EDUCATIONAL DEVELOPMENT OF WOMEN IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

Education is essential for improving a woman’s living standards and enabling them to exercise a greater voice in decision-making in the family, community, place of work and public arena of politics. From century to century, education for women/girls has always been an issue in the world, especially in developing countries. Education has also been seen as the root causes of change to their cultural norms. Having education indeed does allow a person to make proper choices about their future life. However, this idea of choices has not always been the case in the countries where most of the population is not educated. This paper analyzed the significance of education by looking at the women with or without education in Nigeria. It is obvious that women with or autonomy when it comes to decision-making process that involves choices.

Development in the field of education has been essential for eradicating differences in gender-based educational attainment in the world. The goal of this article is to analyze the women’s education in Nigeria with focus on the importance of
education. Development is referred to here as discovering new knowledge about products, processes and services and then applying this knowledge to create new needs, which advances society toward change in one way or another (Pieterse, 2001). However, female education has been identified as more crucial for the advancement of nations than just education in general (McMicheal, 2004). It is now widely recognized that the social returns to female education is greatly exceeding those of male education because development cannot happen without the participation of women in society. Education empowers women to participate in the implementation of necessary social changes, for instance raising smaller and healthier families, while women with no education usually have more children (Wood, 1999).

A distinctive line could be drawn when one talks about educational advancement. This analysis focused on Nigerian women’s education as a comparison of women with education and those without education. In comparing the importance of women’s education, it is clear that women are essential in providing/source stability and good health to their families (Sachs, 1999). The purpose of this article is to examine the significance of education in women’s lives in all circumstances of their decision-making.

**Women with Education**

Development in the field of education has been an objective of the Government of Nigeria since its independence in 1960 (Sachs, 1999). The objectives of development are clear because many different stakeholders do consider education as both basic right and societal responsibilities too (Muchungu, 2003). In this way, there has been long outstanding cooperation between the government and Christian missionaries. Bogdan and Biklen (2003) noted that “The history of the development of African education is largely a history of the development of the grant-in-aid system”. The term ‘grants-in-aid’ refers to government’s money that assists a non-governmental system or project through voluntary agencies, in this case for educational systems. There is no doubt that with the result of this ‘grant-in-aid’ system; the Nigerian educational system quickly became more advanced than those of other West African countries (Wood, 1999).

Development of education for women in Nigeria has shown that educated girls on the average have better lives than those who are uneducated (Ministry of Education, 1988). Educated girls are more capable of making their own decisions rather than relying solely on their parents or families, allowing them to be more self-reliant. This indicates that education is a very important factor in the development of any society (Muthengi, 2003). There is no way that a country can achieve development without the participation of women in society and government. It is not just the participation of women in government that is the necessary solution, but the decisions that the government makes can be positively influenced by their participations (Ahlberg, 1991). A report by the Minister of Education indicates that the government’s long term framework for the development of the Nigerian women’s education will enable
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Nigerians to cope with the challenges of economic development and will allow Nigeria to sustain a large population while ensuring improvement in the standard of living and general quality of life (Ahlberg, 1991).

Without the education and participation of Nigerian women, it is difficult to imagine that the government’s plans will work (Ministry of Education, 1988). It can be argued that women should handle most of the decisions concerning social equality because they played an essential role in society. It is claimed that large numbers of girls are denied education because they are either kept at home or sent to other households to be domestic workers (McMicheal, 2004). As such, women’s education would be essential if the government could afford to train women in various fields.

Women’s education is very important, because women have a central role in the management of households (Ahlberg, 1991). However, the participation of women in society and government has helped immensely, especially in the campaign to control rapid population growth. The Minister of Education’s report indicated, “A campaign to promote family planning and maintain reasonable rate of population growth can be sustained by available resources”. The importance of women in the social realm and their presence in decision-making roles encourages the government to educate more women so that the population will not go out of control, which would have a negative effect both on the society and on the economy. The system of education is the significant factor in the development of society and is the only system people should rely on.

Bogdan and Biklen (2003) noted that acknowledging the education of women and girls had lagged seriously behind that of men, it called for increased efforts in this area because educated wives and mothers would contribute to general welfare of the home and community. In this case, one can see that education is believed to be of great importance for society’s growth in all forms of human socialization. Nigeria seems to have achieved more progress in the education of women than many countries in the West African region (Standard, 2003). Ironical the problem of this argument is that there are some ethnic groups inside Nigeria who ignored the idea of promoting women’s participation in education, mainly because they wanted to keep the girls at home for the benefit of the parents and not the girl’s benefit.

In Nigeria some saw the girls as a means for providing wealth by either marrying them or by ‘giving them’ to someone rich (Ahlberg, 1991). Girls help with cooking, preserving food, caring for children, cleaning the house, washing clothes and gardening. They milk cows, churn butter and make cheese (Ahlberg, 1991). It is believed that all human beings have the same consciousness that they are born with. In such a circumstance, women should have opinions about the decisions concerning their lives.

The good news is that the women’s movement has helped some Nigerian women to eradicate negative attitudes that girls face in schools, hospitals and bars.
Hence, guaranteeing education for women can be a nightmare considering some traditional beliefs, but it will make more services available to girls and families (Kajiado, 2000). In most local communities in Nigeria, girls do not receive the same educational opportunities as boys. Even when given the opportunity to be educated, girls typically face formidable barriers to the completion of their studies. Such barriers are either directly or indirectly related to issues surrounding reproductive health, sexual behaviour and maturation (Wood, 1999).

It has been reported that some of the main causes of school dropout in Nigeria include early marriage, pregnancy, lack of gender appropriate facilities in schools (such as latrines), low self-esteem, lack of money, harassment by male teachers and fellow students and the low value placed on the education of girls by their parents and society in general (Ministry of Education, 1988). Indeed, the government has been aware that Nigerian culture must still be maintained while advancing education.

Most Nigerian women who are educated see that progress that has been made is not enough to combat the vulnerability of girls (Muchungu, 2003). They claim that educational development is very significant for human progress and that more needs to be done to provide women with a sustainable future. Kajiado (2000) cited Mutua saying: The country cannot claim to be on the right course of development if the majority of women are illiterate. A larger percentage of the populations (women) are not receiving education to enable them to contribute effectively to the development of this country.

Education has become the only tool for combating poverty while it should be seen to be a right of everyone (Ambler, 1988). There is no need to allow boys to receive a better education than girls are. It is only that women are not physically strong like men, but intellectually; they are like any man on this planet. As a result, women without education pay heavy prices, because they do not say anything even though it is against their wills.

Women Without Education

Nigeria’s advancement in educating women can be compared with other West African countries. It can be argued that Nigeria has gained in this kind of comparison. Although the goal of universal education has not yet been reached, many advances have been made (Bogdan and Biklen, 2003). Even when problems seem to slow the progress that is being made, there is still a hope that one day universal education will be available to all Nigerians. As such, it can be argued that investing in women’s education yields massive economic and social benefits. Women with more education delay childbearing and bear fewer and healthier children among other demographic outcomes (Ambler, 1988). Indeed, Nigeria has made enormous strides toward universal enrollment; Nigerian parents and educators are very concerned about their children’s education (Pieterse, 2001). Although Nigeria has achieved relative political stability, poverty and
traditionalism remain two serious obstacles to achieving equal rights for women in Nigeria.

Moreover, government policy, legislation and the media favour women's rights, but the traditionally low status of women is hard to overcome in Nigerian society. Indeed, most of customaries law disadvantages women, particularly in the areas of property rights and inheritance (McMicheal, 2004). Girls are forced to accept situations they have not chosen, but must accept it because of traditional ways of life. Women follow this tradition because they have been marginalized by the system (Muthengi, 2003). Violence against women is also a serious and widespread problem in Nigerian society. This is because some traditional cultures permit a man to discipline his wife by physical violent means and is ambivalent about the seriousness of such problems as spousal violence or rape. This is a great blow to Nigerian society and the criminalization of such violence should be made a top priority.

Some believe that those who deny girls formal education face shortages of economic income (Bogdan and Biklen, 2003). Girls in many countries are frequently kept at home and away from school to do domestic work simply because the education of girls is not valued. The denial of girls’ education in any circumstance can be devastating for children because they lack guidance for their futures (Wood, 1999). It is not surprising to say that women do most of the activities in the household. It is also important to point out that the lack of education for women is real and has destroyed some women’s futures in terms of being forced to do what they are not willing to do (Pieterse, 2001).

Despite the fact that education should be a fundamental right for all children, including such girls, which will guarantee them self-esteem and the ability to choose what is good for themselves (Sachs, 1999). This suggests that uneducated women pay a great price and are disadvantaged in many social aspects. Most girls quit school because they have no food to bring to school because of restrictions from their parents (Kajiado, 2000). Society faces these problems whenever it attempts to achieve social development. There is a very considerable amount of evidence to suggest that girls’ education is turning to social advantage in life (McMicheal, 2004).

Educators have become increasingly aware that the solution to many crucial issues in Nigerian education is to address women’s needs and women’s education, although political participation remains an obstacle.

In certain developing countries, the relatively large number of women in tertiary education as compared to men can be explained by the fact that men usually have better employment opportunities than women (Standard Correspondent, 2003). It is certain that girls who do not go to school face many difficulties and are forced to accept the decisions of other people (McMicheal, 2004). Men often forget that people are endowed with certain rights that must be respected.
Analysis of Women’s Education

There is no doubt that there is a huge gap between women with education and women without education. Women without education have little sense of self-esteem, because other people make many of their decisions. The decisions made by other people often complicate their lives, because those who make decision always think for themselves and leave women with no freedom to choose for themselves (Muthengi, 2003). A good example is found in the Northern part of Nigeria, where people getting married often do not see each other until the wedding night (Ambler, 1988). The parents usually make the decision about whom the girl will marry. It is like a lottery – you might win if you are lucky and marry a good person, or you might lose and spend the rest of your life with someone you hate (Ambler, 1988). Women without education pay a great price in such communities where women are thought of as properties.

Furthermore, it is very clear that women without education pay a heavy price when making choices, because cultural norms often prevents them from choosing what they want. However, the reality remains that these cultural norms are man made rules (Wood, 1999). There has been no clear explanation of how these norms started. Women often do house work while men are just loitering around without doing anything meaningful. It could be argued that failing to give proper explanation of these norms has clearly shown that men’s greed was a cause of these norms in which they wanted to keep women in a lower level of society.

In the natural rights perspectives, there is a clear desire that no one has a right to deny anyone their natural rights, which they are born with. However, in the local communities of Nigeria, many women do not get the natural rights that they are born with. In this regard, it can be argued that it will be appropriate to protect women from the abuses of their natural rights. They should be allowed to manipulate their social and biological contributions. McMicheal (2004) noted that the United Nations report in its World Survey on the role of women in development acknowledged that: The bottom line shows that, despite economic progress measured in growth rates, at least for the majority of developing countries, economic progress for women has virtually stopped, social progress has slowed and social well-being in many cases has deteriorated and because of the importance of women’s social and economic roles, the aspirations for them in current development strategies will not be met.

Thus, this argument pointed to the fact that education in terms of development has not changed women’s suffering. In such a circumstance, it can be argued that women are still being marginalized despite the articulation of development through education that focused in improving women’s life.

This reflects the fact that women still have a long way to break the circle of abuse against them. Men often decide what is best for women and leave women’s suffer from these actions without caring about their conditions. However, the reality remains
that women are human beings who have consciousness like men (Wood, 1999). In this case, men as persons with their own minds should respect women.

Conclusion

Nigeria is still ahead of many African countries in terms of providing education for women. Even though women in Nigeria continue to constitute a minority in decision-making, whether in the management of the educational system, industry, commerce, professions, or even in wider political participation, there are some sorts of improvements. This gender disparity frustrates the achievement of general equality and the efforts to empower women through education. When making decisions regarding the educational curriculum, textbooks, or instructional programming, educators need to be sensitive to and plan for differences among students. Access to education is only one part of educational opportunities.

Another important aspect of education is the treatment of students, especially young women, during the process of their education. Literacy and other basic skills are absolutely vital to empowering women and without the skills acquired in primary school and secondary education, women’s life choices are limited. If women are going to fully participate in policymaking and implementation processes, it is important that impediments, which prevent women from participation in all Nigerian societies’ lives, be eliminated.

Recommendations

1) Given that the greatest danger to girls’ education at secondary level is perceived to emanate from pregnancy, every effort must be made by parents, teachers, mentors, and school counsellors to teach them about their sexuality and its management right from the age of reason.

2) The findings of the study show that generally there is need to carry out awareness campaigns to sensitise all stakeholders on the importance of education, especially for the girl child. It is important to create well-maintained single-gender boarding schools.

3) Girls should be targeted in terms of family life and sex education.

4) There is need to create projects and programmes that will increase the family income hence result in material empowerment. This will help parents to generate more income. The fund may help in financing to get rid of the laws that prohibit negative practices such as early marriages, female genital mutilation and sexual harassment leading to early and unplanned pregnancies.

5) Equality should be emphasised bearing in mind socio-cultural factors such as gender stereotypes as gender roles, negative traditional beliefs, attitudes and practices patriarchal descent system and religious beliefs.
References


