

WOMEN EDUCATION AND ITS IMPLICATIONS TO NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract

This paper examined women education and its implications to national development. Concept of women education was discussed. The paper highlighted importance of women education in national development. Problems militating against women education were identified to include: attitude of parents, fear of attitude of educated women and poverty. Recommendations were made such as: conferences, seminars and other sensitization programmes should be organized to create awareness on benefits derivable from women education; families should see education of the female folks as a priority and not as a choice. Re-orientation programmes should be organized in local communities by non-governmental female organizations to give talks to the women on why they should educate their female children.

Education is an instrument for change and development. It is through education that the individual's life can be affected positively; hence, Onyeachu (2006) asserted that education brings about changes in behaviour of an individual. When there are positive changes in the behaviour of an individual, the society will benefit. This will lead to a great improvement in national development. No wonder, Hassan (2009) regarded education as that which is critical in the development of modern societies. Since this is the case, there is every need to educate women in the society.

This paper is therefore looking into women education and its implications to national development. This will be examined under the following sub-headings:

1. Concept of women education
2. Importance of women education to national development
3. Problems militating against women education
4. Recommendations and conclusion.

Concept of Women Education

Women education can be seen as empowering women academically. In other words, women education entails fostering self-actualization by equipping women to become independent human beings who can assume responsibilities for their own lives and the lives of others. That is why Ukoha (2005) regarded women education as a *sine qua non* for the social, economic and political advancement of any nation. Ukoha (2005) therefore advocates for empowering women through education to contribute to their well being and that of their family, community and the nation at large. This underscores the need to have a thorough examination of the importance of women education in national development.

Importance of Women Education in National Development

Women education contributes immensely to national development in various ways. These include:

❖ Transmission of Social Values

Women played very vital roles in transmitting social values to their children and hence to the outer society. Observing this, Ukoha (2005) remarked that women have the greatest inclination to stay at home and spend long periods with their children; hence if educated, they would be able to influence more people and hence contribute more to the society. There is therefore the need to educate women properly as this will enhance their ability to transmit the social values and norms to their young ones, as they raise them during feeding, washing and training them. This means that women education not only help them in their individual families, it help in contributing positively to national development. That may perhaps be the reason why a saying goes thus: educate a man, you educate an individual, educate a woman, you educate a nation. (ANCOPSS, 2007).

No wonder, Federal Republic of Nigeria (2004) through her National Policy on Education remarked that education is an instrument for national development, to this end, formulation of ideas, their integration to national development and the interaction of persons and ideas are all aspects of education. FRN (2004) further noted that education foster the worth and development of the individual, for each individual's sake, and for the general development of the society. This underscores the reason why women should be educated for their own development and for the general society. No wonder Usman (2007) regarded the educated female as an asset to her family and nation. Hence ANCPOSS (2007) is of the opinion that educating the women folk is valid even in the twenty first century and hence conclusively remarked that:

The female is the bearer and care-taker of children. She is their first teacher and is in contact with them right from birth, to maturity. That is the more reason why educating a woman will have direct bearing in the life of their children, the family as well as the society at large. An educated girl eventually becomes an educated mother who has several advantages over uneducated one. She stands to be more productive in her home; she raises a healthy family, and is capable of guiding her children positive on all issues.

❖ **Economically**

Women education enhances national development in that it helps them to secure highly paid jobs just like their male counterparts who are highly educated. If women get highly paid jobs they will help in alleviating poverty both in their families and in Nigerian society in general. Ogbuagu (2004) therefore stressed that women education enhances women's access to and control over income and productive resources through *inter alia* improvement in relevant poverty-alleviating and employment-generating programmes. This means that women education helps to improve the economic condition in the family, in the rural community and even in the society in general. That may be the reason why gender policy is advocating for gender equality so that equal opportunity will be given to women thereby removing gender bias.

Emphasizing on the economic advantage of women education, Ayo-Sobowale (2006) asserted that allowing women access to education serves as an indicator to social progress. Ayo-Sobowale (2006) further stressed that investing in the education of females is the "single most cost-effective investment to improve standards of living in developing countries." This shows that women education enhances further development of the citizenry since it improves the standard of living of the citizenry. To that end, Ofodile (2009) noticed that:

Women are the majority of the world's agricultural producers, playing important roles in fisheries, forestry as well as farming. In many places of the world, women are responsible for providing food for the families. Food security depends on the availability, accessibility, adequacy and acceptability of food.

In each of these areas, women contribution is critical as food producers, as processors and preparers of the food stuff required to keep the family alive. These attributes of the female folks have very big positive implications to national development.

❖ **Politically**

Women education plays very vital roles in politics. When women are educated, it will help in exposing them to politics especially those women that have the desire and charisma to do certain work if given the opportunity, in decision making in the government. If this is done, it will create the opportunity for women to contribute their own quota in national development. To that end, Ogbuagu (2004) described women empowerment as liberation from economic, social, cultural, legislative and political bondage. Ogbuagu (2004) further expressed that woman empowerment through education is a way by which disadvantaged people are enabled to gain independence and capacity to overcome structured inequalities and inequalities that have kept them away from needed resources, land, credit, technology, power, decision-making and information. For rural women, this means gaining access to productive and reproductive factors that build their capacity for self-improvement and an escape from discriminatory practices in all spheres of life. This means total reduction from poverty.

❖ **Cultural Values**

Importance of women education is equally noticed in her social behaviour. The educated woman is cultured and gentle. Appreciating this, Egbuna (2007) asserted that, the educated woman is a cultured woman who knows how to behave in a proper manner. She is gentle, polite and respectful. This means that if a woman is cultured, gentle and respectful, she is in a better condition to train her children to behave well and be cultured as well and moreover, she will occupy a responsible position in her place of work. This will lead to national development.

Tenebe (2011) has observed that the overall development of the country may not be realized if the education of the women is not given the priority it deserves. He therefore advocated for women education to be taken as something very important in the country for academic development and leadership opportunities. To that end, Tenebe (2011) emphatically stressed that if women are developed mentally and intellectually, they can whisper the right thing to their sons and husband which can help make the world a better place. That is why it is very necessary to educate women for great development of the country.

In spite of the positive implications of women education to national development, there are some obstacles to women education that needs to be identified for immediate correction.

Problems Militating Against Women Education in Nigeria

There are myriads of problems militating against women education in Nigeria. These include:

1. Attitude of Parents

Some families do not encourage female education. This is because of the assumption that the female will marry and move to another family whereas the male will stay and look after their father's family. To that end, Usman (2007) lamented that Nigerian females like in most societies of the world have always been considered inferior to males. Usman (2007) complained bitterly that this consideration came about as a result of the belief of some families that the male child not only ensures the continuity of the family name but also increases the family fortune; hence, investing in girls' education is therefore seen as investing in the family she will be married into. This is a very bad discriminatory attitude which affects women education thereby retarding national development.

2. Fear of the Attitude of Educated Women

This is another problem militating against female education in Nigeria. Some parents do not allow their daughters to be educated because of the fear that they will be arrogant and self asserting thereby making it difficult to marry because of the assumption that educated girls may not make good wives.

3. Poverty

Many families in Nigeria are poor. As a consequence, they are left with the choice of who should be trained in their families. The choice to be made now remains only in enrolling male children with very little emphasis on education of the girls. Noticing this, Ukoha (2005) lamented that in most societies, especially in the developing countries, women education is given secondary consideration *vis-a-vis* the education of men where parents have to make a choice because of economic or other constraints. Boys are more often than not given the option of attaining education in preference to the girls.

In many cases, it is only in educated families that parents always decide to train all their children irrespective of gender. Observing this problem generated by poverty, Usman (2007) lamented that poverty poses a great challenge to the education of the girl child as it prevents many families from enrolling and training all or some of their children in school. The girl-child is often the one who does not get enrolled or who is withdrawn thereafter, to enable the boy-child to continue his education. Girls thus withdrawn from schools are either put on the streets to hawk or sent to the cities (within and outside Nigeria) to work as house helps. This is to help families make more money that will eventually be used in educating the boy-child.

4. Influence of Culture

This is another problem that militates against education of girls in Nigeria. Some cultures restrict the education of female folks. For instance, in some places like in the Northern part of the country, married girls are kept in *Purdah*. *Purdah* is a very big barrier to female education, since girls in *Purdah* are not allowed to move about, they always stay indoors and when they are outside their matrimonial homes, they are only allowed to move about when veiled. Since veiling is not part of the school uniform, such girls are not allowed to register in some schools. As a consequence, such small girls are compelled to stay in their matrimonial homes as typical illiterates. This militates against national development, since such girls are not allowed to contribute their quota to national development.

5. Gender Bias

Gender bias as a result of culture affects the society greatly. Uwah (2005) complained that in some societies, culture based their rating on sex thereby delineating certain roles as feminine and other as masculine. Onyeachu (2009) observed that even concerning school subjects, some subjects are assumed to be for males and others for females and because of this, girls do not take such courses. One can just imagine the negative effect of such discrimination. This culture or societal belief about girls affects their choice of subjects and their advancement in knowledge which will lead to national development.

6. Discriminatory Condition at School

Girls are not given equal attention in the school. Usman (2007) expressed surprise that classroom observational studies in Nigeria have also shown that both male

and female teachers do not give equal opportunities to girls for classroom participation with their male counterparts particularly in technical education and science subjects. This attitude made the females believe that the sciences are masculine subjects and as such, they are preserved for the males. As a consequence, Brewton (2001) stressed that the girls are less likely to take advanced courses in science and mathematics or technological careers than their male classmates. Uwah (2005) therefore lamented that this disparity as a result of gender stereotype is felt even in the labour force because it has led the female students to avoid school subjects such as engineering, mathematics, science and technology. This has resulted to shortage of manpower in some professional fields; hence, it affects national development.

7. Early Marriage

This is one of the problems militating against education of women. Usman (2007) and ANCOSS (2007) believed that families resort to early marriage of their under aged female children as a way of maintaining female chastity, for economic gains or religious reasons. This is fraught with many unpleasant consequences associated with health risk and maternal mortality. A situation where these female children are given out very early for marriage, may in most cases affect their education as a result of child bearing or other circumstances surrounding them. This affects national development.

8. Paying Little Attention to Education of Girls

Women education is not seen as that which is important. Observing this, Ayo-Sobowale (2006) lamented that, in the area of equal educational opportunities which National Policy on Education emphasized, it is a lot of lip service since many good intentions are still on the shelves. The nation's educational system seems to have been created for boys. This is because both the policy and delivery process see the student as a boy. Ayo-Sobowale (2006) aptly described the Nigerian educational system thus:

The system views the student as a person who has time to study because his work at home is not essential to the household; who is not physically, culturally or spiritually endangered in the school setting; who is not expected to marry early or become pregnant; who functions in an atmosphere of intellectual respect for his abilities; who has appropriate textbooks, that reflects his concerns in life; who is taught by people like himself who can act as role models; and whose parents see the relationship between education and advantage in later life. That student is a boy. And a lot of resources have gone into his education.

Ayo-Sobowale (2006) therefore noted with dismay that the gender picture of educational policy implementation and achievement seems to have forgotten the other 50% potential school clientele, that is females. Ayo-Sobowale (2006) further observed that crisis in funding, confusing management and government policies take their toll on education and at the end of the day when corners are cut, it is the female children and female education that suffers the brunt. The result is gender inequality in education. Usman (2007) therefore lamented that in spite of the stress on elimination of all gender

stereotyping in education, a great gap still exists between male and female access to education.

9. Poor Perception of Female Education By the Society

Some members of the society believe that women's education ends in the kitchen; as a consequence, such families do not encourage female education. On that note, Akudo (2009) regretted that up till now, in Nigeria, preference is given to the education of male children by some families and thus giving rise to greater number and percentage of male children being enrolled in schools than their female counterparts. Akudo (2009) further lamented that some people, especially in the rural areas, still believe that female education ends in the kitchen and therefore do not encourage their female children to have access to education. The negative effect of this ugly situation is that if women are not encouraged to have access to education, education of their children will be retarded. This is because a woman with little or no education with her less paid job will not contribute much in the education of her children not to talk of playing vital roles in national development. What a big setback to national development.

Recommendations

For effective women education in Nigeria, the following recommendations were made:

1. Conferences, seminars, workshops and other sensitization programmes which include radio and television programmes should be organized by the three tiers of government, religious bodies, non-governmental organizations as well as successful educated women in the society to create awareness and educate the women on the benefits derivable from educating their female children. This will help them to change their negative attitude towards women education.
2. Successful married educated women should be invited to give talks to parents to show that the female education helps them to even look after their families well since they have better jobs; hence their earnings are even extended to their families.
3. Re-orientation programmes should be organized in local communities by non-governmental female professors and doctors where educated female professors and doctors will be invited as resource persons to present papers and give talks to urban and rural women on the humble, gentle and cultured nature of educated women in the society. Doing this will help to remove the old conception that educated women are arrogant and self asserting.
4. Religious bodies should as well assist in the orientation programme by organizing seminars in their churches to show how educated women have brought about positive changes in their churches through their humble nature and enlightened contributions.
5. Families should see education of the female folks as a priority and not a choice. This is because when the female children in every family or majority of the families are educated, they (women) will get highly paid jobs, this will help to improve the economic conditions of their families, their matrimonial homes and even in the

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families where they are born and in the society in general. Doing this will minimize the incidence of absolute poverty in families.

6. State government should organize seminars where the traditional rulers should be invited to present speeches on the evil effects of illiteracy as a result of early marriage both in the families and in the society in general. This will help in solving the problem of keeping young girls in *Purdah* as illiterates. Women should encourage their daughters to be educated before marriage.
7. Parents should allow their children to study courses of their interest and abilities irrespective of their gender.
8. Teachers as well should encourage their students to study courses of their talents and interest, instead of telling them that some courses are for girls while some are for boys. Doing this will help to remove the gender bias.
9. Parents should give equal educational opportunities to all their children whether male or female. This will help in national development, since every child is given opportunity to play his or her own roles irrespective of being male or female.

All the tiers of government, non-governmental organizations, religious organizations, traditional rulers, school administrators, teachers, parents, philanthropists, alumni of schools, women professors and doctors as well as other educated women in the society should put their heads and hands together towards the education of women and equalization of educational opportunities for all and sundry irrespective of gender as epitomized by Federal Republic of Nigeria (2004) National Policy on Education. Doing this will lead to national development.

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