
The Contribution of Educated Women to the Development of Nigerian Society

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Abstract

For time immemorial, women have made tremendous contributions to the development of their respective societies. These vary greatly with each successive stage of human development. Their contributions touch on every facet of human endeavour ranging from child birth, moral upbringing, better health and hygiene, nutritional values, advice to men as mothers, wives, sisters and kinswomen, religious, political and socio-economic developments. Hence, women are described as the heart-beat of the society, because little or nothing can be achieved without their influence either directly or indirectly in the affairs of men. But in spite of these laudable contributions, the male-dominated society has conspired to retard the development of women by not educating them. Societies with liberal educational policies toward women are fast developing while those with non-liberal educational policies toward women have continued to be underdeveloped. The paper argues that some of the setbacks to women education in Nigeria are poverty, cultural and religious practices, and the negative attitudes of the State in implementing policies that will encourage women education. The paper proffers some suggestions on how best the situation can be improved. The methodology used in this research is the secondary data source, by going through books, newspapers and journals.

Education is a medium through which people acquire knowledge, skills, awareness and consciousness from birth to death. Thus, it is an essential instrument any well focused society employs to ensure its survival and development in today's world of competition. To fasten the development of the society, both males and females need to be educated on equal basis without any form of disparity. The importance of education is clearly stated in the National Policy on Education (FRN 1981) as follows;

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Not only is education the greatest force that can be used to bring about redress, it is also the greatest investment that the nation can make for the quick development of its economic, Political, Sociological and human resources.

The above statement explains vividly that education is the bedrock upon which every sector of national development has its roots. However, in spite of the essential role played by the educational sector in the society, the Nigerian male-dominated society through cultural policies have deliberately suppressed the women group from accessing this important factor of development. This action has hampered human progress in view of the fact that women constitute half of the world's population and in Nigeria they make up 50% of the total population. According to the United Nation's Report (UN 1975):

Women are half of the world's population received one tenth of the world's income, perform two thirds of the world's working hours — own only one hundredth of the world's property. Two out of every illiterate people are women. Fifty (50%) percent of the illness in the third world could be prevented by better nutrition, water supply sanitation, immunization and preventive health education. The responsibility for which is usually taken by the women who in their capacity as either housewives or mothers ensure basic health conditions in the home.

With proper education, the output of women can be enhanced in the society through critical thinking, objective rationalization of their actions which will aid in creativity and straight forward assessment of their actions and inactions toward the development of themselves, their children, the home front and the entire society. As observed by Salman, Olawoye and Yahaya (2011), the advantages of women education include,

the better management of the home environment, effective and efficient use of health services, better improved management of hygiene and nutrition practices, reduced fertility, lower child mortality, longer life expectancy, better child health care, smaller families and better educated children.

The education of the woman is a powerful weapon of national development especially in Nigeria where social welfare and economic development are scarcely available due to rapid population, environmental degradation, and unpredicted climatic changes as well as poorly developed human resources. Achunine (2007) pointed out that empowering women intellectually, socially, economically and politically is an instrument for checking and redressing gender imbalance and enhancing the participation of women in decision-making, family life, community development and nation building. Once women are educated, they will acquire basic skills; knowledge and new techniques on how best to manage their lives; handle scarce resources, prepare

balanced diet; enhance good guidance and character training for good leadership; contribute to national wealth; and promote the spirit of patriotism and self-reliance for national development. The implication of this is that the children of the educated women are more likely to be sent to school and this will have positive effects on their education hence poverty reduction for generations to come. Sadik (1997) succinctly states that if a girl is given the opportunity to be educated, she will have the power to make choices; affect her nurturing environment in which to grow and change her society for the better.

Educated Women's Contribution to Nigeria's Development

In contemporary Nigerian society, the contributions of educated women have been appreciated because it is evident in different sectors of national development which were previously perceived as male-dominated. As noted by former President of Nigeria, late Umaru Yar'Adua in (Boer 2009:296) who stated that he had:

...Confidence in the ability of the womenfolk to perform any responsibility most creditably; ...this has been demonstrated by our sisters who have the opportunity to serve.... It is an established fact that women in position of trust have always demonstrated a greater capacity of trust, a greater capacity to deliver service and a greater for honesty, nationalism and patriotism.

As part of his appreciation of the role of women in the development of the country Goodluck Ebele Jonathan the current President of Nigeria, has even gone beyond the Beijing Conference demand for 30% appointment for women to 32% in his cabinet. It is on record that he has appointed 13 female Ministers in his cabinet which is more than that of any of his predecessors. These women are to help him in taking crucial decisions towards the achievement of Nigeria's Vision 20:2020. President Jonathan Goodluck is also the first President to order the admission of women into the Nigerian Defence Academy (NDA) and the first President to appoint a female Chief Judge of the country. According to Ogunesan (2011):

His teams of women are made up of tested technocrats; two professors, a lawyer, a World Bank finance expert, astute administrators, educationists, ICT expert and other professional callings.

Since the democratization of the country in 1999, women have held and are still holding sensitive positions both at the Federal and State levels. At the Federal level we have the likes of Dr Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala as the Minister of Finance. She was the one that negotiated Nigeria out of the \$18 billion debt relief from the Paris Club of public creditors in October 2005. She introduced the practice of publishing each state's monthly financial allocation from the Federal Government in the newspapers. Professor Rukaiyatu Ahmed Rufai is Minister of Education; Mrs Sarah Reng Ocheke is Minister of Water Resources; Mrs Stella Oduah Ogiemwonyi is Minister for Aviation; Mrs Deizani

Alison Maduakwe is Minister of Petroleum who stabilized the supply of fuel in the country.

Some of the women because of their excellent performance especially Dr Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala of the Ministry of Finance, the previous government of Musa Yaf Adua and that of Jonathan had to bend over to plead with her to return to manage the ministry after her first tenure in office during Chief Olusegun Obasanjo's regime. While the women are appreciated for their outstanding performances, their male counterparts in the male dominated society are being sacked for non- performance and incompetence in their respective offices. For example, Dr Mohammed Bello the former Minister of Defence and Retired Lieutenant General Andrew Azazi the former National Security Adviser to the President who were sacked on June, 22, 2012 (Obasi, 2012). The women have contributed enormously in other fields of endeavour such as the business sector, banking sector, educational sector and religious sectors. These remarkable achievements of the educated women have prompted many Nigerians to call for the integration of more women into national development activities both at the lower and higher levels of governance so as to pave way for accelerated development of the country. As correctly observed by Okojie(2002:) there is hope that a woman will rule this country, at least once so we can see the difference.

Table 1: Educated Women and Changes in Family Size

Mothers Education Level	No. of Birth Per 1000	Change to 100 Family Size
No Education Completely	69	6.9
Primary Education	63	6.3
Secondary Education	59	5.9
Higher Education	49	4.9

Source: British Council of Nigeria (2012:39)

Data in the above table shows that women who have never acquired some forms of western education have larger family size of 6.9%. This is because they still maintain traditional attitudes of enjoying/ having large family sizes which is advantageous when it comes to the issue of farming, politics and defense within the society. But when the women have little Western education such as primary education, there is slight change in their attitudes/perception of life. This is shown in the fact that there is reduction in the family size from 6.9 to 6.3 which though small (.3%) is very significant. With secondary education there is a further drop in the family size from 6.9 to 5.9 an equivalent of 1.0%.

Further studies show that with higher education, the family size has become even smaller, from 6.9 to 4.9 that is a difference of two percent (2.0%). The drastic drop in the family size with higher education is an indication that once women are educationally empowered, they can take critical assessment of issues and also look at them objectively with a view to reduce cost and other social burdens on themselves, the family and the society. They are likely to accept modern ideas of family planning such as child spacing, taking of pills to avoid unwarranted pregnancy and using modern contraceptives. Having fewer children to match the limited available resources the harsh economic condition caused by the capitalist system, will enable the women to have good health and enough time to participate in other activities which will help them contribute effectively to national development.

Table2: Educated Women and Use of Family Panning Method

Mother's Education Level	Ever Used Family Planning Method?		
	Never used	Have used	Total
No education completely	91.54	8.46	100
Primary education	68.51	31.49	100
Secondary education	61.45	38.55	100
Higher education	37.51	62.49	100

Source: British Council of Nigeria

Data in the table above shows that there is a strong relationship between the level of women education and the use of modern family planning method. Education is a vital instrument when it comes to the issue of women taking a decision concerning family planning in Nigeria. Out of the women without any form of Western education, 91.54% of them have never used any form of family planning method while just a small percentage of them, that is 8.46%, have used family planning method. Among those with primary education, 68.51% of them have never used any family planning method whereas 31.49 % have used the family planning method. Comparing the two, there is a slight moderation in the attitude of women 23.03% that opt for family planning method due to the slight increase in their education level. But as the level of women education continued to improve, the women's level of awareness and the likelihood to use family planning method tremendously increased. Among women with higher education the level of those who have never used any form of family planning techniques dropped drastically to 37.51%, but the number of women who have used family planning method increased at a geometric level of 62.49% representing 54.03% increase above the initial usage. The few educated women who refused to use the family planning may

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be due to ignorance or religious beliefs as some religious sects strongly oppose the idea of family planning, for example, the Catholic Church and the Muslims who view family planning as unacceptable.

Table 3: Mother's Educational Level, Child Vaccination and Place of Delivery in Nigeria

Mother's Education	Full Vaccination of Child			Place of Delivery		
	NO	YES	TOTAL	HOME	HOSPITAL	TOTAL
No education	50.02	49.98	100	88.59	11.41	100
Primary education	24.60	75.40	100	59.62	40.38	100
Secondary education	11.80	88.20	100	33.98	66.02	100
Higher education	3.89	96.11	100	10.10	89.90	100

Source; NBS~20US (Cited British Council of Nigeria, 2012:43)

Data in Table 3, shows that women without Western education tend not to give their children full vaccination though the percentage difference is only .02%. The same women without formal education tend to deliver most of their babies at home 88.59% and far less in the Hospital 11.41%. Those with primary education tend to get full vaccination for their children, 75.40% and deliver more at home, 59.62% which is paradoxical. Though there is slight improvement on the number of women who deliver in the hospital 40.38% more than the percentage of women without any form of Western education which is 11.41%. Women with secondary education access full vaccination for their children of up to 88.20% and deliver more in the hospital 66.02% than at home 33.98%. Those with higher education access 96.11% of the full vaccination of their children and 89.90% of them deliver in the hospital instead of home. The differences between women without Western education and those with higher education who could not access full vaccination is 50.02% - 3.89% which equals to 46.13% drop whereas the differences between women without Western education and those with higher education but access full vaccination is 96.11% - 49.98% which equals to 46.13% improvement. While the differences between women without Western education and those with higher education who deliver at home is 88.59% - 10.10% which equals to 78.49% decrease. The difference between women without western education and those with higher education who deliver in the hospital is 89.90%- 11.41% which equals to 78.49% improvement. The major factor for these decrease or increase is education.

Factors that Militate Against Women's Full Participation in Development in Nigeria Society

Cultural factors: which are ideas, beliefs, dogmas and practices created and nurtured by the male-dominated group to ensure that the society is organized in their interests. Culture determines what is expected of a gender group for example the work given to men and the work to be done by women, thus assigning gender roles. These sentiments always have negative consequences on the female members of society. Culture is therefore the socio-cultural or religious practices which hamper the girl-child from acquiring education. As observed by Apenda in Okpoh and Sha(2000:225),

Among the Igbos, Ibibios and the Tiv's women are to be seen not heard. Brought up in such an environment, women are traditionally docile, subservient and powerless. Women are not biologically and psychologically endowed like men and therefore are ill equipped to withstand the rigors of leadership.

These cultural attitudes of domination and marginalization of the womenfolk in Nigeria is reechoed by Ker and Okwori (1998:128) as follows:

In almost all cultures and sub-cultures in the country, there is a perpetual domination of men over the women. Families placed emphasis on the education of male rather than female—girls are used for economic ventures to facilitate payment of education of the males.

The cultural practices in Nigeria take the form of parental preference for the education of boys to the detriment of the girl child and socialization within strict gender roles. As observed by Obote Karo in Lifanda (2005:4),

It is generally believed that the family name is preserved in the lineage of the male child; hence, the male child should be better equipped than the female in order to get a good job and provide for the family. It is believed that women are mainly for the purpose of reproduction and domestic activity, hence (there is) no need to educate them, as this is a waste of resources.

The fear stems from the fact that one day the girl child will eventually marry out to a person of another family. Others believe that if they send a girl to school she will be more exposed and civilized and cannot agree to be under the authority of a man. They hold firmly too that educated women might not be willing to accept the woman's traditional place in society. All of these are basically targeted towards meeting the physical, psychological, economic and sexual needs of the man; to be obedient to him and to show him unquestionable loyalty; to bear and rear his children and to arrange for his comfort. They also believe that sending the girl child to school will increase the girl child's rate of promiscuity. Based on the above scenario, parents are generally skeptical and remain unconvinced about the value of educating their daughters. The

girls themselves, acting based on the cultural teachings of the society often see little or no point in going to school. They prefer to stay at home to help their mothers and prepare themselves for marriage. Because the male dominated society is blind about the advantages of educating the girl child and more so due to their selfish interests, they forget the disadvantages the process will have on the woman as an individual, her parents, the community as well as the entire society. These negative cultural practices (non- liberal educational policies) have contributed greatly to the underdevelopment of Nigeria as well as other developing countries around the globe.

Poverty: is another serious factor that discourages parents from sending women to school and often given as a reason for withdrawing them from the school once the need for fees becomes difficult to meet. Almost 70 percent of the Nigerian population lives below poverty line and majority of them are women. As noted by UNICEF (2007), there are as few as 20 percent of women in the North West and North East of the country that are literate and have attended school. According to Obidigo in Lifanda (2005:6):

This household poverty is one of the major factors that prevent women/girls from having access to education. Some parents have been convinced of the need to send their girl child to school but they cannot afford to do so because of the lack of fund. The public schools are not even affordable for them and there is no scheme for such people.

The British Council Nigeria (2012), noted that the 2010 Nigerian Education Data Survey (NEDS) outcome, which was launched by President Jonathan Good luck, indicated that one out of every three children of school age in the country is out of the school system or might have dropped out of school because of the high cost of education. Much of the literature argue that the principal reason for the high cost is due to the poor quality of education which has forced many parents to spend more on extra tuition fee if they wish to see their children pass the national examinations. This view was corroborated by Action Aid's report (2011) when the report said: "In reality a wide range of levies are charged on families, which constitute a significant obstacle to schooling" The report stated that girls linked dropping out of the school system with inability to pay and that some girls were made to miss some lessons because they needed to earn money to make the payments required by their school authorities. To support this position, Mahdi and Asubiario-Dada in British Council of Nigeria (2012:32) stated that: "in one girls' school in the North, the researchers were told that half the students had been sent home for non-payment of fees."

The poverty level in the country has greatly hampered women education in Nigeria; coupled with poor and inadequate funding of education in the country by the Federal, State and Local Governments. Because government is investing less in the

educational sector, it gives room for the private sector providers to fill the vacuum created. As a result, education becomes expensive, unavailable and beyond the reach of the poor within the society.

Non-Implementation of Statutory Laws against Discrimination

There are lots and lots of international charters and conventions which guarantee the rights of women and the girl child. Some relevant sections are as contained in Article 1-16(3) and Article (55) of the United Nation's charter and Article 1-16 of the convention on the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women. Nigeria as a country is a signatory to the convention adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations on the 18th December, 1979 and was enforced on the 23th September 1981. There also exist the UNICEF documents on the convention on the rights of the child (1996) in which Article 28 talks about the education of the child and Article 2 talks about non-discrimination. Article 26 of the United Universal Declaration on Human Rights says that education is a human right. This is also guaranteed by the policy of education for All (EFA); the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against women (CEDAW); the United Nations Platform for Action, the Beijing Declaration; the Millennium Development Goals and other International Conventions (UNESCO: 1998).

At the domestic level, the country's constitution of 1979 article 39 section 1-2, 1989 article 41 section 1-2 and 1999 article 50 section, 1-2 gives equal rights for the genders under various statues. For example, penal code, criminal code and the children and young person's laws. As Military Administrator of Niger State in 1986 the present Senate President, David Mark promulgated an edict/decreed which stipulated that every child in Niger state should be in school up to a minimum age of sixteen years. Adding that from the date of the commencement of the decree, no pupil shall be withdrawn from any school within the state before the period of completion of his/her studies.

The decree also prohibited early marriage of school age children and stated that parents would be liable if such marriages were contracted and that upon conviction they would be punished.

Beautiful as these policies are, it is disheartening to know that up to the 21st century, there still exists a wide gap of disparity and discrimination against women.

This calls to question the genuine intention of the makers of these laws and conventions. These laws and conventions are yet to be enforced so as to discourage the discriminatory tendencies toward the women. Indeed, the general decay witnessed within the structural set up of the society is partly responsible for the non-implementation of such policies.

This brings to question who the executors are and what the law makers and the enforcers of the laws are up to. This obvious distortion stems from an imbalance between the male and female relationship as contained in the society dominated and controlled by men. For example, out of the 41 members of the Federal Executive Council only 13 are women; out of the 109 senators only 8 are women; and out of the 360 members of the Federal House of Representatives, only 25 are women. The Service Chiefs that is the Army, Navy, Air force, Police, Nigeria Civil Defence Corps, etc are all controlled by men. All State police commissioners and major police commands are under the headship and control of men. It is only this year starting from July that the chief law officer was made a woman, but can she have her way in the midst of men? It is clear that she is just there as a figure head like a lion in a decorated caged.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The paper argues that the major factor behind educated women's successes or contributions to development in Nigeria is because they were educated by their parents and their respective societies. If they were not educated certainly they would not have been given such great opportunities to have a say in the affairs of the country. Although women that are not educated have also contributed their quota to the development of the country, these are not as elaborate as those of the educated women. There is therefore a direct relationship between women education and the role of women in the development of the country. The paper concludes that women can contribute even more than their male counterparts once they are given more opportunities to be educated. The education of women will not only reduce their poverty level, but also stimulate national economic growth and equally widen their mental horizon thereby discourage oppressive tendencies, mythological, dogmatic and orthodox shackles by men which gave them the edge over women. The situation will even be wonderful if gender disparity in education is removed which means both the men and the women will be given equal access to education, which will result in equal roles in development and fast development of the country.

The presence of women in leadership positions in the country is obviously a positive outcome of education and this should be a catalyst in changing the societal behavior and attitudes towards women.

Recommendations

The paper recommends that gender equality in education in Nigeria is an absolute human ideal and must be acknowledged as the ultimate goal of any civil society. The cultural idea of not allowing women to acquire education is an antiquated idea which belongs to the seventh century and not the twenty-first century. It must be discarded so that the country can move forward like other developed nations of the world. It should be pointed out that the culture which deprived women from enjoying

certain rights in the past and was tolerated will not be tolerated as the society is fast changing in line with global trends. This country must be fair to the women especially within the educational sector. The women cannot continue to serve the narrow interest of the dominant men group. They must be liberated through education to contribute their quota to national development.

Government must be more proactive in its role in financing education as its failure to invest in education will amount to the failure of the system both in quality and quantity as the situation will provide room for the shyllocks within the capitalist economy to raise education beyond the reach of many Nigerians (mostly women). Government must make financial and political comments in order to ensure equal access to education and make sure schools are affordable, attractive and safer places for women to continue with their education. Cost barriers to education should be removed; user fees, development levies and other charges should be abolished for women in primary and secondary levels. Government must implement all policies and conventions that Nigeria is a signatory to whether international or domestic. Government must recognize the fact that it is not there only to protect and safeguard the interest of the male dominated group, but equally that of women and children. Finally, the researcher wishes to state that the earlier education is democratized between the sexes; the better will be the growth and development of Nigeria as a country.

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