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# The Global Economic Meltdown and Its Implications for the Education of Women in Nigeria

## Abstract

The paper examines how the economic meltdown affects women's education in Nigeria. In view of this, the global economic meltdown and the education of women are clearly conceptualized, with emphasis on the provision of quality education for women in Nigeria. The implications of global economic meltdown on education and particularly to women's education in this country are highlighted. Among other suggestions this paper recommends that, in all periods of the society, women are engaged in multifarious tasks and hence need to operate in enabling environments. The paper contends that periods of economic recession should not constitute justification for the neglect of women's education in Nigeria. Rather during such periods special budgetary allocations should be made to prevent social risks to women and to protect their vulnerable statuses.

## Introduction

The full effect of the current global economic meltdown is largely unmeasured hence women and girls being among the vulnerable groups in society (in both developed and developing countries) and particularly in Nigeria are likely to be affected by the potential social and economic consequences of the meltdown, such consequences include unemployment, inequality in education, increased responsibilities at work and at home, decrease in income, domestic violence etc. According to the United Nations (2009), in the elimination of discrimination against women, it is necessary to identify and respond to specific needs of women by taking into account the effect of the current global economic crisis. To this end, the plan for women in this era should include long and short-term objectives. Most important of all, women's problems identified to have been compounded by the global economic meltdown include education, health, security and livelihood.

The global economic meltdown is militating against some of the initial plans for elevating women's status, protecting their interests and eradicating absolute

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poverty on the African continent. The crisis intensified the problems of gender inequality by widening the existing gaps. Education for women and girls presently focus mainly on the opportunities for their economic emancipation (Economic Forecast, 2009). The present economic crisis is affecting women's education as a result of the pessimistic predictions of experts concerning the global economic crisis. Against this background, millions of people around the globe could become unemployed this year (Dejardin, 2009).

Considering women's low socio-economic status as well as their low political representation around the globe, the effect of the current global economic crisis will be more severe on women most especially women from poor countries or the developing world. Hence gender concerns should be incorporated in the development of interventions and strategies designed to address the economic recession. Dejardin (2009), posits that, failure to take this gender dimension into account, especially at the lower end of the socio-economic scale, could be a critical miscalculation, worsening the working and living conditions of millions of people, deepening economic and social inequalities, in the regions of African and Asia. This is because the greater proportion of illiterates in these regions is women.

The situation of women in Nigeria is no better than what obtains in other developing countries. The education of women and girls in Nigeria remains a major concern, especially, as a result of their vulnerable status and also due to the present economic meltdown. The educational development of women in Nigeria is bound to suffer because of entrenched biases with regards to implementation. The educations of women, as well as that of men are of major concern at the various levels of governments and decision-making. All national issues that focus on the social well-being of the citizenry in this crisis era are meant to combat the social and economic

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effects of the meltdown. They are designed with the welfare of both men and women in view. As the global economic crisis affects the society and its structures, education and indeed women's education is affected by any policy formulated to address the crisis (Womankind, 2009).

### **Conceptual Clarifications**

Global economic meltdown is the occurrence of economic difficulties, a stagnating period indicative of a negative economic climate worldwide. Global economic meltdown or crisis refers to an economic scenario, in which case the economies of countries worldwide become progressively weak. The current economic meltdown is a challenge to the global economic order and is putting the economies of countries worldwide under stress. Economic Forecast (2009) opines that, the crisis carries a characteristic of uncertainty and the effect will be felt for quite sometime. The results of previous economic hardships show that recession has a paradoxical effect. To some nations and companies, this period will result in gains, while to others there will be financial losses and an overall loss of financial confidence.

Furthermore, to Global Research (2009), the global economic meltdown is an era of economic turmoil, which impacts negatively on local resources and economies and at the same time offers new insights into how changes in society during recessions drive the world's wealthiest nations into ongoing cycles of despair resulting in millions of people losing their jobs in addition to huge financial losses worldwide. Nigeria has been adversely affected by the downturn of the global economy due to its strong links with the global economic market. Furthermore, the country's major foreign exchange earner, oil is also somehow affected by falling prices due to the current global economic meltdown.

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Women's education, in all its forms, means the acquisition of knowledge, skills and attitudes for the eradication of poverty and the elimination of social, economic and political discriminations in the society. UNICEF (2009), maintains that, providing education for women should start from the primary level. This initiation should gain impetus throughout the education period so as to facilitate the transformation of girls and women in societies worldwide.

The education of both men and women serves the same purpose of providing knowledge, information and skills for social services in any particular society. Education for women is important to amplify their socialization for life in their marital homes and in the performance of their civic and social responsibilities in the society. In the view of Aggarwal (2006), the world, presently has committed it self to the education of girls and women in all areas of life. There is thus a compelling need for nations to device educational systems that promote women's equality and empowerment, and accord high priority to the education of women as it plays an important role in the socio-economic development of women, children, the family and the nation at large. For the purpose of social justice and the need to improve the society by means of positive transformation, emphasis should be placed on the education of girls and women in the society.

### **Women Education in Nigeria**

Mahuta (2002) stated that, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which asserts the right of all to education, has also made it categorically clear that individuals shall not be subjected to discrimination on the ground of race, colour or sex. In Nigeria as a member nation, the principles of the declaration are thus accepted and implemented with a view to providing girls and women with education.

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However, in realization of the need and relevance of education to both males and females, the FGN (2004 P.7) in section (1), No4, Item (b), (c) and (d) stated that:

Education fosters the worth and development of the individual, for each individual's sake, and for the general development of the society.

Every Nigerian child shall have a right to equal educational opportunities irrespective of any real or imagined disabilities each according to his or her ability;

There is the need for functional education for the promotion of a progressive, united Nigeria; to this end, school programmes need to be relevant, practical and comprehensive; while interest and ability should determine the individual's direction in education.

According to UNESCO (1998) in Suara (2000) about 30 million Nigerian women are illiterates. The preponderance of patriarchal values in the Nigerian society has always impeded equal opportunities for girls and women in access to education, power and wealth. More so, the sexual division of labour has put a greater burden on the female gender.

Furthermore, women are impeded from full participation in education by cultural, social and religious factors. The recognition of this gender disparity against female education had led to some attempts by government to introduce measures such as female admission quotas, establishment of women development centres and so on. However, unless the inherent social, political and cultural inequalities are addressed, the discrimination and marginalisation girls and women suffer from may continue unabated regardless of the changes being introduced in their favour (Dukku, 2000 p.3).

Considering the assigned primary responsibilities of women, for nutrition, health and raising children, education of women and girls in the developing world remain beneficial to the society. UNICEF (2009) states that, women's education remains the most important education to all generations of any society, as it is more

productive because of the universal sexual division of labour to which women are assigned by culture. However, the chances for education throughout the world strongly favour men, in developing countries and in Nigeria as well. Among some of the reasons for this are cultural, social, economic and even political policies.

**Implications of the Economic Meltdown for Women Education in Nigeria**

The worldwide economic meltdown is impacting, sending an important message negatively on the social and economic activities of women. This economic climate has overshadowed the well-being of women of the world with respect to their health, education, economic emancipation and their participation in politics. According to Gulfnews (2009), over 66% of women in the world are affected by the current economic crisis. This effect is not only on education and health, but also affects childbirth. In the United States of America and the European countries, economic recession forces women to postpone or prevent pregnancy.

The International Labour Organization (2009), states that, due to the current economic crisis, over 90 million workers will lose their jobs resulting in increased unemployment of youths. Youths in school are dropping out and being displaced in the society. The recession is also affecting education generally and women's education in particular. During recessions, economic outputs decrease. This causes governments to reduce taxes, while increasing the national safety net on spending. This adversely affects the education of girls and women.

In a related study, Internet Business Blog (2009), states that, government safety net on spending reduced and this imposes constraints on the daily education needs of students. Course offerings, programmes and students' activities may suffer budget cuts as programmes compete for dwindling educational funds. In the case of Nigerian women, education funding opportunities for loans, scholarships, school employment,

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and financial aid are weak. The effect is felt mostly in the payment of tuition fees in some states in the country. This is particularly true for state subsidized institutions and public schools. According to Womankind (2009), the economic meltdown is severe in developing countries and in Nigeria women are at a disadvantage. The education and health sectors that depend and survive on donors and government funds are not getting full assistance. A similar situation exists in Zimbabwe. As government reduces expenditures in all sectors of the society, there are direct effects on girls' and women's education.

Generally speaking, women stand to encounter three risks of social problems, namely, increased violence in public sectors, in schools and in the family. There are other social implications of the economic crisis period. These include reduction in government expenditure on all educational activities which in turn may seriously affect girls' and women's education in third world countries. The cumulative effect is the lowering of the social status of women and girls.

### **Recommendations**

In view of the enormous importance of women's education and the social, political, economic, cultural, and reproductive roles they play in the society, government and the public should take appropriate measures to ensure that girls and women are given equal rights for education. This could be achieved by providing adequate schools, employing female teachers, enriching the curriculum of women to enable them acquire employable skills.

In all periods of the society, women are engaged in multifarious task and hence need to operate in enabling environments. Therefore, economic recession periods should not be a reason for the neglect of women's education. Rather during such

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periods special budgetary allocations should be made so as to prevent social risks to women and to protect their vulnerable statuses.

Women's education during economic meltdown should incorporate and encompass vital knowledge and skills required by women to enable them adequately face the difficulties associated with economic recessions. By so doing girls' and women's education will be invigorated during this era.

### **Conclusion**

The economic meltdown is not only affecting the world's financial markets, the macroeconomic sectors of the society or the working class alone. It affects the entire working and non-working people in the society. The economic recession is affecting the educational sector and hence the education of women. Therefore, women's education needs to be given special attention and urgent consideration in view of the peculiar social, cultural and reproductive responsibilities of women in the society



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