

Women Education and Sustainable Development in Nigeria

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Abstract

All over the world, the role of women education has been linked to the bedrock of every society and a veritable tool for sustainable development of a nation. Thus, this is an attempt to investigate women education as instrument par excellence in achieving sustainable development in Nigeria. The article x-rays concept of education, women education and quality education that is able to achieve sustainable development. It also discusses development and sustainable development. It further indicates that education empower women to a great extent and thus, women empowerment aids sustainable development. This paper therefore, suggests good educational opportunities to enhance women's social, economic and political participation towards sustainable development.

Keywords: Women Education, Quality Education, Sustainable Development, Nigeria

Introduction

Education is a veritable tool for sustainable development. It empowers people and strengthens nations. According to the Federal Government of Nigeria (1981), education will continue to be highly rated in national development plan, because education is the most important instrument of change as any fundamental change in the intellectual and social outlook of society has to be preceded by an educational revolution. Education means the process adopted by a given people to acquire knowledge that will facilitate the attainment of their individual and corporate survival in all aspects of life, viz: social, economic, political and cultural (Enaibe & Imonivwverha, 2007). Anugwon (2009) asserted that education is the main tool for imparting knowledge, skills and attitudes relevant to one's contribution to the development of the society. According to him, it is the key every individual should possess in order to make significant contribution to national development. As observed by Adedokun (2011), education more often than not, holds the key to other conditions such as taking proper decisions about living and skills that can assist one economically, politically and socially in one's society. In the opinion of Imogie (2012), the prosperity of a country depends not only on the abundance of its revenue or on the strength of its fortifications, but on the number of its citizens that are enlightened through education.

No human society is complete without womenfolk. This is equally applicable to the nations of the world. Development of our society could hardly be attainable when women's role is not factored in, not acknowledged and appreciated. This is because, women form the majority of the population (Akubue, 2001). She equally maintained that any society which neglect such a large number of human resource potential cannot achieve any meaningful development. This reality is also articulated in Amucheazi (2001) when he described African traditional society women as being hardworking and resourceful in the following words. They engage themselves in income generating activities of various types such as processing of palm-oil, garri, soap making, weaving, sewing and pottery. Generally, African women carry significant proportion of the work load in food and crop production, animal husbandry, food processing and distribution. They combine all these with their traditional role of procreation and home management.

Education is seen as powerful instrument through which sustainable development can be attained (Federal Republic of Nigeria FRN, 2004). Education in this sense has no gender or sex attachment. This is because the type of development referred to requires corporate participation of members of the society, men and women alike. The fact remains that "the task of nation building demands that all hands should be on deck in order to initiate ideas, make plans and participate in their actual implementation for maximum contribution towards sustainable development in technology and positive outcomes, both sexes (male and female) should be equally interested in science and arts

subjects (Onwubiko, 2012). The above fact simply shows the relevance of both sexes (male and female) in sustainable development. This is when “gender equality and woman empowerment continue to be central theme in global treaties, covenants and declarations because they are now acknowledged as important to people centred development roadmap.

Education is something that is very helpful in developing a country. There are a lot of positive aspects of relationship between education and sustainable development. Having educated people can help to keep the society under control, which then helps contribute to sustainable development. A healthy population is one that is filled with more educated women. Having educated women helps to set good goals for girls. More educated women also have smaller families because they know more about ways to not get pregnant. Education is something that not only affects a society but also an individual and their behaviour; helps to shape people in the workforce which help to make future national development even better (Ojieh, 2007). Onwuka (2008) affirmed that women need adequate formal education to enable them face challenges of changing global economy. In the same vein, Ogueri and Ewuzie (2016) maintained that “educated women are crucial in the development of any nation; uneducated women are real drag on progress.

On seeing that education is one of the powerful instruments of empowering women with the knowledge and skills that would help them to participate actively in the development process, Nigeria became a signatory to the United Nations 1979 Convention known as ‘Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (EDAW)’. Despite the effort of various governments to close the gap created by gender discrimination, there still existed wide gap between men and women in public life and in all sectors. A lot of traditional and cultural factors have been claimed to be limiting women educationally and economically among other opportunities. These cultural practices constituted a lot of barriers to women educational opportunities in all spheres of life (Agu, 2007).

However, Nigerian women have done a lot to escape from cultural prejudice and male chauvinism that inhibited their progress. Women most of the times prefer to work in groups to enable them solve their socio-economic, political and cultural problems. They pull their meager resources together and are able to provide social services infrastructure in their communities and thereby promote development and community solidarity (Ezegbe&Akubue, 2012). Women form non-governmental organizations (NGO) to fight economic obnoxious policies that are against women such as political participation, legal status, child marriage to mention but a few.

Some women groups especially in the rural areas undertake and complete such project as installation of electric generating plant, water borehole, building of classrooms and community halls. Women have endeavoured to overcome discrimination against them through education. According to Okojie (2011), it is a common feature in Nigeria to see women in every highly placed position. Some are medical doctors, pharmacists, architects, university dons of all ranks including professors, bankers, media women and even business tycoons. Nigerian women have indeed ventured into male dominated professions which include aviation, armed forces and so on. In fact, in all spheres of life women are there working, both in Nigerian and in many other countries contributing socio-economic development. Education has gone a long way in making Nigerian women realize their potentials.

Concept of Education.

Okere (2002) points out that education is not just the ability to read and write, but also the ability to use printed and written information to function in the society, to achieve one’s goal and to develop one’s knowledge and potentials. He stresses that to be educated is not just to have mastered the skills of reading, writing and computing with numbers, but also entails the ability to use those skills effectively for communication in all aspects of one’s life in social, cultural, economic and political sphere.

In the opinion of Enoch (2006), education has to do with systematic development and the cultivation of the mind and other natural powers while Joseph (2007) sees education as a process by which we acquire knowledge, skills, habits, values or attitude to be able to become useful and justly related member of the society. Okere (2002), defines education as “a process of developing the individual morally, socially, emotionally, physically, aesthetically and for his welfare as well as the welfare of the society.

Education helps members of the society to acquire suitable appreciation of their cultural heritage and to live a fully more satisfying life. This includes the acquisition of desirable skills, knowledge, habits and values for people living in the society. It equips the members of the society with the capabilities of personal survival in and contributing to other group's survival in the wider world (Chukwusa, 2011). Fadeiye and Olonegan (2011) noted that it is a treasure in which every human kind should heavily invest in earthly pursue to its indefinite end. According to Martins (2015), it is central to development because it is an instrument for acquisition of appropriate skills, ability and competence for both mental and physical as equipment for individual to live in and contribute to the development of the society.

In the view of Adedokun (2011), education should seek to fit the ordinary individual to fill a useful part in his environment and to ensure that exceptional individual shall use their capabilities for the development of the community. Olomukoro (2012) saw education as a powerful agent of socialization in that it plays a tremendous role in preparing an individual to render active and useful service both to the family and society in general.

Ozokwere (2013) maintained that education is one of the most important means of empowering human beings with the knowledge, skills and self-confidence necessary to participate fully in the development of a nation. Oloniyi (2015) affirmed that education is a dynamic instrument for change geared towards nation development. It is therefore, important to everyone but it is especially significant for girls and women because an educated woman is an asset to her family, community and nation in general.

Women Education.

Anugwom (2009), asserted that women education is a multidimensional process involving the empowerment and transformation of the economic, socio-psychological, political and legal circumstances of the powerless. According to Sako (2009), it is the process of strengthening the existing capacities and capabilities of women in the society to enable them perform towards improving themselves, their families and the society as a whole. It involves all efforts that is geared towards harnessing the hidden or untapped potentials in women. Akubue (2001) affirmed that women education is a process of sensitizing the girl-child on the need to possess basic skills, knowledge, ability and attitude to make her fit positively, comfortably and productively into the society.

Women education thus, connotes empowerment of women for self-reliance so that they can be fulfilled in life and be able to contribute to the society (Okojie, 2011). In the opinion of Varshase (2011) women education is a process whereby women become able to organize themselves to increase their self-reliance, to assert their independent right, to make choice and control resources which will assist in challenging and eliminating their own subordination.

Quality Education.

Heneveli (1994) identifies quality in education as the new right's assault and transformation of educational practices; essentially concerned with the marketization of education as the only legitimate device for promoting educational quality. He defined quality in terms of efficiency, value, for money and meeting the demands of educational consumers. Sayed (1997) identifies educational quality as a judgment of the level of achievement in some defined attribute relative to a standard – a 'gold standard'. He further builds into the concept of quality the recognition of its essentially moral, political and ethical nature. He further argues that this understanding of the concept becomes meaningful if it is combined with greater transparency in public life that exposes educational decision making to critical and informed dialogue.

Hawas and Stephens (2000) believe that quality in education can be interpreted as having three strands: efficiency in meeting set goals, relevance to human and environmental needs and conditions and something more in relation to the pursuit of excellence and human betterment. Peters (2004) states that quality education is relevant and adapted to the needs of the society. He argued that such needs must meet the standards in health, growth and physical survival in a complex and globalized world. It implies that quality education is worthwhile, which empowers the recipients with relevant skills, knowledge, ideas, values and attitudes needed for him/her to make informed decisions and live a self-sustained life.

Kagia (2005) maintained that quality education is value-loaded and should produce discipline behaviour, hard work, improved cultural heritage and mutual respect within and outside the school community. He continued, quality education is expected to address critical issues like the dignity of labour, quality leadership and committed citizenship, industrial harmony, political stability, religious tolerance, self-reliance and security.

Therefore, quality education entails that the products of institutions of higher education should be able to perform according to expected standard and compete favourably with their peers in other countries of the world. Quality education is the education that produces a complete person. Complete in the sense that the person is intellectually, morally, physically, emotionally and socially developed.

Concept of Development.

Barbier (2006) described development as what we do in attempting to improve our life within the environment. United Nation Development Programme (UNDP, 2006) identifies development as economic growth, modernization distributive justice, socio-economic transformation and spatial re-organization. Rogers (2006) saw development as a type of social change in which new ideas are introduced within a social system to higher per capita income and levels of living through more production, methods and social organizations.

Rogers (2010) believed that development should mean “a widely participatory process of social change in society intended to bring about social and material advancement for the majority of people through gaining control over their environment. United Nations (2012) confirmed that development is said to bring with it valuable and positive changes that improves the living standards of the people, as it creates employment opportunities and equality of opportunity and reduces poverty among other things. The organization further stressed that this increases the efficiency of a system in the production of goods and services to meet the basic needs of the people in a society.

In the light of the above, development means greater understanding of social, economic and political process, enhanced competence to analyze and solve problems of day-to-day living, expansion of manual skills, greater control over economic resources, restoration of human dignity, self-respect and equality (United Nations, 2014). Thus, development is seen as a multi-dimensional process involving the transformation and improvement of economic, social and political situations.

Sustainable Development.

United Nations (2000) broadly defined sustainable development as a system approach to growth and development and to manage natural resources, production and social capital for the welfare of their own and future generation. In defining sustainable development, Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD, 2005), acknowledge the need for both intra and inter-generational equity-development that meets not only today’s human needs but also those of more people in the future. The term sustainable development as used by the United Nation Development Programme (2006) incorporate both issues associated with land development and broader issues of human development such as education, public health and standard of living. The commission further argued that development is sustainable if it meets the needs of the present generation without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.

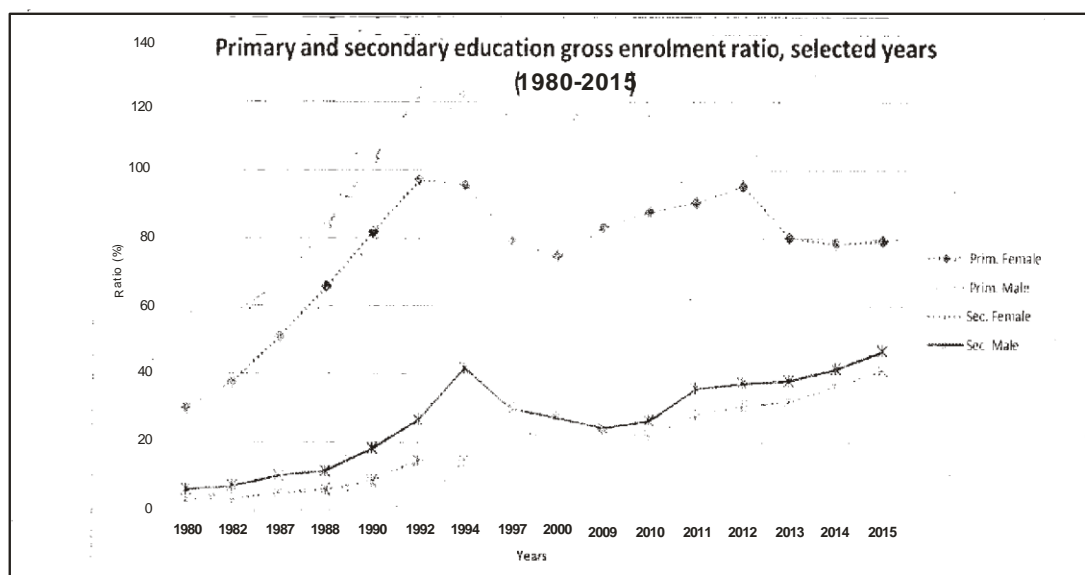
According to United Nation (UN, 2012) sustainable development could probably be otherwise called ‘equitable and balanced’, meaning that, in order for development to continue indefinitely, it should balance the interests of different groups of people, within the same generation and among generations, and to do so simultaneously in three major interrelated areas – economic, social and environmental.

United Nation (UN, 2014) further explained that the concept of sustainable development implies limits nor absolute limits, but limitations imposed by the present state of technology and social organization on environmental resources and by the ability of the biosphere to absorb the effects of human activities. The organization stressed that technology and social organization can be managed and improved to make way for a new era of economic growth.

United Nation (2014) has described sustainable development in terms of three dimensions or domains: economic, environmental and social or “ecology, economy and equity”. This has been expanded by some authors to include a fourth domain of culture (James, Magee, Scerri & Steger,

2015), institutions or governance (Scerri & James, 2015). A study of UNDP (2015) concluded that sustainable development should be reframed through the lens of four interconnected domains: environmental, economics, politics and culture. The organization emphasized that sustainable development links the welfare of generations with the capacity of the biosphere to sustain life and has a policy focus. Sustainable development is not a fix state but rather a process of change in which resources exploitation, the direction of investment, the orientation of technological development and institutional change are made consistent with the future as well as present needs (James, Magee, Scerri & Steger, 2015).

Figure 1: Primary and Secondary Gross Enrolment Ratio in Nigeria, 1980-2015



Source: UNESCO Institute for Statistics

As shown in figure there is increase in girl's primary and secondary school enrolment than boys between 1980 – 2015. Since independence, the emphasis on education as the main means of achieving development and national unity is influenced to increase on primary and secondary school enrolment. The increase in girl's secondary school enrolment is associated with increase in women participation in labour force, their contributions to household and national income.

Also, the data shows that children, especially female enrolled in secondary school to have higher levels of educational attainment. Hence, the positive cyclical effects on women education in the society cannot be over emphasized. According to Egbo (2000) the most important measurable forms of economic benefits include employment, earnings, enhance greater productivity consumption behavior, fiscal capacity and intergenerational effects. Kassim – Eghiator (2005) affirmed that educated women participate in politics and are able to contribute their knowledge to national unity, reconstruction and development. Osokoya (2008) maintained that the role of women education has gone beyond the four walls of their home and extends to all sphere of human endeavors in the development of the nation.

Conclusion

This paper discussed women education and sustainable development in Nigeria. the paper x-rays concept of education, women education and quality education that is able to achieve sustainable development. It also discusses concept of development and sustainable development. The research work shows increase in female primary and secondary enrolment from 1980 – 2015. Thus, the research work concludes that education influences women empowerment to a great extent. Hence, women empowerment aids sustainable development.

Recommendation

It is along this line that the paper feels inclined to put across some recommendations which include:

1. The society should abolish cultural beliefs and traditional practices that make women have limited access to economic rights and privileges.
2. The government through education should modify the curriculum where necessary, to expunge those aspects/portions that carry huge dose of gender stereotype that reflects the societal expectation of each gender.
3. Parents, guardians and the society should send their children to school base on the ability of the child irrespective of the gender of the child. This is because a female child that is empowered through education will always provide for her family even when she is married.
4. Literacy programmes should be incorporated with life skills components so that women can be well equipped to perform their roles more effectively.
5. Educated women should work hard to ensure that they raise social awareness of large number of women in the rural areas through effective educative programmes, and mass communication as these will help to improve their self-confidence.

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