

WOMEN EDUCATION AND THE MILLENNIUM DEVELOPMENT GOALS IN NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses the issues concerning the provision of women education in Nigeria and how the Millennium Development Goals help in providing and strengthening the chances of women in gaining access to educational opportunities or chances. It conceptualizes, women education, the provision of women education in the National Policy on education in Nigeria and important issues relating to the need and relevance of women education in society. Here, women education implies the provision of health education, chances and access to political participation and general social economic empowerment. The Millennium Development Goals are outlined and their relevance to the provision of women education. This was done with emphasis or particular reference to goal number three which states that, "promote gender equality and empowerment". The challenges facing MDGs in the context of women education in Nigeria are discussed. Lastly, recommendations were made such as MDGs should map out strategies that can be adopted by the natives of the land.

INTRODUCTION

The greatest investment any nation can embark on for fast development of its economic and human resource development is the investment in Education. The global consensus is that, it is the process of developing the general well being of people in the society. The perception of the general public based on what sociologists referred to be conventional wisdom, thought, and mere conclusion with regard to women do not only discriminate them from the core sectors of social development, but has equally introduced them to other forms of social violence in society. Women should not be seen in the gender perspective but should be attached progressive recognition in the making of good society. Recognizing the simple fact that no meaningful development can take place without the contribution of women in society, the nations of the world have therefore, committed themselves to provide social, economical and political protection to women by means of educating and empowering them. This means that these nations had resulted to the formation of gender equality, education for all and the development of millennium development goals (World Bank 2002). According to Department for International Development (2007) increasing access to education remains great challenge to the leaders of every nation. If education for all is to be achieved, the process of equalizing and disengendering has to be fiscal. The turning point of the world development today, is the physical and strategic provision of social and economic facilities to women of all categories, irrespective of status and geographical locations. The

Millennium Development Goals gave strong emphasis on education of women and is meant to provide equal educational opportunities for every woman regardless of status and gender in both rural and urban areas. However, among the aims are to empower women, educate the girl child and eradicate poverty among the women of the world (MDGs 2000).

Women Education in Nigeria

There is a growing awareness on the need for and relevance of education today. The use of educational information is no more restricted to the public sectors alone. It is equally important to every day life of the individual. Education is playing a fundamental role in the moulding and socialization of individual in the society. Advancement of individuals is personal but it is varied; the functionalist sociologists like Emile Durkheim, Talcott Persons and Herbert Spencer, all argued that, it can be macro in nature which is social and structural development. Women education is the commitment of educational system to work for women's equality and empowerment. This is by giving women education high priority, as the education of women plays an important role in the social, economic and political development of a country. However, according to Singh (2007) women education is an agent of women, social mobility as well as an agent of basic change in the status of women. This promotes education and development of girls and also facilitates research in girls and women education. Any education that takes care of the problems of gender parity, provide suitable curriculum for equal education and removes all forms of disparities can be described as women friendly education. According to Department for International Development (2007) women education implies the effort to fight against poverty among women of the third world nations, by providing equal rights for them. This is because when ever there is progress in rights for women; other things change for better. For example, when a girl is able to go to school, she transforms her future prospects for employment and economic status. The DFID has pledged to take an international lead on women education. However, DFID is supporting the following factors: Make primary education free which is a significant factor in getting girls into schools as well as a means of universalizing education for free access; Train teachers by providing and equipping them with all it takes to make them work effectively for better education that is capable of yielding productive output; Develop curriculum that is gender parity and free from bias. The curriculum should be such that will promote equal development of boys and girls in the society; Tackle child abuse and violence toward girls and women, by providing equal rights and protecting women from all forms of violence and social abuse and Provide portable drinking water and sanitary facilities. This is to improve the general well being of the individual and mostly women who are backward in social and economic activities in the society. The Department for International Development is working with other international organizations and agencies

such as, the United Nations Girls Education Initiative, UNICEF Girls' Education project; to achieve the aims of providing education for women and better the living standard of all. Nigeria believed that education remains an important factor for development and has adopted education for effective national development. According to the National Policy on Education (2004) Nigerian's philosophy of education is based on the integration of the individual into a sound and effective citizen and equal educational opportunities for all citizens of the nation at the primary, secondary and tertiary levels both inside and outside the formal school systems. However, as the importance of education is growing high every day, the nation's commitment grows to meet the demand of providing effective education for the citizens. Nigeria provides education for the citizens by universalizing basic education which is primary and junior secondary school levels of the education. This practice is to make women and girls to have access to education, just like their male counterparts in the society. The right of women for education in Nigeria is such that the Nigeria National Policy on Education in section 4 number 19, paragraph 10 provides chances for improving women participation in Nigeria education. This section states that: with a view to correcting the imbalance between different parts of the country, with reference to the availability of educational facilities and the number of pupils receiving formal education and girl's education (p.16).

Philosophy of Nigerian Education and the Provision of National Policy on Education

In line with the philosophy of Nigerian education and the provision of National Policy on Education, the Nigerian Government at various levels, had taken several steps to improve women's participation in Education. According to Alao (1998) sequel to the statement in the NPE (2004), the following are some measures taken to provide education for girls and women. Providing more educational opportunities for girls from primary to tertiary levels; Provision of functional education for girls and women through skills such as saving, cooking, banking, typing, knitting and other functional skills required for empowering and improving living standard; Re-orienting the attitude of all females, irrespective of age, towards education; Creating awareness for all citizens, in which equal opportunities exist irrespective of gender, age, locality, creed or special status, and should therefore be made available to all and sundry; Promoting the education of girls and women in the fields of science, technology and mathematics; Awakenning the consciousness of all women to the needs for the development of a positive self – image, by acquiring education and functional skills.

Conceptual Issues on Women Education

Women education in Nigeria do not exist in isolation, it is the amalgamation of other educational and empowerment factors and variables. By women education, it implies the standardization and universalisation of

knowledge skills, and the general social awareness for social protection and general human upliftment. Some important issues in the context of women education are examined under the following sub-headings. Women education for empowerment, administrative and decision making; Education for social, economic and political empowerment; Education for cultural liberation and freedom from superstitious beliefs; Women education for the improvement of health conditions in society; Education for empowerment against extreme poverty in Nigeria; Education for general training and sensitization of women.

Women Education for Empowerment, Administrative and Decision Making

The right type of education required by women is the education that will enhance workers' social and political status. The curriculum of education as emphasized by MDGs 2000 should be a curriculum that will guarantee women's equal access and full participation in power institutions and structures, as well as in decisions making and leadership matters. The curriculum should equally be gender sensitive and provide the general awareness to the public with regard to chances in social, political and economic representation.

Education for Social, Economic and Political Empowerment

There are a lot of differences existing between male and female educational life chances for example, in such aspects as, opportunities to exert power over social, economic and political empowerment. The social structure of Nigeria is that of male supremacy, nevertheless, the population of women is large and yet left behind in the country with regard to social and economic workforce. The curriculum and educational plan should be geared toward addressing these issues of differences by providing educational life chances.

Education for Cultural Liberation and Freedom from Suspicious Beliefs

Culture remains a complex whole of the knowledge, beliefs, art, morals, law and customs of members of a particular society. According to Ogunbameru and Rotimi (2006) cultural practices have succeeded in creating social barriers, bias, and restrictions leading to some acts of social imprisonment. In the view of Mahuta (2007) cultures displays a large complexity and multidimensional activities and generate close relationship between various factors of the cultural believes.

Education for the Improvement of Health Conditions in the Society

It is among the goals of the MDGs that women education should take care of all kinds of health challenges, in the society. This is by providing health information and provides primary health care facilities to improve the health of women in the society. However, in view of the enormous role of women education in national development and especially in the MDGs, the above issues raised about women education are briefly discussed one after the other.

Education for Empowerment against Extreme Poverty in Nigeria: The problem of Nigeria women living far below poverty line has been attributed to factors such as; low literacy level, poor skills and total dependence on the male supremacy culture of Nigeria. To the DFID empowering women implies providing knowledge, skills and social security for the women. MDGs (2000) observed that, by empowering women more than half of the world citizens would be empowered as women and children constitutes more than half of the world's population.

Education for General Training and Sensitization of Women

Education is a social process; it carries the societal values and maintains the solidarity of the institutions of the society. In the view of Aggarwal (2006) the school institution teaches general training such as, physical, psychological, spiritual and sociological training of the social being. The education of a woman, her training and sensitization is a good means toward general development of women and generally the society.

Aims of Millennium Development Goals

The millennium development goals have eight goals which are expected to be achieved by 2015 and which respond to the world's main development challenges. The MDGs are drawn from the actions and targets contained in the contents of the MDGs declaration. These goals were adopted by 189 nations and signed by 147 heads of states and governments during the United Nations millennium of September 2000. The eight MDGs are broken down into 8 quantifiable targets that are measured by 48 indicators. The goals are as follows: (1) Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger (2) Achieve universal primary education (3) Promote gender equality and empower women (4) Reduce child mortality (5) Improve material health (5) Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases (6) Ensure environmental sustainability (7) Develop a Global partnership for development. The MDGs have launched comprehensive programme to ensure the success of the goals. This means, realizing the potentials of making the world a safe environment for every one and to make poverty a history, diseases and extreme poverty are reduced and equality of inter social facilities to be maintained.

MDGs and the Development of Women Education

According to MDGs (2000) the millennium development Goal number three (3) is aimed at promoting gender equality and empowering women. The target of this goal is to eliminate gender disparity in primary and secondary education and the general target is toward the year 2015. According to UNDP (2002) the MDGs are aimed at stimulating real progress by 2015 in tackling the most pressing issues facing developing countries such as, poverty, hunger, inadequate education, gender inequality, child and maternal mortality, HIV/AIDS and environmental degradation. In respect to the elimination of gender disparity, four indicators are used to measure progress towards the goal,

namely, the ratio of girls to boys in primary, secondary and tertiary education; the rates of literate women to men in the 15 to 24 year old age group; the share of women in wage employment in the non-agricultural sector; and the proportion of seats held by women in national parliaments (UNDP 2002). For the success of MDG. goal number three (3), some recommendations given are as follows: Eliminate gender inequality in access to assets and employment. Ensure universal access to sexual reproductive health services through primary health care system. Achieve a 30 percent share of seats for women in national parliaments; Reduce by half the lifetime prevalence of violence against women. The third development goal is geared towards the general development of women as well as, to ensure gender parity. The goal takes care of women backwardness in relation to education, social equality and socio-economic empowerment

Challenges Facing the Millennium Development Goals

In most developing countries, gender inequality is a major obstacle towards meeting the MDGs targets. However, in order to achieve these goals, the factors should be considered: To close gender gaps between men and women in terms of capacities, access to resources and opportunities, and vulnerability to all social violence and conflicts. The low enlightenment level and poor information dissemination strategies should be improved. There should be a change in the extreme traditional beliefs and other cultural factors that stands as barriers between the goals and the people of a nation or communities. The lack of proper implementation of policies should be looked into with some degree of seriousness. The general inconsistency and poor supervision by government of various local settlements and more especially the local committees should therefore be improved.

Conclusion

Nigeria realizes the need and importance of women education by making it part of the National Policies on Education (NPE 2004). In view of this, the nation commits herself to the provision of effective and sound education for the citizens of the country irrespective of gender and socio-cultural variables. This fact is equally justified by the third millennium development goals, and the strategies to achieve and stay by the plans of the NPE and MDGs. Women education is a tool meant to equalize and generalize the standard of development in the nation. Educating women implies, empowering women and enlightening them of their rights and privileges in the nation. By implication, therefore, the outstanding phenomenon of inequality, backwardness and extreme discrimination can easily be curtailed through the means of providing equal access to education, health facilities, functional skills and progressive information for societal and individual development.

Recommendations

Government should enforce women to accept and stay by educational changes and development. Sensitization target should be extended to the affected areas where there is low education, high poverty, and women insecurity, just like the rural or suburban areas. The MDGs should map out strategies that could be adopted by the natives of the land. The interpretation of the strategies should target the people of the grassroots. Plans and policies should involve the local people or inhabitants that the plan or programme is meant. This means that the bottom-up approach could be use in terms of plans and policies for people at the grassroots.

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