

# REVITALIZING NIGERIAN VOCATIONAL EDUCATION FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT THROUGH WOMEN EMPOWERMENT

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## **Abstract**

*In Nigeria, not much emphasis has been laid on vocational skills as regards to sustainable economic development with emphasis on women empowerment. Women have continued to make immense contributions to development in Nigeria but their fundamental contributions is continually under-appreciated and under-supported. This paper thus discusses the concept of vocational education and its importance on the economic empowerment of women. It identifies basic barriers women have in assessing vocational education. The quest for provision of vocational education and training of women as a tool for sustainable development is a task that must be accomplished, considering women multiple responsibilities in our day-to-day life. It recommends among other issues that governments and other stakeholders in education should embark on awareness programmes through workshops and seminars to educate girls, women, parents and general society on the benefits of vocational education for women.*

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## **Introduction**

The development of any nation hinges on the social and economic contributions of her citizens. Vocational education is among the major components that promotes sustainable development. It should be known that such development depends on the education and training given not only to men but also to women. Women form an indispensable part of human resources for development of any society. Without their contribution, the economy of any country will continue to maintain their present low level and there will be no use to contemplate advancing to meet the target and levels that are constantly set by the government. Women are responsible for half of the world food production and between 60% and 80% of the food in most developing countries. Not only are women the mainstay of the agricultural food sector,

labour force, and food systems, they are also largely responsible for post harvest activities (Edu & Edu, 2012). However, women fundamental contribution is continually under-appreciated and under-supported, and is often adversely affected by prevailing economic policies and other development conditions. This situation must be given serious attention by government, since sustainable rural development through agriculture cannot be achieved without the full participation of women.

Odey (1978) stated that it has been proved beyond reasonable doubt that for any nation, country or state to make giant strides in development, women have to move out of their marginalized position. Women, whether educated or uneducated, rural or urban based, engaged in gainful employment or not, still contribute to

societal development, directly or indirectly in a variety of ways. They constitute a sizeable proportion of the national population active in agriculture, small scale businesses and industries. As home managers, they are responsible for improving the general conditions of their families by introducing the necessary changes in food habits. Besides, they are responsible for attending to the early education of the children in the families. In spite of their multiple responsibilities, the chances of educating women in vocational courses seem very limited when compared with those of men. Edu and Edu (2012) affirmed that all along, opportunities in Vocational Education have been for men, thus creating an imbalance and inferiority complex in women. The disparity is conspicuously noticed in certain areas than others. Erinoshio (1997) and Ndahi (1987) separately observed that in the past, neither traditional nor western education in Nigeria encouraged or provided equal opportunities for women to enter the field of vocational and technical education.

Ndahi (1987) also observed that during the early period of the development of technical education in Nigeria, a technician was considered a male who could repair mechanical or electronic devices or products (turn screws, nuts and bolts). It was not conceivable at that time to think of a female as a technician; therefore, enrollment in these technical institutions was strictly boys for industrial technical education courses and girls for the vocational home economics. He further observed that factors such as low level of parental literacy; religious, cultural, and traditional beliefs; and lack of effort by the government have contributed to gender inequity in industrial and technical education programmes. This is rather unfortunate as the importance of

women education cannot be over-emphasized considering its relevance in our modern society

### **The Concept of Vocational Education**

Vocational education is education and training for work. It is an education where skills are taught for the purpose of gaining employment through exposure to practical experience for self actualization. Vocational education is education designed to prepare skill workers for industries, agriculture, commerce etc. Vocational education can be regarded as experience gained directly or indirectly that enables one to participate in a socially useful occupation either in or out of school, at various levels and to be sufficiently equipped to become an intelligent creator of goods and services.

Vocational education is that aspect of education that gives its recipients an opportunity to acquire practical skills as well as some basic scientific knowledge (National Policy on Education, 1981). Vocational education is that aspect of education that exposes the learner to acquisition of demonstrable skills that could be transformed into economic benefits (Akerele, 2007). Vocational education has been an integral part of national development strategies in many societies because of its impact on productivity and economic development. Vocational education is geared towards the production of the educated man who can effectively work with his head, heart and hands. The development of the economy and the cravenness for self-reliance and self-sustainability is the driving force of any nation.

Anerua and Obiazi (2009) define Vocational and Technical education as a process which enhances self-employment and skill acquisition. It is a process of

creating something new which is different from an already existing one. This involves occupational training administered in schools under supervision to make the individual employable. The National Policy on Technical Education (NPE, 2004), in Ejeka and Chinwe (2016), states that Technical and Vocational Education is used as a comprehensive term referring to those aspects of the educational process involving, in addition to general education, the study of technologies and related sciences and the acquisition of practical skills, attitudes, understanding and knowledge relating to occupations in various sectors of economic and social life. The continued deterioration of the national economy is a clear signal to every Nigerian to try hard for a reliable and independent means of survival. This can only be realized through improved vocational training.

### **Importance of Vocational Education for Women**

Ejeka and Chinwe (2016), categorized women into girl child who needs to be prepared career wise; women who have been sidelined to be house wives and basically consumers, women who have been denied access to any kind of training due to cultural or religious practices; working class women in white collar jobs who have the propensity to be vocationally creative; women in rural areas who are ignorant of how to utilize their environment and women who have been tied to high child productivity. For these categories of women and more, vocational education and training finds a place to make them economy driven.

Akpomie (2009) opines that in order to move forward technologically, industrially, and economically, a nation must develop a potent partner initiative in the creation of wealth, poverty reduction and employment

generation with required skills. Such skills integrate technical human and specific skills to cope with the challenges of the future since vocational and technical education is a crucial tool for the sustainable advancement of any nation. The emphasis to prioritize the vocational skills development of women was again brought forward at the fourth world conference on women. According to Ejeka and Chinwe (2016), the following objectives were outlined: promoting, supporting and strengthening female vocational and technical development encouraging investment in environmentally safe products; productive agricultural fisheries, commercial and industrial activities, strengthening training opportunities. They also stated that vocational education will empower women to be entrepreneurial leaders in small scale areas like; metal work, wood work, business center operations. There are also vocations which can be centered around the home like; bracelet and bead making, soya bean milk, various cream making, poultry, fish farming, snailery, bakery. These skills are cultivated from primary school curriculum through the tertiary. As earlier stated, women out of school have access to accredited bodies and non-governmental organizations who can train them. Women are primary care givers to children and members of their household. They need knowledge of domestic skills in; cookery, farming, needle work, craft, to serve their immediate community. It will reduce money spending if these activities are not commercialized.

### **Challenges Facing Women in Accessing Vocational Education**

Over time, the under utilization of women economically, have been a thing of worry; 61% of the total female population

are reported to be illiterates as against 37.7% illiterate male population (Edu & Edu, 2012). The dichotomy against women in both social and economic spheres limits their access to education. Some religions limit many women from benefitting from school instructors, social interactions and participations in economic activities. Access to funds has been a far cry of entrepreneurs in the country. The bank lending rate and collateral required are not easy challenges to maneuver; this has further discouraged women from training in vocations since they cannot put into use the skills acquired.

Uloko and Ejinkeonye(2010) identified inadequate mass mobilization by way of publicity campaigns as a contributory factor in stunting the growth of vocational education and training, which in turn affects job creation. Offering vocational education in a formal environment, educational opportunities for women are indeed expanding, but very slowly compared with those of men. Such out-of-school education and vocational training, which exists for them, have tended to concentrate somewhat conservatively on the careers traditionally regarded as “women's work” such as teaching, nursing and dressmaking. New areas are now available and women are unable to make proper use of such training offered because they lack the general background education which is basic to the development of those skills. Such situation hampers and delays women's meaningful participation in such fields as agriculture and industry, which are so vital to the sustainable development of the nation

The days when farming activities were mostly left for men are over. In the rural areas, where majority of the population live, women now dominate most farming

activities. They do the clearing of the bush, the tilling and hoeing of the soil, the planting of the crops, the weeding, harvesting, conveying or transporting, and marketing of the produce. Governments' efforts towards training of farmers in Nigeria is commendable, but it has not favoured women. For example, it has been generally observed, especially in farming communities, that the Agricultural Extension Services provided by government have favoured men more than the women (Edu & Edu, 2012). During training sections, a percentage of women observed to be taking part are very low. Consequently, more men are enhanced to learn and apply modern methods of farming on cash crops while the women continue to cultivate food crops by traditional methods. Hence, the men's labour is better rewarded by better and higher produce vis-à-vis income, while the women's productivity generally remains more or less static.

### **Vocational Education for Sustainable Development**

It must be understood that there is no single definition for sustainable development but the key idea common to all definitions concerns resource exploitation at a rate that would not prove detrimental to future generations. Sustainable development entails a better quality of life now and for generations to come. It can be defined as “development that meets the needs of the present, without compromising future generations to meet their own needs.

Sustainable development cannot be achieved without education. Development is a process where an economy undergoes social and economic transformation leading to a rise in the standard of living, access to basic amenities for all through knowledge. It is in recognition of the above concept of

development that vocational education and training should be given utmost priority by government, having in mind the future consequences of women empowerment for sustainable development.

According to Usman and Negedu (2009), vocational and technical education is the right tool for wealth creation, self reliance and self empowerment. Okunola, Madumere and Ogundiran (2010) described national development as the effort towards modernization and improvement through the application of knowledge, skills, attitude and values gained from learning geared towards enhancing the quality of life of the citizens. Thus, pointing to vocational and technical education as the heart of any germane developmental process.

Agriculture was the main stay of Nigeria's economy before the discovery of oil. This sector still employs a large proportion of the country's population and food production has been at the subsistence level bedeviled by factors such as poor harvest, uncontrollable post harvest losses due to inability to preserve and process crops, lack of capacity to irrigate, urbanization, bad feeder-road networks, lack of adequate extension workers, difficulties in acquiring improved inputs from research institutes and low protection from government. So there is so much hunger, poverty, diseases, prostitution, theft, thuggery, increasing illiteracy level due to child abuse/labour.

Transforming the agricultural sector requires a concerted deployment of vocational education and training around our traditional approach of doing things by training technicians to solve the problems of farmers as well as training farmers to handle their own challenges (Usman & Negedu, 2015). This could be in the form of training in production oriented programmes for rural

women in operation, repair and maintenance of agricultural machinery (UNEVOC, 1997). This will greatly upgrade the economy of rural dwellers resulting in better living standards through enhanced overall productivity since a greater number of the rural dwellers are made up of women and children (Hamza, 2005). Sustainable development through agriculture cannot be achieved without the full participation and empowerment of women.

### **The Present Plight of Women in Vocational Education**

The report of the Conference on Education, Vocational Training and Work (1971), in Edu and Edu (2012), that took place in Rabat, Morocco, identified such factors as cultural and religious conditions which often dictate that girls should stay at home and help their mothers rather than go to school as responsible for their low numbers in the economic fields. The conference observed that limited economic resources, combined with social factors influence parents and governments' preference for boys than girls. This trend of giving education to boys to the detriment of girls has social implications for their development. It is through education and training that women's horizons are widened, their skills improved and their ability to make plans and take decisions for themselves, their families and the nation as a whole are enhanced.

Majority of women live and work in rural areas, constituting 60-79% of the rural workforce, which is predominantly in agriculture, with only 21% of women in non-agriculture labour force (Hamza, 2005). They lack access to basic economic resources such as land, labour-saving machines (such as tractors), food processing



machines, financial capital and other agricultural innovations such as improved seedlings, pesticides, herbicides, fertilizers et cetera. They also lack access to improved technical services as well as market information among others. In Nigeria, attitude to land ownership makes it difficult for women to access land. Most people with vast acres of land are men; there are hardly any women who own land. The village land ownership procedure gives men the upper hand. Most women, who have access to land, do so through male relatives. The single ladies, widows and divorcees are often "bullied" by their male relatives. Lack of ownership of land and other productive assets due to existing social norms has created a significant negative impact on the family income and the nation's GDP at large (Ejeka & Chinwe, 2016).

### **Women Empowerment for Sustainable Development**

The concept of "empowerment" has been diversely used by scholars and practitioners in the field of gender and development studies. Gajanayake (1993) noted that empowerment implies enabling people to understand the reality of their situation reflect on the factors shaping that situation and, most critically, take steps to effect changes to improve it. This view was reechoed by Ake (1994) who saw the term as a process that enables the ordinary people to effectively participate in governance. In the view of Garba (1997), women empowerment involves enhancing their capacity to influence and participate in making decisions which directly or indirectly affect their lives.

Empowerment increases women's decision-making capability and well-being. The life style of women in rural area is

different from that of urban women. The Global Conference on Women Empowerment (1988) highlighted empowerment as the surest way of making women partners in development. Empowerment enables an assertion of all the other rights and to her own personal space in a patriarchal society. There is great variation in the level of women's empowerment across the different states and across indicators. The Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO) has also emphasized on strengthening and motivating women at the grass roots. These can be achieved by infusing them with the strong positive self-image, critical thinking, group cohesion, and decision making in equal participation. The other point needed for improving the same are increased access of marketing, training, skill management, improved technology, enterprise management and social status and power.

### **Conclusion**

The ideal of sustainable development forms the bedrock of government socio- economic policies and programmes. The quest for provision of vocational education and training of women as a tool for sustainable development is a task that must be accomplished, considering women multiple responsibilities in our day-to-day life. They lack access to basic economic resources such as land, labour-saving machines (such as tractors), food processing machines, financial capital and other agricultural innovations among others. These disadvantages which are caused by cultural factors as well as religious conditions need to be overcome for government to solve the problem of widespread poverty, national food deficits, and unemployment. Thus, this calls for

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clarion call on the government to beef-up vocational education and training programmes for Nigerian women in order to enhance sustainable development.

#### **Recommendations**

- The plight of women in vocational education and training for sustainable development has caused growing concern. There is therefore, the need to reposition women in the vocational education and training scheme. To do this, the following suggestions are made:

- In order to enhance women's contributions to national development, there is need for them to have access to available educational programmes in formal education system. This will impact the necessary skills and training that will reduce their fatigue and also enhance their further participation in other non-formal education programmes. Some of the crafts and skills that can be imparted on women include: cloth weaving, tie and dye, farming, hair dressing, dress making, soap making, fashion design etc.
- Government and other stakeholders in education should embark on awareness programmes through workshops and seminars to educate girls, women, parents and general society on the benefits of vocational education and training for women.
- By virtue of the important role women play in agriculture and in the socio economic life of their

communities, it is vital that they be given appropriate training in modern farming methods. Survival in most rural communities requires a good knowledge of modern farming methods, which must be understood not only by men but also by women.

- Government and other interested agencies should give more attention to the training of women as extension workers in various agricultural skills in order to enable more women in the rural areas to benefit.
- Women need formal training in various disciplines. Such education should preferably, be organized at community or local government level through the establishment of women development training centres that operate mostly in the evenings. The training should be given on trades that will give the graduates functional skills in their individual business or cooperative ventures.
- More female teachers should be made to teach vocational subjects to serve as role models for young girls thus, encouraging them to take up vocational careers for sustainable development
- Women as good managers of the home and financial resources could make a greater impact on the nation's economy if they are given improved access to credit as well as break down all existing barriers to women empowerment.

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