THE ROLE OF WOMEN EDUCATION IN THE EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN FOR NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract

The complimentary role women play in the development of nations makes education very necessary for women. In any modern society, women play multi-faceted roles and education provides opportunity for women of all categories to be empowered for national development. This paper discussed the role of women education in the empowerment of women. The role of women in the society whether educated or not was also outlined. Other things discussed in the paper included the role of women education in national development, problems militating against women education and problems affecting women’s access to development services. Recommendations were made as a way forward in ensuring the education of women because women education is fundamental for any meaningful national development.

It is often said that if you “educate a man, you educate an individual but if you educate a woman, you educate a nation”. This saying is true because the contributions of women to the overall development of nations cannot be overemphasized. In a modern society like Nigeria, a woman plays multiple roles and education provides opportunity for women of all categories and is the only sure way of uplifting womanhood as well as achieving balanced development in any nation. Education for women is a key to improved family health and socio-economic status of the society; it is a veritable agent of change for the better. Education gives women access to the chances and the choices available for them in the society, enables them to know what to do, to who, how, when and why.

People have different opinions and views about women and their role in the society. There are those who believe that women are only to be seen and admired, used but not heard. Others are of the opinion that women are just necessary evils that men cannot do without. In a modern society like Nigeria, women have vital roles in their families, the society and the nation; they are home makers and centers of the family for any meaningful development. According to Nwagbara (2003), a woman is a great wealth to the family and the society at large and to be developed is to increase from a particular standard of living to another. Ja’afaru and Chambani (2000) however, observe that everywhere in every part of the world, women have always been considered inferior to men because of their low performance in education which has hampered their ability to realize their full potentials. Abacha (1995) notes that education is one of the greatest equalizer of opportunities that will uplift the status of women. Suffice it to say here that Abacha’s prediction is coming to pass. Today, women are seen rubbing shoulders with men in all spheres of life. They are teachers, doctors, lawyers, engineers, senators, ministers, Pastors, etc. the list is inexhaustible.

The Role of Women in the Society

In a gender sensitive society like Nigeria, women’s role can be classified into three major groups, namely: reproductive, productive and community managing activities.
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i. Reproductive Role: This role encapsulates child bearing and upbringing responsibilities as well as domestic chores. It does not only take care of biological functions of reproduction but also takes care of the maintenance of the workforce (the men and working children) as well as the future workforce (infants and children of school age) (Salami, 2012).

ii. Productive Role: Women work to be paid either in cash or in kind which include both market production with an exchange value and home production with actual value. Whether a woman works in the organized, private or public sector, buys or sells, does the chores at home as a housewife or works at the farms, she should be recognized as doing a productive work.

iii. Community Managing Role: These are activities undertaken by women at the community level as an extension of their reproductive role. This is to ensure the provision and maintenance of scarce resources for collective consumption such as food, water, healthcare and education. In Nigeria, such efforts are geared towards charity which is often voluntary, unpaid work undertaken whether or not it is convenient.

Considering the serious tasks ahead of the woman, women can save themselves the trouble of agonizing under oppressive yoke if they have at least some level of functional education.

The Role of Women Education in National Development

Good education aims at physical, intellectual, moral development and well being of the individual. It must bring about a positive change in the individual beneficial to the individual and his society. Women education therefore has major roles to play in national development among which are:

Political Awareness: With education, Nigerian women who had no political rights before now have rights, today, they can vote and be voted for. Education brings about political enlightenment and participation. Magaji (2012) observes that education enables women to exercise their rights and responsibilities as citizens of their society. It affords them the opportunity of making more efficient choices in terms of political participation and making life choices.

Economic Development: A good education gives a good job to a woman for the development of her family and community. Apart from getting a well paid job, an educated woman is better in business. Women constitute an integral part of the nation’s manpower, a major part in the labour force. In some homes, they are the breadwinners because they have more lucrative jobs than their husbands, probably because they have acquired higher educational qualifications that make them earn more than their husbands.

Development of Social Status: An educated woman can hold herself in any class or society, express her opinion freely and contribute to the development of social life of her community. Education also helps women to control their lives, have better bargaining power and to be better mothers with improved relationship with their spouses. Unwanted quarrels and unhealthy suspicion are prevented or handled in civilized manners.
Cultural Value: The woman naturally, is more of a custodian of culture than the man. An educated woman is one who is cultured and knows how to behave in a proper manner no matter the provocation. She is gentle, polite and respectful (Pemida, 2006). As mother is the best person to instill societal norms and values to the future generation (her children). Being educated is an added advantage because she will do it in a civilized and acceptable manner when compared to the illiterate.

Realization of the Importance of Children: Education makes mothers to be more aware of their responsibilities to their children. Children thrive and learn quickly when their mothers are educated. Nigerian women have spearheaded the education of their children and many times they have denied themselves the essential things of life such as good food, decent clothing, great opportunities and comfort, all in their bid to get their children educated. Mothers do not consider any sacrifice too much for their children and such mothers go to the extent of losing one thing or the other for their children’s education because they know the importance of education.

National Unity and Reconstruction: Education has made the Nigerian women aware of the need for national unity, reconstruction and security. Today, there are many women associations with membership and activities cutting across the whole country. Their message is national unity and security. There are also lots of women voluntary organizations that contribute in various ways to develop the nation.

In addition to the above, the purpose of women education is to contribute to their lives, help them adapt to the society, develop and broaden their minds and have all round development. Women education should also help to prepare young adolescents and young adults to be able to cope with domestic work and family life. It also helps to develop in the women folk social, economic and political sophistications in their ability to understand, participate in life and finally to be good citizens. From the foregoing, it is clear that women’s access to qualitative and functional education is the basis upon which the foundation of developmental project is laid. Nigeria is a member of the United Nations (UN), a body committed to women development and coupled with changes taking place around the world; Nigeria cannot stand aloof from taking concrete steps to ensure functional education of women.

Problems Militating Against Women Education
As the world continues to transform, the issue of women education becomes very significant and relevant. However, there are a number of problems facing women education. It may not be possible to discuss all these but few major ones include:

1. **Early Marriage:** In some places, young girls are married off at the age of 11–13 years which does not allow girls to acquire basic education. These girls often end up with Vesico Virginal Fistula (VVF) because they are too young for child bearing. This practice only succeeds in depriving the girl child from attending school and being useful to herself and the society.

2. **Religious and Socio-cultural Beliefs:** Societal values, beliefs and traditions have continued to influence the aspiration, education and achievement of women due to the high degree of sex discrimination. In the Nigerian socio-cultural context generally, women are commonly and best employed at home as domestic tools mainly fit for household chores, not to be heard,
not to exhibit any right, authority or power (Moda, 1992). In most nations of the world, women are regarded as second class citizens, subordinates to men, weak, emotive, non-initiative, submissive, non-aggressive, loving and tender hearted. Unfortunately, religion which should encourage the recognition of both male and female as God’s creatures and being equal before God only emphasize that a women should be submissive to her husband in every circumstance. Women are discriminated against even within religious cycles.

3. **Sex-role Stereotyping:** This is an impediment to economic and leadership empowerment of women through education. The opposing force of sex stereotyping is also an obstacle to a woman’s economic betterment. No matter the amount of years the educated Nigerian woman spends acquiring skills and experience, she is still a home manageress, hence the derogatory male chauvinist saying, that, “a woman’s education ends in the kitchen”. As a result, some have their daughters married than send them to school.

4. **Poverty:** The level of poverty is so high in Nigeria that many people cannot afford to send their children and wards to school especially the female children because of lack of money. For example, if parents cannot afford to send all their children to school because of financial problems, it makes more sense to send the boys since it is they who are going to be the breadwinners of the family. The girls are sent to the farms and others jobs to source for money for the boys to be sponsored in school.

**Problems Affecting Women’s Access to Development Services**

There is urgent need to look at some of the nagging problems that affect women’s access to the various development services. According to Moda (1992), corroborated by Fadeyi, (2009) and UNICEF (2009), these problems include:

i. Absence of independent services for women especially in places where men and women do not mingle with one another freely.

ii. Lack of sufficient free time for women due to excessive domestic work.

iii. Most of the programmes planned for the women especially rural women are executed in the urban centres which imply their being excluded and non-involvement.

iv. Difficulties in integrating urban change oriented features into the rural lifestyle of the people.

v. Multiplicity of agencies who deliver conflicting information and ideas to the women.

vi. Cultural and religious restrictions for women and

vii. Natural hatred and petty jealousies that persist among women themselves.

**Conclusion**

Although few Nigerian women have been recognized both nationally and internationally through education or political appointment, their achievements are indeed insignificant considering the vast majority of the female population. So far, the empowerments of women suffer many impediments, which is why it cannot be said that the Nigerian woman has actually been empowered. Despite all governments’ efforts to improve the socio-economic life of its citizens, the Nigerian female population still looms in obscurity in the nation’s political and economic affairs. There is, therefore, an urgent need to redress the issue for effective social reconstruction.
Women education is fundamental for national development. Therefore if encouraged and given the opportunity, education will not only equip the women folk with the desired skills and expertise, but also empower them to make full use of the acquired knowledge, skills, and expertise to the utmost benefit of society.

**Recommendations**

1. There is need for the society to change its attitudes towards women education. Young girls and women should be encouraged to benefit from the fruits of education, not merely for their own self improvement, but for national development.
2. As Nigeria is supposed to be an egalitarian society, efforts should be made to train the women. This can be done by spending more money on women’s education by way of providing extra scholarship in secondary and post secondary institutions. Individuals and organizations should be encouraged to participate in financing women education.
3. Government at all levels should make efforts to implement laudable policies on women education and also intensify National awareness campaign on the importance of women education.
4. Women education centres should be established in each Local Government Area to promote adult literacy among women and organize remedial courses for the unfortunate girls that dropout of school for varied reasons and appear to have reached a dead end in their educational career.
5. Incentives should be given to women by way of employment and promotion opportunities to encourage them to learn and take up interesting and challenging careers, which will give them the security and income they need.
6. Daughters and wives should neither be seen as assets by their parents, nor properties by their husbands.
7. Early marriage should be discouraged. There should be laws banning early marriage until a girl attains a certain level of education.

**References**


