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Critique of the Educational Objectives on Women Education

By

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Abstract

Increased awareness of our concepts and assumptions should impose greater caution and restraint in our interpretation of the educational objectives of the National Policy on Education as to eliminate possible bias on gender. The federal government has adopted education as an instrument par excellence for effecting national development. The philosophy and educational objectives of the National Policy on Education are the huge investment the government made with policies that guide the educational efforts enshrined in the Nigerian constitution. The paper attempted to illustrate some areas women were not favoured in the educational objectives of the National Policy on Education. Education is one of the most important means of empowering women with knowledge, skills and self-confidence necessary to participate fully in the developmental process of the nation.

The relevance of education in the development of every society in the world is important since nations have realized the necessity of education for development and advancement of the people especially women. This is buttressed by the adage “when you educate a woman, you educate a nation”.

The educational objectives are derived from the constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria which is the philosophy and the fundamental laws of the country. The constitution states the relationship between the citizens and the country and also defines the structure, powers and functions of the different organs of government namely the executive, the legislature and the judiciary.

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The constitution gave rise to the National Policy on Education in 1977, revised in 1981, 1989, 1998 and then in 2004. Yoloje (1999:230) stated that the 1969 National Curriculum Conference and the 1973 National seminar on National Policy on Education were to fashion out a direction for public education at all levels in Nigeria. It is on the views of Section; 18 of the Nigerian constitution which is the body of rules and regulations that a critique was done as it affects women education in the National Policy on Education.

Equal and Adequate Educational Opportunities

The Nigerian Constitution does not differentiate between sexes and took everyone on equal basis but there is no doubt that there is inequality in education between sexes in Nigeria. The government has good intentions towards the citizens on education and made Basic Education compulsory with sanctions to those that fail to attain it.

The birth of most children, especially in the rural areas in the country is still not registered because women still give birth at home by traditional birth attendants and in private maternities, whereas in developed countries birth is registered and the child is monitored till the age of schooling which is compulsory. Although birth certificate is a prerequisite for children to be registered into primary schools in Nigeria, many parents resort to the use of sworn declaration of age for registration.

There are many factors why children especially female children are not sent to school. Oganwu (1996:34) stated that in Nigeria like other developing countries, women suffer from undue discrimination, marginalization and exploitation by the men through the implementation of religion and cultural beliefs which put men as super human beings. The part played by parents may not be discriminatory but there are constraints imposed by patrilineal system, early marriage and the use of girls as house helps. However, the National Policy on Education (NPE) stated that in the Second National Educational Development Plan, 1970-74 (Ukeje, 1986:9), the nation would provide equal educational opportunities for all citizens.

The African Platform for Action (1994) on the African Common Position for the Advancement of Women in Section:IIIB stated that the right to education is a human right with major implication for the individual as well as the nations. Nigeria was represented in the conference and has the Universal Basic Education Act of 2004 which stated in Part 1(2) the Right of a Child to compulsory, free, universal basic education .The Act stated in Part 1 (4) that a parent / guardian that contravenes section 2(2) commits an offence and is liable to conviction when they refuse their children access to education.On first conviction ,the person is to be reprimanded and on second conviction to pay a fine of #2,000 naira or an imprisonment for a term of

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one month or both. Then on subsequent conviction, to pay a fine of #5,000 naira or imprisonment for a term of two months or both. Government has the plight of women education and so established Unity Federal Government Girls Secondary Schools in each of the states. This is to ensure that girls go to school but the penalty for offenders had not being enforced for those that do not send their children to school. Although some Northern states enacted laws on the withdrawal of female children from schools, one is yet to hear of any case that has gone to the court.

Promotion of Science and Technology

Science and technology can be defined as the application of scientific knowledge to practical tasks in producing goods and services. The National Policy on Education (2004:23) stated that a greater proportion of education will be devoted to science and technology. Science and technology has enhanced efficiency in agriculture and medical services. The Ministry of Agriculture has an Extension Service unit which is to get to the rural areas especially the women who farm and fish but vehicles and boats are not available to take the field workers out. Science and technology are being taught to children from the primary schools as Basic Science but they could not acquire empirical skills. Skills will enable children that could not continue in school to be self-reliant especially brilliant females that might be dropped from school in favour of their brothers.

Science and technology has made it possible to diagnose diseases by the modern introduction of vaccination, immunization and drug application. The government has established health centres but there are few doctors and drugs for the rural people especially the women. The rural women prefer to consult the traditional doctors who administer what they could afford. This is why Non Governmental Organizations (NGOs) are training Traditional Birth Attendants (TBAs) so that sterilized items can be used on the rural women in a clean environment.

Pre-Primary Education

The early years of life plays a very prominent and crucial role in determining the future of a person. The constitution is silent on pre-primary education of children from 3-5 years plus. The public schools do not run this section of education except in few states like Enugu State as stipulated in the National Policy on Education. The private sector has capitalized on this by providing this form of education with high fees which parents cannot afford. The rural women go to the farm or fishing with their children of this age bracket or ask older daughters who ought to be in schools to take care of the children which hinder the education of the girls. Ejiogu (1987:71) stated that if education is community based, child minding centres can be created within primary schools and some old women in the community could be recruited as nannies at minimal cost.

The National Policy on Education (2004; Section 4) proposed free and compulsory primary school education by the government which was laudable but there was a problem with the implementation of this well intentioned policy. This was caused by the instability of the management of primary education as stated by Maduewusi (1999:181). And that from 1988-1999 witnessed three different decrees issued prescribing management bodies as follows- the National Primary Commission decree 31 of 1983, the Local Government Education decree 3 of 1991 and the National Primary Education decree 96 of 1993. The compulsory aspect of enrolment has not been enforced and so eligible pupils especially girls who ought to be in school are used as house helps and hawkers.

The free Universal Primary Education (UPE) was introduced in September 1976 which ushered in a boom for primary education, but parents still had to provide uniforms, text books and transportation while two exercise books were given to each child almost at the end of the term. In 2000, the Obasanjo government launched the free Universal Basic Education (UBE) and proposed to make it compulsory as soon as possible.

The National Policy on Education (2004), section: 4 -19 (j) stated that government with a view to correcting the in-balance between parts of the country and girls education has embarked on campaign to make parents conscious and the consequences of the situation. It also stated that special efforts would be made with regard to women education by Ministries of Education, Local Government Authorities in conjunction with Ministries of Rural Development and Social Welfare and of Information to encourage their daughters to go to school. The National Policy also stated that the government will do everything possible to discourage the incidence of dropouts at the primary level and however if it occurs, provision will be made in the context of Adult and Non-formal education to enable such dropouts resume their education later on. Unfortunately, the campaign by the government has not been enough to sensitize the populace which the Non-Governmental Organizations are doing.

The government could not sustain all the responsibilities with such impressive Blueprint. The World Bank (1995) came to the aid by providing text books to primary school pupils. One observes from the national news how text books are given to pupils almost at the end of the school year instead of the beginning of the year for the pupils to use so that parents would not complain of money to buy books. There are also some corrupt government officials who sell these books to traders which are displayed in the open market places for sale not minding the stamps on them, indicating the donors and that they were not for sale.

Secondary Education

Secondary school education in Nigeria consists of the 3-3 structure which is in two stages, a three year Junior secondary and another three year Senior secondary school. The two broad aims stated for Secondary schools in the National Policy on Education (2004:13) are for preparation for useful living within the society and preparation for higher education.

The Third National Development Plan (Ukeje & Aisiku, 1982) recommended 70 percent rate of transition from primary to secondary school as in the National Policy on Education. The policy includes admission into Craft Schools, Vocational Centres and into Junior Secondary schools, with a target of 100% enrolment. Furthermore, that Junior Secondary school both pre-vocational and academic would be free as soon as possible.

The secondary schools are still not free in some states and even when they are parents have to provide uniforms, books and transportation of the children. The Introductory Technology has not fared well because of inadequate teachers and few girls in the course which would make for imbalance in the technical know-how for females. The absence of electricity and water also in rural areas has been a hindrance for the effective operation of the course. The curriculum at the Junior secondary three is adequate but the Trade Vocational Centres are not enough for those who want to go through them. The government also promised providing education in form of correspondence courses, radio and television lessons, evening and holiday courses to dropouts which has not been made possible with all the logistics of a developing country like Nigeria. Instead, private investors have capitalized on these lapses to charge high fees in the evening schools which are mostly in the urban centres. Most people cannot afford the fees especially dropout girls from schools who are not accessible to formal education.

Tertiary Education

The Higher education in Nigeria is identified with the Ashby Commission at independence (Ukeje and Aisiku, 1987; 223) and later the National Policy on Education. The National Universities Commission laid down minimum standards in the placing of students, staff, and relevant structure of courses. The Commission stated that only those who could gain admission would be taken and that academic standards cannot be compromised. This has been maintained in the National Policy on Education (2004:30) Section: 8. It was suggested that females should have a lower entry cut-off mark into universities but there was a lot of opposition by women bodies and groups. They stated that females should perform as well as males and no different entry requirement was needed and that to lower the pass mark for females will confirm the wrong perception that females are intellectually inferior to males.

Students in higher institutions of learning pay fees for tuition, boarding and feeding with expensive text books. The books in the libraries are old and inadequate for the number of students. However, assistance comes to the students through scholarships from oil companies , state governments, Local Government bursary allowances and philanthropists. The increased economic growth and labour has opened women to a continuous progress in higher institutions and virtually found in all professions but the female enrolment gap with that of male is still high.

Adult Literacy Programme

The Federal Ministry of Education created a department of Adult and Non-formal education in 1974 to promote functional literacy among adults. Statistics show that about one billion people in the world are illiterate and most of them reside in developing countries including Nigeria which has 48 percent illiterates as indicated by Olarewaju cited in Igwe (2011).It furthermore stated that the literacy rate of Nigeria dropped from 62 percent in 1992 to 52 percent in 2006. There are more illiterate women in the world constituting about 50 percent (World Bank 1995). This led to the establishment of 22 Women Education Centres all over the federation in 1988 by the Federal Ministry of Education (Yoloye, 2000).

The objectives of the eradication of illiteracy among women is not merely to enable them to acquire the rudimentary tools of reading and writing (Chineme, 1990). She further stated that the acquisition should afford them the opportunities to discuss and reflect on all issues related to their lives, their concerns and aspirations as women. Majority of the illiterate women are intelligent and hardworking but need to be sensitized and mobilized to be awakened to the benefits of education even at an older age. It would not be fair also to teach the younger ones and allow the older generation of illiterates to die out without imparting some level of basic literacy to them through Adult Education. Neither is it fair to teach the children who go back home to illiterate parents that cannot help them progress in life.

Women should be encouraged to be educated since their ignorance on several issues that concern them and those of their families can be abated. The women still cannot find time to attend classes in the evenings since they work throughout the day and have to prepare the evening meals for their families.

Conclusion

The educational objectives in the 1999 Nigerian constitution do not carry any sanction for compulsory education as stated by Oyekanmi (1999) which is a right to education for every child with the adoption by the General Assembly of the United Nations on November 20, 1989 on “The Rights of the Child”. There is also none against the withdrawal of children especially females from schools.

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With the specifications in the National Policy of Education, there is need to establish many pre-primary and primary schools in the rural and urban areas, free for the children of this nation so that girls in schools are not asked to stay at home to look after their siblings. This will make Nigeria the land of bright hope with opportunities for all citizens.

Recommendations

1. The educational objectives in the Nigerian Constitution ought to be made gender-sensitive, and state that education is compulsory in the National Policy on Education.
2. There should be more career talks in the secondary school level to especially those in the rural areas for choice of career easier for both boys and girls and telling the boys at this stage that they are not superior to the girls except that they are of a different sex.
3. The women in the rural areas need to be mobilized on the importance of education for Adult Education so that they can transmit values to their children.
4. Women in academia should have workshops/seminar on the educational objectives in the constitution as it affects the female gender, so that the communiqué could be transmitted to the legislature.

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