

WOMEN EDUCATION IN NIGERIA: PROBLEMS, PROSPECTS AND ITS EFFECTS ON NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract

Women constitute about 50% of Nigeria's population, yet their level of participation in the socio-economic, political and educational programmes is quite low. This paper therefore examined the meaning of education. It equally looked at some issues and problems, of women education. Efforts were made to look at the purpose of women education and suggestions were made as regards women education for nation building.

Introduction

In Nigeria, the position or status of women has been no less ridiculous than anywhere else in the world. The Nigerian society is essentially male-dominated. In many cases, women are marginalized and generally excluded from playing any traditional leadership roles. Their avenues for self-expression and self-realization are drastically limited by traditional and cultural practices. In ordinary every day life, there is generally a good deal of social distance between men and women including, the relationship of spouses. This separation is symbolized as well as reinforced by the sexual division of labour. Generally, there is a popular myth at the base of the status of women in traditional Nigerian society. Through out the ages, men have done their best to inculcate the sense of inferiority in women (Akpa, 2001).

In the past, when a male child was born the parents were happy, but when a female child was born they were usually disappointed. Worse still, if all children were females, the father looked for male successors by marrying more wives or acquiring concubines. The main reason given for wanting male children was cultural rather than anything else. Parents especially the fathers, had the idea that male children would help to propagate and perpetuate the family name. Any amount spent on male's education was not therefore regarded as a waste. In the case of females, it was considered by many parents as a waste of money, time, effort, and resources to educate females as they would eventually end up in another man's house or in the kitchen.

Today, with the exception of the core Northern states of Nigeria, the situation has significantly changed. Judging from the common experience today, Nigerian women, although far from achieving equality with their male counterparts, are no longer regarded as things or slaves to be treated any how.

Conscious of their potentialities in and contribution to the task of nation building, Nigerian women today are making frantic efforts to educate themselves so as to fill the gaps and shoulder their responsibilities of building this nation. So far they are succeeding. A good number of them are now found in all sorts of enterprising occupations such as law, teaching, medicine, business, politics, and the armed forces. Some have formed women's rights groups to protect the civil, political and social rights, of women all over the country (Kigotho, 2004).

Education is a tool for national development, the single most powerful weapon against poverty, and a fundamental human right to which we all are entitled. It gives people the opportunity to improve health, raise productivity and help foster participation in civil society. Education is a process of keeping the world and our society intact and in fostering the development and growth upon which human survival and progress depends. According to Ogbonna (2000:50) "Education is a systematic and dynamic process of equipping individuals with knowledge and skills to enable them solve the complex problems of living usefully for themselves, their families and make worth while contribution to the over all progress and development of the over all progress and development of the society. "Thus the educational process has been described as the intentional transmission of something worthwhile or desirable in a morally acceptable manner (Ocho, 1988; Peters, 1967). Peters goes further to argue that education is the all-round development of a person physically, intellectually, morally, and spiritually. This implies that education encourages a wholesome development of the individual through participation in the activities of the social group, and that there must be a guide who can direct such education in a way that can result in all round development of a person.

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Purpose of Women Education in Nigeria

It is clear that a good education aims at physical, intellectual and moral development or well being of the individual. Omolulu (1972) has clearly pointed out seven different but related purposes that women's education in a democracy ought to foster, they include:

1. Social Status

An educated woman can hold her own in any class or society, can express her opinion freely and can contribute her quota to the development of the social life in the community .

2. Cultural Value

The educated woman is a cultured woman who knows how to behave in a proper manner. She is gentle, polite and respectful.

3. Economic Development

An educated woman can get a good paid job, fare better in business and be in a position to contribute towards the up-keep and education of her children, thereby raising their standards. Thus, she can contribute immensely towards the economic development of her country.

4. Realization of the Importance of Child Care

Education makes mothers to be more aware of their responsibility to their children. Children thrive and learn quickly when their mothers are educated.

5. Political Awareness

With education, the Nigerian woman who had no political rights before now has such rights. Today, they can vote and be voted for.

6. National Unity

Education has made educated Nigerian women aware of the importance of national unity. Today, there are women' associations whose membership and activities cut across the whole country.

7. National Reconstruction

Today, in Nigeria there are a lot of women's voluntary organizations that contribute in various ways to develop the nation.

Further more, the purpose of women's education in Nigeria is to enable women contribute to life, adapt to the society, develop and broaden their minds, have all round development, fill the gaps for those who did not go to school or dropped out of school, prepare young adolescents and adults to be able to cope with domestic work and family life, develop in the women's folk, social, economic and political sophistication in their ability to understand, participate in. life., and finally to be good citizens.

Problems of Women Education

Okeke (1989) and King (1996) drew attention to some of the myths and negative stereophytes peddled to discourage the education of females in Nigeria. They include:

- i. Educated women are not respectful to their husbands.
- ii. Educated women are irreligious and do not encourage their children to be religious.
- iii. Educated women do not dress up to reflect the culture.
- iv. Educated women are unruly and bossy.
- v. Educated women cause psychological instability in homes, vi. Educated women tend to be morally corrupt and promiscuous.

The implication is that where parents and society at large believe in such myths, they find no justification in providing girls and boys equal access to education.

In addition, the following problems are considered as hindrance to female education in Nigeria.

- (a) Access: The culture, tradition, religion or societal values and stereophytes are some of the factors hindering female access to higher education.
- (b) Another problem is the paucity of our school curricula. The school curricula are such that girls leave school only with the required academic qualification but without some vocational training in some trade or profession in which they may wish to make a career. This situation presents a one-sided system of education, which obviously deprives our women of their right to meaningful education.
- (c) Also, one of the problems is the time of leaving the home to school. At this time the female may have had children or married, the problem then is who will take care of the child when she is away in school. The UBE programme should be properly organized to take care of female education at an early age so that she is almost through with elementary and the tertiary education before the age of child bearing.

In some countries, of the world today, women hold the reins of government. Efforts must be made to change the psyche of Nigerians, which has been influenced to believe that the role of the woman as the 'weaker' sex is that of childbearing, raising a home, cooking and infact the head and foundation of all matrimony. This concept has to be completely discarded if any meaningful progress is to be made in the field of women's education.

Female and National Development

Women in the recent past have become a serious factor of recognition in nation building. Their important contribution to countries national economic and international trade stands out clearly and cannot be overemphasized. According to Commonwealth (1999), women now constitute about one-third of all industrial sector of the labour force in export processing activities and service sectors such as banking and tourism. So, it thus becomes obvious that when women learn a nation stands to benefit. In furtherance of this, Abbe and Moniodu (1999) stated that women's education positively correlates with several important national and internal goals. Some of these goals according to them include economic productivity, social development, social equity and sustainability of development.

The benefit of female education is the fact that women are the bedrock of life. They brought up the males and also the female to life so if they the male need education to balance up the security in terms of knowledge. A male is taught by mother and when he grows up he never forgets what he was taught hence the saying by the former president of the United States of America that the hand that rocks the cradle rules the world. This fact is further enhanced in the leadership of most governments, as most of what the male leader does outside is the hidden influence of his wife or mother.

Many educated females have contributed so much to national development. Grace Alele Williams was the first female Vice-chancellor in Nigeria, a post usually reserved for males. The present NAFDAC chairperson is making history with her contributions in stopping the evil drug trafficking business in Nigeria.

A female educated in transportation led the Aviation and sea transport service in Nigeria. Others have been made commissioners of education and communication and information ministries. With time it is projected that females will become governors and president some day in Nigeria.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are made to redress the present academic and occupational in balance between men and women for effective nation building.

1. All inhibiting cultural and religious beliefs and practices should be discarded, while all available channels of communication should be explore to change societal attitudes to girl's education.
2. Sensitize parents and the society at large on the importance of educating women highlighting the accruable benefits of women's education to the individual and the nation.
3. There is need to establish more female biased tertiary institutions where science and technology will be emphasized, Federal College of Education (Tech) Gasau is an example.
4. The Open University newly established is a welcome idea; this will significantly raise female enrolment.

5. More women should be involved in planning and policymaking positions in all facets of our national life and development. Given the necessary education and incentives, Nigerian women will contribute immensely in the rebuilding of our economy.

Conclusion

There is the saying that one finger does not catch lice on the hair. So also the men alone cannot build the nation alone. For better national development, it has to be the joint effort of male and female. This will be achieved by giving women equal access or opportunity to education for meaningful progress and national development.

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