

WOMEN EDUCATION AND NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA: ISSUES AND CHALLENGES.
¹Ogueri, E.O.; ²Nze, C.E.N.; ³Nwakamma, J.C.; ⁴Okeafor, S.I. and ⁵Bardi, I.A.

^{1,3&4}Dept. of Physical and Health Education

²Dept. of Agric. Sci./Centre of Entrepreneurship Edu.

³Dept. of Information & Communication Technology (ICT)

ALVAN IKOKU FEDERAL COLLEGE OF EDUCATION, OWERRI, IMO STATE, NIGERIA
Correspondence: Ogueri, E. O.
E-mail: drogueriemmanuel@yahoo.com,
Abstract

The role of women education in national development of any nation cannot be over emphasized. Thus, this is an attempt to re-emphasize and re-awaken the mind of humanity on the undisputable importance of women education as a vehicle for sustainable national development in Nigeria. The paper x-rays the concept of national development, nation building and education, women education and training, and challenge to women education which emphasize some constraints militating against women education. It also highlights women education and national development which when attained would enhance women in the world of excellence, and productivity toward enhanced national development. The paper suggests good educational opportunities to enhance their social, political and academic participation toward enhanced national development.

Keywords: Education, Women Education, Challenges, National Development, Nigeria

Introduction

Education is a veritable tool for national development. It empowers people and strengthens nations. According to Federal Republic of Nigeria (FRN) (2004), education is an instrument par excellence in achieving the developmental goals of the nation. As observed by Adedokun (2011), education more often than not, holds the key to other conditions such as taking proper decisions about living and skills that can assist one economically, politically and socially in one's society. Anugwon (2009), thus opined that education is the main tool for imparting skills and attitudes relevant to the contribution of the individual to the development of the society. It is a key every individual should possess in order to make significant contribution to national development. In the opinion of Imogie (2002), the prosperity of a country depends not only on the abundance of its revenue, nor on the strength of its fortifications, but on the number of its citizens that are enlightened through education.

Women education has therefore been described as women empowerment. Enemuo (2009) assert that women education is a multidimensional process involving the empowerment and transformation of the economic, socio-psychological,

political and legal circumstances of the powerless. According to Sako (2009), it is the process of strengthening the existing capacities and capabilities of women in the society to enable them perform towards improving themselves, their families and the society as a whole. Women empowerment through education involves creating an atmosphere that enables women to be self-reliant. Hence, Fadeye and Olonean (2001) viewed women education as a process of enabling women to develop the capacity to actualize their potentials. It involves all effort that is geared towards harnessing the hidden or untapped potentials in women.

Enaibe and Imonivwerha (2007) noted that women education is the process of sensitizing the girl-child on the need to possess basic skills, knowledge, ability and attitude to make her fit positively, comfortably and productively into the society. Women education thus connotes empowerment of women for self-reliance so that they can be fulfilled in life and be able to contribute to the society. Women's empowerment is a process whereby women become able to organize themselves to increase their own self-reliance, to assert their independent right, to make choice and control resources which will assist in challenging and eliminating their own subordination (Varghase, 2011).

According to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) (2006), women constitute a majority of the world's population, and as such they need quality literacy education to be able to contribute their quota to the development of the nation. There is now the realization that sustainable human development cannot be effective if half of the human race (the womenfolk) remain ignorant, marginalized and discriminated against. The provision of quality literacy to them will greatly improve lives and livelihood and will no doubt have a great and sustainable social and economic impact on the womenfolk, and the nation in general.

In the past, formal educational curriculum was not designed to train women for top leadership positions (Nwaji, 2011). Their education was designed to empower them in taking care of domestic responsibilities. According to Achume (2004), women were not in medicine, politics, engineering,

law and environmental studies. This have resulted in shortage of qualified women for top level leadership posts, and denied them opportunities in formal employment for years. Adedokun (2011) noted that women's overall development has been characterized by a traditional gender bias in economic empowerment which has by and large locked them into types of work that accord low economic status. The situation affected their value in the society and also prevented their movement towards better remunerated jobs. The situation also deprived women opportunities to maximally contribute their own quota to national development.

The traditional belief that women's place in the kitchen has over the years pushed the women to the degrading derogatory position in national affairs and had in many ways, affected her ambitious and so her participation in political activities. Women have been seriously remained in the passive state with its degradation consequences to such an extent that they are not having much freedom that would have allowed them to favourably compete with men. They have been relegated to the background in almost all ramifications of human endeavour, including decision-making in the family and society.

However, as Okong (2008) put it, there have been some improvement for women over the past twenty-five years; the majority still lag behind men in power, wealth and opportunities. He stress that the important roles educated women play nowadays in nation building is currently receiving what could be described as "deserved attention". Many women have taken bold steps in the three tiers of government to demonstrate that they are co-labourers in the building process of the nation. Some of them have contested with the male folks and won political positions. Also, through education, some women have secured ambassadorial and ministerial appointments at federal level. Hence, when more women are elected to office, policy making increasingly reflects the priorities of families and women and results in greater responsiveness to citizen needs.

Concept of National Development

The concept of development has been viewed from different ways: social, economic, political and cultural. From whatever way it is viewed, it depicts positive change and development in socio-economic and political conditions or situation of the society. Development, according to Onwubiko (2012), is a process of economic, social, political and cultural change engineered in a given society by the efforts of all stakeholders both internal and external. Osokoya (2008) sees national development as the development of a nation's human and material resources, and education is perhaps the only means to prepare individuals for participation in national development.

Olomukoro (2012) views development in terms of human potentials and capabilities in the context of relations with other social groups. He further emphasized that development means greater understanding of social, economic and political process, enhanced competence to analyze and solve problems of day-to-day living, expansion of manual skills, greater control over economic resources, restoration of human dignity, self respect and equality.

Okojie (2011) states that the most basic capabilities for human development are to lead long healthy lives, to be knowledgeable, to have access to the resource needed for a decent standard of living, and to be able to participate in the life of the community. Thus, national development is seen as a multi-dimensional process involving the transformation and improvement of the economic, social and political situations.

Nation Building and Education

Nation building refers to a legitimate political process to establish a system of governance and ability to maintain order, guarantee the fulfillment of international obligations and human right and deliver essential social services (onwubiko, 2012). Ekong (2008) views nation building in terms of establishment of equitable, democratic and egalitarian society in which the rights of men and women are respected. He noted that empowering somebody for nation building therefore is about giving her the knowledge, skills and attitudes needed to live more fully and effectively.

Education is one of the most important means of empowering human beings with the knowledge, skills and self-confidence necessary to participate fully in the development of a nation. It is an investment in human capital. According to Amanchukwu (2003) formal education takes care of these attributes listed above. This is because education is a dynamic instrument of change geared towards national development. It is therefore, important to everyone but it is especially significant for girls and women because an educated woman is an asset to her family, community and nation in general. Training a woman is training a nation.

Education and Training of Women in Nigeria

Education is a human right and an essential tool for achieving the goals of equality, development and peace (UNESCO, 2002). They noted that non-discriminatory education benefits both girls and boys and thus ultimately contributes to more equal relationship between women and men. Enaibe and Imonivwerha (2007) noted that equality of access to and attainment of educational qualifications is necessary if more women are to become agent of change. They further buttressed that literacy of women is an important key to improving health, nutrition and education in the family and to

empowering women to participate in decision-making in society. As UNESCO (2002) put it "investing in formal and non-formal education and training for girls and women, with its exceptionally high social and economic returns, has proved to be one of the best means of achieving sustainable development and economic growth that is both sustained and sustainable.

In Nigeria today, there has been an increasing school enrolment and achieving gender equality in enrolment are longstanding development goals. Ensuring enrolment in secondary education, where equal access of girls and boys has been achieved in southern part of the country. Enrolment of girls and women in tertiary education has also increased considerably. Private schools have also played an important complementary role in improving access to education at all levels. Equally vital is what happens at school; is the values of the school system promote gender equality and protect girls and women from abuse and discrimination.

According to Kasim-Eghiator (2005) discrimination in girls access to education persists in many areas, owing to customary attitudes, early marriages, teenage pregnancies, child labour, lack of fund, inadequate and gender-based teaching and educational materials, sexual harassment and lack of adequate and physical and otherwise accessible schooling facilities, in many cases, girls start to undertake heavy domestic work at a very early age and are expected to manage both educational domestic responsibilities, often, resulting in poor scholastic performance and early drop out from the educational system. This has long-lasting consequences to all aspects of women's lives.

Kasim-Eghiator (2005) noted that science curricular and teaching materials remain gender biased to a large degree. Girls are often deprived of basic education in mathematics, science, technological and technical training, which provide knowledge they could apply to improve their daily lives and enhance their employment opportunities. The UNESCO (2006) reported that advanced study in science and technology prepares women to take an active role in the technological and industrial development of their countries, thus necessitating a diverse approach to vocational and technical training. Technology is rapidly changing the world and has also affected the low income countries. Therefore, it is essential that women not only benefit from technology, but also participate in the process from the design to the application, monitoring, evaluation stages; and more especially in the information and communication technology (ICT) in both high and low income countries. The ICT sector also empowers both women and men through the establishment of small and medium enterprises (SMEs).

Gender-biased educational processes, including curricula, educational materials and practices, teacher's attitudes and classroom

interaction, reinforce existing gender inequalities. He noted that girls are often treated as inferior and are socialized to put themselves last, thus undermining their self-esteem. The UNESCO (2006) noted that discrimination and neglect in childhood can initiate a lifelong downward spiral of deprivation and exclusion from the social mainstream that girls are less encouraged than boys to participate in and learn about the social, economic and political functioning of society, with the result that they are not offered the same opportunity as boys to take part in decision making process.

Despite advances in important aspects of the lives of girls and women, pervasive challenges remain frequently as a result of widespread deprivation and constraints. These often violate women's most basic right and are magnified and multiplied by poverty and lack of education. This situation remains a severe impediment to advancement of women and to national development.

Challenges to Women Education in Nigeria

At present, the force which combines to hamper women education and sustainable development in Nigeria could be viewed broadly to include denial of equitable access to and participation to functional education, early marriage, confinement to solitary living, subjugation by culture to accept choices forced on women and discrimination. These cultural barriers and environmental manipulation create inferiority complex in many Nigerian women (Oniye, 2010). He further ascertained that through the traditional socialization process of our cultural society, women tend to accept negative self-fulfilling prophecy, stereotyping and stigmatization. All these predispositions transmit negatively on the family role and responsibilities, which invariably interplay diversely in the national agenda. Women and development rather than women in development becomes an apparatus for gender issues.

Yomi (2007) also raised another challenge which he described as the "patrilineal system of descent" in which generations are identified through male offspring. The responsibility for the preservation and continuity of the "family tree" rest on the male children and special recognition are accorded them in the preparation for their adult roles. In such societies, faced with some limitations for women to progress in education and to be considered outside their family roles, expectation and responsibilities, Reinartz (2002) argues that balancing work and family is a major hurdle for women education. Hence, family responsibilities influences the careers and education choices of women who mostly have disproportionate work to care for children and the home.

The tradition, customs, socio-cultural values, ethics, motherhood instincts are some of the factors influencing gender bias in the education sector. Cultural and social beliefs, attitudes and

practices prevent girls from benefiting from educational opportunities to the same extent as boys. The achievement of girls' right to education can address some of societies' deeply rooted inequalities, which condemn millions of girls to a life without quality education and also all too often to a life of missed opportunities. Education is seen in some societies as a fear of change and now with globalization, the fear becomes even greater – fear to lose the cultural identity, fear of moving towards the unknown or unwanted.

Oniye (2010) noted that the gender disparity is exacerbated by the powerful economic and social rationale for investing in the education of sons rather than daughters, as daughters are perceived to be less valuable once educated, and less likely to abide by the will of the father, brother or husband. He noted that the plight of women, in terms of education is compounded by this negative attitude of parents toward female education.

Women bear the brunt of educational discrimination in the face of parental poverty. The negative implication of such financial stress and strain is that the education of their children, especially the female ones, is neglected. The negative effect on the education of their daughters manifest in the assumption that they can be sent to marriage to raise the parents' financial status or be engaged in different jobs, no matter how menial. In order to supplement the poor socio-economic status of parents, the female children are more accessible to approach to engage in street hawking, farming, house-help and commercial activities. Under such poverty-stricken circumstances, if such girl children are sent to school at all, they do not go beyond the primary education level.

Early marriage is also a constraint because once some girls are married, further education becomes a difficult or impossible task; the husband may not agree to allow them to continue. The women on their own part may be struggling to have children, care for their children's and husband's needs. Such divided attention would bar them from coping with the desire or aspiration to further their education. In some culture, it is a waste of time and family financial resources to educate female children because they later discard the family name for their husband. Others believe that the education of the girl-children will delay their marriage. A related barrier is untimely or unwanted pregnancy which causes many girls to drop out of school prematurely.

Consequent upon these dismal conditions, Chizea and Njoku (2008) noted that women are mothers, sisters, aunts, wives, daughters, friends and confidants, who are the building block upon which the foundations of happy homes and families are built. The family, no doubt, is the unit on which the communities are built and the nation itself is built by communities. It follows, therefore, that if the building block, the mothers are poor, ignorant and

unmotivated, the nation is likely to be poor, ignorant and unmotivated. For, how can any nation rise above the collective ignorance of its mothers?

Women Education and National Development

Olomukoro (2012) point out that 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. He stress that to be literate is not just to have mastered the skills of reading, writing and computing with numbers, 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 buttress the link between education and development, Nwosu (2008) point out that literacy is a basic instrument in social transformation and modernization. It influences the rate of development and its possession or otherwise facilitates or retards the level of development. Ezegebe and Akubue (2012) ascertain that any society which neglects women in her human resource potential cannot achieve any meaningful development. She described Nigerian women as being hardworking and resourceful.

Adekola and Abanum (2010) argue that development cannot take place without education. They stress that development requires an educated and enlightened populace and that the difference between the developed and underdeveloped countries of the world is related to the level of literacy among the populace. In addition, Okemakinde (2014) states that investing in women's literacy carries very high returns. It improves livelihood, leads to better child and maternal health, and favours girls' access to education. He further emphasized that when women are literate, it is the society that gains. Education is seen as a powerful agent of socialization in that it plays a tremendous role in preparing an individual to render active and useful service both to the family and society in general.

Okemakinde (2014) noted that educating girls and women is an important step in overcoming poverty and ensuring economic development. He stresses that an educated woman is an empowered woman and more marketable in terms of employment. Better employment in turn implies more earnings for the family as a whole, as well as improved children's well-being. All of which contribute to poverty reduction and economic growth. Hence, Fadelye and Olonegan (2011) noted that education helps women take advantage of opportunities that could benefit them and their families, preparing women for the labour force and helping them understand their legal as well as their reproductive rights.

Enaibe and Imonivwerha (2007) buttressed that basic education provides girls and women with understanding of basic health, nutrition and family planning, giving their choices and the power to

decide over their own lives and bodies. They further emphasized that women's education leads directly to better reproductive health, improved family health, economic growth, for the family and for society, as well as lower rates of child mortality and

malnutrition. They noted as women education increases, fertility, population growth and infant and child mortality fall and family planning as well as health tend to improve significantly.

Table 1: Mother's Education Level and Use of Family Planning

Mother's Education Level	Ever Used family planning methods		Total
	Never used	Have used	
No education	91	9	100
Primary	68	32	100
Secondary	62	38	100
Tertiary	37	63	100
Total (%)	70.83	29.17	100

Source: Gender in Nigeria Report, 2012

Evidence shows that most educated women in Nigeria tend to use and know more about modern contraception; and the proportion of women who use family planning increases with level of education as shown in the table one above.

Table 2: Mother's Education and Family Size

Mother's Education	Family Size
No education	< 8
Primary	< 7
Secondary	> 7
Tertiary	> 5

Source: Gender in Nigeria Report, 2012

Educated women generally want smaller families and make better use of reproductive health and family planning information and services in achieving their desired family size.

Table 3: Mother's Education Level and Child Care

Mother education level	Full vaccination of child			Place of delivery		Total
	No	Yes	Total	Home	Health facility	
No education	51	49	100	88	12	100
Primary	25	75	100	59	41	100
Secondary	12	88	100	31	69	100
Tertiary	4	96	100	10	90	100
Total (%)	30.56	69.44	100	62.29	37.71	100

Source: Gender in Nigeria Report, 2012

It is clear that child care increases with level of education as shown in the table 3 above. In Nigeria, evidence shows in the table is above. In Nigeria, evidence shows that there is a correlation between mother's education and child's nutrition and care.

Table 4: Mother's Education Level and Employment

Mother education	Women Currently Working		Total
	No	Yes	
No education	81	19	100
Primary	65	35	100
Secondary	62	48	100
Tertiary	37	65	100
Total (%)	40.56	59.44	100

Source: Gender in Nigeria Report, 2012

In terms of women education link to employment Fadeliye and Olonegan (2011) noted that ensuring

women's education in the society increases their earning capacity, that is, they become more

marketable and employable as shown in table 4 above.

They further emphasized that increase in girls' secondary school enrolment are associated with increases in woman's participation in labour force and their contributions to household and national income. They added that children, especially daughters of educated mothers are more likely to be enrolled in school and to have higher levels of educational attainment. Hence, the positive cyclical effect of women education in the society cannot be over-emphasized.

In general, education wipes away ignorance, political apathy and encourages mutual understanding and co-operation among the various strata of society. The role of women in the economic development of the nation cannot be overemphasized. The most important measurable forms of economic benefits include employment, earnings, enhanced general productivity, consumption behaviour, fiscal capacity and intergenerational effect (Okemakinde, 2014).

The empowering potential of women education can translate into political participation and thus contribute to the quality of public policies and to democracy. The relationship between education and political participation is well established. Educated people are more likely to vote and eschew tolerant attitudes and democratic values (Okemakinde, 2013). Beside, Egbo (2000) asserted that literate women have been known to contribute to the political stability and peace of a country. Hence, Kasim-Eghiator (2005) stressed the fact that educated women participate in politics and are able to contribute their knowledge to national unity, reconstruction and development. From the above benefits, it could be seen that the role of women education has gone beyond the four walls of their home and extends to all sphere of human endeavours in the development of the nation.

Conclusions and Recommendations

This paper examined how women education can enhance national development socially, economically and politically through appropriate empowerment programme like basic literacy, skills acquisition, and access to information and communication technology (ICT) and entrepreneurship. Education, formal or non-formal, is the foremost agent of empowerment, and women educational status in any nation correlates with its level of development. The higher the level of women educational status, the more developed the nation. Therefore, empowering Nigerian women towards national development should be a matter of national top priority which demands the attention and genuine commitment of every responsible member of the society.

In the light of the write-up, the following recommendations are proffered:

- ❖ Federal, State and Local Governments should evolve better strategies to encourage and support the effective implementation of women education programmes in the country.
- ❖ Women should take up the challenge and be involved in the struggle for functional education and strive to break through developmental barriers with determination, perseverance and genuine desire to conquer the natural challenges of their origin.
- ❖ Women organizations and movements have important roles to play by seeking to protect the interest of women. These organizations and movements have to shoulder the responsibility of seeing that institutions of society are not deliberately structured to place hindrances and constraints on the paths of women.
- ❖ Educated women should work hard to ensure that they raise social awareness of large number of women in the rural areas, through effective educative programmes and mass communication as these will help to improve their self-confidence.
- ❖ Parents, guardians, and the society as a whole must allow and encourage their female children to enroll in schools and acquire a proper awareness of their potentials, rights and higher responsibilities in society.
- ❖ Teachers as executors of educational policies should not stereotype subjects as has been the case, rather students should be encouraged to choose their subjects base on their ability and interest.
- ❖ Women empowerment through the establishment of small and medium enterprises (SMEs) based on Information and Communication Technology to be encouraged.

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