundation of vocational education. Awka: Awka Meks Publishers Ltd. The
- Pointer (2003). Imperative of female Education. The Pointer. November 20 and 27:16
- The Pointer (2005). Education is the bedrock for national development. The Pointer. October 3:19.
- I'izeilo, Joy (2006). Building bridges and networking for change in WACOL site. Retrieved September 4, 2007 from <http://www.wacolnigeria.org/prcss.htm>.
- Imoukhuede, N (2004). 2004 report on the state of women's right in Nigeria: In women's right watch.

Retrieved September 4,2007 from <http://www.rufarm.kabissa.ora/articles/2004reporthtm>.

Munuh T. (1998). Women in Africa's development in Africa recovery: A United Nation publication.  
Retrieved September 4, 2007, from  
<http://www.un.org/ecosocdev/geninfo/afrec/bpaper/maineng.htm>.

Sogun, M. (1995). Surrender and other stories. London: Longman