

RETHINKING WOMEN'S ACCESS TO EDUCATION: A PANACEA FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

Education is acknowledged as paramount for achieving sustainable development of any nation. Through education, relevant skills, knowledge and values are acquired by members of the society to enable them to maximize their potentials in the ever changing world. Education and adult learning are necessary to guarantee an informed government and citizens with foresights, actions and decisions that are crucial for national goals and development. This paper examines women and access to education in Nigeria. It identifies the history, meaning, forms and purpose of women's education. Engaging relevant archival resources, data and theories, the militating factors including cultural, economic and religious barriers affecting women's access to education and the changes in contemporary societies are critically examined. The study concludes that education of women is a major avenue for harnessing requisite human potential for optimal development of the Nigerian state.

Keywords: Education, Women, Sustainable Development, Nigeria.

1 INTRODUCTION

The recent global movement have continued to improve women's live all over the globe, with the female folk across the developing world also benefitting from it (Aja-Okorie, 2013). The focus globally, is now geared towards women and girl-child education. This is as result of the recognition of the significant roles play by women in all areas of endeavours be it social, economic and political advancement in every country, both advanced and less developed nation (Aroge, 2016). Women's socio-economic contribution was noted by the World Bank when it reported that 50% of the foodstuff in many parts of the less developed nations was produced by women (Adesanya, 2011).

The involvement of women in grown-up and non-formal schooling in Nigeria is crucial for the attainment of sustainable development agenda in Nigeria. The uniqueness of adult education which is mostly non-formal is that it is participatory and also entails grassroots method of reaching out to people, identify and proffer solutions to their challenges (Aroge, 2016).

While addressing African Ministers of Education at Abidjan in March 1964, a representative of the United Nations Educational Socio-cultural Organization (UNESCO) emphasized the fact that adults have a key part to take in the destiny of our modern social life. He observed that for society to make an immediate impact on the urgent challenges of the society and achieve long lasting development, it is imperative to create an effective communication with the adult population and also help them to cope with a rapidly changing world. The emphasis on adult learning shows that effective mobilization of human resources in the society is vital for national development. Essentially, the education of women is one major avenue for harnessing the requisite human potential for optimal development of the society.

As posited by Aroge (2016), the important of women and adult education cannot be overemphasized as it addresses the problems of illiteracy among the grown-ups, school dropouts (especially the youths) and women in petty trading. It also accord value for indigenous knowledge, gerontocracy (which is the believe in the ancient wisdom), with a modest consciousness of one's own abilities, talents, strengths and weakness (Aroge 2016). However, women in many Sub-Sahara African countries are denied this opportunity as many of them are consigned and saddled with the issue of reproduction, satisfying men's sexual needs working in the field to mention a few. In fact the recent statement credited to the President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria declaring his wife, who epitomizes the Nigerian women as belonging only to the kitchen, living room and the other room (BBC news, 2016, Ngharen and Akogwu, 2017) is one of the numerous assaults being melted on the women in this apart of the world. The disadvantaged position of women spans across various areas of life which includes education, employment, health, and civil rights. As reported by the United States Agency for International Development and the World Bank, 57 percent of the 72 million primary school

aged children who do not attend school are females. More so, girls are four percent less likely than boys to complete primary schools (Gender statistics, 2010).

Even though some success have been recorded regarding the overall level of education globally and a good number children more than ever before can now access primary education (King, 2013), it is still apparent that global gender equality in education is yet to be attained. For all income brackets, statistics shows that we have more girls than boys that do not attend schools. Broadly, female children in the poorest 20 percent of household have the lowest opportunity of receiving an education (Jensen, 2010). This disparity unfortunately persist even in adulthood (Aja-Okorie, 2013).

According to the United Nations (1979) in UNESCO (2010) about one half of the world's population comprises of women alone, two-thirds of the world's work is done by them (mainly in the informal sector). Paradoxically however, they only access have access to one tenth of the world's resources in terms of income and other material goods. This shows that women have so far benefitted very little or nothing despite contributing much from the economic resources accruing in the society (Eseyin, Okafor and Uchendu, 2014). It also shows that the women's ability in the society has been greatly hampered. 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 (Eseyin, et al 2014). This has reduced women to the backstage making them 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 denied the privilege of contributing at optimum to the welfare of the society in which they belong. It is against this backdrop that this paper seeks to examine women and access to adult education in Nigeria. It also explains the meaning, forms and origin of adult education and how it can engender sustainable development.

2 DEFINITION AND HISTORY ADULT OF EDUCATION

Adult education refers to education for adults with low or no basic skills in reading, writing, arithmetic and other forms of skills and knowledge needed for survival in a diverse and changing society. Being a well planned and sustained learning programme designed for and relevant to the needs of adults, it aims at promoting changes among adult population and society and also assist members of the society to control change and the environment in which the change occur. Adult education is a way of educating and informing the grown-ups who for one reason or the other do not have opportunity to attend school at an early age.. It is any programme or learning purpose, undertaken by older persons on a part-time basis, or any voluntary, purposeful effort made towards the Self-development of adults conducted either by a public or private agency (Fafunwa, 1971).

On the whole, the notion of adult education is "Functional literacy"- which helps the adult through suitable learning materials to become a persons in their areas of endeavor. Like most developing countries, Nigeria's social and economic development depends largely on the ability to produce a skilled and informed adult population.

Writing on the type of education that Nigerians need, Enoh (1996) quoted the former Premier, of the Northern Nigeria Sir Ahmadu Bello: 'what we lack and what we must endeavour to build as quickly as possible, is a strong body of well informed public opinion which will not let itself be fooled by any glib-soap box orator, but will examine each statement on its merit and single out what is false and worthless'. It is on account of this that he placed tremendous faith on adult education as a means of making every person participates in the developmental process. As far back as 1945, Oxford University England was involved in the development of adult education in Nigeria. Up to 1955, few Africans such as this Ghanaian K.A. Korsah and Rev. Ransome-Kuti a Nigerian participated in the process of establishing adult education. The urgency of developing education in Nigeria arose from the conditions which existed before the Second World War. The most universal factor has been the acceleration of social change: In the year 1971, the Nigeria National Council for Adult Education (NNCAE) was created with a mandate to support adult education in its entire entirety, for it to better serve the needs of the Nigerian population, and make positive impacts towards national development.

Adult education is the process by which men and women seek to improve themselves or their society by increasing their skills, their knowledge or their sensitiveness. Prosser (1967) defined adult education as the force which in its ideal application helps the society to determine its ends, bringing about a maximum readjustment of attitude within a society to any new and changed situation in the

shortest time possible and which helps to initiate change which involves and imparts new skills and techniques required and made necessary by the change. Adult education is a lifelong phenomenon as it can be undertaken at any age and for different purposes, deliberately for individuals, community, state or national progress and development. Adult education is not only designed for the achievement of reading, writing and arithmetic, but also to develop people to be functionally alert in order to contribute to the national goals and aspiration.

3 OBJECTIVES OF EDUCATION

Education is a lifelong phenomenon which can be undertaken at any age and for different purposes, deliberately for individuals, community, state or national progress and development. Education is not only designed for the achievement of reading, writing and arithmetic, but also to develop people to be functionally alert in order to contribute to the national goals and aspiration. In addition to the fact that illiteracy of adults will adversely affect the education of children, the strongest argument for this form of education, Fafunwa (1971) admits is social and economic in nature. Socially, literacy will make the adults more receptive to changes and economically it will make them better producers and consumers.

As in most developing countries, adult education in Nigeria stemmed from a response to the challenge of change which shows a progress in knowledge concerning the world, an enhancement of existing skills, the capacity to think and to comprehend, an ability to participate and to lead, and the capacity to deal with the twin worlds of physical materials and of ideas.

Anyanwu, (1987) explains that “the problem of widening and deepening the change absorption capacity of any people in a situation of social change is one which adult education must tackle.

Objectives of education can be viewed in two perspectives. In the first place, is the angle of the national objective while the other perspective is the learner's objective?

3.1 The National objective

- To provide increased knowledge of the Nigerian situation through a rear view mirror

Based on the experiences of other developed and developing countries, Nigerians should be given the opportunity to self actualize, think positively and apply the knowledge gained in tackling Nigerians problem.

- To help the illiterate adults to learn to read and write, especially in their own languages, thus enriching their minds and thereby enabling them to take intelligent part in the school and political development of their nation.
- To enhance the frontiers of reading ability of adults through post literacy classes particularly in English and arithmetic as well as to make the school drop outs productive participants in baking the national cake.

3.2 The Learner's Objective

- Education is designed and is believed that it will help person to develop certain skills for technical goals with the aim of making learners economically viable. Not only is adult education capable of making individuals to be mentally and intellectually alert through exposure to relevant literature in order to avoid the likelihood of relapsing into illiteracy, it also enable individuals to gainfully utilize their free time and leisure for valuable and satisfying activities.
- By opening up learners to education, there is the encouragement for such responsibilities adequately because they have been made to rediscover themselves.

4 PURPOSE OF WOMEN'S EDUCATION

Apparently, quality education is geared towards overall development of persons be it physical, intellectual and moral well-being of individuals. Education for both men and women remains a powerful instrument for climbing up the social ladder, claiming and realizing their potential in economic, social and political arenas (Aja-Okorie, 2013).

Arising from the above, Omololu (1972) points out seven special but connected purposes that the education of women should promote globally:

- 1 **Social status:** A woman who is educated can embrace her personal view in any society, freely communicate her opinion and can contribute her quota to the development of the social life in the community.
- 2 **Cultural Value:** The educated woman is a cultured woman who knows how to behave in a proper and acceptable manner. She is gentle, polite and respectful. Can this be said of our educated women in Africa? Are there no cases of disrespectful and disobedient women who because of their educational achievement act otherwise?
- 3 **Economic Development:** An educated woman is better positioned for paid employment as well as fare well in her chosen business. Such a woman is in a vantage position to contribute toward the wellbeing and education of her children, thereby raising their standard and conversely contributing to economic development of the country.
- 4 **Realization of the importance of Child Development:** Education no doubt brings awareness especially to mothers in terms of their responsibility to their children. It is acknowledged that children succeed and learn quickly when their mothers are educated.
- 5 **Political Awareness:** With education, the Nigerian women who had no political rights before now have such rights. They can now vote and be voted for.
- 6 **National Unity:** Education has made educated Nigerian women to be aware of the importance of national unity. In recent time, women associations whose membership cut across the entire country have sprang up.
- 7 **National Reconstruction:** women have made immense contributions to national development through voluntary organizations and different non governmental agencies.

5 EVALUATION OF WOMNE AND EDUCATION IN NIGERIA

In Nigeria and many other parts of African society, education mainly focused on the male gender due to certain socio-cultural and religious factors. But with the advent of the 21st century and increasing enlightenments women are now having access to education. As observed by Ngharen & Akogwu (2017), factors militating against equal access for women's education include: certain socio-cultural practices and religious beliefs which are subjugating and sometimes harmful against women. Examples of some of these barbaric acts are child marriage which is forceful and the practice of purdah in Islamic religion. Generally, women education has being identified as an instrument for liberating women from the shackles of backwardness and underdevelopment to a position freedom and empowerment (Aroge, 2016). Generally speaking, education can be understand as an instrument for imparting skills and relevant attitudes that will enable the concerned individual to be well equipped and make meaningful contribution national progress (Jaja, 2013). Therefore, "beneficiaries of education or the chances that it offers should not be determine by ones sex, economic status or social background but by his/her capabilities, talents and hard work" (Ngharen & Akogwu, 2017).

Some ways adult education has positively impact on women includes::

- The involvement of women through women adult education commission in taking care of physically challenged women that are willing to submit themselves to the learning process.
- The awards of bursaries and scholarships for female students that are offered admission into schools at both the secondary and tertiary levels.
- The Nigerian Association of Women in Science, Technology and Mathematics (NAWSTEM) is receiving supports in terms of funding for the purpose of carrying out projects, development and to give room for other uneducated adult with special preference for women who wish to be part of them.
- The admission of more females who possess the required minimum academic qualifications in all the higher institution in Nigeria.
- The establishment of more girls' secondary boarding schools with the emphasis on rural and riverine communities.

- Increased public enlightenment campaign on adults for equal chances like the youth such as the equal right of being exposed to the computers.
- The conduction of national literacy survey to produce planning document and launching of new nationwide mass literacy awareness, to ensure the actualization of willing adults dreams. This is being done once in three years to ensure total eradication of illiteracy.
- At the local Government levels, treatment of adults to mass literacy education as a compliment to its compulsory 9-year basic education for adults who are willing to give in to learning as a top agenda.

6 WOMEN, EDUCATION AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

The reasons behind learning or further learning are very pertinent ones. Why must the woman bother herself with adult education? Is it a necessity? The answers to those vital questions lie in the staggering threat to her continued welfare and economic empowerment. Social, political, economic, moral and intellectual decadence can overwhelm a woman who refuses to learn new things or improve on her knowledge (Ngharen & Akogwu, 2017). There is therefore the need to acknowledge the fact that society is never static but in a constant state of flux and complex dynamic growth. At the same time, changes in society pose various problems. For example, there are the increasing problems brought about by the growth in population, increasing unemployment, technological advancement, accommodation etc. it is therefore necessary for the woman to equip herself adequately to face successfully the hazards associated with these inevitable challenges.

According to Barry (2013), women education dates back to the 18th century where women were being taught how to handle household chores. Women education during this period was therefore tailored towards assisting the girl child become a wife material and manage her home properly after marriage. In recent time however, 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. As argued by Humphreys & Crawford (2014). Education is one of the best way through which gender equality can be achieved. Adult education provides the woman tools with which to tackle problems as they emerge. That is, she learns to live in the present, re-orientate and adjust her life to ensure a balance in ever-changing environment. It enables mothers to improve their own health as well as that of their infants, their family and community (Ngharen & Akogwu, 2017). The resultant effects here is that a healthy nation must be made up of healthy and enlightened women.

The experience of sharing life with companions, of serving known purposes and of choosing and enjoying is promoted by well planned programmes of adult education. Adult education underlines the urgent need for the development of adult potentialities especially the women folk. Adult education helps the woman to develop her innate abilities in such ways that life becomes more fulfilling or satisfying to the individual. It develops the spiritual and intellectual resources adequate for the solution of man's numerous problems and thus the community is enriched by such display of increased skills and knowledge.

Adult education is important, as it increases the knowledge of the individual and gives the adult the opportunities to self actualize, think positively, and apply the knowledge gained in tackling real life problems and other emerging societal problems.

Through adult education, illiterate adults learn to read and write, especially in their local languages. It helps make drop outs productive participants by exposing the learners to adult education, there is the encouragement for such responsibilities adequately, because they have been made to rediscover themselves. In addition, the programme assist adults especially women to adequately utilize their free time and recreation for important and fulfilling activities rather than involving in gossip and related unprofitable activities.

7 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Until recently, the system of education in Nigeria plainly discriminates and is unfavourable to women and girls education as much the same way as touching the less privileged. Traditionally, it was believed that educating the male child is far more important and rewarding because the male would go out and find job that will take care of the family than a female child who would be married off and end up in one man's kitchen and bedroom playing the role of a mother and wife. This is clearly evident in

the Nigerian educational system. Boys have more access to education than girls and many of the higher institution at inception do not even consider the female candidates for admission. Thanks to the changing cultural expectations and new anti discriminating acts, the removal of a large number of these obstacles and a lot of achievement has been made.

In recent times, a good number of Nigeria women are involved in financial and fulfilling ventures like law, medicine, academic, entrepreneurs and politics. The increasing number of women's enrolment in tertiary institutions and of course Adult Education programmes, weekend part-time studies and evening classes attest to this upsurge. Similarly, more females now graduate from high schools, colleges, polytechnics and universities with good grades. It is against this background that one can state that women in Nigeria are now trying hard to acquire education and other relevant skills that will enable them to occupy the already existing positions and take responsibilities towards national development and their involvement in adult education has been one of such avenues. Undoubtedly, a woman that is educated will make a better wife, mother, a great social mobilize and an asset to the society.

The required sacrifice to be paid to educate a woman is incomparable to what the nation will benefit in terms of sustainable development. As Uduigwomen (2004) notes, if the greatest and quality education possible can be offered to these vulnerable group, the future generation of Nigeria may be opportune to a very good footage and environment to uphold our fledging civilization. Further recommendations are hereby stated below;

To attain more women access to education remains a panacea to sustainable development in Nigeria and the desired national development. Adult education must be limitless in scope. It should be re-designed to make Nigerians especially the women to be more productive citizens, reduce poverty and raise their standard of living in its totality. Anything short of this may impinge on achieving sustainable development in Nigeria.

Universal literacy where every woman is able to read at least a local newspaper as well as write a simple letter should be included in the programme.

Recognition of priorities for development must necessarily take into account the culture of the people and operates within the possibilities of local communities.

General knowledge with particular reference to the local environment, culture and values of the people should be taught and emphasized.

Popular education in terms of technical instruction required to improve the local industries should be revisited while the relevant materials and human resource to drive this should be made available.

Adult education should be strategically located in a particular place which belongs to the people and is run by them if the lessons they bring are to be followed. Well equipped libraries and up-to-date teaching aids generally suited for spreading progressive ideas should be available at all centers.

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