

## **WOMEN EDUCATION FOR SUSTAINABLE HUMAN DEVELOPMENT; CHALLENGES AND PROSPECTS IN NIGERIA**

By

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### **Abstract**

*This paper emphasizes on the importance of women education as a vehicle for sustainable human development in Nigeria. The concepts of woman, women education and sustainable development were defined. The paper looks at the factors hindering women education in Nigeria, such factors includes, cultural, economic and, religious factor etc. It highlights the achievement of omen in sustainable human development. Sustainable human development cannot be effective, if the women folk remain ignorant, uneducated and discriminated. Education makes women aware of their responsibilities for the children, families, and society at large, thus contributing to national development. The paper advocates that investing on women and girls in Nigeria will enhance the achievement of sustainable human development. There is a need for positive change of behavior of men folk towards women as this will lead to a brighter prospect for women education in Nigeria. The laws and policies guiding women and education at all levels should be fully implemented. The paper suggests that women educational opportunities should be given to all women, and they should participate actively in policy and decision making of the government.*

**Keywords:** Women Education, Sustainable Human Development, Challenges and Prospect

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### **Introduction**

Over the years, women in Nigeria have been relegated to the background. They have been neglected in the programmes of government in the society, despite the fact that women constitute a very large number in the society. It is on record that the country has more women than men in Nigeria. Women are only given very little opportunity to contribute to national development and this has lingered for quite a while now. Women are endowed with gifts which identify them as a group with the most important and essential tools and ingredient necessary for nation building.

Olaleye (2008) argues that the need to integrate women into development process of any nation have raged on at national and international workshops. He further asserted that women represent two-thirds of the world illiterate adults while girls account for a similar proportion of the world's out-of-school population. UNESCO (2002) states that women form a high percentage of the population and as such they need quality literacy education to be able to contribute their quota to human development of

the nation. Many countries of the world invest in education because they believe that education brings national development to the society. All over the world, education is recognized as the cornerstone for sustainable national development (Oyitso&olomukoro 2012). Education enables a person to maximize any opportunity that may arise from development. It is key in any aspect and level of development and central to the development and improvement of the nation's welfare. It empowers people and strengthens nation's doors for all to lift themselves out of poverty.

In Nigeria today, the women folk have contributed in business, politics, education, sports and other professions. They have tried to reduce the disparity between the male and female. Despite these contributions are still talks about good health for women, educational, economic, social, cultural and political empowerment for women. Nigerian women have not been fully mobilized and empowered to contribute to human development. According to Onwuibiko (2012), they have been dehumanized and traumatized in so many ways as out of over 1.3 billion people who live in abject poverty around the globe about seventy percent are women. Poverty does not only Centre on finance, food and the like, but also on right denied, opportunities curtailed, and voices silenced. Olomukoro (2012) asserted that the National Policy on women was approved and adopted in Nigeria in the year 2000, of which the goal of the policy is the full integration of women, the social and political status as a means of developing the nation's human resources for national economic development.

Sustainable human development is a product of education; it lies and depends on education for functionality. Sustainable development has taken over, as the deadline for Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) approaches in 2015. The United Nations is leading a preparation for a post 2015 development agenda to accelerate the achievement of the MDGs and create a frame-work that will build on what has been achieved over the past 15 years. Nigeria is not left out of the preparation as it also makes enormous effect to all the have been achieved by the MDGs in the pat years.

However, for effective sustainable human development, the Nigerianwomen needto be educated not just informally and non-informally but also formally to conquer the limitations and overcome the challenges facing her. Issues like gender inequalities should be given serious attention. Women should be given the same opportunities as men so as to improve the standard of living in Nigeria. It has been noted and made evidence that a country that does not promote gender equality and full participation and empowerment of women and girls will not succeed in the sustainable development agenda and strategies. Women education encourages young educated ladies to make important decisions that affect their futures in deciding what to study, whom to marry, number of children they will like to have, the level of academy profession they will want to attend, healthy lifestyle and these contribute to human development in the society. There is a popular saying that "if you educate a man you educate an individual but if you educate a woman you educate a nation".

### **Definition of Terms/Conceptualization**

In this paper, there are concepts like woman, women education and sustainable development which need clarification.

**Women Education:** This includes areas of gender equality and access to education and its connection to the alleviation of poverty. However, women education in Nigeria involves the analysis of educational attainment by women and difficulties experienced in attaining such. It also refers to the systematic involvement of the female in all educational activities of the school system. Women education will enable the female to enhance her innate tendencies to function effectively in her environment, which includes her family, community and society at large. These innate tendencies include knowledge, abilities and mental powers. The benefits are not limited to her alone but the family, community, nation and the world.

**Sustainable Development:** There are many definitions of sustainable development. However, the most popular definition is by the Brundtland report. "It defined sustainable development as "meeting the needs of the present generation without compromising the needs of future generation". (Jhingan& Sharma, 2011:154) Sustainable development means that the development should keep going. It emphasizes the creation of sustainable improvement in the quality of life of all people through increase in real income per capital, improvement in education, health and general quality of life. Sustainable development is closely linked to economic development.

### **Theoretical Framework**

To give the work a theoretical base, modernization theory of development was used. Modernization theory is a description and explanation of the processes of transformation from traditional underdevelopment societies to modern societies. Modern theorist believed that development is not purely dependent on economic activities, but change is involve in all aspect of life's economic, social, political and cultural. They are calling for progress in all aspect of life. Their general view has that assumption that no condition is permanent.

In relation to measurement in women education, from the traditional era to present day one can see positive changes, socially, economically, politically and culturally. Women are more aware of their environment and take advantage of it than they use to be. Their attitudes or behaviours towards themselves and life in general are changing and this has led to positive development in society. Women are now self-reliant in trying to make ends meet. They are not economically dependent on the men folk. Accessing women from traditional times to modern times, education has improved women in all aspects of life women are no longer seen as traditional housewives or homemakers but nation builders. The modern woman is a lawyer, doctors, pilot, teacher and engineer and all these are products of education.

### **Women Education for Sustainable Development**

Education is one vital tool for human resource and development of any nation. Through educations the human resource capacity of the nation is being harnessed for development. Woman education for sustainable development is lifelong process that leads to an informed and involved citizenry having the creative problem solving skills, scientific and social literacy and commitment to engage in responsible and meaningful individual and co-operative actions. Woman education for sustainable development makes possible for the development of knowledge, skill, value, and ways of nation building and sustainability. There has been a tremendous improvement to women's lives in past two decades. Women education has contributed meaningful development in Nigeria.

**Socially:** women education has contributed meaningfully to the development of Nigeria. Health wise, educated women are best health workers for their children. They know the right nutrition to give to their children, they adhere to the instruction and guide given to them by experts. This implies that the higher the level of education, the chances of children getting immunized. They are aware of the effect of dirty surroundings, therefore strive to keep their surrounding neat. They are concerned with their environment, social amenities provided like good drinking water, health care facilities, modern technologies and this improves standard of living Female life expectancy is increasing. This eventually reduces mortality and morbidity rate in the society. An example is the eradication of polio in Nigeria and Africa as a whole. In Nigeria just few cases of polio was reported in the North. This is as a result of education and sensitization of women in Nigeria towards polio. This is a plus for Nigeria and it shows that women education is impacting positively to national and human development.

**Politically:** we are moving from an autocratic male dominated era to an era where women are beginning to have a say in the politics of the day. Political history and development cannot be complete without the mention of women like Margaret Ekpo, Funmilayo Ransome-kuti, Queen Amina and so many others.

Nigeria was a clear vindication of the fortitude of women. These women were mentioned because of their pioneering roles on politics in Nigeria. In traditional times because of the low paying jobs, women were not fully involved in politics due to finance. Nnonyelu in Okeke, (2002) stated that aside of religious and cultural constraints, the majority of women are marginalized in the major economic activities. This marginalization in the economic sphere has made extremely difficult to acquire the economic strength that is a sine qua non of effective political participation. Today, more educated women are participating in politics and are striving to get higher positions just like the men. Currently, we have the deputy governor of Rivers and Lagos State as women. These women that are at the helm of affairs ensure that policies set up are favourable to women and ensure that measures are set to build up the women for more challenging roles.

**Economically:** women have contributed both at family and national levels. There used to be a time when men comfortably catered for all needs of the family. Today, it is obvious fact that times are hard and men can no longer cope. Consequently, women do more than keep the house and rear children by making meaningful contributions. In the public sectors women are in various strategic positions where they contribute meaningfully to the economic growth or development of the nation. These women are found in all fields even in those fields that were thought to be exclusive for men like engineering, pilot, medicine. The education and empowerment to women has played a role to reduce poverty. The benefits of education are enormous and passed from one generation to the other. Women who are educated are twice as likely send their children to school as women or mothers without education. The international Planned Parenthood federation says average women reinvest up to 90% of their incomes back into their households compared to 30-40% by men. Currently, women's unpaid labours are estimated up to 50% of GDP in some countries. (Engelma & Sheffield, 2012).

### **Challenges of Women Education for Sustainable Development**

Women who are educated have demonstrated their importance in every aspect of the nation's economy. Education has liberated women from traditional narrow vision and illiteracy. Education has made it possible for women to re-enter the labour market, embrace business enterprises and participate effectively in the national indigenization policy. Educated women are today successful lawyers, doctors, politicians, lecturers, managers of businesses, women are of course wives and mother.

Despite the efforts of these women in contributing to human development through acquiring basic education, they still face challenges. A lot of women are still wallowing in abject poverty. Although, the government with the assistance of voluntary agencies and world bodies have setup measures to improve the empowerment of women. One of such measure is the open discussions held by the UNESCO, UNICEF and UNFPA with political executive of the state on the issues of concern in education of women and girls. According to Okeke (2002) the meeting highlighted the grave situation on girls' education in Nigeria, stressing low access, high withdrawal rate at the primary level as well as the negative effects of early marriage and pregnancy on young girls. The 1990 Jomitiem declaration of education for all (EFA) is one of such measures by government and world bodies to improve quality education and girl child education. The overall focus is the access to quality education by all. Some of the education for all (EFA) goals stated by UNESCO (2002) and (2003) are;

Ensuring that by 2005, all children particularly girls, children in difficult circumstance and those belonging to ethnic minorities, have access to complete free and compulsory primary education of good quality. The goals are set up to ensure that every Nigerian child of schooling age is educated and the girl child has equal access to basic education. Despite all these input by the government, voluntary agencies and world bodies, gender divide still remains. Women in Nigeria are not given equal opportunity to employment, political power. The general failure to provide equal opportunities for women to pursue

education and economic self-sufficiency has left most of our women in poverty. Many women are stocked in low paying, low status jobs because of lack of adequate education.

Women education for sustainable human development is still facing some challenges in Nigeria. The major challenges are;

**Cultural Factor:** the culture of any society is an embodiment of knowledge, characteristics, way of thinking, feeling, attitudes, aspirations and ideas of the people. Studies have shown that in most societies, women have lower status than men because cultural factors makes it imperative that disadvantage of being female starts early in childhood. The female has less access to education, as adults they spend more hours meeting domestic needs.

Most cultures in Africa and in Nigeria believed that girls should be reared informally for the purpose of becoming house wives and mothers in future. This makes the issue of formal education become less important and waste of resources. Some believes the higher a woman educational qualification the lower her chances of getting suitable husband. There is fear that formal education is capable of making them marry late or not marry at all. In the Northern part of Nigeria, there is a fear of public criticism for sending the girl-child to school. There is always a cultural condemnation of the girl child socializing with the boys. The girl-child is being culturally made for domestic works. In most African societies, women do not have inheritance right as such do not carry the family name like the man. This has result to every available means being utilized to training the boy to the detriment of girls because of their important role in protecting the family name.

**Economic Factor:** Poverty is one major factor that hinders women education in Nigeria. Accessing women form where they were in this modern time, women have developed economically. A lot of women are engaging themselves in one business or the other, women in the rural areas are learning how to use modern farming tools to improve farming system, and other women are in pursuit for more academic degrees. All these are to see how women improve themselves economically. These women try to help themselves thru extreme hard efforts. Those who want to further their education to meet with the level of education of their male counterparts so as to get salary increase or promotion in their working places have to pay very exorbitant school fees. The government is not putting efforts to help these women. They organize conferences, setup policies that will empower women but implementing these policies is a problem. Women need full empowerment programmes economically and not setting up cheap empowerment programmes only when they want to score cheap political points. An example is the affirmative action for women participation in politics which Nigeria is a signatory to that agreement, implementing the agreement is a big issue in Nigeria. When there is an economic hardship parents will be compelled to withdraw their children from school. Whenever such situation arises it is the female child that withdraws first. She will in turn support the parents to raise money through other activities like hawking, farming in other to sustain the family economically. Poverty in the family can compel the parents to give the female child out for marriage so that the bride price is used to train the male children.

**Looking at the Religious factor,** though with development this has reduced but it is still a challenge. Some religion do not allow married women to come out freely not to talk of taking part in formal education. It has been observed that some religion lack obligation to western education, parental commitment to the girl-child, marital life, moral condemnation of girl-child education, fear of early pregnancy, fear of exposing and conversion to other religion. However, there are some religious groups that do not encourage such discriminatory practices such as confining women to the house thus the educational gap though closing is still too wide for comfort in today's world.

#### **Other Challenges Are:**

**Sex Role Expectation:** Nigeria cultures assigns sex role to females and males. This has given rise to some activities performed by women as abnormal but normal to male and vice-versa. For example,



parents may give wrong counsel to their children on choice of a particular course of study. Sex role expectation is responsible for the traditional society to believe it is abnormal for female children to involve in formal education.

**Early Marriage:** Due to early marriage, some women are not matured enough to tackle some serious family issues and the same time organize themselves for formal education. Nigeria cannot achieve sustainable development when our young girls are forced into marriage early in life. We strip our young females their opportunities by this act. The impact is very devastating. This harmful practice is as a result of poverty and social norms, culture and value system of the people at the expense of the girl child potential, personal development and education.

**Personal Interest and Peer Influence:** Some females are anxious to get married because others are married. Seeing themselves as single amongst their peer groups can lower their zeal to pursue education instead they channel that zeal in getting a husband.

**Parent Attitude:** The attitude of parents towards the education of the girls-child is another challenge. Ikpenwa (2005) has observed that in some parts of Nigeria, particularly in Igbo land some parents feel reluctant in investing on the education of the girl-child since they do not see the wisdom of providing education for their daughters who would eventually get married. Such parents out of ignorance regard the money spent on women education as a waste. This makes them favour the boy-child education.

Finally, those who have attained formal education still have challenges despite their level of education. These challenges could be said to be woven around some perceived motions around womanhood. The action of the woman is dictated, planned, and even approved and monitored by man who claims to be the head of the woman. Some women will like to further their education but will have to seek permission from their husbands a sign of respect. This permission could be denied or granted or depending on the man due to reasons known to him.

## **Prospects**

There is need for women themselves to realize that they are not hopeless as most of them portray to the world. Women need to accept the challenges of their time to work up to the responsibilities and challenges as well as utilizing every opportunity to acquire education.

Irrespective of the forgoing constraints faced by women and education in Nigeria great achievement has been made so far. The full potentials of Nigeria women are not beyond actualization in this dispensation or era. Today, women are found in every works of life.

We now have more women in low and middle management in jobs than it used to be. This is a welcome development and gives a prospect for more positions for women at top levels in the future. The enrolment of the girl child at different levels of education seems to be increasing by the day. Parents are now embracing the idea of providing educational opportunities for the girl child education. More emphasis and sensitization should be made to parents who are hostile to girl child education. Women now communicate and confer with men although they did not enjoy strict equality in all fields. Women are now self-reliant but they need to cut themselves free from the clutches of male domination. Self-reliance translates to a development strategy which relies mainly on women ability to bring about self-generating and self-sustaining social economic and political system which is problem searching, problem learning and problem solving. There is a brighter prospect for women education if they identify and eliminate those barriers that are stopping them from moving forward.

Due to formal education men are beginning to see women as co-partners in nation buildings and not just goods that can be bought. We hope to see more women vying for top political leadership positions, like presidency in the just concluded elections of 2015 women contested for various political

positions even for the office of the presidency. With high and great expectations we believe that a woman will rule this country someday.

### Conclusion

In conclusion, the need for women for sustainable human development cannot be over emphasized. Women education enhances the natural potentials and qualities endowed in a woman. Women need empowerment in all aspect of life. As this will help them improve their will to contribute to the society. Progress in this country has clearly indicated that marriage and keeping of home are not the only roles women should play. Education of the women should be geared towards the demands which society and economy needs.

### Suggestions

The paper suggests that one must embrace and act on the knowledge that, concrete social change can take place only when all members of society have equal opportunities and rights. If Nigeria promotes the empowerment of women and girls, the scope for achievement for its goal will be realize. Policies on women education and empowerments should be strictly adhered to and these policies should be reviewed periodically so as to conform to change in the society.

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