

FACTORS HINDERING THE EFFECTIVE PARTICIPATION OF WOMEN IN TECHNICAL AND VOCATIONAL EDUCATION PROGRAMMES IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

The impact of differences in socio-political and cultural changes on the status of women situation is limited due to the low educational level and to their increased responsibilities at home. The number of women heading household has risen considerably, while their participation in decision-making and thus in initiatives affecting community life on the whole, is very low. This paper aimed-at finding ways of reducing gender inequalities in access to science, technical and vocational education institutions in our society. The paper also identified some factors inhibiting effective participation of women in national development. Such factors include culture, religious practice/beliefs, parents, childhood socialization, poverty, stereotype role and lack of adequate education for the female gender. The paper also recommended that new flexible and appropriate curricular are needed that cut across traditional division of skills and knowledge; provide technical and financial support for women's initiatives and institute positive discrimination in favour of women to help them gain access to good income generating jobs through suitable training acquisition of experience.

Introduction

There is a pressing need for relevant basic education programmes directly linked to everyday living practices, to the production of income and to the capacity to adjust to constantly-changing living conditions. Today, certain public or private organizations have undertaken training activities focusing on business for women, to enable them to organize themselves and to set up their own small businesses (BREDA, 1999).

The field of scientific, technical and vocational training constitutes an outlet for the creation of jobs, the promotion of self-development and also the generation of income, especially for the young. The financial constraints and major challenges to the development of our society have led to a sharp drop in girls' enrolment levels in technical and vocational education. Even the streams that do exist are not adequately diversified, and do not take market needs into account.

Orientation and counselling service is responsible for informing future graduates and their parents about the different options opened to them, why it would be interesting to follow certain streams, and the job opportunities for the various vocational specialization. It is regrettable that these services do not dispose of the necessary measures to inform and sensitize girls about the ultimate goals and requirements of scientific, technical and vocational education. Neither do girls receive advice about job opportunities in the world of work after they finished training.

The role of the women in national development requires that they be not only well educated but self actualized in order to feel fulfilled in life. The era in which the men are seen as the sole bread winners, while the women are relegated to the background and their role performances limited to domestic activities is outdated. According to Rahman, Gabriel and Marcus (2004) the position of women, as social group, in meeting the critical challenges of agricultural development and food security, cannot be over-emphasized. If the goals of economic development include food security, improved standard of living, removing poverty, access to dignified employment and reduction in social inequality, then women, who constitute the majority of the poor, the under employed, and the economically and socially disadvantaged in many societies, must be consulted and actively involved in development processes. The overall feature of Nigeria women's status is essentially that of marginalization, which is best explained within the context of production relations (Ekwachi, 1990).

Technical and vocational education is education for work, it is an education where skills are taught for the purpose of gaining employment.

Okorie (2001) defined vocational education in terms of people served. It could be viewed as

the education giving to the person of all ages in all communities or states, those in high school, those who have completed or discontinued their formal education and are prepared to acquire skills for practical work, those who have already entered the labour market but need to upgrade their skills or learn new ones, those with special educational handicaps, and those in post secondary training or retraining which is of High quality which is suited to their needs, interest and ability to benefit from such training. Vocational technical education can be made available only for those who need it, because they are interested in it and also hope to progressively continue to participate in it. It is meant for those who can profit by it because they hope to sell the skills acquired through occupations and make a living. (Olaitan, Nwachukwu, Igbo, Onyemachi & Ekong 1990).

It is imperative to find and develop different forms of vocational education, to encourage training that leads to income-generating activity, to create micro-businesses, small and medium-sized enterprises, and to initiate related measures of crafts to be implemented in regional centres promoted as poles of economic development.

When addressing the issue of the status of girls and women in Nigeria, we must first attack the matter of girls' school attendance levels and literacy for women. Here, three-fourths of girls have no access to modern education due to many factors that come into play, particular those of a socio-economic and social-cultural nature.

The human element is to be enhanced not only in the interest of production, but also because it is the pivotal factor in strategies to promote development and thereby attenuate poverty. Issues concerning health, nutrition, population, education, training, employment and the role of women represent the areas of priority for the World Bank, the primary funding partner (UNEVOC, 1998).

There is flagrant job discrimination against women, which denies their access to the same degree of participation as men in the political, social, economic and cultural life of the country. It is against this background that this paper discusses the militating factors that hinders effective participation of girls and women in technical and vocational education programmes in Nigeria.

Factors Determining Girls Orientation Towards Technical and Vocational Education

Sociological factors: The gender inequalities or obstacles come from entire society and include encouraging girls to choose subjects traditionally considered to be "feminine". Indeed, since childhood, girl child is conditional through her games and toys as well as by the help she gives to her mother and by imitating her-to prepare for her future roles set by society, that of wife and mother. The orientation of the male child since his earliest days is altogether different, His games, and toys corresponds either to purely ludic and sports-related activities aimed to fully develop his physical capacities and that of initiatory and self-defensive actions, or to the imitation of various so-called "masculine" trades such as that of the mechanic, mason, driver, pilot, etc. This leads as to affirm that it is this fundamental difference in the way that boys and girls are raised and educated that subsequently determines their lifetime attitude and orientation.

The orientation of women towards science, and technology in Nigeria is affected on one hand by the same gender attitudes prevailing internationally (Women are better as nurses and secretaries and men as welders and engineers) and on the other by the local culture and stage of development. The following statements made by Verwoerd, (1996) provides an indication of the prevailing thinking of the time.

"As a women is by nature so much better lilted for handling young children, and as the great majority of Nigerian children are to be found in lower classes of primary school, it follows that there should be far more female than male teachers. The department will therefore... declare the assistant post in... primary schools to be female teachers post... Quotas will be laid down at the training schools as regards numbers of male and female , candidates respectively which may be allowed to enter the course... This measures will in the course of time bring about a considerable saving of funds which can be devoted to... more children as school".

Trustcotte, (1992) in her comparative analysis of subjects taken by boys and girls argues that men are being trained in commerce, law and engineering to prepare them well paid careers in business and management. Black women study languages, education and social sciences to prepare them for lower paid jobs in teaching or servicing professions.

Economic Constraints: As for economic constraints, it is worth pointing out that $\frac{3}{4}$ of domestic work and field-work is done by girls and women. Parents are hard put to separate themselves from this precious labour, due to technological backwardness. It is not yet possible to liberate girls and women from the burdensome tasks of drawing water, looking for firewood and doing other strenuous domestic work.

The field of scientific, technical and vocational training constitutes an outlet for the creation of jobs, the promotion of self-development and also the generation of income, especially for the young. The financial constraints and major challenges to the development of Nigeria have led to a sharp drop in girls enrolment levels in technical and vocational education. Even the streams that do exist are not adequately diversified, and do not take job market needs into account.

In some Nigerian families, education of the female is terminated due to economic constraints faced by their parents. This is because traditional African families placed greater emphasis on the education of males rather than the females (Mowoe,] 986). Women are given little or no opportunities to develop themselves academically and economically, therefore, it is a common view that women are far more disadvantaged and more vulnerable economically.

Educational Factors: Traditionally, girls had a tendency to follow the course of general education (except for a few technical schools, such as those for medicine, social services and home economics) by mimicry or identification with the local model, i.e. with their elders, who also concentrated on general education. Indeed, it has not always been easy for them to step off the beaten path.

When addressing the issue of the status of girls and women, we must first attack the matter of girls' school attendance levels and literacy for women. Society endorses the belief that the place of women and girls children is in the home. Since they have little or no access to school, or are obliged to leave school very early, there are not many girls or women found in the workforce.

Religious Beliefs: Religious beliefs have also reinforced the attitude of parents towards education for girls. Indeed, brandishing the threat of expulsion, parents set up ferocious opposition to the access of girls children to schooling, first of all, and then to scientific, technical and professional training later. Even today, they still have the unreasonable practice of keeping 13 year-old girls at home. Marriage is often arranged before the girl child attains puberty. These marriages would be less handicap if the girls were jointed to men of understanding who would allow them to continue their schooling or even, at a certain point, guide them towards professional activities.

In terms of involvement in the scientific arena, girls feel intimidated by the sciences from the outset. That is an area, which they have come to view as the realm of men. They feel unable to compete in this area, thereby giving cause to the attitude of men.

The society in general still views the females as inferior and does not expect them to be able to compete with males academically. The girls are treated differentially in the school situation; for example, they may be given jobs such as making tea for the teachers, and entertaining visitors, which may keep them away from their class work. In addition, girls performing well may sometimes be discouraged by being made to feel there is something wrong with them. For example, they may face insults such as being told only ugly women can be good, in science and mathematics or that they are being too "mannish". Unfortunately many girls begin to believe what they hear and becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy (Mboya, 1997).

It is well known that in African, the traditional roles assigned to girls and women in every domain of life are strongly reinforced. Women suffer from this phenomenon even in education milieus. Girls' natural attraction towards the so-called traditionally "feminine" trades such as secretarial work, health hairdressing, hotel services, sewing, home economics and social work, is seen in the makeup of students enrolment.

The Traditional. Status: Of women as procreator and producer obliges her to occupy a preponderant place as mother, wife and worker. She quickly enters conjugal life and is called upon to maintain the equilibrium of the family and of society (bringing up the children, taking care of the household, health care, working in the fields, carrying water, looking for and carrying wood etc.)

In traditional society, the status of the women is governed by customary law, as defined and exercised by men. Other than the power that is conferred upon a clan its numerous offspring, children

have an important socio-economic value. A woman only earns respect and consideration in her husband's family if she brings children into the world and preferably boy children. That is also the condition which allows her to enjoy family heritage if she becomes widowed. At the same time, the more daughters she has, the more they can lighten her load by contributing to farm and household work. According to Uku (1991) the place of the women in the traditional African societies was in the kitchen.

The Burden of Culture: The burden of culture is still very present in the peripheral regions which were scarcely touched by the missionaries and received little investment as far as modern structures are concerned. The traditional oral literature, which is still very much alive, still transmits ideas about the inferiority of women. According to traditional tales, it would seem that the woman is not as intelligent" or as logical as a man. "The hen does not crow when the cock is around" says a proverb which is still quoted in conversations and used by judges (who are mainly males) as an argument in arbitration over family conflicts (Uku, 1991).

In reality, women are comforted neither in tradition nor in modern times. The equality of the sexes is far from being recognized in thought or in deed.

Traditionally, man was seen as the sole provider and a woman as only a receiver. Children were brought up within this environment. These strict roles affected both sexes in two distinct spheres; men in the public sphere, women in the private or domestic sphere.

Indeed, in the area of technology, many that believe women are totally helpless in this sector and it is therefore, at least have a chance of finding a good husband who will take good care of her as well as of us. Okeke (1997) states that "the patrilineal system of inheritance, which is practical in most parts of Nigeria, lowers further the status of women in the society. In this system only the male children can inherit from the family properties, especially land. As a result, male children are more highly prized and favoured in Nigeria than female children. This differential valuation is evident in the home, school and community. In a typical Nigerian family female children are made to work a lot more than their male counterparts, especially in house chores. Daughters get wakened up earlier, go to bed later than sons, received less quality and quantity food, receive less attention to health needs, have less hours to play and even get scolded more than sons when things go wrong in the house".

Parents who transmit stereotypes about the sexes by treating them differently are also a problem. Oyedipo (1991) affirmed that this is the major factor limiting women participation in national development, in certain cultures, priority is given to boys to go to school, while the girls are confined to household chores. Parents believe that the right place for their daughters is in the home, where they are supposed to take care of house chores and the smaller children while their mothers -leave home to work in the informal sector (commerce or field work). The girls has always been relegated to second place, especially by her male peers who qualify her as unintelligent or . intellectually incapable.

Another obstacle is the labour value of girl children, especially in poor families. Living at near subsistence level, with no means of hiring household help, mothers have to rely on their daughters (o perform domestic duties while they are out and involved with income generating petting trade; daughters in families where the mother is the bread winner become overworked. Hence, Wilson (1991) reveals that women experience a double oppression in the labour market as well as home. They can neither study nor aspire to any technical or vocational training whatsoever nor enjoy the pleasures of their age. They often end up dropping out of school, discouraged by their poor performance, and determined to relieve the burden on their mothers of paying very often unaffordable school fees. The low social value of women explains some parents opposition to schooling for girls children. These parents are convinced that a woman's place is in the home and that in any case, the beauty of a woman is best appreciated in her home.

Conclusion

The disparities between boys and girls has been noted everywhere, girls do not receive as good education as boys and are often confined to streams reserved just for them, and which are not as numerous as those reserved for their brothers. Mentalities must be changed as well as ideas people have formed about the place women must occupy in society and the role they are supposed to play in the groups and institutions they belong to.

Despite the limits mentioned above, the emancipation of women must necessarily be achieved through education, by raising the awareness of parents and by society. It is urgent that an information programme for parents be set up. They must also be made aware of their responsibility to allow their children to reach their full potential. Furthermore, girls must be made aware that the quality of their professional future depends on their education.

Recommendations

1. Enough effort should be devoted by the school authorities to incite changes in the attitudes of both the parents and daughters in regarding science, technical and vocational education as a male domain and girls to stop doubting their ability and manage to show boys that they are just as capable.
2. Women education should be made compulsory state policy. Technical education is a vehicle that can enhance the quality of women in the society, and equip them to participate better in the process of national development as actors instead of passive observers.
3. There should be provisions of technical and financial support for women's initiatives and institute positive discrimination in favour of women to help them gain access to good income generating jobs through suitable training and acquisition of skills and experience.
4. There should be reinforcement of measures encouraging school attendance for girls i.e. extension measures guaranteeing free schooling for girls to technical and vocational-education. To encourage the orientation of girls towards areas not traditionally reserved for their sex (auto mechanics, welding etc).
5. Some steps should be taken which once put into operation, will favour girls' access to and an increase in their members in technical and vocational education. This will be achieved by" awarding prizes to the ten girls receiving the best results at the end of year examinations, in addition to making special concessions for girls entering the secondary cycle at the late age, and the creation of boarding schools for girls in technical schools.

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