

# 1017 Millennium Development Goals: Strategies for Gender Equality and Educational Provision in Nigeria

## Abstract

The main thrust of this paper is to examine the strategies of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in promoting gender equality and educational provision in Nigeria. The meaning and goals of MDGs were outlined and explained, the conceptual clarifications of gender and education were made. The issue of gender and educational inequality in Nigeria was discussed and strategies of the MDGs to ensure gender equality in educational provision, representation and access were highlighted. Lastly, however, the paper recommends, among others, that since government remains the major source of provision of education in Nigeria, there is need for time to ensure that our policy makers at the federal, state and local levels adopt the principles of gender equity and enact policies that would ensure equal gender educational provision in our educational institutions. Government needs time too to provide adequate budgetary allocations for implementing gender equity programmes at the various levels. These and many other issues like development of manpower that would implement gender programmes, mount gender programmes in the schools, development of materials and value re-orientation in respect of gender issues in various states require time and funds.

## Introduction

The Nigeria system of education has long been recognized to have various forms of shortcomings. The very foundation of our educational system which is missionary based was viewed to be narrowed in its scope and philosophy. The first National Conference on Education in 1969 was held in order to set educational goals and expand the philosophy of education for the new age in Nigeria. This took cognizance of the socio-cultural aspirations and development of Nigerians in the Millennium (Alao, 1998). Yet the education system remains inadequate to address present national needs and goals.

The aim of education in every nation is towards general development; to provide an enabling environment for every citizen to gain and exercise his or her right in terms of productivity. Enoh (2000), maintains that, education in every society envisages the development of personal, social, economic and political values. These values are not gender labelled or gender restricted, but are universal values that are open to all to ensure optimal happiness in life by all.

However, in the contemporary society, attaining greater values and the development of the society requires education. Therefore, education today represents the values of society and it is through educational institutions that the pride, values and social heritage of the society are

10/8

preserved and transmitted. That is why Mahuta (2007), maintains that, schools are established as a deliberate attempt by societies to teach social values to the younger generations. Thus, the values and norms of any society are in the schooling environment. In this case, the school has become a society in miniature. Contrary to the above argument, the school system or education in Nigeria, just like the dominant deeply held patriarchal culture of Nigeria's society, is gender biased. Gender inequality, has become so pervasive that the need to re-examine gender factors militating against the attainment of educational equality becomes necessary. Happy enough, the Millennium Development Goal number Three addresses the issues on gender inequality in education in Nigeria. It hopes to provide an enabling environment for equal educational life chances for both sexes.

The term gender inequality refers to what obtains whenever there is a display of the preferences of a sex over the other; this could be boys over girls or vice versa. In the case of this paper, the gender factor referred to or centres on the inequality manifesting in the education sector in Nigeria, to which the disadvantages are on the female child. Rao (2008), posits that, gender equality in social, economic and political sectors in societies of the world are growing faster. This has continually attracted agents, governments and non-governmental organisations to be concerned with providing gender fair social and educational environments. The urgent need to provide equality among all genders in various sectors of human endeavour, results in various initiatives to equalize the chances of education, health, security, economy and politics. These agitations have become widespread among various communities of the world. The Millennium declaration of 2000 is a giant and productive stride toward closing in the gender disparities in various sectors of the economy. The prediction of the Millennium Development Goals is towards the year 2015; its goals cut across social problems affecting the various societies of the world. In this paper, the focus is on goal number Three of the Millennium Development Goals, namely "promote gender equality and empower women". This goal is primarily aimed at providing equal educational life chances through the Millennium Development Goals by the year 2015.

## Conceptual Clarifications

### Gender

The most popular understanding of the concept of gender presently is the issue of female and male sex differentiation and the level at which the distinction promotes and guides social life of individuals in the society. Gender carries a centre stage in discourse on social equality or inequality. It should not be seen to have universal characteristics. However, it is a universal concept with different shades of meaning or features and differs from one culture to another. To Macionis (2006, p. 325), gender refers to the personal traits and social position that members of a society attach to being female or male. Gender then, is a dimension of social organization, shaping how we interact with others and how we think about ourselves.

The general attack on gender socialization is more on sex-role socialization, that is, masculinity and femininity, which connotes differences in feeling, behaviour expectations of both sexes at particular times and places. The most frightening scenario about gender disparity is not the evident inherent factor of role allocation or distinction, but in ways which society set gender to override social activities and continue for a life time. To Horton and Hunt (2006), gender importance involves hierarchy. It involves ranking men and women differently, allocating social roles, sharing power, or wealth and allocation of other resources. To Mahuta (2007), gender today, is a tool for obtaining or allocating opportunities. Some of the constraints emerging from this kind of role distinction foster unequal distribution of wealth, power and privileges. In the same vein, Otite and Ogionwo (2006), posit that, the inequality and social differentiation of gender role is culturally based. Therefore, cultural factors of gender restrict the equality of social services including the provision of education and access to schooling.

To the Marxist, the ideological view of gender inequality in society is an aspect of class exploitation, role discrimination and an avenue for male supremacy over female. This strongly, relegates the female sex and limits them in their social pursuit in society in aspects such as, education, politics and economy (Horton and Hunt, 2006). Another interesting insight into the concept of gender inequality is what Sharma (nd) said, "Gender equality implies a society in which women and men enjoy the same opportunities, outcomes, rights and obligations" the

1020

principle of gender equality is inbuilt in the constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. And it is an issue that Millennium Development Goals seek to address.

### **Education**

Education is everybody's right all over the world. Learning therefore, has no restriction or is not gender based. It is against this background that, Macionis (2006), maintains that education is the social institution provided by society, through which society provides its members with knowledge, which include, basic facts about life, job skills, cultural norms and values. To Enoh (2003), education implies what is valuable, with particular commitment to achieving worthy living. In view of the above, it is clear that education is relevant to the human survival and dignity. Therefore, every society needs education for its survival and continuity. The value and relevance attached to education does not recognize gender or do not differentiate its value to the individual citizen. It is true that education is not restricted to male or female (Singh, 2007). Contrary to the above, educational equality is a challenge to the Nigerian educational system, mostly in relation to access to equal and quality education by both sexes. The points of disparity are in gender inequality, rural-urban imbalance in education and general inequality on female sex in Nigeria education institutions at all levels. It is against this background that efforts towards promoting gender equality, promoting parity and assured provision of educational equality that the Millennium Development Goal number Three is aimed at. This goal seeks to promote gender equality and empowerment for women in Nigeria. This is capable of providing opportunity for attaining gender equality in education, economy, politics and social endeavours in the society.

### **An Overview of the Millennium Development Goals in Respect of Gender and Educational Inequality in Nigeria**

The Millennium Development Goals are multi-dimensional in nature, the changes and improvement of one result to the promotion and achievement of the other in the same system. Therefore, all communities of the world are expected to yield fruitfully in the initiative. MDGs are designed purposely to address the problems of poverty and hunger, gender disparity,

reproductive health issues, investment in education and so on. These problems are clearly summarised in the United Nations MDGs report (2008) as follows:

- Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger. This focuses on the possibilities of higher investment in human development, sustainable livelihood and food security.
- Achieve Universal Primary Education. This means that, all children of school age should be allowed and should have access to good education. Education for all children has various advantages. These advantages include, among others the eradication of poverty, economic empowerment and having access to basic life security.
- Promote gender equality and empower women. This is an engine, and can be regarded as a tool for development. It centres on the provision of equal political, economic, social and cultural rights of girls and women in the society.
- Reduce child mortality. This entails the provision of good health services, with a view to have healthier mothers and children. The imperatives of these are on reducing infant mortality, improving medical care and promoting birth spacing.
- Improve maternal health. This concerns women within the productive age bracket (15-49 years). Lack of good productive health can lead to ill health and death. This problem, if not managed and handled properly can affect the family in particular and the society at large.
- Combat HIV/AIDS, Malaria and other diseases. The Universal access to reproductive health is critical in the fight against HIV/AIDS. This requires access to information, knowledge on HIV/AIDS services that can prevent transmission of HIV and other sexually transmitted infections.
- Ensure environmental sustainability. The notion of environmental sustainability is wide and remains an issue that involves huge investment. This involves the provision of clean water, food security, nutrition and health to the society. It also includes sanitation, time saving technologies and skill training or acquisition for a sustainable environment.

- 1022
- Develop global partnership for development. The global partnership mission in Nigeria is progressively improving. This enhances the relationship of Nigeria and the global community in areas that are beneficial and cardinal for development. This kind of relationship provides opportunities for having access to assistance from International organizations on gender matters such as maternal health problems, provision and access to drugs and improved education.

Considering the Eight Millennium Development Goals, which are targeted to be achieved by 2015, education stands as the major tool for the achievement of all the MDGs in all nations of the world.

In the context of our discussion, the kind of dichotomy that exists in our society is gender based with women being at a disadvantage and as Sharma (nd) posits, the only way this dichotomy could be closed is through education. In order to eradicate poverty at all levels, devoid of gender bias, there is need for many factors to be considered. These factors include, investment in education and economic rights of both females and males; providing equal employment opportunities, wages, credit and social resources. Furthermore, there is also the need to improve access to family and community inheritance and property rights, access to family household as well as productive employment. The Millennium Development Goal number Two, which states that, the Universal Education should envisage gender parity and should be able to reduce child labour. This implies that Nigeria should be able to achieve equality in primary education by the year 2015 (NMDGs, 2005).

Gender equality in education refers to eliminating of all forms of gender bias and unjust treatment of women and girls. This further requires women to be improved in their social and economic roles in life as well as be made self-reliant. Educated mothers with health information or those with good health care are likely to have good and healthy babies. This is possible by improving good living condition, preventing unwanted children, reducing illness and premature death.

However, in a related study, the United Nations (2008), reveals that mothers need good health care and access to family planning to improve their chances of surviving child birth. In view of this, it is imperative to provide equal treatment and provision of information, especially to women living with HIV/AIDS. This is necessary in order to prevent mother-to-child transmission of the virus. With respect to sustaining environment, this starts from family structures, rural and urban strategies for improving social welfare, through equal educational provision, sustain and manage population growth. Global partnerships presently remain profitable to various nations and they enhance various international programmes so as to help in education, social security and in providing an enabling environment for survival.

Gender inequality is a global factor, but it is more glaring in developing countries. In societies like Nigeria, where male supremacy is the dominant value, managing this challenge has long been a difficult social phenomenon. This difficulty, or to be more precise the challenges of inequality in the status of women and girl-child education, which has a long history has been most difficult to tackle. Various societies of the world consider women as inferior, second class citizens or to some extent a property of men as it were (Aggarwal, 2006). However, this inequality manifests in various forms and shades. The practice varies from one culture to the other and also from one religion to another. This kind of inequality becomes more pronounced where there is one form of inequality or the other in practice. Educationally, some emanating factors resulting to social inequality are institutionally based, namely, discriminatory cultural practices, religious roles and discriminatory rites in favour of men, forced or early marriage, sexual harassment, domestic chores resulting from socio-economic status of parents, withdrawal and lack of access to school, distance from school, frequent absenteeism and the contending male dominance in Nigeria's social practices (Muhammad, 1999).

It can not be disputed that unequal resources and wealth have a role to play in promoting inequality in education in the Nigerian society. Thus, the justification for inequality is based on the societal preferences of male over females, in the various societies in the global context.

1024

However, in view of this Enoh (2000, p. 60), identified the following characteristic features of equality that are lacking in Nigeria, namely:

- Providing free education up to a given level, which constitutes the principal entry point to the labour force.
- Providing a common curriculum for all children regardless of their backgrounds.
- Partly by design and partly because of low population density, providing that children from diverse backgrounds attend the same school.
- Providing equality within a given locality, since local taxes provided the source of support for schools.

However, this has been in practical application at policy level, efforts to institutionalize them at various states and at various times still indicate that there are problems of inequality among individuals and in the society at large.

Gender inequality is broadly seen in line with general inequality of educational opportunities, prominently existing at all levels of Education in Nigeria. The inequality in Education in Nigeria shows itself in the differentiation in fees paid in schools, provision of learning facilities and access to educational opportunities and services. The provision of opportunities and access to educational services provided youths today are based on socio-cultural and religious factors. This inequality promotes inequality of educational life chances. According to Anaekwe (2001), gender inequality in education is not restricted to the provision, access or chances alone. He believes that gender inequality also exists or manifests in terms of courses offered by boys and girls; that some courses are allocated to students with some gender bias. For example, Mathematic and Sciences are often considered as masculine, while, Arts, Literature, Home Economics are thought of as feminine. Contrary to the above, Meighan (2004), had earlier posited that, genius is not sex or gender bound. Therefore, no subject area, profession or activity should be engendered or be labelled to one gender. Other places in education identified as problematic are in role allocation in the curriculum, classroom organization, textbooks design and generally in the process of socialization in schools. Thus, Millennium Development Goal number Three is aimed at curtailing these problems of inequality in



educational opportunities or educational life chances that exists in Nigeria, which prevents or limits women from realizing their potentials optimally.

It is necessary to note that gender equality should include development of individuals in the society. Focus should be in addressing issues like social norms, attitudes and behaviour that determine distinct roles between men and women. Education, in the view of Anderson (nd) still remains the bedrock of achieving gender equality for women in the world over.

**The Millennium Development Goals' Strategies for Gender Equality and Educational Provision in Nigeria**

The system of education in Nigeria is having some properties of gender equality in such areas as the provision of equal educational life chances or equal educational opportunities. The Nigeria education system is very clear in regard to the provision of education devoid of any discrimination or bias such as, male or female or as a result of factors such as, socio-cultural, political, economic, religious and ethnic factors. The Federal Government of Nigeria, in the National Policy on Education (2004, p.7), had earlier put it that:

- Education is an instrument for National Development; to this end, the formulation of ideas, their integration for national development and the interaction of persons and ideas are all aspects of education.
- Education fosters the worth and development of the individuals, for each individual's sake and for the general development of the society.
- There is need for equality of educational opportunities to all Nigerian children irrespective of any real or imagined disabilities, each according to his or her ability.
- There is 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 individual's direction in education.

However, in view of the interrelationship of international and national plans for the development of the Nigerian citizen with regard to education devoid of gender bias and in respect to goal number Three of the MDGs in particular, there is need for partnership both at the local and international levels to ensure that this is achieved. However, the Nigeria Millennium Development Goals (2005) stated that, the Millennium Development Goals are centred on improving gender status; this relatively allows the full participation of all in supporting

education at the individual, school and community levels for optimal development. The NMDGs (2005) further stressed that, among the crucial factors to note in building fair ground in schools for gender partnership in schooling and learning are, namely:

- Periodic sharing and dissemination of information, plans, knowledge and resources. This is ensured by collaborative monitoring team of both sexes to see into the possibility of equity, quality improvement in primary, post primary and tertiary institutions of learning.
- Building strong unionism or partnership between Parents and Teachers through associations such as the Parent-Teachers Associations and encouraging them to monitor and actively promote equality in the provision of educational life chances and facilities in schools.

With the introduction of MDGs, it was realized that gender imbalance, inequality and disparity is a superficiality of social norms of the environment. Therefore, gender equality resulting from the various forms of efforts and policies could be achieved in goal number Three of the MDGs. The strategies and limitations are on resource allocation for equal opportunities and outcomes, recognition of differences in curriculum, classrooms, development designs and pedagogy. Equating the capabilities of human rights and gender equality makes individuals to have unlimited access to basic health facilities, education and enjoy voting rights, so as to be able to participate in social and economic activities of the society without discrimination. In order to achieve gender equality in educational provision in Nigeria, specific strategic efforts need to be taken. This paper believes, in line with ACCORD, (1999), that the following strategies would ensure equal opportunities for women in terms of educational provision:

- Enhance the existing policies on gender equality at the Federal, state and local levels. The Federal and state governments need to be convinced to pass into law effective policies that would back any attempt to close the gender gap between men and women in education provision.
- Ensure adequate resources are provided for the realization of programmes designed for ensuring gender equality in Nigeria.

- 1027
- Develop specific programmes, projects and departments in the government ministries (Federal, State, Local Governments and Ministries of Education) to ensure the implementation of gender equality. This should take into account, the variations that exist in different segments, or states in the country. Each programme designed should be appropriate for the community it is meant for and should take cognizance of the gender factors that emanate from cultural, religious and social factors within which the programme is mounted.
  - Each programme should develop adequate manpower, training and skills that would ensure success at the level it operates.
  - The Federal, State and Local Education Departments should mount a research, Monitoring and policy programme department that would track changes in implementation of the gender policy at each level. This would imply that educational institutions, agencies and gender equality programmes would be involved in taking responsibility for development, research and information that would be adequate for setting up effective system and intensifying collaboration programmes that will ensure equal opportunities for women in educational provision in Nigeria.

### **Conclusion**

Education is an important tool for social change, innovation, socialisation and social integration in the society. Thus, it is capable of changing the status of girls and women for the better. Therefore, Nigeria should see the education of girls and women as a challenge in order to neutralize the accumulated and distorted factors of educational inequality meted on the females. The MDGs is capable of playing a positive role in providing an enabling environment for equal educational life chances in all sectors of human endeavours devoid of discrimination and gender bias in the society.

### **Recommendations**

In order for the Millennium Development Goals to strategically help in the promotion of the gender equality in educational provision in Nigeria by the year 2015 as targeted by the MDGs, the following recommendations are advanced:

1028

In view of the fact that Government remains the major source of provision of education in Nigeria, there is need for time to ensure that our policy makers at the federal, state and local levels adopt the principles of gender equity and enact policies that would ensure equal gender educational provision in our educational institutions. Government needs time too to provide adequate budgetary allocations for implementing gender equity programmes at the various levels. These and many other issues like development of manpower that would implement gender programmes, mount gender programmes in the schools, development of materials and value re-orientation in respect of gender issues in various states require time and funds.

Educational books or resources need to put girls in their proper perspective towards ensuring a safe home environment with lesser domestic chores to enable girls to have chances for education. Therefore, government should put more premiums on gender empowerment strategies, covering restrictions of education rights for girls due to domestic values.

The date 2015 which is predicted for the attainment of gender equality in Nigeria, is not viable or realistic. In view of this, it is recommended that the MDGs, United Nations and Ministry for Women Affairs at both the Federal and State levels should collaborate and form strong partnership to declare gender equality a compulsory factor to be achieved. One of the ways this could be done is by instituting a state of emergency for all gender sensitive roles in society.

In families, communities and the various nations at large, (this includes our schools), efforts should be made to encourage gender research, improvement of special gender methods of teaching and conceptualizing the importance of women in the society just like their male counterparts. Educational opportunities should be provided for girls and boys, devoid of discrimination and bias.

The various programmes which are aimed at promoting educational opportunity for girls, promoting innovation and resource allocation should be introduced to capture the interest of girls and their parents, more especially the resources for scholarship award.

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