

EDUCATION OF WOMEN FOR NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

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ABSTRACT

The role of women in National development was the theme of the U.N. Development decade for women which ended with a global conference in Nairobi Kenya many years ago. Women who are in the majority in most countries were often relegated to the background regarded as inferior to men and are treated as second class citizens who are confined to the home alone in most developing countries. They are still largely confined by tradition while the men march along with progress. The participation of women in development is very important because development would proceed most rapidly only if all nations' human resources, male and female are provided with the means to participate fully in the development process. Finally, how prepared are women through education for the various roles? What they are to perform in the development process? What are the impediments to women's education? All would be discussed and recommendations would be made.

INTRODUCTION

In the post – independence period in many developing countries, including Nigeria, education was given prominence both as basic right as a major enabling factor in the development. Investment in human resources was identified as the residual factor in economic development. To really demonstrate the importance of education, economists estimated in different ways the social, rate of return to education, that is, the balance of costs and benefits of education to society.

The expansion of education should be regarded as investment in mankind. Throughout the ages and everywhere in the world, women have always been considered inferior to men. In the Roman times, women were regarded as chattels things that could be bought and sold, they could be treated anyhow, they could be beaten, English common law at that time recognized this fact women enjoyed less rights than men. In Nigeria, women were and are still held in no higher regard. When the first born child is a girl, parents are usually disappointed. Worse still, if all children are female, the father looks outside for male successors.

The reason given for wanting a male child is that, the male child will propagate the family name and that any amount of money could be spent on his education and this would not be regarded as a waste. The boys were therefore sent to school while girls received domestic training at home. The result has been wide disparity in education attainment of males and females which is source of concern.

Education and Development

Ekejiuba (1985) a sociologist defines development “as a process of transformation in which the individual and society creatively interact with the environment which has finite non renewable resources, with a view to improving their quality”. Our focus on education settles on the process of transformation in which the individual as part of society creatively interact with the environment with a view to improving the quality of life.

Over the years, education has been considered to be important for individuals and societal development. The position of education to any country is due to the recognition of the contributions of education in terms of the country's scientific, religious, political, sociological, technological advancement and a means towards economic survival. Any country that places education in a wrong position is bound to experience failures. In Nigeria, the role of education in national development has equally helped in projecting various aspects of individual communities and the nation at large.

In recognition of the importance of education in providing the quality of an individual's life, the Federal Government made specific policy statements on education of every Nigerian in section one of the National Policy on Education (2004:8) under the heading philosophy of Nigerian education. The document states that:

Education shall continue to be highly rated in the national development plans because education is the most important instrument of change; any fundamental change in the intellectual and social outlook of any society has to be preceded by an educational revolution (NPE 2004:8).

The essence is to enable one function effectively in any environment in which he/she might find him/herself. Ukeje (2001) also recognized the importance when he defined education as a process as a product and as a discipline. Education is a process of transmitting, preserving, developing and advancing the culture of the people. As a process, education is an activity rather than an idea or a concept viewed as a product. According to him, education means change in behaviour that is desirable and acceptable in the society in which the individual finds himself.

The above means that education is important to normal, the disabled and the handicapped persons. Thus, education is that process which helps the whole man to grow. There are three forms of education; Coombs and Ahmed (1974) stated that they are formal, informal and non-formal education. Informal education received through experience, exposure to the environment at home, at work or play examples are from families and friends, from travel, mass media, books, newspapers, etc. it is not organized. Formal education refers to the highly institutionalized, chronologically graded and hierarchically structured educational system which starts from primary school to university level.

Non-formal education refers to organized systematic educational activity carried on outside the frame work of the formal system to provide selected types of learning to particular sub-groups in the population. It includes Agriculture, extension and farmer training programmes occupational skills etc. For rapid development, the efficient use of women side by side with men is essential, since education helps to prepare citizens for participation in development. Women can be integrated into national development in two ways. They can be participants in and beneficiaries of development; both are inter-related.

Education provides the basic knowledge skill required in today's dynamic society of changing values and attitudes. It equips the individual with some measure of stability and confidence in dealings and interactions with others. Education, especially scientific education frees the individual from the enslavement of superstition, ethnicism, and narrow minded views which retard development. Thus, from all angles, education provides a basic ingredient for sustainable development when all citizens are involved and no group is excluded or marginalized, which additional factors like technologies and other non-human resources would make possible.

An educated citizenry is seen to be both more productive, economically and more satisfied politically, contributing to national wealth and stability. Governments therefore provide

education both as a benefit to be equitably distributed to their citizens and as a resource to be used by their citizens for future development (Anderson, 2006). In presenting a nation for supporting basic education, Anderson observes that education is basic to development and societies' investment in education, at every level; pay off in higher productivity and greater wealth. Nigeria is a typical example of a country in which many of the citizens have always cherished western education and accepted it almost from the beginning as the most viable route to social mobility. Across the years, succeeding governments also came to accept this role and to identify with the interest and aspiration of the citizens. Today, the Federal government has described education as "a huge government venture" (National Policy on Education, p.5). There is overwhelming evidence that education improves health and productivity and that "the poorest do benefit the most from education" (Anderson, 2006).

Participation in Development

Since education is a benefit of development, it must be made equally available to all citizens beginning with basic education which has been described as "the key to the success or failure of the whole system" (National Policy on Education, p.12).

The 1991 National Census shows that females make up 49.7 percent of the Nigerian population and males 51.3 percent, almost a fifty-fifty proportion. On this basis alone, it is expected that resources, opportunities, responsibilities and activities for and in the interest of the nation would be shared equitably between male and female citizens. It is particularly pertinent that education which is a benefit of development must be made equally available at all levels to all citizens, regardless of gender. Additionally, a neglect of their education means loss for future development of the skilled manpower. Since the poor do benefit the most from education and women are usually among the poorest especially in third world countries; social, economic and national development-sense dictate that women be especially encouraged to take advantage of educational opportunities. Women participation in development can be either in the economic, political, or social sphere. Economic participation implies participation in producing the nation's wealth through economic activities, political activities on the holding of positions in the civil service, judiciary or executive government where important decision is made.

The traditional role of women is to be good wives and mothers. It is their duty to socialize the next generation in the value and behavioural patterns of the community. It is often asserted that educated women do not make "good mothers". Levine (1980) in his study emphasized that indigenous patterns of infant and child care all over the world represent successful adaptations to the conditions of life and value patterns of different societies. These patterns have been effectively transmitted by parents who had no formal education. Non-literate women were thus good mothers by the relevant standard of the prevailing culture.

One could argue that educated women will make "better mothers" because they can be better prepare their children for participation in the new socio-economic changes than uneducated women.

According to Levine, the educated mother is more able to adopt strategies which maximize the life chances of her children by taking decisions in the marital reproductive, economic and medical areas. She is more likely to have fewer children, thus improving the quality of life for her child by allocating more resources (time, money, etc) to one. She is more likely to provide a healthy diet, seek proper medical help, and follow medical advice in the treatment of her children, leading to lower infant and child mortality. She is more likely to purchase educational goods and services for her children such as books, toys, etc. Furthermore, she is

to choose a husband who shares some of these tendencies. The educated woman, a product of social change herself, is better equipped to socialize her children to survive in the new socio-economic order concomitant with development. Thus, education not only prepares the woman herself to participate in development, it enables her to prepare her offspring for participation. As the adage goes, “when you educate a woman, you educate a nation” via the socialization process.

Roles of Women in National Development (Economic)

Nigeria women have contributed greatly in recent time to the development of this country of ours.

The benefits of female education to society have a multiple effect which is not necessarily the case with male education. “When schools open their doors to girls and women in particular, the benefits multiply. A more educated mother raises a healthier family; apply better improved hygiene and nutrition practices and has fewer and better educated children. She is more productive at home, in the workplace and also able to get further education if the need arises. Indeed, failure to raise women’s education to a par with men’s exacts a high development cost-in-lost opportunities to raise productivity and income, and improve the quality of life” (King, 1986). It could be seen that by educating women, a country can reduce poverty, improve productivity, ease population pressure and generally prepare a better future for its children. Besides, education has been recognized as a critical factor in improving opportunities for women and for achieving national development goals.

Nigeria women have always and still participate actively in the traditional sectors of both urban and rural areas. In the rural areas, women are more engaged in farming, (mainly in food crops) and food processing, in craft work such as weaving, pottery. They are largely responsible for processing and storing of excess farm output. The rural woman is then in position to contribute towards the up-keep and education of her children thereby raising their standards. In this way, she is also contributing to the economic development of her country.

In the urban economy, women are to be found in what has been identified as the urban informal sector, where women are engaged as self-employed seamstresses, hairdressers, contractors, etc.

Political Development

Military interventions have prevented the continuous development of politics in Nigeria. In Nigeria, women were regarded as having no rights at all politically. But in England, in 1905, Mrs. Emmeline Pankhurst, the suffragette fought for the rights of women and won for women right to vote. In Nigeria, women enjoyed no franchise until recently when the right to vote was conferred on women. With education, Nigeria women became aware of the political situation in the country. With more education their mentality was shaken up and they became alive to this fact that the happenings in the country were as much their concern as that of their husbands, that the political situation in the country would affect their own children born and unborn. They decided to take part in politics. In recent years, we have in Nigeria women like Lady Abayomi, president of Nigeria Women’s party and first Nigeria woman councillor, Mrs. Ransome-Kuti who agitated against payment of tax by women in Abeokuta, Mrs. Margaret Ekpo, Mrs. Warola Esan and many others like Dr. Dora Akinyelu former Chairman NAFDAC, Dim Etiaba as Governor of Anambra State, Senator Joy Emordi, Hon. Uche Ekwunife, etc. In countries outside Nigeria have people like Mrs. Indira Ghandi (late), Mrs. Goleds Meir, Israel’s prime Minister, etc. and Nigeria women on some many occasions have led delegations to government house in connection with political matters which affect the country.

In Nigeria as far as elective positions are concerned, few women have won parliamentary seats, most of them during the last civilian administration 1979-2012 with regard to appointive position the token of female commissioners in state, or board member has often been appointed. In the Federal level, women have been appointed ministers both junior and senior. In the administrative and judicial arms of government the position of women is rapidly improving as women acquire educational qualifications and experience which qualify them for senior positions. Thus, there are female judges, permanent secretaries, attorneys – general etc.

In the field of science there was Madam Curie. In medicine, Mrs. Awoliyi became the First West African woman doctor, in law, Mrs. Stella Marke was the first West African Lawyer, and Lady Kofo Ademola was registered as the First Nigerian woman to graduate in Arts. There are many highly educated women in Nigeria and they made many contributions towards the development of the nation.

National Unity

Education has opened the eyes of our educated women to the importance of national unity. There is the national council of women association, which consists of representatives of each state. The association arranges different activities which are for the benefit of the whole country and these are activities that encourage solidarity among the states. Women are contributing to development within the limits of tradition; however, they can contribute more effectively if adequately prepared.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion therefore, education has brought a lot of advantages to women. It has made them better wives and mothers. There are women politicians, doctors, administrators, scientists, educationists, and so on. There are equally many skilled women engineers to design and install new and improved equipment and technically skilled personnel to plan and manage production, etc. At present, Nigerian women, conscious of their contribution to and potentialities in the urgent and eminent task of nation building, are resolutely putting forth their strength to shoulder their portion of the responsibility of building this nation. Women now educate themselves in order to lessen the gulf between them and their male counterparts; they educate themselves not mainly with the object of becoming merely literate but also with the dedicated purpose of filling gaps.

Finally, women are as hardworking as men and there are qualified women in various fields, who can compete successfully with men in developing the nation.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Involve more women in planning and policy determination.
2. Enfranchise all Nigerian women.
3. Entrench in the Nigerian constitution certain basic legal, political, social and economic freedom of all citizens.
4. Encourage, rather than discriminate against, Nigerian women in the professions, and give them equal employment opportunities.
5. Encourage mobility of labour within and among the states of the federation to meet the critical shortage of women's labour force in certain professions, e.g. technicians, engineers, etc.

6. Encourage women's organizations in urban areas to propagate the concept of common education.
7. Girls should be trained early to fulfil their roles just as boys.

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