

VOCATIONAL COUNSELLING AND THE STATUS OF NIGERIAN RURAL WOMEN; CONTEMPORARY EXPERIENCE

Rev. Canon B.C. Okeke (Ph.D.) and Mrs. Obit/iegwu, Uche J.

Abstract

Women play very important role in national development. The role relates to a complete range of socio-economic activities. They (women) are not only users of basic services, bearers and socialises of children and keepers • of the home, they also represent a productive potential which is not being fully tapped. Thus the paper sought to ascertain the socio-educational and technological status of women in Nigeria. The paper equally looked at the standard set by the United Nations on Gender issues and how that is being met in Nigeria. The paper also considered the effort of NGO's and other professional standards of Nigerian rural women, the paper highlighted some tactics and strategies for overcoming problems rural women encounters in the process of seeking better living Recommendations and conclusion were made

Introduction

Women constitute a gender and not a social class. There are different categories of women with differing access to the means of production, access to power, wealth and influence. These involve urban, rural women, poor and rich women, working class and bourgeois women. Rural women are those Nigerian women who work long hard hours as wives, mothers, domestic planners, breadwinners, at farming, fishing trading or weaving with little resources, with children on their backs, fetching water from streams and ponds far away from home and far away from her other responsibilities of fetching firewood under the rain, or sun. The above description differed from that of bourgeois or petty bourgeois women who mostly live in modern homes with a-number of house helps, including personal drivers. They are wealthy and influential., and some .control means of reproduction. There is the third group of Nigerian women who are complete housewives, purely dependent on their husbands in everything, because their husbands forbid them from working because of their cultural influence. The fourth group of women are the widows who are in their homes in the village, forbidden by cultural to participate effectively in any social and economic issues that will help the family, because it is a taboo to do so until some number of years she has to mourn the. spouse have expired, and in the process of mourning, the properties of the deceased husband will not belong to her but to the family of the husband. She can only be allowed to share a little of the deceased spouse's properties including land is she allows herself to be abused sexually by the relations of the husband. The children, if any, will be shared to the relations as house helps.. The fifth group of women are those that end up their long suffering and persecution as prostitutes either because of childlessness, divorce or death of their spouse.

While there may be difference between women, all women in Nigeria are subordinated and discriminated against on the basis of their gender. This discrimination manifest in various ways regardless .of their class position in the society to which the woman belongs. Women suffer discrimination on the basis of culture. They are socialized to accept inferior positions in the society. This is reinforced by the patriarchal system, which also manifests itself in culture. 'Most peasant women suffer as a result of their class position within the social structure. They also suffer as a result of gender. The social, economic and technological status of women is actually difficult to be ascertained. Since majority of-women arc in [he rural areas and since the majority of those who live in the **villages*are** certainly peasant and poor (1NDP, 2000),this paper will assume that a majority of Nigeria women are poor and engage in rural agricultural, petty trading, and other minor vocational craft. Those who are rich and of high **socio-economic** status arc insignificant. In spite of their poor social, economic and technology position, They form the basis and vital ingredient of every family.

Socio-Educational and Technology Status of Women

The social status of Nigerian women could be assessed primarily on the basis of their access to education, health, and how they relate to the law, or extent to which they have basic human rights. Issues of family rights, marriage, employment, cultural rights, etc. are important in assessing the

social status of Nigerian women. It is an open, secret that right from the home, female children are denied the privilege of pursuing academic interest. Men are given wider preference with respect to education. Parents are more concerned for their male children to be useful in the society than female children. This is because they believe that the male children will inherit the- home and keep the lineage and name of the family alive, while the female children will finally be married outside the family and become another person's properly. They feel that training a female child is like training' her for another person (the husband) to gain: it is sheer waste of money. Even now, in spite of the efforts of government and non-governmental agencies such as UNDP, UNESCO and UNICEF, many families are yet to encourage the education of the girl child. In the Islamic schools, the ratio of girls to boys shows that girls are still lagging behind.

It is quite unfair that in most families where resources are inadequate to train all children in the family, it is often the girls that will be left at home to help in the house keeping and learn a trade. A majority of young persons on the streets hawking some wares are girls who are not going to school. And often these girls that are hawking become victims of violence and rape and other vices that are -prevalent in the third world. Some of the girls who are likely to be virgins before they start the hawking at the age of seven to eighteen will be exposed to sexual abuse of men in uncompleted buildings or craftsmen's workshops or bachelors' homes. Thus they can be impregnated or infected with diseases like HIV, AIDS or other sexually transmitted diseases.

In the Northern parts of Nigeria where most women are in Kule or Purdah, the women are highly restricted from going out for any social activity or school because of their Muslim culture. Their girls are not allowed to go to school either; they are only used as messengers to carry messages around for them. They end up growing as illiterates, will marry early, have many children and be like their mothers, thus replicating a culture of poverty, illiteracy and female oppression (Okeke, 1996).

It appears to be a national cultural that most girls that were able to go to school are discourage from taking math's and science subjects that will-eventually lead the person into Technology and other science-related professional courses. In some girls' schools, the sciences and technical subjects are not even included in the syllabus.

Girls are encourage to offer Home Economics since they will end up in their homes as house wives. Other are asked to study Arts subjects such as English, Religious Studies and Education core course- to enable her teach Arts subjects. Most women are being discourage from getting higher degrees. .Those who do so may not have husbands. Men may be scared to marry such, even among the men elite.

In fact the status of women in the area of science and technology education continues to be a concern because girls still register less than boys in every university and polytechnic entrance examination in the country (JAMB, 2002). Very few women are into the prestigious profession like medicine, pharmacy, accounting, engineering, architecture and the Natural sciences. The society has instead chosen some career lines for women. A woman is more likely to be a nurse where a man is a doctor* a secretary, a man her boss; a catering and domestic worker, a textile worker where a man will be her manager, sales manager, productions manager, personnel and General manager. Almost all nursery and primary school teachers in Nigeria arc women. However the head teacher is usually a man especially in the Arts and humanities subjects are women but most principals of secondary schools are men. Interestingly in the Arts and Humanities where women are more in teaching and learning in the junior schools, that was not the same in university education. Fewer women are seen as academic staff in Universities NUC Report (2002).

The implication is that women occupy jobs that have less social value and prestige, lower wage levels and usually, dead end jobs that have no prospects of promotion. They have been brainwashed by the society whose culture and social lives (Nigeria) are male favoured, that science and technology-based courses are too difficult and are therefore for the male, since males are used to handling difficult things both mentally and physically.

There have been series of attempts by the stakeholders in pressuring the government to change the trend. In 1974, the Federal Ministry of Education established Women's Units to allow for consistent policy towards providing more education to females. In 1977, the National Policy on Education was introduced and it was reviewed in 1981. These also reinforced the need to encourage parents to send their, daughters to school. The gender discrimination of the female in Science and

Technology was highlighted in the National Educational Rolling Plan of 2001. Federal Government Colleges for girls were also established in all the states as mixed colleges, so that the psychology of girls over science and technology will be eliminated. The establishment of these colleges was a right step but it has helped matters because more male students are seen in these mixed schools than girls. The percentage of male over female has been 70% to 30% (ERDC 2002).

In 1986 a Blueprint on women in science and Technology Education was initiated and a Blueprint on Mass literacy was adopted in September 1989. these were to promote every aspect and form of governmental and non-governmental agencies lo ail levels. The major objectives of the Blueprints include:

To awaken the awareness of people to the fact that equal science and technology educational opportunity is the right of all citizens irrespective of sex, age, locality, creed or social status and should therefore be made available to all.

To educate parents and the general public so as to bring about a change in attitude towards women educational Programmes,

To orient the attitudes of ail females, irrespective of age, towards science and technology education.

To awaken the consciousness of all women to the need for the development -of a positive self-image, self-reliance, overcoming inequality, economic growth of women, reducing poverty of women and increasing their personal welfare.

The essence was the provision of more educational opportunities for girls from primary to tertiary levels and the promotion of science among females. In addition to this, Akinsinde (2000) stated that government at all levels as a matter of urgent national policy should establish and enforce a law that will discourage withdrawal of girls from primary schools to tertiary education for whatever reason. Also policy on hawking and street trading is to be prohibited by law. And all levels of education should be tuitions-free for girls. Girls' schools are now to be headed by female principals and co-educational schools will have at least a female vice-principal. In fact all these have been the focus of the Women Affairs Ministry in Nigeria and Association of Women Vocational Counsellors in Nigeria for the past three years.

Women in fact constitute the majority of illiterates in Nigeria. At all levels of education males represent a higher ration females (Fos, 1995). By 1991 the proportion of literate men to women was 54:3 1 and the total female literacy rate was far below I 5% while that of men was above 40%. A more recent survey shows that 83.7% of females had no form of education in the North Eastern States of Nigeria (Borno, Yobe; Adnmawa and Bauchi). The North Western states (Kano, Kebbi, Sokoto, and Jigawa, etc.) had 87.8% of women who had no formal education. The case in the Southern states was slightly better. In the South Bast (Abia, Akwa-Ibom, Rivers, Imo, Cross-Rivers, Anambra), only 36.2% of women had no formal education.

In the south West (Ogun, Lagos, Oyo, -Osun, Ondo, etc.), at least 26.1% of women had no formal education. The Middle Belt state (Plateau, Benue, Taraba, Kwara, Niger, Kogi) are in between the South and North in terms of average figures of illiteracy of women (UNDP, 1996).

The enrolment of girls in all levels of education Nigeria demonstrates discrimination against females (Maduewesi, 1996). There are remarkable disparities according to state and region (NERD 2001). In all states and regions of Nigeria, women tag behind men in access to education.' For instance, only 7.6% of women interviewed in the Northern part of Nigeria had some primary education whereas in the Southern part of Nigeria, at least 25.9% had. In the case of primary school enrolment, only 12% of female children of school age are registered in the primary school In the south, 44.44% of girls are in school. By the time the girls have reached secondary school age, only 40.2% of them in Northern Nigeria are allowed to continue by parents and societal influence. The situation in the rural areas is even worse, then that in urban areas. As UNICFF (1990, P.45) state, three-quarters of rural women aged, 15-24 years arc illiterates in Nigeria, only half in urban are illiterates. Fos shows that 49% male and 39% female literacy rates was corded in Nigeria by 19*55. According to Okcke (1996), the illiteracy in Nigeria is being gradually reduced. Between 1975 and 1990 the percentage of girls enrolled in school rose from 4.5% in 1984 to 15% in 1990. As At present the enrolment among female students in the polytechnics and universities in the "Northern part of Nigeria is still as 12 and 12.9 respectively.

Several reasons account for the gender gaps in education in Nigeria namely:

1. The existence of a strong patriarchal ideology (culture) accords male children priority for schooling. The western education is assumed to be for boys whereas the females are merely equipped to become good 'wives'.
2. The economy plays a part as reasons for gender gap. Nigeria was rated 16th position as the poorest nation in the world. In the year 2002, it was rated 22nd position as the poorest nation. The general downturn in the economy made it impossible for parents to pay the school fees-of all their' children. Nigerians have large families with several wives and children, with extended families. The depressed--economy gives parents a reason to limit the children they could conveniently pay for. This coupled with the dominant culture helps parents to allow only boys access to education. In some cases, girls are not only denied access to education, they are given out in marriage so the dowry paid on them is converted to school fees for the boys.

Religion--has also been a cause of gender gap in education in Northern Nigeria where Islamic religion is dominant, some religion parents frown at the idea of allowing females to acquire western education. They fear western education may expose girls and corrupt them (Hussaini, 1994 p.13). Lack of sustained policy and action plan on women education in Nigeria is a contributory factor.

One of the major obstacles to bridging the gender gap in education is the unwillingness of government at all levels to enforce appropriate instruments. Less than 5% of women are involved in Agriculture in Europe and America. In Nigeria 85% of economically active women are into peasant agriculture (Obiajunwa, 1992 p.98), In spite of their role in agriculture, women are discriminated against. Afonja (1984) stated that rural women get only token cash gifts from their husbands in return for services rendered in the farm throughout the year. Great farmers as they are Nigerian women still do not own land -and depend on men to acquire farmland each year. In some parts of Nigeria like Delta State, Edo State and some parts of Rivers State, only Women produce food. Husbands and younger people migrate to the cities to look for other jobs.

A recent survey (Uyaryar and Obijuwa, 2002) shows that the main, problems women in agriculture face include:

Lack of land, since all lands belong to men; lack of farm input like fertilizers and storage facilities such as jute bags, etc; labour saving machines like harvesters; Take-Off capital for purchase of inputs and land; men fight their wives regularly over issues bordering on funds realized from the women's farms; and lack of effective women's cooperative society on farms.

In some states in Southern Nigeria, (Edo, Delta, Cross-Rivers) there are cases where girls are sold as servants. The "employer" pays so many months' wages and the girl is now to work for him in Lagos or any of the country. All over the country, a women has no family right and-inheritance. She' has no legal to her own children. The property in the house belongs to the man even if bought by the wife. When the man dies, relatives maltreat the widow and confiscate the property.

In the South Eastern part of the country and in urban areas in the South West and South Southern parts of the country, there is increase in gender sensitization and publicity campaign and with the help of the churches on the right of women in the society, men and women are gradually changing. These oppressive practices may not have stopped, but they have not been increasing. The social status of women in Nigeria is changing from inferiority to-come dignity. But how far this goes depends on how far there is a rise, in the economic status of women in Nigeria'.

Okeke (1996.) stated that the economic contribution of women is high but the benefit they derive is very low because:

Women lack access to credit facilities, though UBA Scheme and peoples --Bank-were established two decades ago to address this imbalance but, the balance is yet to be addressed. An insignificant number of women are employed in industries of their choice.

Women are deficient in acquisition of modern technology and therefore have no plan in-the modern industrial sector. In addition, government had never made any serious provision for the women to-train in technical schools and acquire relevant technology to perform in the world of business and technology. As of now men have monopoly and control of trade, industry, technology, business, sciences and politics in Nigeria. This has continued to be so because there are continuing

gender gaps in political participation and decision-making.-The highest decision-making bodies -in Nigeria have no women included. In politics on I, -a negligible number of women are voted into party political office or into government office-as chairperson in a local government area or as legislator. Out of 396 senators in the upper legislative house. Three are women, others are men. In the house of representatives,' the nation's lower legislative house, out of 792 members, only 15 are women. Women are denied leadership positions even at the grassroots level.

Tactics and Strategies for Overcoming Those Problems

The social structure is the major determinant of power and powerlessness. To empower women it will be first and foremost important to alter the class position of majority of Nigerian women hunted by poverty and deprivation. This will enhance their opportunities for more education, better employment in the public and private sectors, good health services, water and other basic needs. How does-the alteration of their social come about? There is power in unity of organized groups. When women see the need to come together to form groups, associations and organization to address the needs of women, the process of empowerment would have begun. Women associations and organizations already exist in Nigeria. The recent survey carried out in various parts of the country by the Directorate of Foods, Roads and Rural Infrastructure (DFRR1) recently identified more than five thousand vocational women groups and associations across the nation but reports that those groups are potential groups for vocational activities and mass literacy development but not effectively for now because of lack of proper empowerment. There are also women cooperatives which have increased across the country as a result of introduction of She Programmes: Better Life for Rural Women, Family Support Programme, and Women Daily Bread Programme. These are Programmes introduced by respective Heads of State, Governors' wives have no direct benefit, effect or dividend to the women. The Programmes are mostly politically motivated therefore their existence was not even known by the women. But if such associations and groups will be encouraged and its policies implemented to the end, it will help to raise more awareness on the inarginalization of women, which will hence find ways to tackle it.

Presently, women from Niger-Delta area numbering 3000-rioted to the oil companies to provide jobs for their children and themselves. Such move should be refined to reflect provision and training of-those women in skill, vocational and technical areas.

Associations like women in Nigeria, National Council for women Societies, association of Women Lawyers, Association of Women Engineers, should be encouraged by the government and non-government groups to promote women empowerment in Technological and Science skill areas. This is in line¹ with the decision of World Women Conference held in China last three years. These kinds of women elite groups if promoted and supported, have greater potential of influencing women's environmental policy. Political education will be an important aspect of the overall political function of women organizations. Education is, and will continue to be basic tool which any deprived group will deploy. Our task and the task of the women in Nigeria cannot be successful if women are not educated. Education makes people aware of place, aware of things, aware of living, and even much more aware of one's social and the need for vocational, technical and science skills and knowledge. Women associations without education will not be hopeful. They will be like Marx's idea of peasants as potatoes in a bag. They will lack requisite consciousness, access and power to influence public policy about women and the environment.

The States and Local Governments must have serious roles to play in the education of women. But perhaps a national women's group will serve as a vanguard. Women's group and associations should lobby some patriotic groups such as Nigeria Labour Congress, Students Union, Christian or religious groups, Academic Staff Union of Universities, the Federal Houses of Assembly. These groups will help her to promote women favoured Programmes.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The empowerment of Women in Nigeria through every possible means is very essential to the nation's development. Science,¹ Technology and Mathematics education is seen as the best antidote to superstitions, taboos and ignorance that have found to be more prevalent among women in Nigeria (Alele, 1986). The mind of the citizen is freed from the shackles of ignorance through education. The

enlightened mind is thus able to contribute more meaningfully to self and national development.

Also, education is", an important pathway for enhancing the attainment of leadership position by women. The attainment of leadership position is very important because more than half the populations of this nation are females and low participation of this significant group in the leadership of the country could appreciably slow down the pace of development.

Also, female literacy has been shown to boost national per capita income. Records have shown that there is a positive significant correlation between female literacy and economic and social development of the countries in Africa.

Fourth, the Nigeria woman is traditionally relegated to the background relative to the man in socio-political, technological and economic affairs. The issue was ascribed to societal role expectation. This role expectation derives from a long history of deprivation of women from school and the resultant illiteracy. The illiterate women are assumed to lack mental aptitude, knowledge and skills to participate meaningfully in discussions and decision-making.

Also, women are more vulnerable and are mostly and are mostly affected in the prolonged civil wars and violence in Africa and Nigeria in particular. Thus their education will help them to say "No" to men's oppressive attitude of struggling to hold power. Women emancipation will help to uplift their health standard.

References

- Adeola, B. (1993). Educational Opportunities for Women. Paper Presented at W.C.C.I Region 2 conference at ASCON, Lagos.
- Alele, W (1987). On Promoting female participation in science, Technology and math's Education. *Education Today*, Vol. I.N.I.
- Alele, W (1996) FAWE: Promoting Education of Girls, Women. Vanguard Newspaper Wed, July 31
- Akinsende, S.I. (2000). Problems faced by Girls in the study of science and technology subjects in Delta State. Paper Presented at the international conference centre Abuja.'
- Federal Organization in Sciences (1995). *Gender Development Report-Nigeria*. Lagos: Fos Press 45 -50.
- Federal Republic of Nigeria (1981). *National policy on Education*.
- Maduawsie .E. J. (1996). 'Gender issues in Educational Development paper presented at public lecture by NERDC. /'
- Landu, J.T. and Adeniyi (1997). women in National Development the place of science, technology and ijialhs Education, *journal of Nigerian Academy of Education*.
- Okeke, B.C. (1996). Sources of job satisfaction and involvement of Technical College Graduates in Delta State Industries Unpublished Ph.D thesis U.N.N.
- (J.N.D.P (1996), Zonal workshop on Gender Program Planning Implementation and monitoring Held in Umuahia. Abia-State Nigeria. Joint Admission and matriculation board (200) Evaluation Report-Nigeria Abuja FRN press 13 - 18. ' ;
- UNDP (2000). Regional workshop on-Gender Discrimination in Africa held in Abuja, Nigeria. National University commission (220). Annual assessment report. Nigeria Abuja NUC Press. Educational Research Development Council (2002). *Quarterly Report Nigeria Abuja*. FRN Press.
- United Nation International Children Educational fund (1990). *West African Regional Yearly Report*

Genera U.N

Hussaini (1994). Female Child hindrance the formal Education; Paper Presented at a Three-Day Workshop on Gender Education held in Jos. Platen Stale by Nigerian women forum.

Obiajunwa (1992) women in Agriculture and Economic Development in Nigeria. *Nigeria Academy of Education Journal* 3,13-21

Ityaryar, Obiajunwa (2002). Funding women Education in Nigeria: way forward, Nigerian Academy of Education.

Afonja (1984). The implementation' of the current UPE scheme for Educational Development, Universities Vol. IONo2pp32.