

**LITERACY
AND
READING
IN**

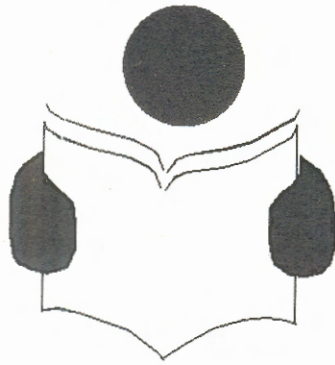
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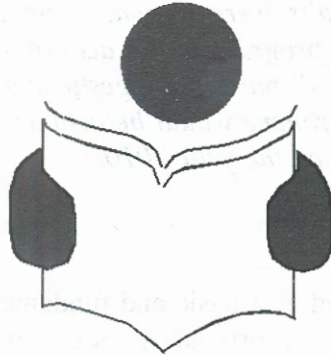
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**EXAMINING THE MASS LITERACY PROGRAMME
IN ZARIA LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA OF KADUNA STATE:
IMPLICATIONS FOR WOMEN EMPOWERMENT.**

By

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ABSTRACT

The Mass Literacy Programme which was launched in 1982, was meant to eliminate illiteracy by the year 1992. This, however, was not meant to be as the "Magic year" shifted to the year 2000. The programme has made some progress in trying to eradicate illiteracy, especially among women. This programme, partly sponsored by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), caters for learners who have enrolled for the Basic Literacy, Post-Literacy (Functional) and the Remedial/continuing Education Courses.

This study sought to answer the following questions:

- 1. Why did women enrol in this programme?*
- 2. How important is education to a woman?*
- 3. Has literacy changed the women's view on certain issues?*
- 4. How will their achievement in this programme affect their lives?*

Data gathered from 24 women and girls from Zaria City and Tudun Wada wards of Zaria LGA in Kaduna State revealed, among other things, that:

- i. although most of the women would love to be literate, their husbands refuse to give them the opportunity.*
- ii. the women enrolled because they want to be educated*

- iii. *these women see themselves as having an enhanced social status because they are now literate.*

The implications of the results were drawn. The paper calls for prudence in the management of funds for the programme. It also observed that serious attention is not paid to the problem of gender disparity. Suggestions are made for tackling the problems so identified so that the programme would be achievement oriented as well as meet the expectations of the designers by the year 2010.

INTRODUCTION

Education has been recognised as a basic and fundamental human right by international bodies, conventions and declarations. Unfortunately, Education has not fared well in developing countries especially in Nigeria, where it is reported that "no fewer than 40 million Nigerians are illiterates". This was admitted by no other person than Umar Aji, the Executive Secretary of the National Commission for Mass Literacy in Calabar in 1996. Literacy is not just the ability to read and write but the ability to carry out these tasks intelligibly. The operational definition of literacy, however, includes in addition to the two skills, the ability to calculate numbers (efficiently) for everyday use.

The UNICEF Progress Report of Nations (1977) observed that "over 140 million school age boys and girls are not receiving a primary education. Most of them would grow into adulthood unable to read a simple warning label, let alone a newspaper or a computer terminal".

Women, Education and Empowerment. The multiplicity of roles played by women cannot be over-estimated. From birth, she is made to feel inferior. She is brought up to embrace skills that would prepare her for her future roles as wife, mother etc. Whereas in infancy this same "fairer sex" has more resilience than boys. In childhood, she is quickly made to realize that life is a matter of eat what you earn. She is given a long list of domestic chores such as cleaning, cooking, sweeping, hawking, sibling care etc. Greedy and poverty-stricken families marry off their young girls at the adolescent age. By the time she is a teenager, she has already inherited all her "mother's disadvantages" - early marriage, illiteracy, poverty, disease, ignorance, prolonged years of child-bearing, etc.

Since education is expected to free the individual from all of the above, it follows therefore that education should be provided for all.

Unfortunately, several factors, top of which is gender disparity, does not make it possible for most girls to be educated.

...of the estimated 960 million illiterates in the world, two thirds are women. In 1990, 130 million children had no access to primary education, of these, 8 million were girls. The gender discrepancy increases during the secondary school phase, and by age 18, girls have on average 4.4 years less education than boys (UNICEF).

Even global institutions such as the UNDP, World Bank, etc now recognize the importance of paying attention to women's education. Education has ceased to be a predominantly male domain where women feel segregated, isolated and victimized. Nowadays, both boys and girls are high investments in the area of education. According to the World Bank, a country with more educated girls and women is not only healthier but wealthier. (UNICEF, *ibid*).

An ignorant woman would find it difficult to develop her other skills. For instance, she would not be able to assist her children with their homework, neither would she be able to reconcile her role in the socialization process with her roles as mother, wife, etc. It is in recognition of the interwoven nature of her roles that the UNICEF, UNDP, are championing female literacy as well as sustainable efforts to enrol and keep girls in school. Educated women have fewer and healthier children, and it is thus agreed that every nutritional, sanitary, communicable hazards facing the young child is considerably lessened by the level of the mother's education. The better educated the mother, the better the chances of her child's survival.

We did not need to go to Beijing in 1996 for us to determine whether women were being marginalised or not. We only had to look around for us to conclude that there are inequalities in all aspects of life between the two sexes. The "favoured" sex has severely battered the "fairer" sex. Hence, the clarion call for more awareness among women. Not the physical strength, but the power and awareness that comes from knowledge about your rights as a human being, as a wife, mother, daughter, citizen, etc. The Beijing document insists that "the empowerment of woman is a critical factor in the eradication of poverty. (US News & W.R 1995 pp 44-5). Thus, the surest route to propelling nations out of poverty is to end the cycle of female neglect. Giving women a leg up in the education, entrepreneurship and political power could pay off priceless benefits - ranging from slower population growth and higher incomes to healthier families". The United States is committed to, among other things, "remove barriers to women's and girls's education; take steps toward increasing women's access to credit and economic empowerment; encourage increased female participation in education, development planning, and political processes internationally..." MS Jan/Feb. 1996. p.17.

If advanced and developed countries feel they are not doing enough for women even with their level of technological advancement, we should show more concern for our women who are virtually illiterate. If we hope to move ^{the} the rest of the world into the 21st century, positive and decisive actions should be taken with regard to women education.

A UNDP report reveals that:

Out of the 1.3 billion people living below poverty level, 70 percent are women, and that in the developing world, 900 million people are illiterate. Of this number, women would be about 600 million. Despite the fact that female form a large part of the labour force in a country, the number of unemployed female is more than that of males (Human Development Report, 1995).

In Nigeria, for instance, working mothers are not given child allowance even when it is clear that men have since ceased to be bread-winners. The patrilineal nature of our society further complicates matters. She is mentally, intellectually, physically, emotionally and financially relegated to an inferior position.

THE MASS LITERACY PROGRAMME

Before the national mass Literacy Campaign was officially launched in September 1982, the Centre for Adult and Extension Services of the Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria was running a list of programmes as community work and Extension Services. The one that arrested the attention of the present researcher was the Basic Literacy Programme. Girls and women enrolled for the Basic Literacy Programme because they could neither read nor write. They attended classes three times a week at weekends: Thursday, Saturday and Sunday for 2 hours each. They paid a token of N5 - N20 per month even as late as 1994. The interest and enthusiasm displayed by these women was remarkable. They came with their children and some had to hawk their personal possessions in order to generate the school fees. As at the time the Centre was permanently scrapped, there were 3,000 girls and women registered for the courses. They formed 72 classes in 18 learning centres and were taught by 113 teachers (over 60 of these were graduates of the courses).

Since it was a Basic Literacy Course, the language of instruction was Hausa. The pupils, 95% of whom were married, were taught simple Arithmetic, Hausa, Arabic, Religious Studies, Home Economics courses, Arts, Primary Health Care, etc. The course lasted for 1 year.

The Adult Primary Education was the next stage. Since it was more advanced, pupils spent 3 years on the course at the end of which they were given the First School Leaving Certificate.

The third level was divided into two - The Adult Secondary - Junior and Senior. Students were required to spend 3 years on each stage and they wrote the JSS and SSS examinations along with other students from different institutions.

This, however, was not to last long. The major problem encountered by the centre was non-payment of teachers. For instance, as at 1996, teachers were being owed a back-log of 2 years pay. It appeared as if the tuition fees paid by participants could not be used in paying teachers - it fell short. Yet, the university continued to run the programme as this was regarded as a service to the university community. The women also themselves attended too many ceremonies to the detriment of their studies. This led to repeated cases of absenteeism. Because they were mostly married women, they were either pregnant or most of the time nursing babies. This contributed to their lazy attitude towards their studies. Consequently, the centre was shut by the end of 1996.

With this scenario, the researcher went to the Kaduna State Agency for Mass Literacy, situated at Tudun Wada in Zaria Local Government of Kaduna State. This Agency is partly funded by the UNDP. There are 3 programmes being run by the Agency in all the 18 Local Government Offices in Kaduna State. The Zaria Local Government Office include Zaria City, Tudun Wada, Gyellesu, Tudun Jukun and Wusasa Wards.

Because of the importance of education to women and girls, the researcher sought to find out certain things concerning the programme with specific reference to women. The intention was to acquire new knowledge about the programme which was launched in 1982: measure the effectiveness of the programme; produce insights that would have a more direct formative value in the development and improvement of the programme; provide feedback for learners, instructors, coordinators, sponsors and policy-makers; clarify needs and obtain evidence that will improve the quality of results; and finally compare Agency expectations with those of the learners.

The programmes run by the Agency are also three - The Basic Literacy (Functional) and the continuing (Remedial) courses. The basic Literacy runs for a period of 6 months, the Functional for 2½ years and the Continuing is split into 3 years for JSS and 3 years for SSS respectively.

THE STUDY:

To find out whether the Agency is on the right path with regard to achieving its objectives and needs of participants, especially the women, the researcher picked Zaria LGA of Kaduna State, and conducted a sampling of 2 centres. The choice of Zaria City was, because it was within the ancient walls of Zaria City. In addition, most of the people there are noted for their conservatism.

A total of 24 girls and women responded to the questionnaire personally administered by the researcher in the two centres. All the questions had to be translated into Hausa and asked individually. Besides, the women were just learning how to write. So, the responses had to be written for each person. The problems were considerably reduced by the fact that the researcher is fluent in Hausa whereas the instructor could not speak English.

A 15-item questionnaire was prepared.

Items 1 - 6 (Part I) sought for information on the respondent's age, professions, whether their spouses were literate, to what level, and their occupations. It also includes whether they could read and write, in what language(s), and the role each one plays in the family: whether they read at home and which materials they read.

Items 7 - 15 (Part II). Item 7 wanted to know why they enrolled for the programme. Items 8 -15 wanted their views on politics, their opinions (then and now) on Health care, their rights as women, their present social status, their opinion about early marriage, breast feeding,

purdah, girl-child abuse and hawking. It also includes how important they think education is for a woman, whether they feel education is a determinant in participation in politics and how their husbands contribute to the success of their programme.

It then asks how the mass Media can contribute to making learning easier in order to eradicate illiteracy. It finally sought to know how the present achievement would affect their lives, whether they now have more job opportunities and what else they would like to be incorporated in the programme.

Some of the responses were graded, making it possible for easy responses. Some required free responses and as such, some women gave more than 1 response and insisted they wanted everything to be reflected.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Zaria City sample. Mangwaro Babajo, Kwarbai Ward.

Out of the 22 women, 12 were present. That is 54.5%. Six (50%) are in their 50's; 4(33.3%) are in their 40's; 1(8.3%) is in her 70's and 1(8.3%) is a teenager. They all responded to items 2 and 3 saying they could read and write in Hausa and Arabic. Concerning their occupation, 6(50%) are traders. 1 knits, another operates a grinding machine, and makes "kuli-kuli" and pastries. The other 6(50%) are tailors who also embroider caps and gowns. Eleven (11) 91.7% claim they read at home such materials provided by the Agency like *Hanya Karatu (Sabuwar) How to read* (Revised edition) NNPC, 1983.

Rubutun Wasika (Letter Writing) NNPC (revised) 1995 *Hanyar Lisafi Sabuwar* (How to Add) Revised (1990). However, not all of them were lucky to get these books, so they sometimes borrow from each other. The only girl in the group was the one who did not read at home. Her education is a result of the connivance between her and her mother who is anxious to have an educated child. They all claim they assist their families financially. When they were asked why they enrolled for the programme, 6(50%) wanted to become literate and enlightened; 1(8.3%) for commercial and economic advancement; and 6(50%) for an enhanced social status. They gave other reasons. For instance, one of the first six claimed that any time she went to hospital, she had to go along with all the cards in the house to be sorted out by the Nurses in the hospital. But now, she could pick the right one. She said this with pride. (See Table 1.)

Another among the second 6 told the class of her sister who had come from the village to visit a sick relation in the hospital. Unfortunately, they got to the house with a notice written in English and Hausa: "Beware of Dogs - Hankali da kare", but because they could not read, they walked right in and they were badly bitten by dogs. It was then that she resolved she must do something about her illiteracy.

None of them showed interest in politics. They claimed it was the domain of their husbands. Their views have certainly changed on certain issues such as health and the fact that whether the child is a boy or a girl, education is compulsory for better life. But they claimed their economic status was still the same because they were only being taught how to read, write

and add. Eleven (91.7) claimed literacy has not changed their views on breast-feeding. According to them, it is a sin to have a child and not give water to the child, even if the child lives for just five minutes (see Table 1). So, the baby-friendly posture now common in most Teaching Hospitals is not acceptable to them. The other touchy areas are purdah, hawking and girl-child abuse. For purdah, 7(58.3%) say literacy has not changed their views on this. Neither has it changed their opinion on hawking and child abuse. Six argue that hawking is not child-abuse (50%); while for girl-child abuse, 4 (33.3%) claim literacy has changed their views, 4 (33%) claim it has not, 3 (25%) are undecided and the young girl did not respond.

The most positive responses in this section were on early marriage and their social status. 10 (83.3%) agree that early marriage should be discouraged as much as possible. (The researcher believes this is not unconnected with the rampant cases of VVF being aired on the electronic media).

ITEMS	ZARIA CITY CENTRE		T/WADA CENTRE	
	NO. OF RESP.	%	NO OF RESP.	%
Item 7: Why did you enrol for this programme?				
a. To become literate and enlightened	6	50	6	50
b. For commercial/economic advancement	1	8.3	1	8.3
c. To achieve a higher social status	6	50	4	33.3
d. For political reasons	-	-	1	8.3
e. Any other reason	-	-	-	-

*Some gave more than one response

Item 9 Your opinion about your:	ZARIA CITY										T/WADA									
	S	%	MA	C%	U%	B	%	D	E%	NR	S%	MA	B	%	U%	NR	D	E%		
Health care	4	33	-	-	4	33	4	33	-	-	-	-	12	100	-	-	-	100		
Economic status	9	75	-	-	-	3	25	-	-	-	25	-	9	75	-	-	-	-		
Social status	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	12	100	-	3	83	-	-	16	-	12	-		
Rights as a woman	-	-	11	91	1	8	-	-	-	-	-	10	-	-	2	-	-	-		

* S - Same; UND - Undecided; D.E - Definitely Enhanced; B- Better; MA or C More Aware or Clearer

ITEM 10: Has literacy changed your views on:	ZARIA CITY								T/WADA							
	Y	%	N	%	UND	%	NR	%	Y	%	N	%	UND	%	NR	%
Breast feeding	-	-	11	91	-	-	1	8	-	-	10	83	-	-	2	16
Purdah	1	8	7	58	3	25	1	8	1	8	2	16	3	25	6	50
Early marriage	10	83	-	-	1	8	1	8	10	83	1	8	1	8	1	-
Girl-child abuse	4	33	4	33	3	25	1	8	2	16	8	66	1	8	1	8
Hawking as child abuse	4	33	6	50	-	-	2	16	8	66	2	16	-	-	2	16

* UND - Undecided; NR - No Response

They, however, claim if their husbands insist, they really have no say. This is a post-literacy view. Concerning their social status, all 12 agreed (100%) that their social status is definitely enhanced. They were asked to explain briefly. One woman told the class that whenever her daughter in Maiduguri wrote to her, she would have to go and look for somebody to help read the letters. But now, even though she cannot read fluently, she still reads and understands all the contents. According to her, her daughter's secrets remain in the family and that she has assisted two people in this task. And she feels very proud that she has risen above their level.

Another claimed that illiterate women move in groups because they lack the confidence and self-esteem to walk on their own. She further argued that even when crossing the road, they cross together and that their steps are not sure. Out of curiosity, the researcher asked whether in addition to reading, writing and doing calculation, they were taught how to walk. They said no, but that now that they are literate, they are more sure of themselves and their carriage has improved.

On their husband's contribution to their education, only 2 (16.77) claimed that their husbands buy them materials. In part I, item 4, we had sought to know how educated their husbands were, as there could be a link between the husband's level of education and his perception of his wife's ambition. But there was no link whatsoever. Concerning the mass media, they all claimed that it would help and they suggested more teaching programmes on the radio and television. Also, they all agreed that their achievement in the programme would positively affect their lives but 6 (50%) claimed they have more job opportunities while the other 6 claimed they don't. This is probably because of religious and cultural restrictions on women in the area.

Finally, they would want more books, writing materials, to be taught how to cut and sew dresses, make vaseline, drinks, use knitting machines and the most important of all, how to read and write in English.

TUDUN-WADA CENTRE

12 (60%) were present out of the 20 registered. The same questionnaire was administered to them. However, the Instructor could speak English, so it helped.

Here, the women were younger. 5 (41.7%) were in their 40's, 3 (25%) in their 30's, 2 (16.7%) were teenagers, one already divorced, the other 2 are in their 50's and 20's respectively.

7 (58.3%) are traders, 2 (16.7%) are teachers (in the first language) at home, others sew. Items 5 and 6 have the same responses as those of Zaria City. The major difference is that the participants in Tudun Wada have already completed the Basic Literacy Course. What they are engaged in now is the Post Literacy Programme, but there are no books, no materials and even the "graduates" of the Basic Literacy course have not received their certificates 2 years after the

award.

For items 7-15, 6 (50%) wanted to be literate and enlightened while (33%) wanted to attain a higher social status. Conversely, the women in Tudun Wada were more interested in politics. They claimed if they were given the opportunity, they would participate.

In the same vein, all of them claimed their concept of health care has definitely improved and their social status has certainly been enhanced by their exposure to literacy. Their views on purdah, hawking and child-abuse remain the same as those of their counterparts in Zaria City. They all, however, share the same views on early marriage. There is better perception of their rights as women in Tudun Wada. They all agreed that the achievement would positively affect their lives and in this centre, the women say if they get job offers, their husbands would not stop them. They, finally, would want a better classroom outside their home but within the ward. They want more books, more materials and they want to learn more subjects like knitting, weaving, gardening, etc.

From the researcher's interaction with these women, it is clear that some of them are really anxious to learn and make up for lost time. Even the ones who are widows believe their chances of getting another husband would be higher if they are literate. It was also observed that some of the men entertained secret fears that their wives would no longer respect them if the wives become literate while they are still illiterate, and because such men cannot be bothered, they refuse to allow their wives to enroll. In cases where she enrolls in his absence, he personally goes to the centre to make sure she is de-registered. Ironically, such men will not even think of stopping their wives from attending social functions three times in a week.

IMPLICATIONS, CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

A lot of documents have paid lip-service to women education. Even the *NPE* (1977 : 15) made special mention of women's education. Despite the fact that the UNDP is contributing a substantial amount to this programme, the executors are still cash-trapped. The UNDP needs to be encouraged by positive response and qualitative output rather than what obtains now. The Tudun Wada centre classroom is shared by goats and it is also somebody's kitchen. Celebrating International Literacy Year and other related activities will not help. It is chasing shadows rather than the substance.

Creating Agencies for Mass Literacy, Ministry of Women's Affairs or Family Support Programmes is not the solution if the women are being prevented from coming; there are no materials; the environment is not conducive and the tasks are not challenging enough for adults. Formulating policies is theoretical. In practice, it involves more than that for successful execution, implementation and positive feedback.

Frankly, reading, writing and addition is to say the least, inadequate. Women are plagued by illiteracy which gives rise to ignorance, disease and poverty while the men are given all the liberties in the world and nothing to the women. They find themselves in positions of economic inequalities, segregation, gender disparity, isolation and even sometimes find their

rights violated. For instance, the tailors among them said pre-literacy, they could only sew based on samples. They could not use the measuring tapes. But now they have been liberated.

Education is the key that can free and thus empower women to fully realize their potentials as human beings. Education should not be short-changed. It requires a greater commitment than what we are doing presently.

Educating these women enhances their maturity, decorum and also modifies their socio-cultural behaviour which they will invariably transfer to their children. Education leads to empowerment, and woman power lifts these women from the grassroots level of ignorance to the tree top level of enlightenment. Women's education will go a long way in helping us in our march towards the 21st century. If we do not gear up now, we will find ourselves paying the price of female neglect in the near future.

Based on the findings in this study, therefore, the following suggestions have been made:

1. The Agricultural Extension Services Unit of Universities and Research Centres should be co-opted to teach modern ways of farming and storing food even if it is seasonal, as this was what the women complained about.
2. Since most of them would not be able to afford knitting machines, they should be encouraged to learn how to use knitting pins alongside the machines as most of them would not be able to afford the price of a knitting machine.
3. They should be taught tasks and skills which can improve their economic status. they should also be taught how to cut and sew materials, so that they can have means of livelihood which will reduce their financial dependence on their husbands.
4. Funds should be spent prudently so that the programme can achieve at least three quarters of what it is meant to achieve.
5. Since the purpose of the Mass Media is to inform, educate and entertain, the Agency should mobilise the public through the mass media's various programmes. A much innovative approach is clearly needed.
6. Government somehow has misplaced its priorities. Education always takes a back seat when millions are being spent on sports and defence. The government must vigorously supervise and ensure that mass literacy, especially women education, does not suffer. A strong financial and political commitment is thus very crucial.
7. The necessary infrastructure is essential because it contributes to the motivation of the participants as well as the instructors. If the UNDP has made provisions for this, the Agency should ensure that learners are taught in a conducive learning environment for increased and qualitative output.

8. This writer feels it is necessary to conduct a follow-up study of the "graduates" of this programme in order to ascertain its effectiveness and benefits in the lives of these women. They are sure it would positively affect their lives. It is necessary to find out how it is positively affecting their lives.

APPENDIX**PART I: ITEMS 1-6**

1. How old are you?
2. a. Can you read? b. Can you write? c. In which language(s)?
3. What is your occupation
4. a. Is your husband literate? b. If yes, to what level? c. What is his occupation?
5. a. Do you read at home? b. Which materials do you read?
6. What role do you play in your family?

PART II: ITEMS 7-15

7. Why did you enroll for this programme?
8. a. Are you interested in politics? b. If you are given the opportunity, would you venture into politics? c. What is your opinion about women in politics?
9. What is your opinion about:
(a) Healthcare, (b) Your economic status (c) Your social status (d) Your rights as a woman?
10. Has literacy changed your views on:
(a) breast-feeding (b) purdah (c) early marriage (d) girl-child abuse (e) hawking as child abuse?
11. a. How important is education to a woman?
b. Do you think education can determine one's participation in politics?
12. What is your husband's contribution towards your education?
13. Do you think the mass media can contribute to making learning easier and to the eradication of illiteracy?
14. a. How will your achievement in this programme affect your life?
b. Does this mean you now have more job opportunities?
15. What else would you like to be incorporated into this programme?

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