
Regenerating Women Education for Poverty Eradication, Self Reliance and National Development

By

FESTUS CHUKWUNWENDU AKPOTOHWO, Ph.D
*Department of Vocational and Industrial Education,
Niger Delta University,
Wilberforce Island.*

And

EMILY OGADIMMA IBE
*Department of Office Technology and Management,
Federal Polytechnic,
Bali, Taraba State.*

Abstract

This paper examines the place of education as a catalyst for eradicating poverty in the country. It examines the regeneration of education as a catalyst for women empowerment in alleviating poverty in Nigeria. Utilizing secondary sources of data, the paper revealed that in spite of all the laudable goals of education, Nigerian women and girls still suffer a lot of constraints and inhibitions which militate against their personal development and the inability to contribute meaningfully towards national development. The paper showed that, lack of easy access to education has made women and girls vulnerable to poverty and intentional neglect. The paper concludes that committed investments on education of girls and women have the potentials for high returns on the economic development in terms of increase in income, entrepreneurship, better understanding and utilization of existing health facilities. It was recommended amongst others that: Government should involve women in policy formulation that affects them to help them come up with policies that are relevant, responsive and sensitive to the plight of all women. There should be improved quality of educational service delivery to enhance girls' participation and improve learning outcomes, retention, and achievement by providing in-service training for teachers, administrators and inspectors and by evaluating the curricula for gender sensitivity.

Journal of Resourcefulness and Distinction, Volume 5 No. 1, April, 2013

Education is the most potent instrument for the emancipation of any group of people. The belief that education is the basis for full promotion and improvement of status of women is also recognized as a tenet of developmental strategy. There can be no sustainable development if women remain ignorant, disenfranchised and discriminated against. It is a known fact that women and girls are undervalued all over the world. Okakulein (2006) argued that women all over the world have been categorized under the disadvantaged groups of people and society itself has systematically and consistently pursued the socialization of women into accepting the notion of a disadvantaged group. This notion needs to be corrected through education which has proven to be a veritable tool for emancipation of the mind and as an agent of social change especially in developing countries. Improving and widening access to education, especially basic education is an objective in itself, as well as conduct to accelerated social and economic development.

The prevailing economic problems in Nigeria, prompted by the global economic crisis of 1980s and negative effect of Structural Adjustment Program (SAP) introduced by the government in 1986 to rectify the problem has undermined the country's effort towards economic growth, thus causing a lot of hardships to people. These hardships eventually resulted to high scale poverty. Educating women and girls especially at the primary and secondary levels can help to reduce poverty by increasing their productivity, reducing infertility and improving health and equipping them with the skills they need to participate fully in the economy and society at large. Having recognized education as instrument par excellence for effective national development as well as a dynamic instrument for poverty eradication, numerous strategies, policies and programmes were conceived and implemented by successive Nigerian governments since 1985 Nairobi Declaration and World Declaration on Education for All. Unfortunately, a cursory look at the pattern of women's involvement in education in Nigeria reveals abysmal low levels in spite of the laudable objectives of education.

Ojuolape (2000) observed that women still suffer a lot of constraints and inhibition which militate against personal and national development. As much as 61% of Nigerian women in 1991 population census suffer from intellectual poverty. The quantity and quality of education available to Nigerian women will invariably determine the developmental pace of Nigerian families, children from such homes and the Nigerian nation at large. It has been noted that what Nigerian women are today and what they will be tomorrow depends on what plans Nigerian has for her women. Empowering women educationally has helped some countries increase and sustain economic development thereby reducing poverty. Therefore, if Nigerian women are inspired and given the right facilities and support, they will prove successful in politics, media, education, science, technology, business, etc. This paper, however, seeks to examine the following: factors inhibiting women education, relationship between

Regenerating Women Education for Poverty Eradication, Self Reliance and National Development

education and poverty, and how investing in women education would help in poverty eradication, self reliance and national development.

Causes of Poverty

World Bank (1995) looks at poverty as hunger, lack of shelter, a state of being sick and unable to see doctor, losing a child to illness brought about by unclean water, powerlessness, lack of representation and freedom. The absence of reliable data has made it impossible to give a comprehensive analysis of the trend of poverty in Nigeria. However, the World Bank's Poverty Task Force (1995:23) has identified the following as the main causes of poverty:

1. Limited or lack of access to education and other basic services
2. Inadequate access to employment opportunities.
3. Inadequate access to physical assets, example land and capital and minimal access by the poor to credit even on a small scale.
4. Inadequate access to means of supporting rural development in poor regions.
5. Inadequate access to markets where the poor can sell goods and services.
6. Low endowment of human capital.
7. Destruction of national resources leading to environmental degradation and reduced productivity.
8. Lack of inclusive participation, which is the failure to include the poor in the process of designing development programs.

The poor state of Nigeria's education also has its turn on the poor people. At primary school level, the shortage of funds resulted to delays in the payment of teachers salaries. Usually, the worst hit, are young girls whose parents never wanted to send them to school because they are usually seen as helps to households. Poor women, because of their lack of education, often have too many children, and poor health conditions, frequently suffer from hunger and malnutrition and related illnesses which often undermine their productivity.

Concept of Education

Okafor (2000) defined education as a process of acculturation through which the individual is helped to attain the development of all his potentialities and their maximum activation when necessary according to right reason and thereby achieve his perfect self fulfillment. Education according to Offorma (2009) is the process of providing information to an inexperienced person to help him or her develop physically, mentally, socially, emotionally, spiritually, politically, and economically. It is a process through which a person acquires knowledge, skills, habits and values that enable him to function effectively as a member of the society.

Majasan (2000) asserted that "development in any society is anchored primarily to education progress". He saw education as a corner stone of economic and

social development. According to him, the future of the world and of individual nation hinges more than ever before on the capacity of individuals and countries to acquire, adapt, and advance knowledge.

In fact, education is central to development. It empowers people and strengthens nations. It is a powerful “equalizer” opening doors to all to lift themselves out of poverty. It is critical to the world’s attainment of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). The only effective way to meaningfully contribute to emancipation of women in Nigeria is to widen their access to quality education. When women are given access to requisite education, relevant to their needs and environment, they will gradually become self sustained, visible and recognized in the mainstream of activities both at home and within the society at large.

Relationship between Poverty and Education

Poverty manifests in various ways, and according to Psachropoulos (2002), poverty is evidenced in lack of access to, and control over productive resources, physical goods and income, which results in individual and/or group deprivation, vulnerability and powerlessness. However, World Bank (1995) explained that education especially basic education, helps to reduce poverty indicators mentioned above, by increasing the productivity of the poor, by reducing fertility and improving health and by equipping people with the skills they need to participate fully in the economy and society.

In Nigeria, as in most African countries, access to education and training has lagged behind other developing regions, which has been a major factor in the low growth rates and high poverty levels witnessed in the country. Statistics reveal that Africa has one of the lowest rates of female literacy and the highest gender disparities in adult literacy. Approximately one quarter of girls in countries are not in school in Sub-Saharan countries, that including Nigeria and 62% of the 155 million adults who cannot read nor write are women (Ojobo, 2008).

Challenges against Women Education

According of Ojobo (2008) women make up 50% of the Nigerian population, yet their contribution is insignificant to the nation’s progress and growth. Of all the problems confronting women in the realization of other rights, education is the most basic. This is because the key to realization of all other rights of girls and women be it social, economic and political lies in the catering for the development and empowerment of women educationally. Basically, the problem confronting women education ranges from cultural, economic and in some cases to religious factors among others.

Regenerating Women Education for Poverty Eradication, Self Reliance and National Development

1. **Access to education:** The problems of male/female disparity in access to education in Nigeria is not restricted to the primary schools, rather, it is almost the same for both secondary and tertiary institutions. For instance, according to the National Universities Commission (NUC), National Board for Technical Education (NBTE) and National Commission for Colleges of Education (NCCE), 1999 statistical data as cited by UNICEF (2001), revealed that out of a total number of about 500,000 students that were admitted in all tertiary institutions in Nigeria, female enrolment represented only 34 percent. This imbalance in the number of male and female enrolment is more pronounced in science and engineering disciplines in universities.
2. **Poverty and economic crises:** Reflecting on the level of poverty and economic crisis, UNICEF (2001) observed that 70% of the Nigerian population is living below poverty line, and women are sent to generate income for families by selling wares in the market on the street among other things that take them away from school. This condition never placed the girl-child in a vantage position to benefit from formal education which invariably would equip her for the world of work; being self reliant and consequently, contributing to national development in the long run.
3. **Early marriage and teenage pregnancy:** Early marriage and teenage pregnancy have also militated against girls' attendance, retention and advancement in schools. UNICEF (2001) reiterated that about 30% of school-age girls drop out of school having already begun childbearing before the age of 18. This situation has to a large extent reduced the productive capacity of the girl-child thereby worsening the poverty problem in Nigeria due to outright lack of self reliance.
4. **Parents' education:** How much education a girl's parents have is probably the most important factor in determining her educational opportunities. Educated people want to appreciate education for their children and often push them to acquire at least as much education as they themselves have. Research has shown that the level of education attained by fathers was systematically associated with the schooling of daughters (King and Masson, 2001). Although King and Masson positions are still under critical contest, it is generally believed that the girl-child education is closely related to the type of educational opportunities that were

available to the parents. This paper believes that it is not parents education per se that determine the girl-child educational opportunities, but problem of attitude, cultural inclination and poverty conditions.

5. **Family size:-** From the foregoing, it is obvious that family size associated with other factors, including a family's income and parents' (especially mothers) education and occupation invariably has influence on women education. A study of parents' aspirations for their children carried out by King and Mason (2001) found that, larger families with children under 13 years of age had lower aspirations of their children especially their daughters than did smaller families. This situation has not help the girl-child to develop her potentials towards making a better living through self-reliance and have been denied the opportunity of contributing to national development.
6. **Parents attitude/ignorance:-** The plight of women in terms of education is further compounded by illiteracy resulting from negative attitude of parents towards women education. Some parents are usually reluctant to send their girl-child for formal education especially to higher levels like their male counterparts. Umar (1996) noted that the girl-child is valued not for who she is, her potentials or achievements but for her services, submissiveness and at best good looks. Traditional Nigerian communities believe that the place of women is in the kitchen or at home has compounded women's desire for quality education thereby compounding their poverty conditions.
7. **Religious factor:-** Religion, especially Islam is usually associated with low female participation particularly in education. Ojobo (2008) held that the practice of Purdah in Islam makes it difficult for married Muslim women to fully benefit from the educational system. The history of formal western education which is associated with Christianity and the fear to convert is still very much an issue in the some part of the country. This probably explains the complete backwardness of many communities because mankind's immense progress, which is evident in many landmarks, is attributed to education.
8. **Opportunity cost:-** The opportunity costs of girls' schooling are high for poor households in developing countries and often exceed the opportunity cost of boys schooling (Herz, 1991). They further said that the costs of education to household

Regenerating Women Education for Poverty Eradication, Self Reliance and National Development

affect the enrolment and the dropout rates. Unforeseen incidents such as illness and death of a household member can mean that daughters are required to drop out of school.

Role of Women Education in the Eradication of Poverty in Nigeria

One way of reducing poverty problems is for individuals, organizations and government to direct attention towards investing in education especially that of women. Education would not only improve women's ability to acquire and use information, but it will also deepen their understanding of themselves and the world, enrich their minds by broadening their experience, and improve the choice they make as consumers, producers and citizens.

Education will strengthen women's ability to meet their wants and those of their families by increasing their productivity, and their potential to achieve a higher standard of living. If women are educated, they can help in the promotion of entrepreneurship which is the foundation of development of small scale business. Women as entrepreneurs have the ability to plan, organize and manage their businesses and also work hard to see that their businesses succeed.

Investing in girls and women education will enhance their productive capacity, increase their income and make them better informed about their health and the life expectancy of their children, create incentives for reducing family size, which in turn will help reduce poverty. For instance, in Brazil, a woman who has completed primary education makes 91% of income more than her uneducated co-worker's income in the informal sector and 110% more than an uneducated woman in self-employment (Psachropoulos, 2002).

With basic education, women will be able to envisage new economic opportunities, adopt new technologies and change their methods of production and distribution. There is a wide range of self employment options and choice for more profitable alternative which only education can offer the possessor. By improving educational opportunities for girls and women, the programmes help women develop skills that allow them to make decisions and influence community change in key areas. In turn, these programmes have a positive impact on some of the most profound issues of our time: population growth, HIV and AIDS, peace and security, and the widening gap between the rich and poor.

It is worthy to note also that investing in education alone will not guarantee faster growth and development in any economy. When the economy is badly damaged, investment in education will result into a wasted venture if the government shows not real commitment. Therefore, improvement in infrastructure, health service,

accountability and transparency on the part of government and the collective will of the people can go a long way in poverty alleviation, self reliance and national development.

Conclusion

Women Education has a long history of successfully working with local partners to design, execute, manage and evaluate participatory, community-based initiatives to advance the conditions of girls and women. Educational programmes help girls enroll and stay in school and also help women gain access to or create new educational, financial, and social resources in their communities, improve their own lives, the lives of their families and the conditions in their communities.

For parents - and especially mothers - this means creating conditions that ensure their daughters who have equal access to basic education, are able to make informed decisions about their futures, and are able to protect themselves from trafficking, sexual exploitation, HIV and AIDS and other associated vices. One way of eradicating poverty is to ensure huge investments in education, especially, women education. This is because of its importance to economic development, increase in income and entrepreneurship for self reliance, better understanding and the utilization of existing health facilities, etc.

Empowerment of women by government should begin from formulation to implementation of policies that affect their lives and which can assist them assert their rights and develop their potentials so that they can contribute maximally towards the eradication of poverty and in the process, help in the development of the entire nation.

Recommendations

Based on the issues raised above, the following recommendations are proffered:

1. Adult literacy programmes should be encouraged and adequately supervised.
2. Financial incentives like special scholarship award, soft tuition loans and other financial grants can be specifically granted to female students to check talented and promising female girls from drifting away from education.
3. Government should involve women in policy formulation that affect them to help women come up with policies on education relevant, pertinent, responsive and sensitive to the plight of all women.
4. Improving the quality of educational service delivery to enhance girls' participation and improve learning outcomes, retention, and achievement by providing in-service training for teachers, administrators and inspectors and by evaluating the curricula for gender sensitivity.

Regenerating Women Education for Poverty Eradication, Self Reliance and National Development

5. Continuous research into factors affecting the education of women must be launched and supported by appropriate educational research organizations and governmental department.
6. Donor Agencies such as UNICEF, UNESCO, UNDP and British council's contributions towards women empowerment should be monitored by serious stakeholders for proper utilization and accountability.
7. Women on the other hand must organize themselves to meet the challenges of a positive and meaningful role in the struggle for national emancipation, development and progress through acquisition of functional education which will usher in a new lease of life in order to face squarely the challenges of poverty and other ills in the country.

References

- Herz, B. S. (1991). "Letting Girls Learn", *World Bank Discussion Paper* 113, Washington D.C: World Bank Publications.
- King, E and Mason, A. (2001). *Engendering development: Through gender equality in rights resources and voice*. Washington D.C.: Oxford University Press.
- Majassan, J. (2000)). *Qualitative education and national development*, Ibadan: Spectrum.
- Offorma, G.E. (2009). *Girl-Child Education in Africa*. Conference of the Federation of Women of Africa, Lagos, July, 16-19.
- Ojobo, J.A. (2008). Education: A catalyst for women empowerment in Nigeria. *Ethiopian Journal on Education & Science*. 4 (1), 23.
- Ojuolape, W. (2000). *Role of women as a wife; a mother and career women*. A paper presented at the Citizen Leadership Training Centre, Lagos, 22 March, 2000.
- Okafor, R.K. (2000). *Nigerian Teacher Education: A search for new direction*. Enugu, Fourth Dimension Publishers.
- Olakulein, F. K. (2006). Distance education as a woman's empowerment strategy in Africa. *Turkish Online Journal of Distance Education*. 7(1), 13.
- Psachropoulos, George (2002). *Returns on investment in education: A further update*. Washington D.C.: Policy Research Working Paper 2881.

Umar, K. K. (1996). 'Education of girl-child in Northern Nigeria: A case for counselling.' *The Counsellor* 14(22), 72-75.

UNICEF (2001). Girls education in Nigeria. *World Bank Report.*, New York: University Press.

World Bank (1995). *African development indicators*. Washington D.C. World Bank.

World Education Project (2012). The girl-child education and poverty issue in Africa. *International Journal for Girls and Women Education Initiative in Boston* 15(5)1-2.