

**PROBLEMS AND PROSPECTS OF EDUCATION
FOR WOMEN EMPOWERMENT IN NIGERIA****BENTINA ALAWRI MATHIAS**

Department of Sociology/Anthropology

Faculty of Social Sciences

Nnamdi Azikiwe University Awka

ABSTRACT

This paper examined the relevance of education in women empowerment. It used information gathered from relevant scholarly research to show that when women are educated, they contribute meaningfully to national development. From the functionalist perception, it observed that education performs the functions such as transmitting culture, promoting social and political integration maintaining social control and serving as agent of change. It also highlighted some of the challenges that hinder the education of women especially in developing nations. And finally some recommendations were made, among which is that Federal and state governments should make girl child education free and compulsory.

Keywords: *Development, Education, Empowerment, Government, Women.*

Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to B. A Mathias, PhD, Department of Sociology/Anthropology, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, Nigeria.

Introduction

Women empowerment is a process by which unequal power relations are transformed and women gain greater equality with men. At the government level, this includes the extension of all fundamental social, economic and political rights to women. At the individual level, this includes processes by which women gain inner power to express and defend their rights and gain greater self- esteem and control over their own lives and personal and social relationships. The major agent of empowerment is education. This includes formal education, informal education, skill acquisition and access to information. Male participation and acceptance of changed roles are also essential for women's empowerment. (Okonkwo, 2007). A series of

international agreements reached in the past decade has affirmed that Global Health depends on fostering the full capacity of all citizens; essential to this is the empowerment of women (UNFPA 2000). The empowerment of women has been recognized through many international regional and national conferences as a basic human right and also as imperative for national development, population stabilization and global well-being. Reproductive and sexual health rights are essential for the empowerment of women and to all quality of life issues concerning social, economic, political and cultural participation by women (UNFPA, 2000).

Literature Review

Empowerment means moving from enforced powerlessness to a position of power (Webster Dictionary, 2013). Education is an essential means of empowering women with the knowledge, skills and self-confidence necessary to fully participate in the development process. Sustainable development is only possible when women and men enjoy equal opportunities to reach their potential. Women and girls experience multiple and intersecting inequalities; structural barriers in the economic, social, political and environmental spheres produce and reinforce these inequalities. Obstacles to women's economic and political empowerment, and violence against women and girls, are barriers to sustainable development and the achievement of human rights, gender equality, justice and peace. Across much of the world, either by law or custom, women are still denied the right to own land or inherit property, obtain access to credit, attend school, earn income and progress in their profession free from job discrimination.

Women are significantly under-represented in decision-making at all levels. While the economic benefits of educating girls are similar to those of educating boys, recent findings suggest the social benefits are greater. Women have the potential to change their own economic status and that of their communities and countries in which they live yet usually women's economic contributions are unrecognized, their work undervalued and their promise undernourished. Unequal opportunities between women and men hamper women's ability to lift themselves from poverty and secure improved options to improve their lives. Education is the most powerful instrument for changing women's position in society. Investing in women's and girls' education is one of the most effective ways to reduce poverty (Mathias, 2008).

In line with the Millennium Development Goals and the objectives established by the international community, MASHAV, Israel's Agency for International Development Cooperation, at Israel's Foreign Ministry, consistently promotes the empowerment of women, considering women's education a critical component of development policy and planning, and central to sustainable

development. The benefits of educating girls and women are well understood, but education's role as a catalyst for promoting gender equality and empowering women is not. Because research has established that basic education of girls and women improves key development outcomes, such as reducing fertility and child mortality or increasing worker productivity, it is often assumed that education enhances women's well-being and gives them a greater voice in household decisions, more autonomy in shaping their lives, and better opportunities for participating in the community and labor market. But a recent literature review by the International Center for Research on Women (ICRW, 2005), entitled "Impact of Investments in Female Education on Gender Equality," shows that education is a necessary but not sufficient investment to achieve gender equality or improve women's well-being. In most cases, only secondary or higher levels of schooling lead to improved options, opportunities, and outcomes for women. That said, for secondary and higher levels of education to have the greatest payoff, investments also are needed that address the social and economic constraints that can impede education's benefits. The international development community and most developing country governments have made increasing girls' primary education a central policy aim. That's a good start. But in a globalizing economy, it increasingly is important to consider what must be done to help women and girls not simply to get by, but to thrive. ICRW (2005) research shows that women are more likely to control their own destinies and effect change in their own communities when they have higher levels of education. As such, the international development community and developing country governments must begin investing in girls' and women's post-primary education if they are to achieve the third Millennium Development Goal (MDG) of gender equality and women's empowerment. To date, global commitments to girls' education have focused on primary education. Indeed, the second MDG is to achieve universal primary education for girls and boys by 2015. This focus must continue, and international commitments to universal primary education must be met because primary education results in positive health outcomes, including improved fertility and lower child mortality rates.

However, a review of available research shows that education is most beneficial to women in settings where they have greater control over their mobility and greater access to services. In many developing countries, women do not have such mobility or access to the resources they need to improve their health or the health of their families. Often, health services are not widely available, or where available, they are of poor quality. In such situations, primary education alone often cannot equip women with the skills and knowledge they need to overcome the many constraints. Recent research in India, for example, shows that women with higher levels of education are more likely to reject a strong societal preference for a son and find ways to

compensate for the lost support and discrimination they may experience should they give birth to a daughter (Pande and Astone 2001).

Higher levels of education – six years or more – also are strongly associated with women's improved use of prenatal and delivery services, and postnatal care, and have a greater impact on girls' and women's knowledge of HIV prevention and condom use. Studies of HIV in Africa and Latin America find that education lowers women's risk of HIV infection and the prevalence of risky behaviors associated with sexually transmitted infections (Jewkes 2003; Wolff 2000). While primary education increases girls' and women's ability to discuss HIV with a partner, ask for condom use or negotiate sex with a spouse, secondary education has an even greater impact. Girls who attend secondary school are far more likely to understand the costs of risky behavior and even to know effective refusal tactics in difficult sexual situations. Secondary education also can play a crucial role in reducing violence against women and the practice of female genital cutting. While educating women clearly cannot eliminate violence, research shows that secondary education has a stronger effect than primary education in reducing rates of violence and enhancing women's ability to leave an abusive relationship (Jejeebhoy 1998).

Secondary education also has more effect in reducing female genital cutting than primary education. Profiles of nine African countries found that the practice was more prevalent among uneducated than educated women (Population Reference Bureau 2001). Women with primary or no education are more likely to have been cut than those who have received secondary instruction. In the Central African Republic, for example, 48 percent of women with no education and 45 percent with primary education have been cut, while only 23 percent of women with secondary education have been subjected to the practice. Women's education also affects their attitude toward the genital cutting of their daughters. A study in Egypt found that women who had some secondary education were four times more likely to oppose female genital cutting for their daughters and granddaughters than were women who had never completed primary school (El Gibaly 2002). The effects of education, in general, are greatly influenced by the social context in which women live. In situations of domestic violence, for example, the degree to which education can have a positive impact differs, depending on the social rules or norms governing a woman's life as well as her economic situation. Studies show that the benefits of education in reducing domestic violence are greater in the less patriarchal state of Tamil Nadu in southern India than the more patriarchal state of Uttar Pradesh in the north. In the latter case, only secondary schooling for women leads to lower domestic violence rates (Jejeebhoy 1998).

In Nigeria, the degree to which education increases a woman's autonomy and decision making depends on family structure and employment opportunities. In

a study of five ethnic groups in Nigeria, education had no effect on a wife's decision making among the Ibo and Ijaw, whereas among the Kanuri, both primary and secondary education increased women's decision-making authority (Kritz and Makinwa-Adebusoye 2009). Among the Hausa and Yoruba, only secondary education had that effect. The study found that cultural differences related to family and gender roles, and the varying employment opportunities among the groups, accounted for the failure of education to benefit some women and for only secondary education to help others. In sum, context matters.

Higher levels of education have greater economic returns for women than men. In India, for instance, a recent study found that the wage benefit for women with secondary education was double that for men. This result is consistent with studies in other countries. Women with higher levels of education also are more likely to work in the formal employment market (where earnings are higher) versus being self-employed or engaging in informal work. In India and Thailand, women are more likely to secure no manual, "white-collar" jobs than production or agricultural jobs. The same study found that women with post-secondary schooling were about 25 percent more likely to be formally employed (Mammen and Paxson 2009). The benefits of education for women are only realized, however, if they can find appropriate employment. Several studies show that not only do women lack decent employment opportunities in many developing countries, but they also face various discriminatory actions in the work place, ranging from preferential hiring of men to lower pay for equal work. To reap the full economic rewards of investing in women's education – especially higher levels of education – developing country governments also must ensure that their social and economic environments are favorable to women working.

Theoretical Orientation

To the functionalist, education has both manifest (open stated) and latent (hidden) functions. The most basic manifest function of education is the transmission of knowledge. Schools teach students how to read, speak and write. It also bestows status on individuals (Charter and Sherman 1996). In addition to these manifest functions schools perform a number of latent functions: transmitting culture, promoting social and political integration maintaining social control and serving as agent of change.

Processes of Empowering Women: The processes of empowering women include the followings:

Formal Education:

The popular adage that says that when you educate a man, you are educating an individual but when you educate a woman, you are educating the entire nation can not be over emphasized. This is because; education like the family and religion is a cultural universal. As such it is an important aspect of socialization – that is the life long process of learning the attitudes, values and behavior considered appropriate to members of a particular culture. Thus, the urgent need to educate the girl child. The formal education occurs in institutions that had been accepted by the society as an agent that transmits knowledge, skills and morals (Mathias, 2011).

Informal Education

When people think of school, they often think of brick houses and the teachers, administrators and other employers who staff school buildings. But we should also look at homes which are classrooms and parents who are teachers (Garison 2001). In every society, the conventional school builds on the foundation which was laid at home. The first place of socialization is the home. Here the child is socialized into the norms, values and beliefs of his society. The acquisition of skills is also done in environment outside the school building. Informal education can occur in the classroom or at home, through interaction with parents, teachers, friends and even strangers. Exposure to books, films, television and other forms of communication also promotes socialization. When learning is explicit and formalized, some people consciously teach, while others adopt the role of learner. The process of socialization is called informal education (Schaefer 2006).

Education has become a vast and complex social institution throughout the world. It prepares citizens for the various roles demanded by other social institutions, such as the family, government and the economy. The functionalist perspectives offer distinctive ways of examining education as a social institution.

Transmission of Culture

As a social institution, education performs a rather conservative function – that is the transmission of the dominant culture. Schooling exposes each generation of young people to the existing beliefs, norms and values of their culture. In every society, school children learn respect for social control and reverence for established institutions, such as religion, the family and the state. In Nigeria, every school child is exposed to subjects like citizenship education and current affairs. These subjects teach the children the accomplishments of people like Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe, Chief Obafemi Awolowo, Queen Amina of Zaria and many others. It also teaches them the current events in the country. Promotion of social and political integration: Education serves the latent function of

promoting social and political integration by transforming a population composed of diverse racial ethnic and religious groups into a society whose members share to some extent a common identity (Touraine 1974). In Nigeria, for instance members of each of the political parties come from different ethnic groups. Very often, the president and vice president do not come from the same ethnic group. From a functionalist perspective, the common identity and social integration fostered by education contribute to societal stability and consensus (Woodard 1998).

Maintenance of Social Control

Like other social institutions, such as the family and religion, education prepares young people to lead productive and orderly norms; values and sanctions of the larger society.

Serving as an agent of change

Education stimulates or brings about desired social change. For instance, the introduction of sex education to the school curriculum has reduced the soaring pregnancy rate among teenagers (Williams 1992).

Bestowal of Status

Education contributes to this process by sorting people into appropriate levels and courses of study that will prepare them for appropriate positions within the labour force.

Access to Information

Information is ideas, attitude or emotions from one person or group which is usually transmitted to another primarily through symbols (Hogan 2006). Accessibility to information enables one to accumulate knowledge and also makes possible the existence of empathic understanding among individuals.

Women in Education

According to Flexner (1972) the educational system in many societies has long been characterized by discriminatory treatment of women. This is because there is this believes that women should aspire to become wives and mothers not lawyers and intellectuals. This was the case in Nigeria some decades ago. Now the situation has changed particularly in the southern parts of Nigeria.

In the twentieth century, sexism in education showed up in many ways, such as in textbooks with negative stereotypes of women counselors' pressure on female students to prepare for "women's work", and the unequal funding for women's and men's athletic programmes. Educational discrimination was also evident in the employment of teachers. The position of university lecturers and

administrators which hold relatively high status were generally filled by men. While other jobs with lower salaries were left for women (Tyler 1995).

In Nigeria, the position or status of women has been no less ridiculous than anywhere else in the world. Nigerian society, like most societies is essentially male dominated. In the past and even today, when a male child is born, the parents are happy, the society is also happy but when a girl is born especially if there are other females before her, the environment is usually charged with muffled disappointment. In the past, educating the girl child was considered a waste of money, time, effort, and resources as they will eventually end up in another man house or kitchen, unlike the males. Thus, the education of girls is not favoured by parents, while traditional forms of education were employed to prepare them for future roles as mothers and wives. Most often girls education was terminated at the primary level, thus, very few girls proceeded to secondary school, as illustrated by the following statistics. In 1959, the distribution of pupils in Nigerian primary schools comprised 92,480 males and 23,106 females. In 1965, the figures 51,807 males and 60,072 females: and in 1970, there were 205,959 males and 104,095 females (Alele-Williams 1988). In 1975, according to Statistics of Secondary Education in Nigeria by sex: 1975, there were 580,889 males and 200,736 females. In 1980, there were over a million male pupils but only 543,564 girls in school (Federal Ministry of Education 1985). This showed that girls formed as low as 19.99% of the primary school population in 1959, and worse still as low as 3.45% in the secondary school population in the 1975 school year. These had affected the position in different spheres of endeavours.

But in recent times women have made great strides in different endeavours of life. The number of women continuing in their schooling has continued to be in the increase. Pressure from feminist movement played a major role in opening the doors of educational institutions to women (Tyler 1995). Women who have been empowered by education have done the world proud in which ever position they occupied. At the international level, Queen Elizabeth and Queen Victoria of England were not seen as women but as symbol of government, Margaret Thatcher led Britain for ten years as Prime Minister and distinguished Britain in international circles as a great nation. India which is the largest democracy in the world had a woman Prime Minister – Indira Gandhi and during her years of service to the country, India did not suffer any set back. And recently Liberia which had been in conflict had peace under the leadership of Ellen Johnson- a woman (Mathias 2008). These women were able to showcase their talents because they have been empowered by education.

In Nigeria, women who had the opportunity to hold both national and international offices of responsibilities have distinguished themselves in such

posts. Some of them are Dr. Ngozi Okonjo Oweala – Managing Director World Bank, Dr. Oby Ezekwesili – Vice President World Bank of African Region, Professor Dora Nkem Akunyili – Former Director General of NAFDAC and Minister of information and communication, Professor Grace Alele – Williams – former vice Chancellor University of Benin. Others are Professor Roseline Omotosho, Professor Jadesola Akaude, Cecilia Ibru –Nigeria First Lady of the Banking Industry, the list is endless. All these women during their service to the nation made tremendous impact in the economy of the nation. Suffice it to say here that these women were able to rise to these positions because they were educated. It is worthy to note that, the twenty-third special session of the general assembly on “Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century” focused on the importance of education stressing that it is both the entry point into the global economy and the best defence against its pit falls (Wikidepia). Once they are educated and integrated into the workforce women would have more choice and be able to provide better social services and even health care and education for their children. The fourth world conference in Beijing recognized this when it stressed that violence against women should be seen as an illegal act in all country. A good example is the Cross River state law No. 2 of 2000 which prohibit Girl-child marriage and female circumcision. What this law implies is that it is an offence now in Cross River state to perform female genital mutilation, give out a girl child in marriage or impregnate a girl child. Where found guilty, the person (accused) goes to jail for one year or in the alternative pays a fine of N10, 000 for the first offence. For subsequent offences, the penalty is three years imprisonment or N20, 000. Many other states in the country are taking the same step (CIRDOOC P.E.P.S. No. 30) These penalties are not so serious, but they have put a check on the wrongful attitude of most parents and men who take undue advantage of teenage girls.

Challenges Faced by Women

Women face several challenges despite their educational attainment. They include:

Discriminating Policies: According to Komolafe (2006) banks in Nigeria employ single women as opposed to married women and also require that the single ladies employed must not be pregnant for a certain period. She also noted that in many establishments practices of sexual harassment and pregnancy have been reported especially in banking, aviation and advertising industries. She went further to state that such policies have forced women who should have been in the formal sector into the informal sector, thereby disempowering them. The implication of this policy is that working women are not expected to get pregnant and single women often delay marriage and pregnancy until their thirties and forties. Even at that they may still have to get

permission from their management to raise a family. Also the married women may resort to telling lies about their family status, which gives rise to the disturbing trend of leaving their children at the mercy of house-helpers, who in most case are children themselves (Agbu 2006).

Discrimination in employment and wage: This discrimination was said to be pervasive in Nigeria. Surveys had shown a wage gap between men and women in a highly segregated labour market. Few women are employed in the formal economy due to social discrimination in education and training and a gender-based division of labour. Moreover, Nigeria's minimum wage Act excluded many workers, in particular those groups where women are disproportionately represented such as part-time workers and seasonal agricultural workers (Afro News 10 May 2005)

Cultural Barriers: The African social system is male dominated. Thus, traditionally women are given limited opportunities. The basic training given to the girl child is the one that will enable her to be a good wife and mother (Mathias, 2008).

Religious Barriers: The two dominant religions in Nigeria perceive women as weaker sex that is supposed to be protected by men. As such women are not supposed to be 'seen or heard' they are supposed to be hidden from the background. They are not supposed to take any decision outside the one taken by their father/brother or husband as the case may be. These are taken as sacred order that must be obeyed. This barrier has hindered many women from pursuing their desired career.

Conclusion

From the foregoing, it is clear that most government policies as well as companies have not helped the working woman to achieve her dreams. They have also forced most women who want to retain their jobs to remain single which may in future have a demographic effect on the country. Women should be encouraged in all spheres of life both at work place and at home. This is because; the woman folk carry dual responsibilities and will be able to carry out her duties/ responsibilities if she is given an enabling environment.

Finally, the gains from educating the girl child can not be overemphasized. Women are the bedrocks of development in any nation. If a woman is properly empowered, she will not only develop the nation but she will develop the generation unborn.

Recommendations

The paper put forth the following recommendations:

1. Federal and state governments should make girl child education up to post primary level free and compulsory.
2. Parents should be encouraged to send the girl child to school, especially in those states where there is a strong cultural believe that the girl child is only supposed to be socialized into womanhood and motherhood. Sending the girl child to school will reduce the gap between the males and females and lead to proper empowerment which will ultimately bring out the hidden qualities of womanhood.
3. Any tradition or culture which will hinder women from manifesting their potentials should be abolished. This is because; women are the greatest resort to national development.
4. All policies that are discriminatory to women should be constitutionally lifted and sanction placed on any organization that still hold on such policy.

References

- Afro News, (2005) Labour standards remains poor in Nigeria. 10 May. Available from [\(http://www.afrol.com/articles//6310\)](http://www.afrol.com/articles//6310).(Accessed 2-3-2009)
- Agbu, J-F, (2006) Kamiko wants to know the challenges of the working women in Africa. *CODESRIA Bulletin*. Nos 1 & 2. Pp52-55
- Alele-Williams, G. (1988) Education and status of Nigerian women, in Ogunshye, FA.(ed). *Nigerian Women and Development*. Ibadan: Ibadan University Press.
- Charter, D. & Sherman, J. (1996). Schools must teach New Code of Values *London Times* January 15, p. 1.
- Civil Resource Development And Documentation Center (*CIRDDOC*) Public Education Publication Series No. 30
- El-Gibaly, O. (2002). The decline of female circumcision in Egypt: evidence and interpretation. *Journal of Social Science & Medicine* 54(2): 205-20.
- Flexner, E. (1972) *Century of Struggle: The Women Right Movement*. New York: Atheneum.

Garrison, J. (2001) Staying Home to go to School *Los Angeles Time* May 8 P. B6.

International Center for Research on Women (ICRW) (2005) Research Buletin USA

Jejeebhoy, S. J.(1998). Wife-beating in rural India: a husband's right? Evidence from survey data. *Economic and Political Weekly* 23(15), 855-862.

Jewkes, R (. 2003). Gender inequalities, intimate partner violence and HIV preventive practices: findings of South African cross-sectional study. *Journal of Social Science & Medicine* 56(1), 125-34.

Kritz, M. M. & Makinwa-Adebusoye, P.(2009) Determinants of women's decision-making authority in Nigeria: the ethnic dimension. *Sociological Forum* 14(3): 399-424.

Komolafe, F. (2006) World forum knocks Nigeria for anti-women banking policies. *Vanguard Newspaper*, 31 January.

Mammen, K. & Paxson, C. (2009). Women's work and economic development. *The Journal of Economic Perspectives* 14(4), 141-164.

Mathias, B.A. (2008) The Place of Women in National Development in E. Akpan (ed) *Journal of Language And Development (LAD)* vol.5 September

Mathias, B.A. (2011) Socialization in *Fundamental Issues in Sociological Studies* a publication of the Department of Sociology/ Anthropology. Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka. Ed by P.C. Ezeah. Fab Educational books: Awka, Nigeria. Pp151-160

Merriam Webster Dictionary (2013) Merriam Webster Incorporated

Okonkwo, O. (2007) Lack of Women Empowerment *CIRDDOC* Public Education Publication Series No. 23.

Pande, R. & Astone, N.M. (2001) *Explaining son preference in rural India: The independent role of structural vs. individual factors*. Annual meeting of the Population Association of America. Washington, D.C.

Population Reference Bureau (2001). Abandoning Female Genital Cutting: Prevalence, Attitudes, and Efforts to End the Practice." Population Reference Bureau, Washington, D.C

Schaefer, R.T. (2006) *Sociology*. Mc Graw Hill New York.

Touraine, A. (1974) *World Academic system*: Mc Graw Hill New York.

Tyler, P.E. (1995) The Fall of Girl Child Education *New York Times*, December 31 P 5

United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) 2000

Williams, C.L. (1992) Hidden Advantages for men in the Female professions in *Social problems*, 39, (3) 253-267.

Wolff, B. (2000). Who decides? Women's status and negotiations of sex in Uganda. *Culture, Health and Sexuality* 2(3), 303-22.

Woodard, W. (1998) Rote Learning in a global economy: *Christian Science Monitor* April 15 p. 7.