

ENHANCING WOMEN/GIRL-CHILD EDUCATION: A PANACEA FOR NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

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ABSTRACT

In the world today, women and girls constitute a higher percentage of the population of most societies. Hence, they make up an important group in the world society. Therefore, there is need to focus attention on discussion which affects their education and how such education impacts on national development. Education has been defined in various ways by different people depending on their perception of the concept. Education, according to English Online Dictionary, version 2.4, Education is defined as the facts, skills and ideas that have been learnt either formally or informally. It should be a germane part of any strategy to address the gender-based discrimination against women and girls that remain prevalent in our society. In most parts of the world, Africa and especially Nigeria, women education is being neglected due to the belief that whatever level of education women acquire would be useful mainly in their matrimonial homes. It is therefore pertinent to address this issue. The fact still remains that educating a woman is like educating the whole nation. It is on this note that this paper takes a cursory examination at ways of enhancing women education for sustainable national development. It would also educate all, that the acquisition of education will make women better fit into the society and that when women are educated, they will be able to better perform their roles as mothers, wives, and home makers. Thus, undoubtedly make them to contribute meaningfully by participating in other activities that would foster national development.

Keywords: Women/ Girl-child, Education, Panacea, National Development

INTRODUCTION

The place of education in the advancement of any nation that intends to be in the fore front of development can never be undermined. The prosperity of a country therefore depends not only on the abundance of its revenue, nor the strength of its fortifications, but on the number of its cultivated citizens, men (and women) of education, enlightenment and character. This stems from the fact that the strength of a nation is never measured by the number of oil fields, gold mines or other natural minerals but in the number of able bodied men and women who lie awake while others are sleeping (Okebukola, 2014).

Education is one of the important tools that is employed in measuring the development of any nation because through it, one can acquire relevant skills, knowledge and values in order to maximize one's potential. Education is concerned with the process of building, training and developing the inborn potentials and capabilities of the individual learner so as to make him or her a useful member of the society. It is also a systematic process that influences people's knowledge, skills and attitudes and transmits and develops the cherished cultures, values, skills and attitudes of the community. This development enables learners to become functional adults who will take care of themselves and their families and contribute to sustainable national development. This paper examines the situation in Nigeria.

Okebukola (2014) defined women education as the pathway to getting women and girls to contribute maximally to national development. Section 18 of the Nigerian Constitution, the Universal Basic Education (UBE) Act 2004, the Child Rights Act 2003, and Article 17 of the African Charter all guarantee the right of every Nigerian child (including girls) to education. The UBE Act and the Child Rights Act further made provision for free and compulsory basic education for all children up to junior secondary level. Despite all

these efforts, the girl-child education attainment in Nigeria is low, since majority of girls drop out for various reasons before completion of junior secondary education (Obayan, 2007). According to Obayan (2007), low enrolment of girls in schools can be due to cultural beliefs, poverty as well as the beliefs by some certain groups that the place of the girl-child is in her husband's house. Male children are thus, seen as being superior to their female counterparts in many aspects of life. Azikiwe (1988) attests to the fact that the rate of illiteracy as regards the girl-child in the country is alarming. In most Nigerian homes especially in the North, women and female children are relegated to the background while their male counterparts are given preferential treatment. Some people do not even believe in the education of their female children (Abdulazeez, 2004).

There are four basic types of education in Africa: indigenous, formal, informal and non-formal (Egbezor & Akanezi, 2008). Formal education involves the training and development of a population's knowledge, skills, and character in a structured and certified programme that is delivered in a school setting. This type of education is a deliberate process by which the cultural heritage of a society is transmitted from generation to generation and through which that heritage is improved upon through scientific discovery. Formal education is classroom-based, administered by qualified teachers which include structured instruction, specialized personnel, physical structures, special instruments, curriculum and objectives. Generally, formal education refers to the structured system of schooling designed by the state for children and youth. In most African Countries like Nigeria and Ghana, the formal education system is fully state-financed and operated. However, in some other African countries, the state allows and certifies private school systems to provide a comparable education alongside public institutions. Formal education includes elementary schools, secondary schools and post-secondary schools (colleges, trades or technical schools, and universities) (Ololube (2011); Ololube & Egbezor 2012).

The purpose of education is often closely related to personal, community and national economic development. Over the years, Nigeria has expressed commitment to education with special emphasis on female education. However, girl-child educational attainment is low, as records have shown that fewer girls go to school than boys. The gender gap is said to widen as girls move up the formal education ladder (Obanya, 2007). An estimated fifty percent of the population of Nigeria (i.e,70 million) is made up of women and girls (Obanya, 2004). Thus, for Nigeria to experience meaningful sustainable development, the female population cannot and should not be ignored. Investment in girl education benefits individual, society and the world at large. Broad based education of good quality is known to reduce poverty and inequality. For this reason, government being aware of the benefits of female education, has made concerted effort to promote girl-child education.

Informal education can sometimes be referred to as traditional education. In African traditional setting, children learn with their parents, hence, parents are their first teachers. Methodology under this system of education includes recitation, imitation, incantations, observation, indoctrination and the syllabus depends on nature. This education is rigid as opposed formal system of education while non formal type of education is the type of educations specially designed for adult and people with physical challenges. Hence, all the types of education are important for all round development of woman/girl-child.

EDUCATION FOR DEVELOPMENT

United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) in 2012 put forward some pertinent questions as they relate to Education and these have led many to ponder the true importance of education and how we might better educate for a more sustainable future. These questions raised include:

- What if every person benefits from an education promoting development that is environmentally sound, socially equitable, culturally sensitive and economically just?
- What if learning was about knowledge and also about doing, being, interacting with others and changing the world?
- What if formal learning was enjoyable, hands-on and relevant to life outside school while addressing the problems of our world?
- What if every person benefits from genuine learning opportunities throughout life, in the workplace, and within the community?

What if education systems prepared learners to enter the workforce as well as handle a crisis, be resilient, become responsible citizens, adapt to change, recognize and solve local problems with global roots, meet other cultures with respect, and create a peaceful and sustainable society Federal Republic of Nigeria (FRN, 2013). National policy on education. Lagos: NERDC Press

From the aforementioned questions it becomes necessary for both national and regional governments in Sub-Saharan Africa to join hands in the great endeavour of making use of education as a veritable tool for sustainable development. Education helps citizens to grow and develop, provides them with desired skills and professional abilities, assists them in acquiring the understandings, concepts, values and attitudes

needed to manage future tasks, and shows them how to be productive members of the society. It is thus believed that, with high-quality education programmes, it is possible to ensure the effective first-class teaching needed to raise students' academic achievements and foster further national development (Amedeker, 2005).

Development can be viewed as a noticeable movement out of a perceived stagnation. This could be either negative or positive development. It is also a concept used to measure human comfort and satisfaction. According to the World Bank (2004), development can mean the actualization of an implicit potentiality, the simplest example being the patterned growth and maturation of a seed or an initial germ cell, or human person. It is a progressive unfolding of the potentialities of a given reality. As it applies to humans, it is the integration of the various natural, physical, acquired and human of a people towards the full working out, permanently and cumulatively of their being, as persons of their nation and their real productivity (Uwadia, 2010).

Development does not necessarily end with economic prosperity, but transcends. This is an indicator that includes psychological, social, political and environmental change for the betterment and well-being of the society (Okorosaye-Orubite, 2005). Development in this context is thought to be of the people, by the people and for the people. It is a multi-dimensional process that can involve the reorganization and reorientation of the entire economic and social system. In addition to improvement in incomes and output, it can also involve radical changes in institutional, social and administrative structures as well as in popular attitudes. In terms of national development, it can be realized through the transformation or transfer of technological ideas, institutions, attitudes, values and cultures to the underdeveloped nations.

In support of the preceding view, Okodudu (2007) opines that development occurs when technological change, either through the transformation or transfer among sectors, positively and spontaneously impacts national development. Aminigo (2003) also argues that it is common knowledge that economic growth and development come through industrialization as industrial development itself means wealth, employment and lessening economic strife. Obanya (2002) states that national development as seen from the human point of view simply means a state of well-being. Such a state is not considered from the point of view of increase in quantity alone, but in a qualitative transformation of people's living conditions (Efemini, 2002). It is worth noting here, that countries that have attained certain level of successes in their social, political and economic development are deemed to be developed nations while those who are still struggling are referred to as developing nations (World Bank, 2004).

Development as we understand it today often revolves around humans. Development thus pertains to any form of improvement in the living conditions of humans, be they social, economic, political, cultural or educational. Through the process of education, humans continue to mold and remold their own lives and the lives of others in their society. The National Policy on Education (FRN, 2013) captured this by stating that education shall continue to be highly prioritized in national development plans because education is the most important instrument of change; any fundamental change in the intellectual and social outlook of any society must be preceded by an education revolution.

Education and National Sustainability

No society can effectively transmit its values and aspiration without institutions of education. Amaele (2008) had observed that education, if adequately handled is the greatest legacy a society leaves for the quality of humankind. Education as an instrument for sustainable national development is no longer a contestable fact. What should rather capture attention now is the type, methods, dynamics of education as well as making the goals of education instrumental to the changing context of national development (Ololube & Egbezor, 2012). The major aim of education is for human capital development which, when systematically applied, will translate into functional resources in the national development of a country. Education is therefore, an investment that equips the individual for proper understanding of important phenomena and fuller exploitation of human past experiences. It is in recognition of this fact that individuals who are properly educated are expected to function to address the challenges of the society. This is more crucial for women and girls in a developing country such as Nigeria.

Education is one of the most important means of empowering women with knowledge, skills and self confidence necessary to participate fully in the development process. Education empowers women by improving their living standards. As a process of learning, UNESCO (2005) suggests that, "education helps in the provision of skills preparatory for youth economic, social and political empowerment". In this regard, education ensures the development of social stability and the production of new knowledge, and serves the complex interests of society. Accordingly, nations can progress in a sustainable direction if they embrace these values of education overtime. It is therefore pertinent to note that education is an instrument for peace building, equity, progress and growth. It opens up the minds of women towards the knowledge and

appreciation of societal values and aspirations. Despite these numerous importance of Education the percentage of Nigerian women and girls attending schools is nothing to write home about.

Education is central to solving the problem of poverty. Poverty in this context includes lack of income and productive resources sufficient to ensure sustainable livelihood. Education and lifelong learning are prescriptions for solving the problem of poverty across the world. According to estimates provided by the World Bank, in every region of the developing world, the percentage of people living on less than \$1.25 a day declined from 2005 to 2008 (World Bank, 2012). This across-the-board reduction over a three year monitoring cycle marks the first decline since the World Bank began monitoring extreme poverty (World Bank, 2012). Yet, in 2008 an estimated 1.29 billion people majorly females (or 22% of the population of the developing world) still lived on less than \$1.25 a day. It is estimated that more than half of those living in extreme poverty reside in sub-Saharan Africa, Nigeria being one.

Across the world, education helps in the building of universal principles based on shared values, especially in multi-cultural and multi-religious societies. Culture, science and technology are all about knowledge which are shared and communicated through education. This education is what is known as Science, Technology and Society education (Ogunlade, Ahmed & Soetan, 2012). Education also exercises modernizing influences on the values, beliefs and cultural patterns of those who are still held back by their cultural values. In order for a society to become modern (that is to develop economically and socially) it must be composed of a modern population, in values, beliefs and behaviour patterns. Education helps to clarify the concept of literate and illiterate societies. It also helps to clarify the status and position of both individuals and nations in terms of social, political and economic development based on educational attainment. The economic development of a society is ultimately dependent on the productive capabilities and capacities of its citizens. This, in turn, depends largely on the quantity and quality of relevant education provided. More practically, education generates the human resources required for both development and sustainability. Education systems are thus, usually adapted to the demands of the society because they are expected to produce individuals with the requisite skills, values and competencies that will help them work to advance their society. More specifically in the Nigerian context, the values and roles of education should be more and therefore national development is and should be of top priority.

UNESCO (2008) noted that, for every additional year girls go to school, they receive twenty percent higher wages and suffer ten percent child deaths since they are more likely to seek medical care, ensure their children are immunized, are better informed about their children's nutritional requirements and adopt improved sanitation practices. This, in essence, according to UNESCO 2008 leads to improved productivity and economic growth. However, despite these numerous advantages there are some barriers which hinders education for all and in particular the girl-child education. According to Oshun and Ofem (2014) barriers against girls-child education in Nigeria include: gender discrimination which is rife in Nigeria, poor educational background, poor infrastructural facilities, lack of marketable skills, lack of access to capital, which hinders the woman from starting a business of her own, hostile business environment and high level of insecurity in the state. Other barriers that have been identified include: cultural beliefs, poverty, parent unwillingness to send the girl-child to school, some cultures also do not encourage girl-child education and exposes the girl to early marriage, ignorance and illiteracy of parents (Oshun and Ofem , 2014).

The barriers highlighted above can however be overcome by

- Improve funding to enable all female children access to education
- Partnering with Non Governmental Organizations(NGO) for enlightenment campaign on the importance of education
- Public enlightenment through the use of various media
- Strengthening of the Child Right Act and ensuring strict compliance to the Acts by all concerned. These include local government, state governments and agencies.

However, if the preceding barriers can be overcome, the benefits that accrue to educating the girl-child are enormous. For instance, like Islamic religious quotation states that "If we educate a boy, we educate one person. If we educate a girl, we educate a family and in fact a whole nation". By sending the girl-child to school, she is empowered more and is also placed in a better position of ensuring that her children also receive qualitative education, thus enhancing the chance for national development.

The following are important benefits of girl-child education:

- Reduces gender inequality
- Reduces poverty
- Decreases infant mortality
- Decreases maternal mortality
- Decreases the incidence of early child marriage

- Decreases population explosion since such a woman can make use of the appropriate family planning methods
- Decreases domestic and sexual violence against women and girls
- Decreases support for militancy and murder
- Increases involvement of women in politics / political processes
- Contributes to the democratic process by giving opportunities to Nigerian women and girls
- Improves the women socio-economic growth as this provides opportunity for entrepreneur and vocations
- Breaks the yoke of ignorance
- Helps the women to develop civic sense and learn to respect and love her fellow human being.

CONCLUSION

Women are educationally disadvantaged in terms of accessibility to formal education, participation in policy formulation and policy implementation especially in the education sector. It can also be deduced that owing to the traditional socialization process, Nigerian women have been misled into believing that aspiring for higher educational attainment is relatively insignificant or antifamily development. However, it has been recorded from various researches worldwide that, the educated girl-child is very valuable to the nation for the following reasons: She as a professional would contribute to the Gross Domestic Product (GDP). She could also contribute meaningfully to national issues which may lead to the resolution of conflicts within the nation. Her contributions might lead to a healthier nation since she will bring up her family in a healthy environment. This would also lead to savings both on the part of the family and the nation as less money will be spent on treatment of diseases. The healthy family can result in a nation's healthy manpower, which will lead to higher productivity and a wealthier nation. Furthermore, she is able to read, write and then specialize in various fields of endeavors as well as being able to take care of her immediate family, thereby contributing to the building of a disciplined society. She is able to take care of herself financially and otherwise instead of being a liability to others. Hence, the education of woman/girl-child should be given adequate attention in Nigeria to enhance National sustainability and development to foster national development.

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