

TOWARDS MAXIMISING WOMEN EDUCATION IN NIGERIA FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract

Globally, women and girls constitute a larger percentage of the population of most societies. Women are the backbone of any civilized society; hence they made up a significant group in the world. There is therefore the need to focus attention on issues affecting their education and consequent effects on national and sustainable development. The greatest factor which can improve the status of women in any society is education. Women empowerment is a worthwhile investment in communities and society as a whole. By contrast, where women do not have full participation in economic and political life, development is not truly sustainable. Women participation is crucial if such efforts are to hit their intended target and have the full desired sustainable impact. Educated women can play an equal role as men in nation building. However, in spite of several efforts by international women groups, constitutional guarantees, protecting laws and sincere efforts by governments to uplift the plight of women, education and women empowerment is still unsustainable. This paper sheds more light on various problems related to women education and its need for sustainable development. It also highlights the concepts of woman, women education, and sustainable development. It thus recommends amongst others that women should develop negotiation skills and rise to the challenges of assisting themselves in a competitive society.

Introduction

Globally, education is recognized as the cornerstone for sustainable development (Oyitso & Olomukoro, 2012). The place of education in the advancement of any nation that intends to be in the forefront of development can never be undermined (Ahmed, Salman, Ogunlade & Ahmed, 2015). The well-being or good fortune of a country therefore depends not only on the abundance of its revenue, nor strength of its fortress but on the number of its educated citizen's men and women of education, enlightenment and character. The strength of a nation is never measured by the number of oil fields, gold mines or other natural mineral deposits but in the number of able bodied men and women who lie awake

while others are sleeping. (Okebukola, 2014).

Education is defined as the facts, skills and ideas that have been learnt either formally or informally. Education is basic to a person's ability to maximize any opportunity that may arise from the development. Education, be it formal or informal, constitutes a vital instrument for socio-economic development of any civilized society as well as the upliftment of the individuals concerned (Ainabor & Ovbiagele, 2007). Education is a human right, an instrument of freedom, democracy on which good governance, sustainable human and national development hinge on. Education aims at elimination of poverty, ignorance, disease. It also provides the

requisite knowledge for the empowerment needed for full actualization of human potentials (Undiyaundeye, 2013). In the last two decades, debates on the status of women and the need to integrate them into the development process of any nation have ranged on at national and international workshops, seminars and fora among others (Olaleye, 2008).

Major problems of women opportunities for education looms larger at the turn of twenty-first century in Africa and women represents two-thirds of the world illiterate adult while girls account for a similar proportion of the world's out-of-school population. Since education is seen as a facilitating factor which allows people, specifically women and girls to participate in and benefit from development. For women to be integrated into development process, they need quality education, so as to become co-partners in sustainable development (Okemakinde, 2014).

UNESCO (2010) observes that women alone constitute one half of the world's population, they do two-thirds of the world's work, and earn one tenth of the world's property including land. This buttresses the fact that women have so far benefitted very little or nothing despite their contributions from the economic resources accruing in the society (Eseyin, Okafor & Uchendu, 2014). This is an indication of the fact that the potentials of women in the society have been greatly underutilized. There is now the realization that sustainable human development cannot be effective if half of the human race (the women folk) remain ignorant, marginalized and are discriminated against. Enhanced education of women will therefore bring about an improvement of their health practices. The provision of quality literacy to women will greatly improve lives and livelihood and so

have great and sustainable social and economic impact on the women folk and the nation in general. The full integration and empowerment of women in all aspects of political, social and economic life, at the international, regional and national levels, is essential, if the obstacles to the achievement of the goals and objectives for women are to be overcome (Okijie, 2011). The importance of literacy and women empowerment in promoting gender equality and the advancement of women was further stressed by the Millennium Development Goals (2000), the Education for All (EFA) and Dakar Goals (2002).

The National Policy on Women approved and adopted in Nigeria in the year 2000, of which the goals of the policy is the full integration of women into the social and political status as a means of developing the nation's human resources for national economic development (Olomukoro, 2012). One of the objectives of the policy was the promotion of gender mainstreaming into all policies and programmes while one of the strategic factors for women empowerment and national development is access to women education development programmes (Kagiticibals Goksen & Gulgoz, 2005). Against this background, this paper is therefore out to examine how to maximize women education for sustainable development in Nigeria.

Conceptual Clarifications

Webster's Online Dictionary (2013) defines a woman as a human species that belongs to the female class and has attained the age of puberty. Wikipedia (2013) opines that the term 'woman' is reserved for adult females while a young female is a girl. A woman can simply then be referred to as any female who is matured enough to handle matters that pertain to livelihood. For a

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person to be called a woman, she needs to be a female who can handle the challenges of life and take appropriate decisions. She may or may not however be married since a female who is advanced in age would not be addressed as a girl but a woman. Okebukola (2014) describes women education as the pathway to getting women and girls to contribute maximally to national development. Terdood and Ityar (2000) opines, women education as the type of education received by women who would make them become aware of themselves and their capacity to exploit their environment. Section 18 of the Nigerian Constitution, the Universal Basic Education (UBE) Act (2004), the Child Right Act (2003), as well as the Article 17 of the African Charter all guarantee the right of every Nigerian child (including girls) to education. Provision for free and compulsory basic education for all children up to junior secondary level (Basic 9) was made mandatory by the UBE Act and the Child Right Act.

Pre-colonial Nigeria was limited to the informal system of education acquired in the family. Presently, the education of women has gone beyond the task of being home managers to that of managing small and large business organizations. In addition, women should be involved in a kind of education that will provide them with equal opportunity and access to formal education just like their male counterpart. This means that education of women must be tailored to meet their societal and health needs. Education of women is an instrument for providing sustainable economic development.

Development can be defined as a qualitative increase in output of a nation from all productive sectors of the economy. Development, Akintayo & OgheneKohwo (2004), describe as a process of economic,

social, political and cultural change engineered in a given society by the efforts of both internal and external stakeholders. Development is also a state in which the various sectors of the economy are working at full capacity to provide a better life for the citizens.

Sustainability, according to Wikipedia (2010), is derived from a Latin word *sustinere* (tenere; to hold; sus; up). To sustain therefore implies to maintain, support or endure. From the perspective of human survival on earth, the United Nation General Assembly (2005) presented a unified definition of sustainable development as 'the development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.

In the same vein, UNESCO, (2010) defines sustainability as the endurance of systems and process often captured in the use of 'Sustainable Development' that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. However, the International Institute of Sustainable Development (IISD, 2013) defines sustainable development as development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of the future generations to meet their own needs. Development can only be adhered through the deliberate efforts of young men and women of purpose and vision (Mofoluwawo, 2011).

Sustainable development is closely linked to poverty eradication, empowerment of marginalized groups who are often more reliant on natural resources, and grassroots participation in decision making. Development is sustainable when the level of qualitative and quantitative output from the various sectors of the

economy is able to meet the needs of the present and future generation respectively. It is the development that has maximum importance to both the present and future generations according to their needs. It should be noted that all the above definitions share a common phenomenon and this prioritizes the development of the present generation without compromising the future generations.

Women Education and Sustainable Development

Literacy is not just the ability to read and write but also the ability to use printed and written information to function in society, to achieve one's goal and to develop one's knowledge and potentials (Olomukoro, 2012). To be literate is not just to have mastered the skills of reading, writing and computing but also entails the ability to use those skills effectively for communications in all aspects of one's life in social, cultural, economic and political sphere. To further buttress the significance of women education, Undiyaundeye, (2013) asserts that any society which neglects women in her human resource potential cannot achieve any meaningful development. African women are hardworking and resourceful.

Suffice it to say that the role of women in ensuring sustainable development in the country cannot be over emphasized. Development is a product of the effort of the productive members of the country. Women in the society have important roles to play in sustaining the development of the nation. The role can be achieved effectively when women are given equal opportunity to contribute to the standard of the economy like their male counterpart.

Education for sustainable development helps every individual to acquire the knowledge, skills, attitudes and values necessary to shape sustainable development and better future. Education requires participatory and developing society, economy and environment for sustainable development. This participation according to Sharma (2016), will be complete only if women are given their due place everywhere without any kind of gender discrimination.

Education is a great tool to impart knowledge, develop motor abilities, change the attitude and improve the self-confidence. It increases employment opportunities, income and self-dependence. Employment gives the income and improves the economic position of the women. Employed women are given due importance by the family members. Hence educating women can prove to be a prime factor to bring about gender equality, elevation of women and sustainable development.

The economic and political participation of women is very low. Their economic independence has been in question for ages. Education helps women to get employment which in turn helps in getting economic independence. Economic independence frees the woman from a dependent position and boosts her self-confidence (Shu'aibu & Ayuba 2015). Consequently, such a woman helps in the national economic development as well as in sustainable development.

Moreover, the empowerment of women is an investment in communities and society as a whole. By contrast, where women do not have full participation in the economic and political life, development is not truly sustainable. If an educated woman is empowered, she is aware of her own rights

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and duties, she asks society to accept her as an equal gender like the male. She avails herself of all opportunities of development and national participation and hence plays a significant role in sustainable development.

Quality leadership is another role through which women can contribute to sustainable development of the nation. Shinaba (2008) submits that abuse of power, violations of human rights, mismanagement of national resources and underdevelopment are the order of the day for the past decades that men have been in power. Certain percentage of political positions in the country should be set aside for women. This will serve as motivating force for women empowerment in the country. However, as the manager of the home, it is expected that if women are given the opportunity; they will be able to implement their managerial skills in the management of the various sectors of the economy.

In many societies especially Indian societies, the decision making power lies with men. Mostly males take the important decisions in the family and in the society. This may be due to less education of the females. In order to end this gender discrimination, education of women must be given due priority.

Hindrances to Women Education towards National Development in Nigeria

Education: In Nigeria, education remains the basic impediment to women development. This is as a result of the preference for male education. Hindrances to women education are still visible in some parts of Nigeria, particularly the far North (Ainabor, Eregha & Ovbiagel, 2006). The effect of mental under development of women population, according to Egonwan, (2000), expresses itself in a double negative

outcome, a few number of educated women and low educational equality or content of women education as most women shun courses in sciences, accounting and other fields that would equip them for work in the modern sector.

Social cultural factor: The African culture over the years has relegated the position of women into that of a home tender. This belief has been upheld by various societies and has contributed to the slow progress recorded. It should be noted that socio-cultural factors constitute a hindrance to women education in Nigeria, leading to gender inequality on our educational development. In the cultural and traditional environment in Nigeria, as a male child grows up, he finds out that his sex confers something extra on him (Mofoluwawo, 2014). Most cultures restrict the role of women to domestic activities like keeping the home clean bearing and raising children, cooking food for the entire family members and so on. It was the view of the society that the above mentioned roles require less extensive formal education. This unfortunate misconception has been a major impediment to women development in Nigeria.

Religious belief: This is another factor that contributes to gender inequality in Nigeria's educational development. Some religions believe that women should be confined to their houses. This therefore makes it difficult for young girls to acquire basic formal education. The author's personal communications have revealed that till date, there are many young girls in Kwara state and Northern parts of Nigeria who prefer to be selling things like food items, locust beans rather than having formal education.

Early marriage: is also another factor that contributes to gender inequality in Nigeria's educational system. Early marriage of girls is sanctioned by cultural and religious beliefs which deprived girls of attaining the skills needed for an empowering adult livelihood ((Africa Peer Review Mechanism, 2008). The practice has contributed greatly to the lesser proportion of girls in school enrolments and the poor retention of girls in the school system not especially at the secondary school and tertiary levels. In 2004, about 12 percent of girls between 10 and 14 years were married compared to 1 percent of boys of the same age. This situation negates the Federal Government Child's Right Act 2003, which established 18 years as a minimum age for marriage. This shows that rights given in Federal Laws may not be adhered to at the level of the State (APRM, 2008).

Conclusion

Education remains an important tool in achieving national transformation. The quality and quantity in any nation will be improved through the collaborative effort of both male and female in the society. A nation or society, without the participation of women cannot even achieve the development; sustainable development is hence a far reaching dream therefore, government, international development, partners, civil society, non-governmental and private organizations should ensure that the use of women educational programs towards national development takes higher priority. It is needful that all hands be on deck to ensure that they have quality education so as to enable them (women) contribute immensely to the sustainable development of the nation.

Recommendations

Women must be empowered as ambassadors of natural resources and the environment and as contributors to socio-economic progress if the earth is to be sustainably developed. A reasonable political position in the country should be set aside for women empowerment in the country.

Women themselves should develop negotiating and persuasive skills and rise to the challenges of assisting themselves in a competitive society like Nigeria.

There is the need to discourage all forms of discriminating practices against women education in Nigeria. This can be achieved if parents and other stakeholders are enlightened to accord equal value to both male and female children such as equal representation in political appointment. For example all socio-cultural practices against equal access to education such as early marriage, exclusion of women sex stereotyping in certain responsibilities careers and so on must be discouraged.

Proper laws and policies should be formulated and implemented by the government at various levels that will help defend the rights and privileges of women to acquire formal education of their choice in Nigeria.

Appropriate human, financial and material resources should be provided to support women education in the country. These resources will help to provide a comfortable environment for women to study and contribute effectively to self and national development.

Women on their part should strive to break through developmental barriers with great determination, perseverance, unbreakable solidarity and genuine desires to conquer the natural challenge of their

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