

Women Education and Sustainable Economic Development in Nigeria

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Abstract

The paper focuses on the role of women education in ensuring sustainable economic development in Nigeria. The paper relied on the use of secondary source of data collection for data analysis. As such, qualitative method of data analysis was employed. The concept of womanhood was defined as well as the meaning of women education. The meaning of sustainable development was also highlighted. The factors that inhibit the education of women such as cultural beliefs, low self esteem among women and inadequate infrastructures were also highlighted. The role of women in ensuring sustainable economic development such as quality leadership, increase in GDP and reduction in dependency rate in the country were also identified. Ways of improving the education of women in the country such as provision of infrastructures, proper legislation and provision of education grant to female students were similarly suggested. It was therefore recommended that for women education to contribute to sustainable economic development in the country the government must make proper legislation to support women education and the various educational stakeholders must contribute immensely to the success of women education in the country.

Key words: Women Education, Sustainable Development, Quality Leadership, Insecurity and Gender Equality

Introduction

Over the years, women and children in most countries around the world have remained the most neglected in the programmes of government in providing socio-economic benefits. Despite constituting a large percentage of the society, women have not been given the opportunity to discover, harness and contribute to the development of their society. According to the United Nations (1979) in UNESCO (2010) Women alone constitute one half of the world's population they do two-thirds of the world's work, they earn one tenth of the world's income and they own one hundredth of the world's property including land. This buttresses the fact that women have so far benefitted very little or nothing despite contributing much from the economic resources accruing in the society. This is an indication of the fact that the potential of women in the society has been greatly underutilized.

The opportunity given to women to contribute to national development has been very little for a very long time. Major and minor responsibilities such as those in the family and business units, and also bigger tasks such as those in national and international endeavors has remained the sole responsibility of their male counterpart. This has relegated women to the position of been passive even in matters that involve their overall wellbeing. Expectedly, this has reduced the worth and impact of women in most societies. Women in the society have therefore been deprived the opportunity of contributing at optimum to the welfare of the society in which they belong.

Despite the fact that this trend has been so for a long time now, it appears that women in the society are also not prepared to change the trend in the country and world at large. This is reflected in the unwillingness of women to explore all avenues through which their voices can be heard in a society where their population and dexterity can make a difference. Majority of the women in the society have failed to rise up to the challenge through conferences and seminars, running apprenticeship programmes, developing entrepreneurial skills and acquiring quality formal education as a step towards ensuring equality with their male counterpart in the society.

Who is a Woman?

In the face of the recent debate on the child marriage bill in the Nigerian national assembly over who exactly is a woman, it may be difficult to define and identify who exactly is a woman. This is because the child marriage proponents declared that any girl who is married automatically becomes a woman. However, the Webster's Online Dictionary (2013) defined a woman as a human species that belongs to the female class and has attained the age of puberty. In the same vein, Wikipedia (2013) noted 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 person to be referred to as 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 also a woman.

Meaning of Women Education

The education of women has a very long history around the world. Educating women was earlier limited to the informal system of education which is education acquired in the family. The informal method of educating women was the major system of acquiring knowledge which women were exposed to for a very long time. According to Barry (2013), women education dates back to the 18th century in America where women were being taught how to handle household chores. Women education during this period was therefore fashioned towards assisting the girl child become a wife material and manage her home properly after marriage.

Today, the education of women has gone beyond the task of being home managers to that of managing small and large business organizations. Women now acquire formal education in order to assist them to contribute effectively to the management of various sectors of the society. Since women are now exposed to the same learning environment available to their male counterpart, they have been empowered to contribute equally to the advancement of the society. In a similar opinion, Wikipedia (n.d.) noted that women education vis-à-vis female education is the provision of primary, secondary, tertiary and health education specifically for females. It refer to all platform of education established to provide women 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. Baba (2012) concurred to this position when he stated that women education is an instrument for providing sustainable economic development. It is an avenue for providing formal education to women in the society by equipping them with the skills and abilities needed to contribute meaningfully to the growth and development of themselves and the nation. Women education is therefore provided at all levels of the educational sector specifically for women in order to equip them with the required knowledge to become empowered and contribute to self and societal development.

Concept of Sustainable Development

Literarily, development has been defined as a qualitative increase in the output of a nation from all productive sectors of the economy. It is a state in which the various sectors of the economy are operating at full capacity to provide a better life for the citizens. However, sustainable development goes beyond the qualitative and quantitative increase in output from all sectors of the economy. According to Wikipedia (n.d.) sustainable development has to do with human development in which resources are used to meet human needs while ensuring the sustainability of natural systems and the environment, so that these needs can be met not only in the present, but also for generations to come. Sustainable development therefore goes beyond meeting the immediate needs of the present generation; it also deals with securing a comfortable future for the future generation. On their part, the International Institute of Sustainable Development (IISD) (2013) defined Sustainable development as development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. 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. Sustainable development can similarly be said to be development that has maximum importance to both the present and future generation according to their needs.

The role of women in ensuring sustainable development in the country cannot be over emphasized. Development in a country is a product of the effort of the productive members of the country. As such, women in the society have important roles to play in sustaining the development of the nation. This role can be effectively achieved when women are given equal opportunity to contribute to the standard of the economy like their male counterpart. Contrary to this, the level of sustainable development that will be recorded in the country will remain far below the optimum capacity of the entire sectors of the nation.

Factors that Inhibit the Education of Women in Nigeria

As earlier posited, women play a significant role in sustaining the efficiency of the various sectors of the country. The economic, political, social and religious sectors of the economy will perform better when women are involved in managing the affairs of the various sectors of the economy. This will assist the nation in achieving quicker and better national objectives. However, there are so many factors that have hindered the education of women in order to empower them to contribute meaningfully to the sustainable development of the nation. Some of these factors include but is not limited to the following:

Cultural Beliefs: The African culture over the years has relegated the position of women into that of a home tender. This belief system has been upheld by various societies and has contributed to the slow progress recorded

by women both nationally and internationally. According to Shinaba (2008) cultural beliefs in the past suggest that training a woman was just a waste of time and resources. This has contributed to the unwillingness of parents, communities and the nation at large from providing an enabling environment for women education to thrive. Based on the little attention given to women education due to various cultural beliefs in our society, women have been deprived the opportunity for the acquisition of formal education at all levels. This has resulted in a wide disparity between the number of males and females who are undergoing various programmes in the various educational institutions across the country.

Low Self-Esteem: According to Glover (2000) most women have failed to pick up science and technology related tasks even though they possess the needed intellectual ability. They have deliberately shied away from responsibilities that they also have the capacity to execute. Women all over the country have passionately embraced the position of a home tender which society has relinquished to them. Very few women are willing to rise up and compete with the men in areas where they have comparative advantage. This is due to the low self-esteem that has been developed by them. Most women have viewed themselves as being incapacitated even in activities where they would have performed well due to fear of failure. Women believe that they do not have the strength, intellect and political will that the men possess and as such it becomes unnecessary to compete with them. This has made most women to ignore the need to further their education as they view it as a waste of time and other precious resources.

Fear of Dominance: Another factor that has inhibited the drive for the education of women in the country is the fear of domination by their male counterpart. Anugwom (2009:131) stated that “men see themselves as the rightful owners of the formal economic sector and abundant socio-cultural practices support this. It appears that the will and possibility of succeeding in the society is solely reserved for the men. Therefore, most men fear that when women are given the opportunity to acquire the needed education, it may imply that they may have to relinquish some of their positions to the women in the society. Women in the society have been deprived the opportunity for quality formal education as this may mean that the men will have to share their political, economic, social and cultural privileges with women in the society.

Insufficient Infrastructures: Infrastructures play a significant role in the provision of quality education in any nation. The availability of appropriate infrastructures such as school library, classrooms, workshops, laboratories, electricity, water supply etc contributes to effectiveness of the school system. Similarly, women have certain infrastructures that need to be put in place in order for them to learn effectively in the school system. Infrastructures that will boost their entrepreneurial skill, home management skill need to be put in place in order to make schooling interesting to them. Also, there are certain facilities that enable women to learn effectively in any school system. This includes sanitary facilities, home management facilities among others. However, when these infrastructures are not available, meaningful teaching and learning may not take place for them.

Insecurity: The level of insecurity in the nation has affected the educational sector as a whole. However, the worse hit is women who are already marginalized in the past and are unable to defend themselves in the time of crisis and violence. Most parents would prefer their children to attend schools where security is guaranteed. Also, with the increasing level of insecurity in the country. Students both male and female alike have been deprived the privilege of acquiring education of their choice. According to Odebode (2013) insecurity in the north has led to the death of 70 teachers, 100 students with thousand of teachers and students fleeing for safety. This has compounded the problem of inaccessible education in the country both for male and female students in the country. Despite the prevalence of the security challenges in the country, the male students have been able to manage the situation than the female. More female students have therefore been deprived the opportunity of going to school for fear of insecurity around the country.

Sexual Harassment: Sexual harassment at all levels of education in the country is more pronounced between male teachers and female students. In the same way, the type of job secured by women is dependent on the type of education acquired. Women are therefore exposed the most to sexual harassment both in school and at work. Leathwood (2005) noted that the preference for different job types contribute to sexual enticement in selected job types. With more male teachers in the educational sector, there is bound to be an increase in the level of sexual harassment between male teachers and female students than the other way round. This has contributed to the more reasons why most girls especially in the north have been deprived the opportunity of attending formal education as this may serve as an avenue for the married women around them to be exposed to sexual advances from their male teachers. This has contributed to the more reason why some men would prefer their wives to be housekeepers rather than undergo any form of formal education.

The Role of Women in Ensuring Sustainable Development in Nigeria

There are various ways through which women can contribute to the development of the nation. Based on some of the special qualities possessed by women, a lot can be benefited from them if given the opportunity to be educated. Some of the benefits that can be derived from women education towards a sustainable development are:

Quality Leadership: According to the report of Shinaba (2008) abuse of power, violations of human rights, mismanagement of national resources and under development are the order of the day for the past four decades that men have been in power. Similarly, the period in which men have been in power have been characterized by gross inequality and violence. However, as managers 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. The quality of leadership that will be provided by women will be such that would be characterized with equality, peace, transparency and protection of human right. All of these qualities are very important in building a stable nation.

Increase in GDP: The World Bank in White (2013) pointed out that if the gap between male and female employment is closed, it would help to increase GDP in America by 9%, Europe by 13% and Japan by 16%. When women are given the opportunity to be educated, it will help to increase the workforce of the nation. Similarly, the activities of women in the various economic sectors of the economy have the potential of contributing to an increased GDP. This is because their contribution will help to argument the effort of their male counterpart in securing a higher GDP.

Building of a Healthy Nation: The health condition of the citizens is one of the factors that determine the lifespan of the masses. In the same way, the lifespan of the citizens is one of the factors that determine the level of development. Orji (2011) noted that girl education vis-à-vis women education stands as one of the potent tools for reducing girls' vulnerability. A healthy nation has also being linked to a wealthy nation. Similarly Kingdon (2002) noted that doubling the female secondary school enrolment ratio from 19% to 38% in 1975 helped to reduce infant deaths in 1985 by 64%. The education of women is therefore closely related to raising a healthy generation that would be empowered to contribute significantly to national development. Women in the society are usually known for their cleanliness and have the capacity of building a healthy nation.

Reduced Dependency Rate: The education of women is one of the ways of reducing the level of dependency in the nation. The empowerment of women through education will assist in reducing the pressure on economic resources in the country. This will help to sustain the economic resources in the country towards the path of development. Similarly, empowering women through education would also enable them to become self sufficient individuals. They would be equipped to learn and develop various means by which they can meet up with personal and societal needs. This will help to reduce the pressure on national resources and also reduce dependency level on their sponsors.

Resource Management: Women all over the world are known to be better managers than their male counterpart. The prudent management of resources helps to reduce wastage and increase economic benefit from available resources. When women are properly educated, it helps them to put their managerial skill into use and help manage national economic resources for the benefit of all. It is therefore advisable that women should be empowered through formal education on how they can harness their management abilities for the long term benefit of all citizens in the country.

Ways to Improve the Education of Women in Nigeria

Various educational stakeholders have continued to re-iterate the need to improve on women education in the country as a way of empowering women in the society. The education of women has been linked to have a positive relationship with national development. It is therefore needful that women education be given the needed attention in the society. Some of the ways through which women education can be improved in the country include the following:

Ensuring Gender Equality in Admission Process: According to occupational statistics provided by Wikipedia (2013) female workers in some identified professions were as follow: architects 2.4%, quantity surveyors 3.5%, lawyers/jurists 25.4%, lecturers 11.8%, obstetricians and gynecologists 8.4%, pediaticians 33.3%, and media practitioners 18.3%. This is an indication that the method of admission into various courses in most of the nation's higher institutions is gender sensitive. Most of the tertiary institutions in the country reserve some courses basically for the men against their female counterparts. Some of these courses are areas where women can either perform better or compete favorably with their male counterpart. As a way of improving women education in the country, more women need to be given equal opportunity during admission to study courses of their choices. The method of admission in higher institutions should be gender friendly and give women the opportunity to acquire higher education in a course and institution of their choice.

Provision of Educational Grants: Although all persons interested in acquiring formal education in the country should be given the opportunity to do so, however, more female students should be given educational grants as a way of encouraging them to further their education to higher levels. In the face of the disparity that already exists in the ratio of boys to girls in most of the educational systems in the country, more female students should be provided with financial support as a way of bridging the differences in education at all levels. Female students can be provided with educational grants that will help them complete their education or provided with financial encouragement in the form of stipends that will assist them to study comfortably in any institution of their choice. This will help to increase the interest of more women to acquire formal education just like their male counterpart.

Proper Legislation: The level of disparity between the male and female child has been in existence for so long. Various authors have identified the fact that the African tradition naturally places more importance to the male child than the female child. However, Nasir (2002) also noted that the inability of women to acquire education and contribute to the independence of Nigeria also contributes to the slow progress of women education. It is therefore necessary that proper policies be formulated and implemented that will protect the female child from cultural and contemporary beliefs. The various arms of government should be ready to stand up and defend the rights of women when such right is being eroded and abused. When appropriate laws are put in place, it will go a long way in overcoming all barriers that limit the girl child from acquiring quality education just like other citizens in the country.

Employment of Quality Female Teachers: One of the ways of encouraging more women to acquire formal education is by providing a sufficient number of female teachers in most of the schools across the country. Majority of the schools in the country are occupied by male teachers who may not understand or give the needed attention for the female child to excel in school. Similarly, there are increasing cases of female students being sexually harassed by their male teachers. Most female students need female teachers who would serve as role models to them in the school system. It is therefore needful that more female teachers be employed in the various educational levels in the country so as to encourage the female child to demand for and willingly acquire formal education at the various levels.

Provision of Appropriate Infrastructures: Women education in the country is so sensitive that it requires the provision of appropriate facilities for it to succeed. Male students are naturally wired to succeed under pressure in meeting life goals including that of education. This case is not so with women. Women require a well organized environment for them to learn effectively. According to OECD DAC (2004) infrastructures for women education should be able to achieve the following:

- Increase women's economic opportunities
- Provide appropriate services to women.
- Actively involve and empower women.
- Encourage women to take up decision making and leadership roles.
- Improve girls and women's access to education and health care.
- Eliminate discrimination against girls and women.

It is through the provision of quality infrastructures that the essence of women education can be achieved. These infrastructures will help women to learn meaningfully and also put the knowledge acquired into productive use.

Conclusion

Education remains an important tool in achieving national transformation. However, the quality and quantity of development in any nation will be improved through the collaborative effort of both males and females in the society. When the women in the society are deprived the opportunity of acquiring quality formal education, it will result into an immeasurable loss into the various sectors of the economy. Since the education of women has a comparative advantage to the advancement of the society, it is needful that all hands should be on deck to ensure that they are quality education so as to enable them to contribute immensely to the development of the entire nation.

Recommendations

Based on the above reviewed literatures, in order for women to contribute effectively to the sustainable development of the nation, the following recommendations are made:

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

2. 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.

3. Various educational stakeholders should also be encouraged to contribute meaningfully to support women education in the country. The private sector, parents and school management should provide enabling environment for women to acquire quality education for sustainable development. This could be introduced as part of their corporate social responsibility to the society.

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