

RIGHTS OF WOMEN AS PANACEA FOR REPOSITIONING WOMEN EDUCATION IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

Issues concerning women have been taking the centre stage in recent times. Understandably, the role of women in the society and their position in the story of human salvation make them to be either loved or hated. So some of the laws and customs are said to be discriminatory against women. This forms the basis for formation of national and international organizations, both governmental and non-governmental, to initiate moves aimed at repositioning women affairs in the society. To talk of repositioning women implies that the position of women with reference to education for example is not encouraging, hence the need for repositioning. Here we are therefore to look at what women education was in the past so as to understand who or what was responsible for the state of affairs. But basically, looking at women education every nation through its laws, both written and unwritten, tries to take care of every member of the society without discrimination and women are no exception.

Introduction

One of the ironies of history is the fact that despite the role women play both at home and in the society, they have remained unnoticed and even belittled. This is borne out of the notion that women's function of being home makers and caring for children is not important. Women therefore, are to be seen' and not heard. This has become part of women history, history of low women enrolment in education, history of discrimination against women in education. A survey of early educational trends in ancient European states where education first started clearly shows the extent of apathy towards women education. Even among the ancient cities of Athens and Sparta, we have the same story with each having a somehow peculiar line of action. Athens, the birth place of Olympic games devoted much to sports and athletics. Men were trained in gymnastics and various types of sports. Boys were given to early training who will eventually become adult sports men and not women. According to Clement (1963), the Spartans train their children right from the cradle to be strong astute soldiers. An educated man from their own assessment, is a brave soldier who can withstand the winter cold and dare the enemy with courage and determination and the training for this usually began when the child was five years or below. Eventually all the soldiers then were men.

In the United States of America, in her early educational years, the first high school in Boston in 1821, was for boys only. Even in the holy book, the bible, Jesus Christ selected his twelve apostles preached and performed miracles in their presence and at the end of Jesus mission on earth, he handed to them authority and power to become fishers of men. These twelve apostles were men and not women.

The story is the same in Africa when early Portuguese who visited West Africa wanted to take the children of the chiefs of Europe for training. The chiefs, for the fear of the unknown, refused to release their children but instead allowed them to take the children of their subjects. According to Page (1964) these children were boys. In tracing the development of education, the point is clear that the position of inequality had existed for centuries and the trend seems to be endless as we can see in the following reports courtesy of Awake Magazine (2005).

The UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs estimates that two thirds of the world's 876 million illiterates are women. In Africa, the Arab states, and East and South Asia, according to UNESCO, over 60 percent of the women are illiterate. Furthermore, large numbers of men believe that educating women is unnecessary and even makes them unfit for their child bearing role.

On the other hand, according to the book *Women's Education in Developing countries*, parents fail to invest in their daughters because they do not expect them to be able to make an economic contribution to the family. We will not continue to trail (the development of education, but the point is that the poor position of women education had existed for centuries, and if anything could be done as a way of repositioning women education it must be by recognizing the right of women.

The Right of Women

According to the 1999 constitution of Federal Republic of Nigeria chapter four, every Nigerian has his/her fundamental human right thus:

- > Right to life
- > Right to dignity of human person
- > Right to personal liberty
- > Right to fair hearing
- > Right to private and family life
- > Right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion
- > Right to peaceful assembly and association
- X Right to freedom of movement and
- > Right to freedom from discrimination.

Education as a Fundamental Human Right

Education is regarded as inalienable right of man (United National Chapter 148). Events that led to the Second World War show how lack of education can contribute in directing people towards negative ideas by those who are on the corridors of power. Ignorance and lack of information gave the key factor in the war (Adolph Hitler) the impetus of determining the cause of action. At the end of the war, the United Nation Organization met at Hague in 1948 to pass a chapter - Fundamental Human Rights, which declared education as inalienable right of man. To realize this objective, it became an international directive for nations to provide education to their citizens free, if possible, at all levels.

Equal Educational Opportunity

The National Policy on Education describes education as the most important instrument of change and an instrument per excellence for effecting national development Federal Ministry of Education (1981) As men are created equal, justice demand that men should be treated equally or at least fairly. Equality in education is very much related to democracy. Education therefore is the biggest step that can be taken by any nation aiming towards provision of equal opportunities for her citizens. Society comprises the young, the elderly, man and woman. However, a situation where the Nigerian women could not be well evolved in policy formulation in Nigeria leaves much to be desired. This also shows how far women are exposed to education which helps them acquire communicative ability to brave the challenges of modern society.

Rights of Women as Panacea for Repositioning Women Education

All we have been trying to establish in this paper is to state in an unmitigated terms the rights of women. If we have a close look at the Nigerian Constitution and the UN charter with regard to women, we would have been able to establish that constitution and the charter reaffirm faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of human person and in the equal rights of men and women. Also to be noted is that the Universal Declaration of human rights affirms the principle of the inadmissibility of discrimination and proclaim that all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights and that everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth therein, without distinction of any kind including distinction based on sex, noting that state party to the international covenant on Human Rights have obligation to ensure the equal rights of men and women to enjoy all economic, social, cultural, civil and political rights.

From the above, it is clear that one has no option but to conclude that the rights so stated above form the bases for repositioning women education. It should be noted that the Organization of African Unity recognizes the paramountcy of Human Rights and the African Charter on Human and Peoples Rights proclaimed and agreed that everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedom recognized and guaranteed therein without distinctions of any kind such as sex, colour language, religion etc. or any other option, national and social origin, fortune, birth or other status. It is necessary to note here too that many a time, a lot of factors infringe on these rights, consequently creating gender inequality. An example of such factors is cultural practice. According to Ilo (1998) gender refers to learned differences between men and women which is determined by social and cultural values. Most cultures have earmarked roles for women. Culturally we cannot talk of gender equality since women are not given equal opportunities to act and exercise their ability and interest.

According to Brandt (1996) gender bias is discrimination based on widely held beliefs about the abilities, characteristic and behaviour often and women. The traditional roles assigned to men and women limit their opportunities to choose careers and life style best suited to their abilities and true interest. It is worthy of note that these traditionally or culturally assigned roles do not consider the rights of women. Ilo (1998) stated that it is important to address the issue of gender inequality because it has a negative effect on how men see themselves by reinforcing and perpetuating gender stereotypes. It is the down trodden rights of women which gave rise to the emergence of the Fourth World conferences of women at Beijing which recommended among others the full participation of women in power structures and decision making. Also, the 1995 Copenhagen World Summit on social development, commits countries to ensure gender balance and equality in decision making process at all levels.

Scientific researchers have been conducted on gender formation and their implications on social roles. The researches were intended to affirm or deny the claims associated with masculinity and femininity in respect of which men had been given more recognition and respect in almost all communities. The findings where certain attributes like intelligence, perseverance, courage are associated with a particular gender and denied of the other is fallacious (Vidal, 1995).

Repositioning Women Education

Education, it is said is a weapon for social development, equity and justice. Providing women with equal opportunity for education would foster a gender-fair society. This will ensure the repositioning of women since women are mothers of tomorrow's nation. According to Ikegulu (1998), it is universally acknowledged that women play vital and central role not only in family well being and maintenance, survival, protection and development of children but also in the process of recovery and reconstruction of society.

For the 1996 blue print on women education Ikegulu (1998:35) had the following objectives:

- * Awaken the awareness of all citizens irrespective of sex, age, locality, creed or social status and should therefore be made available to all.
- *> Educate the parents and the general public so as to bring about a change in attitude towards women educational programmes so developed.
- *> Orient the attitude of all female irrespective of age towards education.
- *> Awaken consciousness of all women to the need for the development of a positive self-image.

Apart from international conferences, seminars, or workshops, the Nigerian government had come up with a lot of initiatives as international programmes. We have programmes such as Belter Life Programme for rural women, Family Support Programme, Women Education Centre through different pressure groups, Nigerian women have succeeded in bringing to bear the creation of the Ministry of Women Affairs which is charged with the sole responsibility of protecting and ensuring that rights and privileges of women are realized.

Recommendations

In the light of fact of history of women and development, the following recommendations have been articulated as ways towards repositioning women education.

Women should take their destiny in their hands by coming together to fight for their rights and pursue those common interest that impart positively on their lives.

Legal reform is necessary to wipe out some cultural practices which tend to relegate women to the position of second class citizen.

There are some traditional norms and customs which inhibit girl-child education in Nigeria, such practices should be esponded.

Parents should think less of sending their daughters for early marriage, but encourage them to read and pursue education.

The education of the girl-child is a sure way of ensuring women emancipation and their venturing into those profession that are hitherto the exclusive of men.

Conclusion

Based on chapter four of the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria concerning the fundamental human rights, every woman has the right to the freedom of expression, this right should include freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kind regardless of frontiers, be it orally, in writing or in print, in the form of art, or through any other media of the woman's choice. We have to note that discrimination against women and indeed breeding gender inequality violates the principle of equality of rights and respect for human dignity. This also hampers the growth of the prosperity of society and the family and makes more difficult the full development of the potentialities of the gender to be discriminated in the service of their countries and humanity. Repositioning women education in Nigeria is to empower women to understand what they are in the strict sense and what they are not as result of societal, cultural and social factors. It is to empower them to remove cultural and social shackles that have inhibited their development

As a matter of fact repositioning women education is one of the first steps in a process of enabling women to take control over their own lives, participate on an equal basis in society and finally free themselves from economic exploitation and patriarchal oppression.

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