THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA IN THE NEW MILLENNIUM: STRATEGIES FOR IMPROVING WOMEN'S EDUCATION

Orumwense, F. E,

Abstract

This paper looked at the roles of women in sustainable development in Nigerian and strategies for improving women education. It was found out that women have good knowledge of sustainable development, which seeks to meet the needs and aspirations of the present without compromising the ability to meet those of the future. It was also shown that women play vital contributions to sustainable development and they are responsible for majority of (he family needs. Generally, some factors affect women's roles in sustainable development. Therefore, it was recommended among other things, that more females should be encouraged to read science subjects at all levels of education, to prepare them for technological changes, without they cannot meet up with their roles in sustainable development.

Introduction

Sustainable development is a concept that attempts to harmonize the benefits of development with minimal destabilization and disturbance of the environment. For man to be able to satisfy his needs, he necessarily has to mobilize and harness resources provided by nature and couple. Same with skills and industrialization to produce goods and services for the satisfaction of his needs. This of course affects the environment in at least two obvious negative ways namely:-

a) The removal of natural resources as raw materials affect the ecological balance of the environment;

b) The production process itself results in waste materials of various categories capable of polluting the environment.

According to Nigerian Environmental Study/Action (1993:2):

Sustainable development seeks to meet the needs and aspirations of the present without compromising the ability to meet those of the future.... It is a process in which the exploitation of resources, the direction of investments, the orientation of technological development and institutional change are all harmony and enhance both current and future potential to meet human need and aspiration.

Panayotou (1992), also defined it as the development that does not result in reduction of the future product capacity of the economy, which depends on the stock of natural, human capital and technology. It is further said that, sustainable development means development at the highest possible rate consistent with leaving the same or an improved endowment of resources and options to the future. The goal of sustainable development is lasting improvement in the quality of life and not just short-term improvement that disappear rapidly at the end of the project cycle.

Development has been defined as a process of change; particularly change of a structure nature, towards the enhancement of people's socio-economic welfare and average individual's scope for self-fulfillment. Such a structural change it is observed, should transform the society's instructions, organizations, social rules customary usage and the attitudes of the individuals. Thus, development is conceptualized as putting premium and willingness to innovate and adopt necessary innovations for the desired structural transformation; so a development is about people rather than things (Agbola, 1990).

Therefore, most functions are still structured along the lines of gender even where nature supposes differently.
The Role of Women

The tradition female functions/roles in our community include the following:

(a) Child Bearing and Rearing

Nature has endowed the female folks with the capacity to bear and rear children. Therefore, women can be seen as the custodians of the future. Thus, when the children are born, it is the women who take the primary duties of nurturing them. This nurture begins by warm hugging and breast-feeding but does not end there in the process. Values and morals are transmitted to these children. Such value range from simple toilet habits, feeding habits, to issue of respect to elders. Therefore, if a good percentage of women are properly educated on the elements of sustainable development and their desirability, then such women will be properly equipped to transmit value that could enhance sustainable development to the children to transmit value that could enhance sustainable development to the children. Those values could also be transmitted to the next generation in the form of folklore and by story-telling.

The children sit round an adult in an informal class setting and beg to be educated in the form of stories. Therefore, without having to adopt a new modus operandi the existing system makes room for positive values that enhance sustainable development to be built into the stories; such stories become available as vacant vehicle waiting to be convey precious and cherished values to the children. In this way a lasting legacy can be left for subsequent generations. And environmental consideration would become an integral of our culture and day-to-day living (Nigeria Environmental Study/Action, 1992).

(b) Collection of Water for Domestic Use

According to the Nigerians Environmental Study/Action, 1992. The traditional women is responsible for collection of water for domestic activities may not necessary be hazardous, however waste water from traditional industries such as cloth dyeing could constitute some hazard. They could pollute the water and local streams.

Again, since the concept of sustainable development contemplates the well being of members of the society, this underscores the fact that proper management of water resources for domestic use is very essential to check the spread of water borne diseases. This means that women should be exposed to alternative and modern methods of water treatment for domestic usage.

(c) Collection of Firewood for Domestic Fuel

The major sources of domestic's energy used by women in the homes are firewood and kerosene (Nigerian Environmental Study/Action 1992). To obtain firewood, trees have to be cut down and forests destroyed. This leads to climate changes and disturbance of the ecological balance. It is difficult to ascertain the tones of fire-wood consumed in Nigeria. But we know that a greater percentage of the populace depends on firewood as a major source of domestic energy.

Unguided exploitation of vegetation for wood for fuel spells dooms for the future. Therefore, thought it can be argued that the generally of the populace cannot afford modern alternatives of domestic fuel such as electric and gas cookers; however, women could be mobilized to plant trees in replacement of those that have been harvested for fuel,

(d) Shopping for Domestic Needs

Green consumerism is another means by which women could enhance sustainable development as a culture. By green consumerism we refer to situation where a consumer restricts his demand pattern in favour of goods that are in themselves environmentally safe and whose production technology is benign to the environment (Ogbugwe, Y. 1996).

For instance where a given proportion of the society shows its disapproval for a particular product by boycotting the purchase and use in favour of an alternative product, and also mobilize and encourage other consumers to do same; they could successfully make the producer of the boycotted product adopt safe and begin technology. Since women mainly perform the role of domestic shopping, they can perform this task. Therefore, if women were
properly informed on the various environmental hazards of products, then as done in western countries women would be able to tailor their shopping to encourage producers who sincerely take steps at reducing and treating wastes. The concept and practice of Green consumerism can therefore, be used as a pressure too to compel industries to adopt safe technology convenient for the environment in their production processes and producers.

Factors Affecting Women's Roles in Sustainable Development
The factors affecting women's roles in sustainable development include:

a. The Status of Women in Nigeria
   According to Opong and Abu (1987), the status of women in different cultural contexts is correctly understood as one factor that has effects on main streaming women in developing. The term status indicates the overall position of women in society, political and domestic spheres as well as the personal autonomy they enjoy and the esteem accorded to them. Where the status of women relative to man is high a large proportion of the female population is enrolled in schools. Modern sector employment is encouraged and the amount of control they have over personal and household decisions such as fertility decision is high. It has also be proved to be problematic issue in terms of its unclear dimensions and its inability to explain the many facets of women's lives and their correlational configurations.

   Opong and Abu (1987:9) added that women; status needs to be understood in its many aspects and as having differing levels and different impacts, improvement is on not necessarily entails improvement in another. Her framework presents seven major roles played by women in social life in their respective societies (the materials, conjugal, domestic, occupational, kin, community and individual), incorporating behavioural and attitudinal aspects giving rise to women's three major types of status recognized as economic status. Women's source of economic statues derives from their occupational role which may give them little power.

   Women have been sole breadwinners in 25%-33% of all families worldwide, according to a study, and the number of female headed households is growing for various reason.

   As child bearers and others, women are the key to influencing and controlling the peace of national population growth, as educators with the families, they help to shape essential human resources, instructing their offspring on the necessary skills and knowledge for survival and small scale entrepreneurs, they engage in a variety of small enterprises and if women's household labour was given economic value, it would add one-third to the world annual income product. Unfortunately, their inputs have been ignored by planners and policy makers.

b. Women's Education and Population Variables
   The multidimensional and complex channels through which education affects economic development in general and the household's economic well-being and economic independence of women in particular have been examined in numerous studies (Caldwell, 1979; Opong and Abu 1987; Revabushaiga, 1988; Mamman, 1985; Mamman, 1992; Palmer, 1991; and Stephen, 1992). This leaves that women's education has a powerful social impact measured primarily in terms of women's reproductive roles, focusing on girl's education and decreased fertility, increase child health and decreased child mortality. Educated women can and do use investments in health, family planning and education services more efficiently. In addition to socio-economic benefits for women and their families, education empowers women to exercise their rights and responsibilities and enables them to make more efficient choices. The right to use credits or own land is enhanced if women read, understand contrasts or do simple arithmetic. The right to vote becomes meaningless if women cannot inform themselves on political issues (Palmer and Almaz 1991:9).

   Extensive research has established that education promotes sustained economic
development and because women constitute a significant proportion of the economically active population in Nigeria, economic growth and development depend in large measure on improved female education. In addition direct economic gains, when girls and women are educated the benefits multiply because of the key role women play in their families, tend to marry later and have fewer children (Almaz, 1992)

The literature on the relationship between education and fertility is enormous. Cochrane's review of the evidence (1982), found that women's education affects fertility in three ways:

- By affecting the biological supply of children;
- By lowering the demand for children; and
- By increasing knowledge of contraception.

The biological supply of children is affected by raising women's age of marriage, reducing the proportion of women who marry, thus, reducing female's exposure to pregnancy. However, education also tends to raise fecundity by improving the health and by breaking up traditional postpartum abstinence taboos prevalent particularly, in African countries (Cochrane, 1982), education also reduces the demand for children because earnings are enhanced and job prospects for women become attractive. The perceived benefits of more children decrease while perceived costs increase. Education increases knowledge of fertility regulation and contraceptive use.

Despite the benefits of education for girls and women, a mixture of social, cultural and economic barriers keeps a large proportion of girls and women out of school. Many families cannot afford to send girls school because their labour is needed in the home and in the fields.

Global research indicates a consistent inverse relationship between education and fertility and the gender gap comes as a cost for population concerns, (Almaz, 1992). In addition, the relationship between desired family size and education which was found in the research as well as in the fertility size and education which was found in the research as well as in the national fertility survey (NFS, 1983) and the world fertility survey (WFS, 1983), as being consistent and monotonically negative and between contraceptive use and education, similarity positive, but a great significance for deliberate issues such as fertility, child and material mortality, and family planning.

Another dimension derivable from the analysis is the incentive system. By this we do not mean direct financial aid, as such have been highly abused through corruption. Bullock power and oxplow, high yielding and early maturing varieties have the potentials of encouraging adoption (Joyotee Smith, 1992).

**Strategies for Improving Women Education in Sustainable Development**

The following are possible strategies for improving women's role in sustainable development

1. The national Commission for Women develops more plans and polices to address the education of women. Ministries of education should create divisions specializing in planning and designing programmes to enhance girl education in Nigeria.
2. Furthermore, studies should be conducted by government to determine the factors that constraint women's education and development plans to redress the constraints.
3. Basic education policy programme should be made to focus on increasing enrolment and decreasing enrolment and decreasing dropout and repetition rates of girls and raise expectations of their capabilities and opportunities. This would involve such initiative as schools location being closer to homes, training of females teachers, curriculum design relevant to future employment, opportunities by gender appropriate programming for vocational and technical training and labour demands.
4. According to Ukpore (2001), more non-governmental organizations (NGOs) should be found to take care of girl child problems.
5. There is an urgent need for an introduction of labour and time saving devices and technologies, which increase the productivity of women's activities. Of particular note are
technologies for water collection, storage, food processing and preservation.

6. Information is both a resource and a motivating factor. As such, incorporation into rural development process of regular meetings, informal communications, news briefs mass communications programmes to share plans and achievements and visit of local people to rural development projects outside their community—all improve the chance of success. At the national level every means should also be used to disseminate information on rural development activities and possibilities.

7. Existing women organization in rural and urban areas can easily be used as platforms to educate women on the concept of sustainable development.

8. Concurrent steps could be taken to involve women in policy formulation that will enhance sustainable development. The present situation is unfair, not equitable and therefore calls for a change. Women should be invited to make more inputs into policy formation.

9. The women in academic should be involved in research to develop alternative production technologies that will enhance sustainable development. Research efforts by women in academics should be directed more to improve cottage industries peculiar to women. Such as "dire" production

**Recommendations**

1. Women in academics should be involved in research to develop alternative production technologies that will enhance sustainable development
2. Ministries of Education should create divisions specializing in planning and designing programmes to enhance girls education
3. The national commission for women should develop more programmes for the education for women in Nigeria
4. Studies should be conducted by governments to determine the factors that constrain women's education and develop plans to redress the constraints
5. Basic education policy programme should be properly implemented to prevent or eradicate increasing dropouts for girls from schools
6. Existing women organizations in the rural and urban areas can easily be used as platforms to educate women on the concept of sustainable development.
7. Women should be properly equipped to transmit values that could enhance sustainable development to their children
8. More non-governmental organization (NGOs) should be founded to take care of girl-child problems
9. More females should be encouraged to read science subjects at all levels of education to prepare them for technological change; without they cannot meet up with their role in sustainable development.

**Conclusion**

Women play a big role in contributing to development like their men counterparts. Therefore, there effects need to be recognized and not made invisible. The problems associated with the development of small enterprises, which are predominantly women's work practice around the home environment arise partly as a result of lack of physical planning in controlling their locations within the towns. These problems become uncontrollable. They need to be recognized, developed and funded to enhance their sustainability to meet the needs of the present and future generation.

Moreover, given the substantial contribution that women make to agriculture and other areas, it is important that attention is to their concerns. It is necessary to look into the needs and problems of women in order to tap their full potential and productivity. It is not enough to have it to the governments; it is challenge for all of us. We can all play substantial roles in changing the current situation. There is a need to look at our policies and see whether they are conductive to increase the role of women in sustainable development.
References


