

REPOSITIONING WOMEN EDUCATION FOR EFFECTIVE POVERTY ALLEVIATION IN NIGERIA: ISLAMIC PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract

In all nations of the world, education is seen and believed to be an effective weapon for change in all aspects of human life. By implication, education makes life to be better and qualitative for all individuals and the society at large. Women therefore need to be educated. Therefore, this paper intends to recognize the importance of women education, highlight on the strategies through which women education can be repositioned effectively in Nigeria.

Introduction

Education generally is accepted to be a major factor in the development of modern man. It is also a major instrument of socialization and enhancement of the well being of the individual and the society at large. Alfred North Whitehead as quoted by Okafor (1988) observed that "in the conditions of modern life, the rule is absolute, the period that does not value trained intelligence is doomed". This goes hand in hand with the provisions of Islam which enjoins and encourages Muslim to work harder and contribute towards the development of the generation. Allah (S.W.T.) alludes in the Glorious Qur'an 9:105).

"And say, work (righteousness) soon will Allah observe your work and His messengers and the believers"

In support of the above verse, a prophetic tradition has said:- (wisdom is sole property of the believers (Muslims) wherever they found it they should acquire it. (reported by Trimdhi etc).

State of Knowledge in Islam

Acquisition of knowledge in Islam is regarded to be an obligating act upon every Muslim male or female. The firm verse which was revealed to the prophet (S.A.W) indicated the position of knowledge. The verse shows that man's first action after delivery is to seek for knowledge. Therefore, learning to read, learning to write, learning to become a useful member of the society and to humanity in general is the pivot upon which the secret of the principles of the religion of Islam is revolving. The first verses Allah (S.W.T) revealed to His Prophet Muhammed (S.A.W) were those in which He commanded him to read;

"Read in the name of your Lord and Cherisher, who created He who taught
(the use of) the pen. Taught man that which he knew not"

[In respect of the above verse Allah (S.W.T.) honored mankind by giving him the intellectual capability to seek for knowledge and disburse it in every aspect of life, so that they utilize the knowledge acquired to develop their immediate environment and the society at large. Modern discoveries have shown that no society can prosper without giving due attention to education. This is noted by Okafor (1988) who stated that education "is the wheel-base around which all the other factors of development revolve". He continued that that "it serves as a catalyst both for individual actualization national development and international relations". An Arabic poem I know since my secondary school days comes to my mind whenever education is mentioned this poem says. Knowledge raises a house which has no foundation and illiteracy destroys the house's glory and honour.

Islam and Women Education

Finally society and ultimately the whole of mankind is treated by Islam on an ethnical basis. Differentiation of sexes is neither a credit nor a draw back for the sexes. Therefore when we talk about women and education we like to know the position of Islam with regard to it.

Islam being a complete way of life has not left a single segment of life untouched. However, before the advent of Islam women were not recognized in the society as creatures who were endowed with equal rights and responsibilities in line with their biological nature as it was given to their men counterparts. Islam has made provisions for women recognition in all spheres of life without any discrimination e.g. spiritual life, social life, and economic and educational life in Islam women are to be given proper education of how to devote themselves in the act of Ibadah (Worship) to Allah (S.W.T.) at anytime and anywhere for we believe that the total life of every believer is Ibadah (worship) because Allah has mentioned in the Glorious Qur'an that

"I did not create Jinn and Men except that they should worship me"
(Qur'an 51:56).

Also knowledge in Islam is not confined to only one branch of learning. With regard to women education prophet Muhammed (S.A.W.) is saying.

"Acquisition of knowledge is compulsory for every Muslim (Male or Female)

The above tradition shows no classification of those to acquire knowledge. The Hadith does not discriminate between the sexes the word 'Muslim' is generally referring to both Muslim men and women. Prophet Muhammad (S.A.W.) says

Whoever desires the world must acquire it and whoever desire the hereafter must acquire learning and whoever wishes the two together must obtained learning" (Mahmud 2003:7)

From the above tradition one could easily understand that Islam encourage both male and female adherents to strive hard in acquisition of knowledge in world and thereafter. We cannot easily forget our female companions who strive hard in teaching and learning disciplines. We can take example of the prophet's wife Aisha (R.A.) whom the prophet (S.A.W.) himself gave a testimony of her versed knowledge by requiring his male and female companions to search from her by saying

"Acquire the Half of your Religious Knowledge from this small Reddish lady" Women and Poverty

Fundamentally, poverty is a negative term devoting to absence of material wealth, it has a lot of detrimental effect and hence undesirable conditions. Before going into discussions of poverty in this contemporary period, it will be better we talk on the meaning of poverty given by previous writers. According to Tanimu (2003:12) quoted in Maidugu (2002:164) poverty "is universally perceived as an undesirable state of being". He continues to say that 'it is seen variously as a state of financial distress human enslavement, human disease, a factor that robs one self-respect and is the grinding curse that keeps down noble aspirations'¹

Ogunwuma (1999:10) gave the meaning as "a word, which vividly described the deplorable living conditions of individuals and communities not only in a state of economic deprivation but also in terms of the individuals inability to access basic social services such as education health care and environmental protection". With this statement one can understand that the individual access to the services mentioned by Ogunwuma is in dim influenced by his level of economic power.

Going on the definitions of poverty we can come to the conclusion that women are mostly the victims of poverty due to the indices of the afflictions:-

1. Illiteracy: Studies have shown that between 1985 and 1996 poverty has concentrated among those with no education 9% of urban poor of 45% of the rural poor has only primary education. These poor people are illiterate both in later and in skills and they are mostly women. They are given to marriage between 12-35 years without their knowledge of how to take care of the matrimonial home. Sooner or later they become mothers without acquiring the skills of how to care for the children. As time goes on, some women find themselves in a miserable condition i.e. poor health conditions and chronic poverty which causes are more permanent and depend on a host of factors such as limited productive resources, lack of skills

for gainful employment, vocational disadvantage or endemic socio-political and cultural factors. This kind of poverty has been responsible for revolution.

2. **Malnutrition:-** If a poor man suffers from poor nutrition he or she is vulnerable to disease. Mostly women suffer a lot from malnutrition due to the fact that most of them are not" educated, they share the little got from the husband. Most of the time they try to satisfy their children at their own detriments. To some extent women cannot afford the minimum 3 square meals requires by their body to grow well especially if they belongs to a polygamous family. •
3. **Child Abuse:-** This goes hand in hand with the second point (Malnutrition) the bottom line of this bad phenomena is poverty by the fallen standard of our economic system and the careless attitude of our leaders towards humanity.
4. **Lack of Hygiene:-** In the instances where an individual lives in huts, mud houses, under the bridge, parks and slums or in crowded apartment where squalor perpetually surrounds man, he or she must find himself/ herself in an unhygienic situation which gradually makes him / her unhealthy. According to Tanimu (2003) the percentage of poverty in Nigerian is distributed according to years as follows:-

Year	Percentage
1980	27%
1985	46%
1990	67%
1992	42%

The above percentage shows that luckily the percentage of the year 1992 has declined to 42%.

As we can observe, the poverty phenomenon is threatening the survival of mankind, the eradication of poverty is a difficult challenge facing all the developing countries where of the populace are considered poor. As the above evidence in Nigeria shows that the number of people affected with poverty is increasing.

According to Tanimu (2003:45), more than 70% of Nigeria populace lived in poverty. The above percentages definitely no doubt if analyzed will give the largest number of women as victims of poverty.

In Nigeria, poverty was largely a rural phenomenon for example a percentage is given according urban and rural populace who suffer from the afflictions of poverty.

Year	Rural percentage	Urban Percentage
1980	28%	17%
1985	52%	38%
1992	46%	37.5%
1996	72%	59%

In the year 2000, out of 120 million Nigerians, 80 million people lived in poverty. (Tanimu, 2003).

According to the above percentage the number of the rural poor was found to be roughly twice of that of the urban poor, because 85% of Nigerians lived in the rural areas and survives on small-scale farming

Recommendations

It seems that the rate of poverty victims is increasing in our contemporary period and it continues to cause more harm to the Muslims and non-Muslims alike.

Therefore measures have to be taken to eradicate this afflictions:-

1. The foundation of Islam education is faith and God consciousness while spiritual forms of worship are its life-wire, which demonstrate the Muslim submission to God. This testified in brief that Islam is a Muslim's culture and Qur'an is his constitution. Therefore woman generally without any discrimination needs to be educated because through educating them poverty can be alleviated in Nigeria. Education here does not extremely differentiate between religious and secular education. Women need to be aware of their religious obligations and

social duties / responsibilities. By so doing women will realize their fundamental rights and make proper development of their personalities which is one of the primary objectives of the educational policy in Nigeria,

2. Home Economics lessons should be elaborated and some topics in home management should be changed. This is to enable our young girls realize their roles as future mothers. Example when we talk on kitchen management, tutors focused their attention to modern kitchens only without having in mind that Nigerians are different. Only the lucky ones survive according to their wishes while the other segments are managing their survival.
3. Women should be made part of decision-making in all educational matters relating to them.
4. Women educational matters and problems should be left in the hands of educated among women in conjunction with men.
5. Poverty alleviation programmes should be organized in a way that women will always be found in centre of the programmes as a means of alleviating poverty among them. According to Sheikh Usman Ibn Fodio, women's need should be provided by either their

husbands or relatives. However if their economic needs are not provided by one of the two above, it then becomes obligatory for them to seek for the economic means necessary for the protection of their integrity. (Malami 1998). But strictly on conditions led by Islamic such as absence of anybody to carry out the business for them they are permitted by the Islamic law to undertake it themselves under strict moral and social restraints.

Conclusion

Conclusively, this paper focused in the noble importance of education in general and women education in particular, in an attempt to do that, Qur'anic verses and traditions of the prophet (S.A.W.) were quoted.

Attempt has also been made so far to show the implication of poverty among women in particular and the whole nation in general. We have seen the wide spread of poverty among Nigerians which made our living deteriorated, in terms of quality of life, poor income, unemployment, poor social infrastructure etc. the paper tried to suggest some measures which if implemented will help our women out of poverty afflictions.

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