

Education, A Necessary Tool For Women Empowerment And Gender Equity

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ABSTRACT

This paper is basically focused on highlighting the impact of education in women empowerment and gender equity. Women empowerment and gender equity is very paramount to achieving the millennium development goals. And education is one of the most important means of empowering women with the knowledge, skill, ability and self-confidence necessary to participate fully in the development process. On the basis of the discussion, some recommendations were made amongst which are the facts that women can be educated through open and distance learning.

INTRODUCTION

Education is important for everyone, but it is especially significant for girls and women. This is true not only because education is an entry point to other opportunities, but also because the educational achievements of women can have ripple effects within the family and across generations. Investing in girl's education is one of the most effective ways to reduce poverty. Investments in secondary school education for girls yield especially high dividends. Girls who have been educated are likely to marry later and to have smaller and healthier families. Educational women can recognize the importance of health care and know how to seek it for themselves and their children. Education helps girls and women to know their rights and to gain confidence to claim them. However, women's literacy rates are significantly lower than men's in most developing countries. Women empowerment is receiving

world attention; United Nations has included gender equality and women empowerment in its development goals. Women empowerment is an essential ingredient for achieving all the development goals.

MEANING OF WOMEN EMPOWERMENT

Women empowerment is the development of mental and physical capacity, power or skills in women for them to operate meaningfully in their social milieu, thereby experiencing a more favourable level of social recognition and subsequently enhance their economic status.

IMPACT OF WOMEN EMPOWERMENT THROUGH EDUCATION ON MILLENNIUM DEVELOPMENT GOALS

The recent millennium development goal has rightly acknowledged that the key to this goal lies in educating women: “Eliminate gender disparity in primary and secondary education preferably by 2005 and at all level by 2015”. Article 10 of the Convention on the Elimination and Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) specifically provides that women shall not be discriminated against and shall have equal opportunities in the field of education.

The issue of women empowerment is a global concern. Access to quality education has been the root of women empowerment. Adult education, Regular education and open and distance learning are strategies of educating women. Whereas regular education is expensive, government can use open and distance learning as a strategy to alleviate the problem of illiteracy amongst women.

Nigeria as a nation has adopted education as an instrument for social and economic transformation. It was spelt out in the Federal

Republic of Nigeria (2004), National Policy on Education that every Nigerian child shall have the right to equal to equal educational opportunities. The efforts of Nigerian government in education has not yielded significant positive results on girls and women education, girls-child educational attainment in Nigeria is still low as records have shown that fewer girls go to school than boys. Female enrolment dwindles as they move up the educational hierarchy (Onuebunwa, 2003).

The education of parents is linked to their children's educational attainment, and the mother's education is usually more influential than the father's. An educated mother's greater influence in household negotiations may allow her to secure more resources for her children.

Educated mothers are more likely to be in the labour force, allowing them to pay some of the costs of schooling, and may be more aware of returns of schooling. And educated mothers, averaging fewer children can concentrated more attention on each child.

Besides having fewer children, mothers with schooling are less likely to have mistimed or unintended births. This has implications for schooling, because poor parents often must choose which of their children to educate.

Closing the gender gap in education is a development priority. Education especially for women has been recognized as a force for social and economic development.

STATUS OF WOMEN EMPOWERMENT IN NIGERIA

Education is the bedrock of women empowerment, be it formal or informal education. Fafunwa (1971) viewed education as the

aggregate of all the process in which a child or young adult develops the abilities and other forms of behaviours which are of positive value to the society in which he lives.

The level of education of women is low in Nigeria most especially in Northern parts of Nigeria. The National literacy rate for female is only 56% compared to 72% for male, and in certain states the female literacy, rates, enrolment and achievement rates are much lower, for example, girls net enrolment in Sokoto, is 15% compared to 59% for boys. (UNICEF 2002). However, in Nigeria today, there is progress in women education with the exception of northern Nigeria (Uduigwomen, 2004).

Although Nigerian women still have a long way from achieving equality with their male counterparts, a good number of Nigerian women are now found in all sorts of enterprising occupations such as law, teaching, medicine, business and the armed forces.

Political empowerment of women has been enhanced by the level of education. In Nigeria today, women are gradually occupying their rightful positions. Awareness is being created that women should participate in partisan politics. Women are discriminated against in occupying as many positions in comparison with their numerical strength. However, Nigerian women have been occupying various positions such as: ministerial positions, senate, house of representative, State House of Assembly, as Deputy governs, commissioners and various important political positions. During Ex-President Obasanjo's first term in office (1999-2003), he appointed about seven women as ministers while during the second term (2003-2007), he appointed more

than seven women into his cabinet. He also appointed women as some of his advisers.

Women domestic empowerment in Nigeria is too low. Observations have shown that resources that are of great importance in the life of women for the purpose of meeting their domestic and matrimonial commitment are inadequate and not available in most cases. In average home in Nigeria women and children move in search of water, firewood and coal for domestic uses wasting a lot of human hours, and more over female children waste most of the time they should devote to education. Domestic facilities like pipe-borne water, electricity, kerosene, cooking gas are not within the reach of average Nigerian therefore these problems are subjecting women and children to undue hardship.

Women economic empowerment is low in Nigeria compared to their male counterparts. Many women still live on menial jobs. Most jobs performed by women do not have economic values. All the work and activities that do not require financial reward are the responsibilities of women (Egunjobi, 2005).

Women empowerment goes a long way in reducing child abuse, if women are empowered their children will receive more care and education. Poverty has been a great hindrance to women education. Low education coupled with cultural discrimination against women is a constraint to women empowerment.

According to UNESCO statistics 31% of women in Nigeria are literate against 54% for men. Women made up of two thirds of illiterate adults, (Egunjoi 2005). It is believed that women place is in the kitchen and they are perceived as parts of husband's properties. The goal of

women empowerment is to be directed towards restoring the dignity of womanhood as a sound, intelligent and functional members of the society.

SOME EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMMES IN NIGERIA THAT EMPOWER WOMEN

i. Regular Education:

This is known to be expensive and one of the major reasons why some parents deny their female children access to quality education. But it is a vital educational programme that empowers women for parents that can afford it.

ii. Open and Distance Learning Programme:

The development of open and distance learning programme has indeed been a solution to the problems of inaccessibility, high drop-out rates and lack of opportunities that have always constituted barriers to education.

Open and distance learning is the type of education that takes place outside the traditional school system, it is imparted without necessarily having personal interaction with the learners, and there is liberal admission procedure and requirements. The practice of open and distance learning include:

a. National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN):

NOUN was established as a supplement and complement to traditional channels of delivering education to Nigerian public. The

need for open and distance learning is imperative in view of the ever-increasing growth in Nigeria population and the high proportion of Nigeria under the age of 15 (about 51 percent of the total) have produced the highest number of Nigerian to be educated (Jegade 2002). NOUN provides access to tertiary education through open and distance learning. In NOUN, the courses are organized for easy access, grasp, retention and retrieval. The programmes are made available to students at their chosen places (e.g. home, school or work place) at affordable costs and are to be completed at the students' own time and pace (Alaezi, 2006).

b. Nigeria's Teachers' Institute (NTI):

The NTI's pivotal teacher training programme was designed to produce teachers through open and distance learning for the primary schools and junior secondary schools in Nigeria. NTI uses self-instructional materials and weekend vacation contact session for tutorials, practical lessons and counseling. It has about 600 study centres country wide. Between 1990 and 1992, the NTI graduated 21,000 Nigerian certificates in Education (NCE holders). This figure compares with the combined total of 58,000 teachers graduated by the nations 58 conventional Colleges of Education (Aderinoye, 2001). The NTI's pivotal Teachers' programme produced 19,025, 20,800, and 15,567 qualified teachers for the 2000, 2001 and 2003 respectively (Aderinoye, 2001)

c. Sandwich Programmes:

They was established and run by many tertiary institution in Nigeria, most especially the university and colleges of education. Sandwich

programme in Nigeria, dates back to the mid eighties. They are programmes that are run during the school vacations to create opportunities for working class. These programmes are made available to all categories of entry qualifications ranging from, standard six, certificate attempted, school certificate holders, grade two teachers, degree holders. Many universities have been running the programme right away from its inception in the mid eighties, although some universities later joined.

Universities that are very prominent in the running of these programmes includes: university of Port Harcourt, Amadu Bello University (ABU), University of Benin, University of Illorin, Delta State University, Adekunle Ajasin University and University of Ado-Ekiti, Nigeria (UNAD

d. Weekend Programmes:

They are run by some universities, Nigeria Teachers' Institution (NTI), and polytechnics. These programmes were established and run to create opportunities for working class and young school leavers as a means of accessibility and opportunity to be educated and to improve on their level of education. In Nigeria today, many Senior Secondary School Certificate holders are now seeking admission into these weekend programmes. Indeed these programmes are grace saving devises for Nigerian government since the traditional school system cannot cope with the teeming population of potential students for tertiary institutions. Weekend studies have produced holders of degree in various disciplines, National Diploma (ND), Higher National Diploma (HND), Nigeria

Certificate in Education (NCE), and Teachers Grade Two Certificate in Nigeria.

e. Correspondence Learning

University of Lagos has established correspondence studies as far back as 1974. It was formerly referred to as the correspondence and open studies unit (COSU), but today it is redefined to produce university graduates in disciplines necessary to meet national labour need (e.g. teachers, nurses etc). Ahmadu Bello University (ABU) also established correspondence, and Teachers in-service programmes (TISEP) in 1976 which offers special training programme to prepare middle level teachers for Nigeria's primary schools (Aderinoye and Ojokheta 2004).

f. Distance Learning Centres (DLC):

DLC was established by the University of Ibadan's Senate in 1988, it was initially referred to as the External study programme (ESP) that later became the Center for External Studies (CES), and today is called Distance Learning Center (DLC). It was established to provide opportunities for teachers on the job improve their skills and knowledge through on-the-job training. This in-service training enabled them to subsequently raise their status from holders of Nigeria Certificate in Education (NCE) to full pledged Universities degree holders.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

Education and women empowerment is a vital tool for achieving national development in Nigeria through the millennium development

goals. This paper discussed the importance of women empowerment through education. It is said that to educate a woman is to educate a nation. This is because an educated woman will give her children quality education thereby enhancing national development and achievement of the millennium development goals in Nigeria.

It is therefore recommended that government should provide programmes, strategies and policies that will enhance women education and empowerment. This can be through open and distance learning.

Government should translate the goal and objectives of open and distance learning stated in the national policy on education into reality, and should encourage, regulate and promote Adult education, regular education and open and distance learning programmes for women.

Women should be encouraged through relevant education programmes that are designed to meet needs. Educational Institutions offering open and distance and other programme that empower women should be encouraged to expand the scope of the programmes to meet the need of various categories of women in rural locations, urban cities, nursing mothers, market women, illiterate women and semi-literate women. Technological mediated learning should be intensified so as to get more dividend of education (Adult Education and Open Distance Learning) in Nigeria.

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