

ENHANCING WOMEN EDUCATION IN THE 21ST CENTURY: CURRICULUM IMPLICATIONS

Ugbe Agiolihu Ugbe; Mboto, F. Abeng (Ph.D) and Richard Agiolihu Ukpanukpong

Abstract

This paper focuses on strategies that can improve women education and enhance the eligibility of our women in the 21st Century to enjoy sustainable development. It re-established the fact that if women are adequately educated, they will be liberated from the pangs of ignorance, poverty and unstable homes. The paper concluded by slating the need to make the current secondary school curriculum relevant to all Nigerians in order to achieve a genuine national progress irrespective of the gender.

Introduction

This special emphasis on women education has been propelled by a realization that women constitute an integral part of any society when it comes to development. Several studies conducted on African women have firmly established that women produce % of the food eaten in cities and rural areas (Aina, 1991, Akpoke, 1992, Bolarin, 1997, Ukpong, 1997).

They engage in such vital activities like child bearing food processing preservation, and home-making among others. These vital responsibilities which are essential for national development, indeed make a persuasive case for women to be given the same emphasis as their male counterparts in the 21st century in terms of educational provision.

It is important to educate women massively as a good preparation in the 21st century for the following reasons:

1. Women need adequate skills in reading and writing.
2. They require enlightenment in order to participate more effectively in political, social and economic development of their nation.
3. They need education to develop their potentials.
4. Women require education to better rear children and improve their standard of living.
5. They need education to be able to improve personal health of their children and that of the family.
6. They need education for better management of homes.

Women do make many contributions in the home as they carryout unpaid labour such as farming, fetching of firewood and water, cooking, house maintenance not to talk of bearing and bringing up children. It is believed that they could do better if they are meaningfully and specifically educated. This means that women when educated will have enlarge coasts of thinking, creating and implementing old and new ideas to contribute immensely to the community and national development.

If women are accordingly educated, they will be liberated from the chains of gender around them in the choice of occupations. No school subjects will be disdained or feared on grounds of stereo-typing. Although, many women are in banking and finance, medicine, engineering and others now more than before, there is still need to educate more women so that they can develop their

potentials that are not yet tapped for maximum utilization for national development in the 21st century. It is when women are educated that they will become more aware of their responsibilities in nation building. Not just that but better health care for themselves and the family and reasonable participation in economic development and the politics of the land.

In a nutshell, an educated woman will be more caring, friendly, motherly, and truthful for prostate living. There is an adage that when you educate a woman, you are educating a nation, but when you educate a man, you are educating just himself. This saying is self explanatory. Educated women in turn educate their children (household in all spheres of life namely, socially, morally,

spiritually, intellectually and physically. Moreover, Nigeria as a nation has moved forward tremendously and is still forging on technologically. As such, women's education become a priority at all levels for reliance and that of the nation.

Self-awareness will be an asset if women are adequately educated in the 21st century. Knowing who they are, intellectually and psychologically, women will be better faced in their areas of intent capability and personalities. Guidance and counselling will be women's household words not only for preventing a resolution on their personal, educational and vocational problems but those of their family members, the community and the nation.

In the 21st century, women's education will be sure way of setting women from the pangs of traditions and customs among some ethnic groups in tin's nation. For example, preferences by some parents to send boys to school to girls will be a thing of the past. Withdrawal of girls from primary or secondary schools to marry out will die a natural death because educated women in such families will kick against such traditions.

Barbaric custom of female circumcision will be vehemently campaigned against if women are educated and they know their rights. Women will put a unanimous frontier and those customs that impede their freedom and progress will be relegated to the background.

The usual tradition of looking down upon educated unmarried women by even their married counterparts in the society will be abolished. With education, women will be empowered psychologically, and morally to overcome and accommodate the rapid changes in our environment to support self and the family. And if in every home women have such empowerment to support each other, this will in no small measure affect the entire nation and abject poverty will be driven out in both rural and urban areas of our nation. In 21st century, Nigerian women need education more than ever before to actualize and ginger others to do the same with the available local resources in their communities.

It is important to note that women's education will narrow the gap between socio-economic group and between sexes (Bolarin, 2000). Apart from education being the basic human right, it is also a strategic tool for releasing the masses from ignorance, diseases, poverty, a dynamic force for moving forward and bettering the condition of livelihood of the people. Education above all makes a way to building an egalitarian, seasoned, respectable and business minded society.

The National Policy on Education (FRN, 2004) defines education as the process of helping man to develop wholly physically, mentally, morally, politically, socially, and technologically to enable him function profitably in the environment he finds himself. This explanation definitely applied to every individual-child, youth and adult (male or female). Ipaye (1991) ascertains that policy recognizes education as the most important investment that can bring about rapid change for national development. Education is vital for women because it will bring about changes in the way of thinking, modifying the cultures across the nation that are detrimental to development and change attitudes as well as banish ignorance as stated before.

Concerns in Women Education: Past and Present

There are a number of obstacles in women's education in Nigeria. Some of these problems have been from time immemorial and still persist to date. But other problems only emerge as a matter of administration in implementation of policies on women's education in the country. The concerns in women's education can be grouped as follows:

1. a) Education for Girl child
- b) Women Literacy in education
2. Empowerment of women in Education Technology. Many works in research, like Federal Government of Nigeria/UNICEF (1993), Aina (1991), Akpoke (1992), Bolarin (1997), Denga and Denga (1998) have identified concerns in women education in Nigeria as shown below:
 - i. Religious bias
 - ii. Sex discrimination
 - iii. Socio-Economic Hurdles
 - iv. Early pregnancies
 - v. Early marriage
 - vi. Ignorance and lack of interest
 - vii. Distance

Other hurdles that may be considered as present hindrances to education in Nigeria are:

- viii. Curriculum
- ix. Publisher's price
- x. Teacher influence
- xi. Funding
- xii. Coordination

1. **Religious Bias** - In situation and policy Analysis of Basic Education in Nigeria Federal Government/UNICEF (1993) clearly showed that some states of the federation do not allow their daughters to go to school because of Religious inclination. Such States and families believe that girls only need to know just the commandments from the Holy scriptures so that they can marry early and make good wives. After all, girls will soon marry and be their husband's property. So the less they are educated, the more humble and obedient, they will be to their husbands.

2. **Sex Discrimination** - Denga and Denga (1998) state that some families in Nigeria still prefer their male children to further their education to females. Even some parents (fathers) who have enough money to educate their daughters feel reluctant to do so but are eager to marry them out. They conclude that girls earning are not as high as that of boys. Moreover, another family will enjoy the benefits of their daughter's education since at marriage, daughter bear their husbands' family names.
There is also the fear of girls wasting the family assets if they are allowed to continue to school. This wastage will occur if girls get impregnated. There is need to educate parents with such notions especially as we are in the 21st century, that educated daughters are assets where they marry and where they are born as well as to the nation building in general.

3. **Socio-Economic Hurdles** - One of the past and present hurdles of women education in Nigeria is the poverty level of parents & guardians. Apart from the low level of education, some families are generally poor and backward. They cannot afford to send their children to school no matter how promising they may appear. Apart from lack of funds, some parents deem it again to collect decoy on their daughters after primary or highest secondary education. They feel that their daughters will grow out of hand if they continue to go to school. Another reason for withdrawing girls from school early may be able to help in business ventures on the farm, shop or other business. Parents in rural areas may engage their girls on the farm while those in urban areas would want their daughters who may be more truthful to help in attending to their numerous business ventures.

4. **Early Pregnancies** - There are number of girls with promising intellectual potentials that drop out of school because they were put in family way. Some parents in most cases reject and drive such girls out of home and withdraw their sponsorship at primary, secondary school levels. Sometimes even when the parents are considerate, the girls in fear of punishment attempt abortion and die as a consequence. Loss in this case sends fear to probably other neighbours who deem educating girls as painstaking for -nothing. Where distress and shame sets, inexperienced young women prefer to marry any man than face the agony in their parents/guardian's home. This hurdle in women's education can be removed in 21st century through sex education in schools and counselling of parents, teachers and school population as well as the masses.

5. **Early Marriage** - A good number of women who would have contributed immensely to the development of their families in particular and nation in general were and are still hindered due to early marriage. The reasons are not far fetched. When one is saddled with the responsibility of child - bearing and rearing, it is difficult to think of going to school. In some cases, the young mother may be willing to return to school but the husband may not be willing. Sponsorship becomes a problem since many other responsibilities compete with each other.
It is believed that as we approach the year 2020, when illiteracy is expected to have been

eradicated or minimized women need to be encouraged by their parents, husbands and government at all level to go to school. This can be formal as well as non-formal education, where they can develop their potentialities to the fullest for self-reliance and national development.

- 6 **Ignorance and Lack Of Interest** - It has been observed that some girls and young women have no knowledge of the importance of education as such have completely lost interest. Some young women think it easier to sell their bodies to men in order to make quick money to look after themselves and their greedy uninformed parents who encouraged such promiscuous life style.

The authors are aware of some cases that young girls and women choose to be lazy in school instead of working hard to compensate the struggling put by their mild and considerate mothers (in the case of single parenthood) to educate them. Such girls prefer gangsterism to diligent studying to become useful to themselves and parents or community in days ahead. The end result of their stay in school is abhorring. They only pass through the school without school passing through them. Could this attitude be attributed to the school curriculum, distance, publisher bias of teacher effect?

7. Distance- This particular concern was experienced in the past so much so that parents did not allow their daughters to go to school. One, parents were not sure of the safety of their daughters in far away places from home. The most prevailing fear was that of becoming pregnant as if girls who school from their parents' homes do not get impregnated.

Secondly, girls are still considered to be more helpful in the home to boys as such some parents feared losing their daughters who were the bedrock of making things to happen in the kitchen, farm and home generally. There was also fear of bad influence on girls if the school was far away from home. This kept girls and young women from school who would have become more aware of themselves and in turn helped maximally to develop their communities.

8. **Curriculum** - One may not be far from truth to list the non-divergent curriculum of our school as one of the hindrances to women education. There is a saying that our fingers are not the same but each has its function and usefulness. In most cases, the school curriculum does not even have co-curriculum to further potentials hidden in girls who cannot squarely face pure academics. Blueprint (2001) on women's education in Nigeria recommend non-formal education for women at various centres so that they can improve themselves for self-reliance. A diversified curriculum is believed to take care of girls and young women who lose interest in schooling because of too much brain work, reading and computations. The use of brains and hands will be more exciting to such category of young women.

9. **Author/Publisher Bias** - it is an observed fact that publishers only show male researchers pictures on their book covers. Some authors on the other hand portray female as fearsome, helpless and undecided without men to rescue them, this trend of publication is bias in nature and can only do harm than good to encourage women to bodily aspire to reading Sciences and technology or to carry out research to add to the existing knowledge bank. Moreover, girls may imbibe the stones told by such authors about female dependence on male for survival.' This can make women who would have worked hard to achieve. Authors and publishers therefore need to be neutral in their publication as we are in the 21st century so that women will not curl to their shells, not utilizing their God-given potentials for national development.

10. **Teacher's Influence** - Teachers are expected to be models and light to their pupils. Teacher's good example go a long way in planting hard work, God - fearing attitude and desire to progress in female students like their male counterparts too. But, where models are the first to cry wolf about school subjects like mathematics and other sciences, girls will relax and say, even my teacher says mathematics is a hard subject. Also, where teachers do not take their subjects seriously, students lose interest as well and drop out. On the whole, teachers can do

and undo towards the education of women in Nigeria since they are the implementers of policies and programmes in education.

Funding - Funding women education is a necessity. But most times the funds are inadequate. Even where the government releases such money, it goes into other projects or it is mismanaged by people charged with the responsibility of disbursement. Due to inadequacy of funds, enlightenment programmes on mass literacy campaigns both for cities and rural areas are not undertaken. Demonstrations that would sensitize women who need education to come out enmass to join the programme are not done. Seminars and workshops to educate professional women further and others become difficult to be organized with the absence of funds. What can be done in the 21st century to ameliorate funding women's education? Can non-governmental organizations be of help? What of prioritizing programmes?

12. Coordination - Money answers all things, it said. But even if there is enough money to fund women's education and haphazard coordination is done, there will be no headway. Lack of sound and thoughtfully coming together on part of women's education unit, Women Affairs Ministry, Social Works Sports and Youth Development to plan, and implement, research and keep records of what is to be done, where, when and how to get the feed back will make the work of educating women difficult. Poor or no research is a hindrance to women education. In fact, where women organization exist, they need to co-operate and co-ordinate their activities to sought for funds to execute their programmes. When women's education programmes are coordinated, funding may be easier and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) may be willing to support where necessary.

Threshold Innovations To Achieve Women Education In Nigeria For The 21st Century

For women's education in Nigeria for the 21st Century to succeed, there is need to put into use without delay some threshold innovations. The following are:-

1. Legislation
2. Relevant curriculum for women education
3. Training more women guidance counselors for schools and non-school settings
4. Establishment of more women education centres and training the manpower to take charge.
5. Engaging in research and evaluation
6. Partnership education of women involving all the three tiers of government, religious and non-governmental organizations as well as parents.
7. Maximization of funding women education in Nigeria by the federal Government.

Legislation - Due to the fact that in some states of the Federation girls are withdrawn from school for early marriage, financial constraints, pregnancy and gender prejudices, the government can help to legislate that no female child should be withdrawn from school. Under any circumstance, until the age of 16 or 18 (depending on State) years of age. It is believed also that if primary education is made free for girls and compulsory, there will be tremendous change in attitude of female's education in the 21st century.

There should be no citing of beer palours, hotels or guest houses near school. Any person who does it should face the law. Also, girls under the age of sixteen should not be employed as bar attendants or in any establishment. There should be enforcement of law to appropriately punish teachers or other workers who relate with their female students or colleagues in a fornicative or adulterous manner. A law on sexual harassment should be enacted so that the culprits will face the law of the land.

Relevant Curriculum - It is recommended that our school curriculum should be diversified for the fact that many females drop out of school for lack of interest in the core academic subjects taught. Subjects on Home Management like food and Nutrition, Clothing and Textiles can be emphasized in schools from primary to tertiary levels. Carpentry, mechanics, and Engineering should not be left out. Few schools in Nigeria involve their youths in Junior Engineers, Technologists and Scientist (JETS) programme. This can be intensified and broadened to involve more schools.

Manpower can be sought from local experts with a minimum token to be sure that Fashion Designers will feel happy to be called to demonstrate in schools on special arrangement to reach out to pupils and teachers. Curriculum planners and implementers as well as learners at all levels of education. It should be relevant, productive and profitable to the society. The same trend of curriculum planning and execution should apply to women education centres.

Training More Women Guidance Counsellors and Other Personnels - In 21st century, there is incessant need to promote women's welfare by training more counselors for schools and non-school settings. The present state of counselling personnel's is inadequate for a big nation like Nigeria. If women in the rural areas are to benefit from counselling (the nomadic women) riverine women, rural women) and even at various education centres that will be added to the existing ones. This is the time to start to arrive at something worthwhile.

Establishment of More Women Education Centres - The existing women education centres are far fewer than the need at hand. The government should establish more centres for women to be massively educated. All the existing tertiary institutions in the country should have women education centres where diverse programmes should commence to educate women in the 21st century. By so doing drops outs and other categories of women will benefit from women education.

Engaging in Research and Evaluation - With the emergence of many more women education centres, legislation on girl child education, training of counselors and other personnel, and relevant curriculum in view, it will be best to engage in research and evaluation. Research and evaluation will identify areas to open new centres, strengthen the staff and assess the successes or failures of the already executed programmes. It is necessary to know the number of the existing women education centres and review the curriculum to meet the needs of the nation for development

Partnership Participation - There is need to involve all the three tiers of government, religious groups, individuals and Non-Governmental organizations. Parents also must participate fully in the education of women in this country. Provision of space, infrastructures and funds will be highly welcome in order to boost women education in the 21st century.

Funding - Women education in Nigeria should be maximally funded by the Federal Government of Nigeria. Individuals as well as NGO's and others should help the best they could so that we can move women forward since they are the backbone of any nations economy, health and education which promote development.

Conclusion

In the discussion above, we have seen that women education has come a long way. Many women are educated now than ever before. But there is still a vast majority that are not only illiterate, they live in abject poverty since they are not educated. Young women, married and unmarried lack knowledge on sex education. That is why those of school age get impregnated easily or sexually transmitted disease and waste their lives.

It is therefore concluded that if women are adequately educated, they will be free from pangs of ignorance poverty and unstable homes. Let us educate our women to have a sound economic, Godfearing and self-reliant nation.

References

Aina, H. E. (1991). *Women education and gender role in home*. Conference paper.

Akpoke, N. E. (1992). *Women participation in economic and social life of nation and role of trade union*. 3rd Annual Win Conference Zaria.

Bishop, G. (1986). *Innovation in education* London, Macmillan.

Bolarin, V. \V. (2000). Women education and career development in Nigeria. Conference paper -Casson,

Blue Print on Women Education in Nigeria (2001). Lagos, Federal Ministry of Education.

Denga, D. I. (1985). Mental adjustment and value among selected Nigeria women.

Denga, D. F. and Denga, H. M. (1998). *Educational malpractice and cultism in Nigeria*. Calabar, R. E. P. Ltd.

Federal Republic of Nigeria (2004). *National policy on education*. Lagos; NERDC

Ikpaye, T. (1991). Social and psychological foundation for the education of African women.

Ukpong, E. M. (1997). Education of women for self-reliance. *The Researcher* \ (2), pp. 1 - 15.