



Education, Women Empowerment and National Development in Nigeria

Ehigocho Peace Aimua^{1*}

¹*Department of Economics, Federal University of Lafia, Nigeria.*

Author's contribution

The sole author designed, analyzed, interpreted and prepared the manuscript.

Article Information

DOI: 10.9734/ARJASS/2021/v14i230232

Editor(s):

(1) Dr. Alina Georgeta Mag, "Lucian Blaga" University of Sibiu, Romania.

Reviewers:

(1) Sylwia Kruk, Cracow University of Economics, Poland.

(2) Margaret Araoye, Federal University Oye-Ekiti, Nigeria.

Complete Peer review History: <http://www.sdiarticle4.com/review-history/68439>

Review Article

Received 14 March 2021

Accepted 20 May 2021

Published 04 June 2021

ABSTRACT

This study examines the role of Education in women empowerment for effective participation in National Development. Education is a very important tool in improving the status of women in any society. It is indispensable as it enables women to gain Knowledge about the world which helps women upgrade their status, gain positive self-esteem, self-confidence, and necessary strength needed to face challenges in life. Therefore, educated women have a vital role to play in governance, agricultural sector, industrial sector, and the commerce sector for the nations building. Although Nigeria women are faced daily with some grassroots challenges that have hindered their participation in the nations building. The challenges faced by women daily which have limited their contributions to the development of Nigerian economy includes; cultural and traditional belief system, religion, illiteracy and low standard of living. The study concluded that, across the country women access to education is still low as the gender disparity in the enrolment of women into all level of educational institutions has widened over the years. To bridge this gap, the government should as a matter of urgency create and implement policies capable of promoting gender balance in access to education across the country, by insisting on the enrolment of a higher percentage of girl child in schools from primary schools. The government should also create policies that can remove institutional and artificial barriers based on culture, religion and traditional considerations impeding women from contributing to economic development.

*Corresponding author: Email: ehiogbeba38@gmail.com;

Keywords: Education; women empowerment; development; Nigeria.

1. INTRODUCTION

Globally, education (formal or informal) plays a significant role in women's empowerment. Through education skills and knowledge are acquired for the transformation of societies and maximisation of women freedom. The knowledge gained through education endows women with the cognitive skills necessary to contribute socially, politically and economically towards national development. Women are classified as the fundamental building block of the society, they contribute immensely to the development of both the formal (trained wage labour, banking sector, cooperate jobs etc.) and informal sector (subsistence agriculture, child bearing, home-based workers, street vendors) of the economy.

In developed and underdeveloped societies, women are referred to as currency with which economic and political alliance are cemented. Furthermore, women are agents of reproduction and procreation, this places them at a position of life blood of the entire humanity [1]. According to the International Centre for Research on Women (ICRW) 2005, Education strengthens the wellbeing of women and creates an opportunity for them to air their voices in household decisions and have better opportunities to participate in the labour market and community as a whole [2].

Sufficient evidences from the 21st century have proven that women have the capacity of holding and managing key leadership positions in the economy for sustainable development [3]. This is proven in the lives of Ellen Johnson the immediate past president of Liberia, Queen Elizabeth II the Queen of England, Professor Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala the current Director General of the World Trade Organisation, Jacinta Kate Laurell Ardern the current Prime Minister of New Zealand and Late Professor Dora Akunyili, Nigeria's former Minister of information, among other women who have distinguished themselves in leadership and administrative positions worldwide.

Today in Nigeria, women have become conscious of their right, there by engaging themselves in social and economic activities regarded exclusively for men. But majority of women in Nigeria have not yet been effectively mobilized and put in their own quota towards national development [4]. These may be as a

result of constraints such as Poverty, Socio-Cultural Factors, Religious belief, Illiteracy, Tradition, sex stereotype, poor standard of living etc. The history of economic development showed that economic development is achieved by the collective efforts of all citizens through their creative contributions and hard work. It is significantly clear that one of the key causes of underdevelopment in emerging economies in Africa is the lack of participation of women in the process of national decision making and governance [5]. Hence, there is need for women inclusion in national development in Nigeria. Although a significant population of women are still academically untrained and unemployed in sectors that could enhance their opportunity of competing for positions in the country that could bring about national development. Therefore, this paper seeks to highlight the importance of education in empowering women to contribute towards national development in Nigeria.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Nkiruka & Akubue [6], critically examined the status of women at different stages of development, the study further pin point the role women play at the three different epochs and the impact of education on women in Nigeria. The three epoch stages as classified by the study includes, women status in the pre-colonial era, the colonial era and at the post-colonial era. The study reviewed the overall view of women status Vis-à-vis, education and development. The study concluded that presently there is little effect on women's status, although not as expected when compared to the population of women in the country. From the conclusions drawn, the study recommended that; the Federal, State and Local arms of government should as a matter of urgency ensure the implementation of existing women empowerment programmes in the country. Also, literate women should take advantage of available women forum such as 'class room' to acquire knowledge skills and values necessary to alleviate their poor self-esteem that can be effectively impacted.

Ogunjemilua & Familugba [1], examined the contribution of Nigeria women to national development giving the detrimental effect of colonialism on Nigeria women status. The study further highlights the various challenges faced by women in contributing their quota to Nigeria's development. In view of offsetting these

challenges, the study recommended that; women should be given access to education to contribute to nations building. Also, government should establish business cooperatives for women, and enhance enlightenment campaigns on gender equality at all levels of educational institutions as well as grant women their right to effectively participate in the affairs of the country.

Using secondary data and content analyses, Asaju & Adagba [7] highlighted the importance of women in National Development of any Nation. The study emphasized that for women to be able to play their role in nations building, they must first be given access to education and frontline positions in the economy. The study employed content analysis technique, and results obtained from the study showed that women's access to education is still very low in Nigeria, and the gender disparity is still wide. This shown in the enrolment of women in primary, secondary and tertiary institutions. This problem is portrayed by the high level of girl's school dropout in Nigeria. The study recommended that government and other stakeholders should put in place more proactive measures to ensure gender parity through education and programmes geared towards promoting women participation in economic development processes.

Ojobo [8], highlighted the importance of empowering women in Nigeria through education. The study applied both primary and secondary data to analyse the literacy gap between men and women in Nigeria. The result showed that at all levels of education there exist fewer girls than boys enrolled at various schools despite the numerical advantage of girls. The study recommended that women should be included in educational formulation policies from grassroots level. Furthermore, there should be extensive enlightenment campaigns nationwide for women empowerment for national emancipation, progress and sustainable development.

Ovute, Dibia & Obasi [3], analysed the state of art, challenges and prospects of empowering women in Nigeria for national development. The study highlighted the challenges hindering women from contributing to national development to include: illiteracy, culture and tradition, sex stereotype, lack of power drive, religious belief, low participation of women in leadership positions (politics) and poor economic base. The study recommended that women holding key positions in the economy is necessary for

national development. Therefore, Nigeria government owes it as a duty to put to an end the institutional and artificial barriers created by culture, religion and traditional belief which has hindered women from contributing effectively to the nations building.

Stromquest [9], critically analysed the importance of empowering women through education, linking knowledge to transformative action. The study further viewed empowerment as a theory of social change and addressed the importance of women in the development process of every nation, which through different degree, presents a significant commonalities that tend to cut across various levels of socioeconomic development. The study highlighted the role of formal education in empowering the girl child and examined the contribution of non-formal education in empowering adult women. The study concluded that given the non-reluctant support by government of underdeveloped and developing nations towards women emancipation and empowerment, women led NGOs and organisations have a key role to play in facilitating both individual and collective women empowerment through education.

El Alaoui [10], examined the effect of education on economic growth in Morocco, Tunisia, Egypt and Algeria using general panel model technique and gender panel technique for the period 2000-2012. The result from the analysis showed that women's education most importantly tertiary education is a very important factor for attaining economic growth and development preceded by a healthy and quality institutional capital and a discriminative free society.

Nwaigwe [11], emphasized on the role of education in empowering women in Nigeria. The study stated that women empowerment through education is a necessary factor in achieving economic development. The study concluded that to achieve national development, government must eliminate traditional and cultural practices that are meted against women. Women should be given equal opportunities as their male counterparts without prejudice at all leadership level as a measure of promoting gender equality in the country.

Rani & Sr [12], emphasized the need for women empowerment as a critical tool for national development. The study pinpointed that if the women in a particular nation are developed then no doubt the development of that nation is a

must. In order to achieve this goal, government must eliminate every embargo hindering the rights of women, ethics and values from the society. Such as, rape, female infanticide, honour killing, trafficking, sexual harassment, domestic violence, illiteracy, prostitution and many other issues. The study concluded that there exist five components of women empowerment which includes: their right to have and determine choices, their right to have power to control their own lives, both within and outside the home; their ability to influence the direction of social change to create a more just, social and economic order, nationally and internationally and finally women sense of self-worth and their right to have access to opportunities and resources. In this context, education, awareness and training of women increases their self-confidence, increases their access to resources and expand their choices. Therefore, elimination of laws and structure that perpetuates gender inequality and discrimination are very important tools for women empowerment for national development.

Orisadare [13], identified the role of women group in political participation for economic growth and development in Nigeria; stressing the importance of women groups as a strong pillar for grassroots politics. The study also identified the challenges face by women groups in politics for economic development. The study employed the use of primary data from forum and dialogues within existing women groups, consisting of an average of thirty (30) members from ten (10) local government areas (LGAs) in Osun State, Nigeria. The results from the study showed that most women groups do not have political agenda and most of their goals do not have political agendas, although their members enjoy government patronage. Thus, it is difficult for these women to participate in politics and contribute their quota towards national development. Hence, the study recommended that as a matter of priority, more empowerment programs most importantly in areas of decision making and participation in politics, be targeted at women groups by the government and other stakeholders.

3. WOMEN'S ROLE IN NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

The role of women in national affairs is very important. Across the world today, women have tangible records of their contributions to economic development. Nigeria women like their foreign counterparts have significant roles to play

in driving the nation's economy to development. In contributing to national development, women's active involvement in strategic sectors of the economy is highly necessary.

3.1 Agricultural Sector

Women play an important role in agricultural development through food production, food processing and livestock management. Women perform activities such as clearing, planting, tilling of land, fertilizer/manure application to harvesting, weeding, food processing and livestock management [14]. According to Oseni, Godstein and Utah [15], although women constitute a large share of the agricultural labour force in Nigeria, but due to social constraints and barriers little is known about their activities in the sector. Women involvement in commercial agriculture has the tendency of increasing the nations national output. In addition to the contribution of women to food production and livestock management, women play significant roles in food crop preservation and storage. For instance, cassava processing, Africa bread fruit processing, cocoyam, Palm oil, among others are specially preserved by women in Nigeria. Usually, this food crop are processed and preserved during harvesting period with high food supply, and sold in seasons of food scarcity [3].

3.2 Industrial Sector

One of the most widely recognized contribution of women in national development has been in the area of industrialization. Through the means of education women have developed knowledge and skills needed for the establishment and expansion of small, medium and large scale industries across Nigeria. In most developing economies women have been gainfully employed in different types of industries that are both formal and informal, managing the various production levels of goods and services.

3.3 Governance

Governance and leadership plays a vital role in national development. The role of women in politics for achieving national development can never be over emphasized (Cooperate Women Directors International, 2007). Women's performance in handling the mantle of leadership should never be taken for granted. Example, late Professor Dora Akunyili served as the Nigeria's honourable minister of information and

communication in the Federal Republic of Nigeria from 2008 to 2010, bringing recorded development to the ministry [16] Also, Nigeria's pre-colonial history is replete with the contribution of queen Amina of Zaria who led armies to drive out invaders from Zaria. Our recent past speaks of successful women in the likes of Magret Ekpo, Fumilayo Ramsome Kuti, Gambo Sawaba who championed and led various causes of women emancipation in Nigeria [7]. Aina [17], revealed the importance of women in governance as a vital tool for achieving national development because women play a critical role in peace building and economic stability at home and in their societies, Women especially mothers, plan, organise, direct and coordinate available resources and have good managerial abilities needed to develop all aspects of the economy which can promote national development. But whenever this is lacking, the reverse is always the case in such an economy [18].

3.4 Commercial Activities

Women are engaged in distribution of goods and services in most African societies. Most of the marketing begins by trading of excess farm products ranging from local trade to international trade. In rural areas in Nigeria proceeds gotten from sales of product by women are used to offset the daily expenditure of their households. Women are involved in marketing as full time occupation in most African communities, this includes foodstuff, processed food, local beer and crafted baskets, pots and life stocks. Although, Nigeria women's traditional role in commerce has been greatly affected by the lack of innovations and illiteracy. This has made them less competitive when compared to their foreign counterparts.

4. CONSTRAINTS TO WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

In spite of the seemingly remarkable achievements recorded by women across the globe, Nigerian women remain severely constrained in contributing their quota to national development. These barriers have hindered their efforts towards making decisive contribution in the social-political and economic development of the nation. Women in Nigeria no doubt belong to the disadvantaged group in the society when compared to their male and foreign counterparts for reasons beyond their control. Although there

are obviously no formal policies of discrimination against women in Nigeria, but some existing traditional, social- cultural belief system, habits and ideas about women inhibit their progress and active participation in national affairs. Some major factors that serve as constraints to women's participation in national development in Nigeria are outlined below in this section.

4.1 Culture and Tradition

Some Prevailing cultural and traditional belief system in Nigeria restricts the role of women in participating in economic activities, belief system such as women should be restricted to keeping the home clean, bearing children, cooking food for the entire family members among others have constrained women from contributing to the Nations building. The society as at today sees these roles as less important as they require less extensive formal education for one to be able to perform them. In Nigeria, Most cultures and traditions depict male dominance in all situations and as such females are inferior. These unfortunate traditional belief systems have been a major barrier to women's participation in national development in Nigeria.

4.2 Religious Belief

Nigeria is a country with diverse religious belief system with different views as regards the position of women in worldly affairs. Some religions in Nigeria believe strongly that women should only be seen and with their voices and views not heard, while other religions see men as superior to women especially in decision making, few others see them as equal. This difference in beliefs adversely affects the way women are treated and contribute to national development.

4.3 Illiteracy

Education is a medium through which individuals maximize opportunities that may arise from development. Through Education (formal or informal means) women acquire the vital knowledge and skills necessary for the socio-economic development of any society as well as that of the individuals concerned [19]. Unfortunately, the problem of gender disparity in Nigerians educational development as is the case in other parts of the world, is a strong constraint to women development in Nigeria.

The importance of education and women empowerment in promoting gender equality and

the advancement of women was further stressed by the Millennium Development Goals (2000), the Education for All (EFA) and Dakar Goals (2002). According to Ovute, Dibia & Obasi [3]. Women's access to education is considered one of the main factors for women empowerment and national development. For women to be integrated into the nation's development process, they need to have access to quality education, in order to become co-partners in national development. The problem of gender imbalance in access to basic education in this country has not been fully addressed going by gender disparities in school enrolments. The Preference for male education and anti-women education are still visible in some parts of the country, particularly in the far Northern region of Nigeria [20]. This gender imbalance in access to educational development opportunities has greatly restrained women's full participation and contributions to national development.

4.4 Low Standard of Living

Most Nigerian women are classified poor with very low standard of living. This situation may be related to their low level of educational attainment, unemployment, general economic hardship that have restricted their contribution to the nation's development. In business, most women do not often involve themselves in high profile ventures. Instead, engaging in petty trading where the gains and losses are articulated at the end of each day and used primarily to run the affairs of the family [21]. The access of women to finance for business expansion is so minimal that woman are generally disadvantaged in terms of economic stability and independence. With poor economic standard of living faced by most women their contribution to national development will be less substantial.

5. THE IMPORTANCE OF EDUCATION IN WOMEN EMPOWERMENT IN NIGERIA

The role of education in empowering women cannot be over emphasized, as this is a back drop of their level of participation to the economic development. Generally, the level of women's access to either formal or informal education in Nigeria is still very low [22]. This can be attributed to religious, traditional and socio-cultural believe and sex stereotype.

In recent times, the international development community and government of most developing

countries have made increasing girls primary education a central policy of interest. According to ICRW (2005) women are more likely to control their destinies and make effective changes to their communities when they have higher levels of education. As such government of developing nations are investing significantly on girls and women post-primary education in a bid to achieve the third millennium development goal (MDG) of gender equality and women empowerment. Education enables women to attain the development of all their potentialities and their maximum activation when necessary, according to right reasons and there by achieve their perfect self-fulfilment. Through education women acquire knowledge skills, values and habits that enable them to function effectively as members of the society [8]. Education aids women to maximise their mental, physical and emotional capabilities which are useful for national development. Hence, through education women acquire the necessary skills and knowledge for their personal development and that of the society. Education provides the enabling environment for women's productive and intellectual abilities to be realized. The benefits derived from education includes; enhancement of the quality and standard of living of women, enhancement of the personal development of women, improvement in household decision made by women, improvement in health care, also women are likely to have better confidence in themselves and their ability to contribute effectively to nations building and reconstruction.

6. CONCLUSION

The 21st century have witnessed significant contribution of women to national development. However, a number of socio-cultural barriers still exist in Nigeria that has seriously impeded the participation of women in national development. Education remains a vital tool to break this barrier and empower women with the needed knowledge and skills to contribute their quota towards nations building. In Nigeria the empowerment of women through education towards attaining economic development should be of top most priority to policy makers and other stakeholders. This requires the immediate attention and commitment of every member of the society.

The government should as a matter of urgently create and implement policies capable of promoting gender balance in access to education

across the country, by insisting on the enrolment of a higher percentage of girl child in schools from the primary level. The ministry of women affairs should establish more women forums in cities and rural areas, these forums should be effectively utilized as avenues to educate women on skills, knowledge and values necessary to improve their economic, political and social lifestyle need for their effective contribution to national development. The government should create policies that can remove institutional and artificial barriers based on culture, religion and traditional considerations which have served as a constraint to Nigerian women's participation in national affairs particularly in economic decision making and politics.

COMPETING INTERESTS

Author has declared that no competing interests exist.

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Peer-review history:
The peer review history for this paper can be accessed here:
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