Facilitating Nation Building through Women Education for National Development in Nigeria

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Abstract
Women Education could be seen as a part of Education process that deals with the art of acquiring skills and values by women to contribute positively in all aspect of development in the society, that is why women were trained in the areas of religious, tradition and in different feminine skills so as to have the brighter future of the women in society in general, therefore the need for women empowerment is a vital issue in achieving national development. This paper examines the areas that could facilitate nation building through women education such as Health, Small scale Industries, Vocational training, Entrepreneur, Agriculture and others. Recommendations on how to empower women for effective and sustainable national development in Nigeria are also offered.

INTRODUCTION
Women education could be seen as a part of the education process that deals with the art of acquiring skills and values by women to contribute positively in all aspect of development of the society. In Nigeria, particularly in the north, women residing in both urban an rural areas were and are trained in different feminine skills such as spinning, weaving, sewing, knitting, dying, pottery etc so as to integrate them into the development process of the society. In the areas of religious and tradition, the education given to women prepares them to obey their husbands and train children to grow up with good moral for societal peaceful co-existence, progress and promotion of global peace.

CONCEPT OF WOMEN EDUCATION
Indeed, the Nigerian society recognizes the worth of the contributions given by women in relation to the traditional and religious training they acquired long before the spread of the western type of education. In Nigeria, western education came with colonial background; and whether consciously or unconsciously, it attached little or no relevance to women education. This is because the education then was not meant to cater for the general needs of the people.
Gradually with the passing of time, the society began to develop consciousness in the education of women particularly with regard to their sensitive roles of child bearing, nursing and educating of the future generations. As reported by (Osuman, 1997). Professor Jibrin Aminu, a one time Nigerian Minister for education said:

*Just as a man can never do too much for a woman,
So can a nation never do too much for its women,
Folk, when people romantically say that woman
Are the light of their lives, they may not be fully
Aware how true thi is........In both Hausa and
Arabic it is sun that is regarded as being feminine
While the moon is masculine.*

This clearly indicates that women are the light upon which the society depends for its general advancement and a better tomorrow. Also we can understand that women need to be educated to prepare them face the continuous challenges of educational, traditional, religious and social need of the changing society.

**WOMEN EDUCATION IN NATIONAL ADVANCEMENT**

Beyond any doubt, education is an instrument per excellent for affecting national advancement. In this case, without any gender prejudice, women should be educated in consideration of their crucial role in society. Women, whether as producers or reproducers, are mainly responsible for the care and general well being of the younger ones; that the nation can depend on its tomorrow’s advancement. Apart from their key role in the education of future generations, they fulfill economic functions in both urban and rural areas. This, therefore makes them vital for the survival and meaningful development of any nation.

For centuries gender has been key factor that has affected illiteracy rate worldwide.

Osuman (1997) reports:

*There are about one billion illiterates, currently existing in the world, and of this number the majority are women although there are wide variations by regions, illiteracy rates invariably are higher for women than for men.*

Even in the advanced nations, women participation in education, particularly at higher level, has suffered some set backs. Walsh (1997) report that “the first set of women who inspired to study medicine were often driven from the classroom by irate male student:.
Similarly in the second half of the 19th century an American educator, Edward Clarke maintained that:

*Women’s brains were relatively undeveloped and unsuited to The intellectual rigors of higher education; and that if woman Used too much of their energy to think, it might rob energy from Their vital reproductive organs and render them infertile.*

Also, early American psychologies such as Margaret Washburn, Chirstine Ladd-Frankling and Mary Calkins were denied official status in graduate programmes near the turn of the 19th century for the fact that they were women (Farumoto & Searborouhg, 1986).

At the moment, all these may be looked at with amused tolerance, for the simple fact that women in a big number have full access to higher education in such developed countries. In the United States, in 1995, women were expected to earn over 57% of all undergraduate degrees as compared with 43% in 1970 and 24% in 1950 (Koener, 1999). However, in many African countries, there is still cause for alarm; as women make up no more than 30% of undergraduate students. In Ethiopia, the percentage of female students in Colleges of Education was 19% (UNESCO, 1995). In Nigeria, women participation in higher education is extremely low. The situation is even worse in the northern parts of the country. Nigerian women therefore need to be educated to enable them perform all the functions expected of them. These include their participation, on equal terms, with men in the process of social development and change for quantitative and qualitative progress in the society.

As a fundamental right, women should be given the opportunity to read, write and calculate. The level of women participation and positive contribution in national advancement depends solely on their level of education. To raise the status of women for a better society, women enjoy “equal rights to education” as rightly enshrined in the United Nation’s charter.

**WOMEN AND EDUCATION IN A CHANGING SOCIETY**

Society is dynamic, and this always brings about endless challenges for its citizens particularly in areas of Science and Technology. Such challenges could only be faced developmentally by society members if they are well educated. The late Sir Ahmadu Bello, Premier of former Northern region said in one of his speeches “we cannot move forward to achieve our proper place in the world unless we have a large number of educated men and women to staff our various services and commercial
concern” (sustaining a proud heritage A.B.U Calendar 2005).

It is also on record that in 1964, the late Sultan of Sokoto, Sir Abubakar III held a conference with the Awujale of Ijebu land and the Alake of Egba land on how best to promote women education in northern Nigeria. But the question here is that, to what extent, and at what level of education did the various governments in Nigeria try to translate the foresight of these nationalists into reality? Not only that, the report of the Phelps Stoke Commission, titled “Education for Africa” 1922 emphasizes in its recommendations: “the education of women and girls receive much more serious consideration both as to quality and quantity” (Osuman, 1997).

All these are clear signals that women education should not be restricted to the up-keep and maintenance of family and other household; but extended to furthering their education for a better result. We should always remember that women play a greater role on their children’s school enrolment, attendance to school and ensuring good performance. Indeed, it is the educational status of women that determines the brighter educational future of their children. The level of parents’ education is mostly a replica of the attitudes and values they transmit to their children and this would positively or negatively affect the societal advancement.

In the present day Nigeria, beyond any iota of doubt, the “inter-generational illiteracy cycle” is on the increase among communities that completely deter women from being educated for fear of pre-marital pregnancy, sexual harassment or economic hardship. Many parents in the country choose to invest more money in educating their male children at the expense of the female ones. this is a myopic vision. Parents should not forget the popular saying that “when you educate a man, you educate an individual, but when you educate a woman, you educate a society.”

The writers are not unmindful of the efforts of parents, past and present governments in upgrading women education in the country. However, a much more practical attention is needed by both parents and governments to promote women education in all its ramifications for the general advancement of the current complex and democratic society of ours.

IMPEDIMENTS TO WOMEN EDUCATION

Impediment according to Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary of current English is “something that hinders”. In relation to women education in Nigeria however, impediment could refer to cultural and sentimental reasons
that deny women full access to education particularly at higher level.

Osuman (1997), outlined the following to be some of the impediments to women education in Nigeria.

- Gender inequality, the inability of the government to address gender difference between males and females has seriously affected the development of women educationally and otherwise in the country.
- Role play in the home; in many homes girls are subjected to various duties at an early age than their male counterparts.
- Preferences shown to male children by parents: some parents apparently show more interest in the education of their male children than female ones.
- The lifestyles of the cattle Fulani; due to the unsettled style of life of these people, lost of their children, particularly females, could not have access to education.
- Attitudes of some educated women: many husbands and parents of educated women, especially those with higher education, find difficulties in convincing such women to honour all religious and social norms and values.
- Also in addition to the above, we can see impediments to women education in Nigeria in relation to the:

- Cultural outlook of women. In some societies, women are reduce to the level of commodities; for instance, there exists cultures where a man can own up to twenty women in the society, has contributed to the stagnant development of women generally, particularly in the northern areas of the country.
- Psychological defeat’ is found to be another factor that makes women shy away from science related disciplines, and other skilled high paying jobs in trades sector. A young woman moving out of her undergraduate engineering programmes said. “I like my courses, and I am getting good grades. I think I am good at this………….but I just cant see myself as an engineer” This inferiority feeling leads women into low status jobs; and is a clear reflection of the way the society views them.
- Low socio-economic position of parents as reported by Longe Commission on the review of higher education in Nigeria (1992) is observed to have put women inferior to men with regard to their participation in higher education. This indicates that parents with meager income may choose to send their sons to school, leaving their
daughters behind even if they are more brilliant than the boys.

• High level of illiteracy among parents, particularly those in the area is found to affect the girls’ access to education. In such environment girls are relegated to hawking and trading in order to improve the income of their families.

RECOMMENDATIONS
In order to enhance women education participation in all development processes in Nigeria, the following are recommended:

• That Federal Ministry of Women Affairs through states ministries of education and departments of women affairs shall open functional offices at all local government headquarters so that its impacts could be felt at the grass level in good time.

• Government should mount a special public enlightenment campaign through whatever means as to the importance of women education.

• At the communal level, religious leaders should understand the wind of change nowadays and educate their followers on the worth of women education, considering the roles they play from religious point of view.

• The lucky, highly educated women should articulate their thinking to be in conformity with the norms and values of the society; with regard to obedience to their parents and husbands.

• The government should make it a policy that all governmental levels must set aside least 20% of their total in-service beneficiaries to be women folk.

• Parents should desist from rating their daughters as second class members of the household; and give them equal sponsorship educationally as they do to their sons.

• Educational managers, teachers inclusive should ensure that women are devoid of intimidation and sexual harassment.

• Finally, as reported by Hausa version of Radio Douche Welle, on 11/7/2005, that co-education should be discouraged at all educational levels, as this would encourage women’s personal thinking and enable them control their enticement or desires, if exonerated from men.

CONCLUSION
This paper tried to synthesize on concept of education; where it has touched the importance of women education from
traditional, religious and western points of view. It has shaded light on how women education, if achieved could enhance national advancement in all sectors of human endeavour. Also it has carefully focused on the relevance of educating women to face the continuous challenges posed by our society especially in the field of science and technology.

Having outlined the necessities for educating women, the paper has attempted to portray some hindrances in educating women; more importantly those related to gender inequality, sentiments, tradition, social preferences attributed to parents and so on.

In the end, some recommendations have been advanced on how to improve women education in an effort to ensure meaningful national advancement in the current century.

REFERENCES


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