

WOMEN EDUCATION AND NATION BUILDING: THE NIGERIAN PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract

The education of women is (the art of exposing them to the art of reading and writing to improve their social, economic and political well being in the society. In Africa in the olden days educating a woman was regarded as a waste because a woman then was meant for child bearing and cooking good food. As a result of this, therefore, educating women in the past was totally neglected. Presently, women do compete with men in all spheres of life: educationally, socially, economically and politically and the enrolment figure for women in nursery, primary, secondary and tertiary institutions has risen tremendously.

Introduction

Women education in Nigeria is meant to bring the women - folk in parity with men or even surpass them. In the past, women were discriminated against by both men and women themselves. The entire society was against them. It means that women "lacked the basic skills and were thus marginalized in education and then in the peripheral unskilled regions of the labour market, typically with long spells of unemployment" (Hannon, 2000).

Women in Nigeria then saw themselves as weak and powerless to challenge the men-folk in any sphere of human endeavour. Yet they put up a persistent struggle which later on gave birth to various women movements that have put gender inequality to a serious coma.

Today, women movements in all their forms with all their differing priorities have begun to change the accepted values of the Nigerian women and those of the whole world. In Nigeria, women's inferior status is being seen not only as something right and natural but also as a result of systematic discrimination on the basis of gender. As far as women are concerned, a lot of changes are taking place, globally. The United Nations Organization declared the years 1975-1985 a decade for women. To many women this period passed without their knowing or caring what the period had been designated internationally for their concern. Yet unknown to many women there have been changes in the period slated by the United Nations Organization. Taylor (1987) observed that new laws, new governments have come about directly as a result of pressure on individual governments both from women within opinion from decades of activities.

In Nigeria today, governments can no longer placidly assume that women are inferior. Nigerian women have done many things nationally and internationally to defend their positions in the world. In sports, the Nigerian basket ball team which played in Japan in 1989 brought honour and glory to Nigeria. In many states of Nigeria women have been appointed to posts as Commissioners and Chairmen of Boards as well as members to serve government at high levels of the society.

Division Of Labour

An Igbo renowned musician, Oliver de Couque. (1979) acclaimed, "behind a successful man there is always a woman and any man doing anything without a woman is bound to fail". Two to three scores of years ago the general notion in Nigerian was that women's education ended in the kitchen and rearing of children. Nowadays it is not so. Many Nigerian women do choose to take extra work in addition to their domestic responsibilities. Even in their choice of professions they consider the chances of attending to their domestic responsibilities before taking up any job. That is why many Nigerian women are teachers, traders, typists, nurses, midwives, bankers, computer operators, football, lawn tennis players and musicians where they can easily take a little time off to do their domestic duties.

It is only recently that the Nigerian mother favoured office work more than any other job because of the huge monetary reward attached to it. But even at that, they have (the interest of their homes at heart. That is why they employ the services of maids, house-helpers or servants and older women to keep the homes when they are away for work.

In the past, female enrolment in school remained very low because most of the girls who were supposed to be in school were engaged in one form of domestic service or the other. Many of them were engaged in early marriages. Many parents attached greater importance to the education of their male children than the female ones because of our so-called traditional hereditary system of succession by sons and not daughters. This idea is not strange and peculiar to Nigeria alone, it is a practice in many parts of the world. In England under King Henry VIII (1485-1516). Martin (1957) said that there was a war of succession to change the law that only males should succeed father in favour of women in the event of the absence of a male child. That was why Queen Victoria came to the throne after the death of

their father Henry VIII in 1506. In Nigeria, if women are made heirs to the family estate there would be a change of attitude towards women education.

Now that both the State and Federal Governments have started to sink huge sums of money into education the trend is greatly changing in favour of women. Observations and experience have shown that since after the civil war in Nigeria, that was in 1970, female enrolment in school from nursery, primary, secondary and tertiary, has tremendously tripled. Male enrolment in school has dwindled because they take to business early enough.

The education gap between girls and boys is not proving to be a stubborn gap to close. The National Commission for Women has helped to close this gap, in the form of seminars and workshops, radio and television broadcasts and award of scholarships to deserving women who are determined to pursue higher education. The National Council for Women Society is doing everything it could to help in women education campaign. In Nigerian higher institution, for instance, Enugu State University of Science and Technology (HSUT), Institute of Management and Technology (I. M. T.) and Federal College of Education Eha-Amufu, all situated in Enugu State, more and more female students register yearly for degree courses in various fields of education than males. In higher institutions females now outnumber males. The trend has greatly changed because parents no longer give out their daughters for early marriage.

Sex Or School

In Northern Nigeria wives and daughters are kept off from men. They are covered in purdah. Getting out of the house as well as any premarital sexual relationship is a taboo. Any such action attracts very severe punishments. Many parents keep their daughters away from co-educational schools as soon as puberty approaches and because of this, female attendance at secondary schools in Northern Nigeria tends to be very low indeed.

Equality

Although women and men are born differently; there are some similarities, they cannot be equal. Even identical twins can never ever be equal in everything. In 1945 the United Nations Organization in its charter tried to encourage equality between men and women by enacting a law. Two years later the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women was established and 1975 was declared the International Year for Women. A conference of the representatives of women all over the world was held in Mexico City. This is a sign that women are being encouraged to attain equal status with men, not only in Nigeria but all over the world.

Women's Contributions In Nigerian Affair

In Nigeria, there are lots and lots of roles played by our women. During the Nigerian struggle for independence powerful women like Mrs. Janet Mokuolu championed the course of women and led the women wing of the National Council for Nigerian Citizens (N.C.N.C.). Other notable women politicians included late Mrs. Kuti and Mrs. Margaret Ekpo. All of them worked hand in hand with their men counterparts to attain independence for Nigeria.

In the field of education we have prominent women like Professor Alele Williams, the former Vice Chancellor of the University of Benin and the first Nigerian woman to be a Vice Chancellor. We also have women who have served as Commissioners for Education in their respective states as in Oyo in 1982-85, where Professor (Mrs.) Bambole Awe of Oyo State served under Governor Bola Ige. Mrs. Grace Obayi was a Commissioner under Chief Jim Nwobodo's administration. Dr. (Mrs.) A.

Ndu was a Commissioner for Education in Anambra State under the administration of Governor Mike Allah.

Mrs. Veronica Iyiegbu who was the Commissioner for education in the Enugu State cabinet, is now the Commissioner for Science and Technology under (the Chimaroke administration. Dr. (Mrs.) Angela Mgbo is head of service in Enugu State. Dr. (Mrs.) Ikedigwu, who is a lecturer at Enugu State University of Science and Technology (E.S.U.T.), has recently been appointed Chairman of (the Post Primary Schools Management Board (P.P.S.M.B.) Anambra State. In several other considerations women have been seen as contributing immensely for nation building. Ivowi (1995) and Anya (1998) maintain that the only genuine knowledge can enhance the rapid development of women education.

In the bar and bench we have notable women who have served as judges of High Court and magistrates. An instance is Barrister (Mrs.) Ada Adogu of Enugu High Court, while under General Babangida administration women were appointed Chairmen of local Governments, as well as members of Local Government Caretaker Committees. Mrs. Justina Offiah served as a judge in two

regimes during the military era.

Better Life Programme

The Better Life programme was and still is the climax of women participation in nation building in Nigeria. In General Babangida's administration, (he wife, Mrs. Maryam, launched a programme for rural women. This programme was aimed at mobilizing women to contribute meaningfully towards their individual and collective welfare. Although the benefits of all these programmes are enjoyed by both men and women folks, (he target starting point of each of the projects is women (Obinaju, 1994).

The Better Life Programme in Nigeria was divided into state and local government chapters. The local government chapter was later sub-divided into wards and each ward manned by the wife of a local government chairmen who saw that members of each ward embarked upon viable projects. These projects took the form of enlarging the scope of the programme and researching into avenues by which these projects were to contribute towards the economic life of the people (Obinaju. 1994). Where training was needed the Better Life programme did not hesitate to select and (rain manpower to manage their various projects. Belter Life embarked on selling up on Better Life Stores, stalls and markets in both rural and urban centres.

As for storage facilities the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN) report (1992) recorded a total of 352 stores/stalls set up in various parts of the country. These creations and provisions were testimonies to the encouragement and support given to women in the area of food production.

Improved awareness of women and the improvement of their economic status, resulted in the establishment of co-operative societies. A total of 750 co-operative societies were reported in Abia state alone in 1993 (Nyong, 1993). In the whole of Nigeria 5479 cooperative societies were identified and recognized as existing under Better Life scheme. This was clear indication that in the field of agriculture women helped in food, crop and fruit production and helped to take them to markets for consumers to buy.

Implications Oil he Study

The findings of this study have several implications for women education and nation building. For instance, the observation in some slates of the Federal Republic of Nigeria shows tht male enrolment in many school at all levels of education is dwindling because they (males) take to do business even from primary school. Therefore, if this trend is not checked quickly nursery, primary, secondary and tertiary institutions in Nigeria, will in no distant further be dominated by women in both the teachers and the taught.

There will be no balanced equation as far as male and female populations are concerned in the schools and any country that has one sex of its citizens in the majority of its institutions is heading for an educational disaster. The country will not grow politically. Okonjo (2000) and Anya (2001) warn that the lime is long past when a nation's identity was guaranteed just by an abundance of natural resources, one-sided sex education, inexhaustible human enthusiasm, or even by relative isolation from the malignant problems of globalization.

Furthermore, the findings imply that the Nigerian educational system will suffer if it is onesided. The female teachers, computer operators, typists, nurses and midwives, bankers etc who take lime out to do their domestic duties leave (heir jobs to suffer when they go on maternity leave. 'They have divided loyalty.

Conclusion And Recommendations

The nolion thai woman's education ends in (he kitchen can now he proved wrong. This is because in all levels women folk arc more in number than males. The latter take to business early enough in Nigeria and (end to allow the females to surpass them in all spheres of human endeavour. From the facts set out in this paper we can see that the role of women in nation budding in Nigeria is countless and the women themselves need great encouragement to make them contribute more meaningfully to nation building.

Based on the foregoing, therefore, it is recommended that:

1. Women be given 50% seats in the three tires of government (Federal. State and Local Government).
2. A law be enacted to make the male folk stay in school till af least after the first degree. This is to bring their population in parity with their female counterparts in schools.

3. Women be given both moral and material supports to help them grow educationally, economically, socially and politically.

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i

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