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Women Education and Sustainable Development

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Abstract

This paper looks at the role the education of women plays in sustaining national development. The human person is seen as the question of all questions and the mystery of all mysteries. Humanity is comprised of both men and women and women occupy a greater percentage of the human populace. Education is seen as a liberating tool and the role women play in development cannot be overemphasized, hence educating them is quite necessary. They combine their roles as mothers, wives, daughter, intellectuals and so on to facilitate positive changes. This paper argues and concludes that any nation that wants sustainable development, protecting and preservation of her heritage, ought to educate women.

Keywords: Women education, development, humanity, positive change.

Introduction

Homo mensura omnia, says Protagoras. This entails that the human person is at the measure of all things and also at the centre of all endeavours. Every human society is made of male and female, men and women, hence need one another, not just for development, but for sustainable development. Achieving

sustainable development is not an easy task only for any particular sex.

Women occupy a greater number of the human populace and are said to be at the centre, strength and engine room of sustainable development. Education is one of the most important means of developing and empowering human beings with the knowledge, skills and self-confidence

Women Education and Sustainable Development
necessary to participate fully in the development of a nation. This is based on the fact that education is a dynamic instrument of societal and national change. It is, therefore, important to everyone but it is especially significant for girls and women because an educated woman is an asset to herself, her family, community and nation, hence training a woman is training a nation.

Women in the Nigerian society have always played second fiddle hence they have been relegated to the background, excluded from numerous socio-political activities, including decision-making in various areas of endeavors. The questions become; what does women education mean? Can any given society achieve sustainable development without women? Are women instruments of positive change? What are the factors that affect women education? These questions and many of its kind are the major concern of this paper.

Conceptualizing Sustainable development

According to Anna Bäcklun, the concept of sustainable development is one of the most frequently debated concepts within the academic literature on environment and development.¹

¹ Anna Bäcklun, *Philosophical Perspectives on Sustainable Development with a focus on the Urban Poor* 2014, p.2.

There are many different definitions of the concept. A common definition of sustainable development is the one from the World Commission on Environment and Development;

Development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. There yet no consensus about how social, economic and environmental development are related to each other.²

The Brundtland Commission's brief definition of sustainable development as the "ability to make development sustainable—to ensure that it meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs"³ This concept of sustainable development aims to maintain economic advancement and progress while protecting the long-term value of the environment; hence, providing a framework for the integration of environment policies and development strategies.

At its heart is the simple idea of ensuring a better quality of life for everyone, now and for generations to come. The concept of sustainable development has been around for a number of decades.

² www.google.com

³ The Brundtland Commission 1997.

According to Rachel Emas⁴, the overall goal of sustainable development (SD) is the long-term stability of the economy and environment; this is only achievable through the integration and acknowledgement of economic, environmental, and social concerns throughout the decision-making process. In the application of this definition of sustainable development, one issue concerns the substitutability of capital. There are several types of capital: social, natural, and man-made.

The key principle of sustainable development underlying all others is the integration of environmental, social, and economic concerns into all aspects of decision making. All other principles in the SD framework have integrated decision making at their core.⁵

When development is sustained, there will be good health and well-being, no poverty, zero hunger, quality education, gender equality, clean water and sanitation, affordable and clean energy, decent work and economic growth, industry, innovation and infrastructure, reduced inequalities, sustainable cities and communities, responsible consumption and production,

climate action, life below water, life on land, peace, justice and strong institutions, partnership for the goals.⁶

Women Education: an Analysis.

The term education has been defined in many ways, with each author stressing some or the other important dimensions of education. Education is derived from the Latin word *educere*, mean “to lead out. It is indeed, difficult to define education. Education is a relentless process of becoming.⁷ According to John Dewey, Education is the process of remaking experience, giving it a more socialized value through increased individual experience, by giving the individual better control over his own powers.⁸ Hence, Rai adds:

Education is nothing but a means to equip the person to face life and to grow into worthy citizens. This can be successfully done only when the educational process is planned in such a way as to be geared to the ideals and requirements of life. This requires a philosophical background.⁹

⁴ Rachel Emas⁴, p,2

⁵ Dernbach J. C., 2003; Stoddart, 2011).

⁶ SDGs

⁷ V.Narayan Karan Reddy, (1979) Man Education and Values, New Delhi: B.R. Publication

⁸ J.Dewey

⁹ Rai 99

In other words, it can be deduced that education should be in conformity with one's culture or philosophy of life.

However, education is seen as a right to every human, whether male or female, hence a potent, essential and valuable instrument for positive change, integration and sustainable development.

On the other hand, women education has to do with empowering women mentally, socially and economically for national advancement. According to Enaibe and Imonivwerha, women education is the process of sensitizing the girl-child on the need to possess basic skills, knowledge, ability and attitude to make her fit positively, comfortably and productively into the society. Provision of sound, general education and vocational training for women will go a long way to improve their political power.¹⁰

Women are the backbone of the society; therefore, educating them will help improve the healthy living and discipline of the people of that society. Eboh explains:

The primary aim of women education is to prepare a woman for social, economic and above all, effective family care and maintenance of a happy home, which will lead

to a stable family and society that promote national development. We can deduce that women education is non-self-centered, because women provide the first discipline at home¹¹

In other words, one of the main functions of education is to prepare young people for adult life. If the women/ girl-child is provided with the right education and at the right time, she would be exposed and would not be a victim of certain societal ills.

Education is the light and bedrock of any society. No nation develops above her education sector. The United Nations Education Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)¹² outlines the main rationale behind of women education as follows:

To enable women to improve their family's health and diet; To increase women's productive ability thus raising the families standard of living; To give women access to appropriate technologies and management of cooperatives; To improve women's social and cultural states; To enable women discharge their responsibilities more effectively; To help women fight their own fears and feelings of inadequacy and inferiority; To develop them

¹⁰ Enaibe and Imonivwerha 2007

¹¹ Eboh 1995

¹² The United Nations Education Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) 1995

in all round, that is, mentally, socially, physically, psychologically, religiously and economically; To make women participate fully in all the affairs of their nation and to be the Centre of sustainable development; To make women to acquire their own basic needs of the society like food, shelter, fuel, cloths and nourishing; and To enhance national development and human development.

Raising the education levels, literacy rates of women is one of the most effective investments for increasing female productivity on top of enhancing the well-being of families. In developing countries, reducing gender inequality in literacy and in primary, secondary and management education is essential to reducing poverty and accelerating sustainable development.¹³

Factors that affect Women Education.

There are some factors that affect education of women. These include: illiteracy, culture, religious practices polygyny/polygyny, early marriage, and lack of confidence.

Illiteracy or lack of education is one of the factors that has led to high prevalence of poverty among the women folk. It has to do with women's inability to read, write and have basic knowledge. This is mainly due to their unequal access to formal education with their male counterpart in the society.

Being literate as well literacy competencies are fundamental skills that should be mastered by women to be developed, advanced and civilized. G Harsha and K R Shashirekha explain:

Culture is another factor. The way or pattern of living of any given society affect their members, which women are a part of. Marginalization and discrimination of the women arise from traditional, socio-cultural, socio-economic, religious practices, thereby, denying them full in all areas of endeavors. In spite of the overwhelming contributions that women are making and are expected to make to the socio-economic development of the nation, they are still frustrated and relegated to the background, because they are women.

Culture significantly impacts women's education in various ways, shaping both opportunities and barriers. The cultural belief system and practices have made it difficult for some women to stick out their necks in the midst of men. In Nigeria, the man is seen as the head of the family and hence his decisions

¹³ G Harsha and K R Shashirekha, *The Role of Women Education for a Sustainable Development of the Balanced Society*, , 2015, p.63.

are always right, final and binding on the woman. No doubt, education is vital for human building, yet some man feel threatened by the educated woman as well as seeing women go to school. These set of men will therefore do anything to ensure that the women are kept in ignorance.

Similarly, in some cultures, it is a taboo or a waste of time and family financial resources to educate female children because they are birds of passage, who will discard the family name for their husbands'. Others believe that the education of the girl- children will delay their marriage.

Moreover, to the traditionalists, it is believed that in the formal school system, the girls become exposed to or are trained in sex and sexuality matters. They feel that such exposure or training will lead the girls to promiscuity which will rob them of their chastity, that being a highly valued moral quality of the girl-child and her parents' moral training disposition towards her to be rated at marriage. This patriarchal culture and stereotyping of sex roles which has permeated the family, religions, government and the society subordinates' women and affect women education.

Religious practice is another factor that affect women education. These religious practices pose as stumbling blocks to women

education and active participation in the society. Some religious beliefs equate women education and exposure to sin and an entrance ticket into hell and, therefore, forbid women being educated. In the Muslim religion, women are confided to Purdah. There is no gainsaying that such women will not be exposed to formal education and participation in national politics. There are some extreme cases in which some parents who regard themselves as very holy Christians feel that if their female children are enrolled in school, they will be unequally yoked with unbeliever, will expose them to knowledge that will make them disregard the doctrines and dressing patterns of the religion.

Polygamy/ polygyny is not left out. Polygyny family which is a variation of polygamous family is defined as the practice whereby a man has several wives at the same time. This type of family is very prominent in African traditional setting and common with the people of Southwest Nigeria. In polygyny family, each wife always likes to have her own children, thereby resulting into a large family. When a family is large, children's education may be a problem. In educating the children, a lot of factors are considered in a very large family such as sex and the position of the child to be trained from each wife. in African setting, male children are mostly

Women Education and Sustainable Development considered in terms of education as they are seen to be the one that will further the name of the family unlike their female counterpart who are seen as people that will finally end up in their husbands' homes.¹⁴

Women's lack of confidence and poor self-esteem which results from years of internationalization of debilitating social norms, also affect their education.

Early Marriage is another factor that affect women education. Once some girls are married off at an early age, further education becomes a difficult or an impossible task; the husbands may not agree to allow them to go to school, or even continue with school as the case may be. As a wife or mother, she is often expected to take care of the home, children and extended family. Returning to school can be almost impossible for a married girl. Such divided attention would bar them from coping with the desire or aspiration to further their education.

A related factor is untimely or unwanted pregnancy which causes many girls to drop out of school, prematurely. In other words, a girl is more likely to drop out of school during the preparatory time before her marriage or shortly after.

Ikea, C.S

Early child marriage is therefore a manifestation of gender-based violence, putting women and girls at increased risk of sexual physical and psychological violence and related outcome, like poor health and depression throughout their lives.

Importance of Women Education

Educating women cannot be neglected by any society that wants to record sustainable development. The importance of women education includes the following:

Education is a process and as a process, education may be looked at from two points of view; from a social point of view, and from an individual point of view. From the social point of view, the society seeks to perpetuate itself by handing on its cultural acquisitions to each succeeding generation while from the individual perspective, education seeks to bring about growth and development within the individual. Education therefore brings about positive changes. Onyeachu et al explain;

Education brings about changes in the behavior of an individual and that the society will benefit because that will lead to a great

¹⁴ Fasiku, Adesola Mercy, Polygyny Family and Girl-Child Education in Southwest, Nigeria, Port Harcourt

According to Cahn, all that we lack at birth and need when grown up is given to us by education. This education comes to us from nature, from men or from things. The internal development of our faculties and the organs is the education of nature.¹⁶

Educating women will lead to a disciplined society. According S. Suen, it is also found that children of educated women have better opportunities in receiving education...and, as the primary care-giver in the household, children receive initial forms of family education from their mothers. Thus, women play a pivotal role in the intergenerational transmission of knowledge”¹⁷ To Jean Jacque Rousseau therefore, correct education disposes the child to take the path that will lead him to truth when he has reached the age to understand it, and to goodness when he has acquired the faculty of recognizing and loving it.¹⁸ By sending a girl to school, she is far more likely to ensure that her children also receive an education. As many claim, investing in a girl's education is investing in a nation.

¹⁵ Onyeachu et al, 2007, p. 23;

¹⁶ Cahn 155

¹⁷ Hanushek, 2008, p. 24)

¹⁸ Jean Jacque Rousseau (Cunningham 21

¹⁹ . Mohammed and One Kata (1998)

Mohammed and One Kata state that educating women folk is one of the steps forward in national development because men folk alone cannot successfully solve the problem of manpower shortage. The women should be given a special educational training in order to fully participate in the development of the nation.¹⁹ King and Hill go further to explain;

Investing on women education as they are the custodian of younger generation who are going to be the leaders of tomorrow. Educating women will enable them to discharge their responsibilities more effectively; by educating their children on how to become good citizens and shine away from the ills of the society.²⁰

Women are agent of development. In other words, educating women brings about development in the society. According to S. Suen ‘Educated’ women have higher capabilities to yield externalities, additional benefits which would contribute to the development of their families and the nation as a whole. educated women as better development agents when compared to men.²¹ Nneka B. Dean, agree with Suen:

Education opens doors, and provides a better understanding

²⁰ King and Hill (1993)

²¹ S. Suen: The education of women as a tool in development Hydra 1(2) pp.60-76
<http://journals.ed.ac.uk/hydra;p.62>

of concepts, objects, and people. Therefore, with the increase of women's education, women and also the people around them are able to add on to their knowledge by cooperating, sharing, and learning from each other.²²

Also, the poverty-reducing impact of education on women is believed to perform a key role in generating economic growth for the society by enhancing women's productivity and deterring decision-making that could lead to a reduction in productivity, such as incurring poor health. This therefore helps in maintaining of high and stable levels of economic growth and employment.

Moreover, educated women are believed to be more capable of caring for their children's well-being as they are better informed about health and medical treatment available.²³ Tembon and Fort observed that countries with higher levels of female post-primary enrolment enjoy a series of aggregate health benefits that link to the next generation: i.e. lower infant mortality rates, lower rates of HIV and AIDS, and better child nutrition.²⁴ Children of educated women are less likely to die before their first birthday. Girls who receive an education are less likely to contract HIV & AIDS, and thus, less likely to pass it onto their children. Primary education alone

helps reduce infant mortality significantly, and secondary education helps even more. This however, paves way for social progress which recognises the needs of everyone.

Women education helps to reduce maternal mortality. Educated women (with greater knowledge of health care and fewer pregnancies) are less likely to die during pregnancy, childbirth, or during the postpartum period. Increased education of girls also leads to more female health care providers to assist with prenatal medical care, labor and delivery, delivery complications and emergencies, and follow-up care.

Knowledge is power, says Francis Bacon. Educated women are informed and this information help decrease child marriage. Child marriage – in some cases almost always results in the end of a girl's schooling, premature death, exposure to diseases. Educated girls have choices and typically marry later, when they are better able to bear and care for their children.

Decrease domestic and gender-based violence. Educated girls and women are less likely to be victims of domestic and sexual violence or to tolerate it in their families, as

²² Nneka B. Dean, Women's Education: An International Perspective, 2017,

²³ S. Suen p.65

²⁴ Tembon and Fort, 2008, p. xviii)

Women Education and Sustainable Development
they are exposed, know their right and will not accept any dehumanizing treatment.

Improved socio-economic growth.

Educated women have a greater chance of escaping poverty, leading and living healthier and more productive lives, and raising the standard of living for their children, families, and communities at large. These and many more are some of the valuable reasons we should all support education for girls.

Conclusion

Having analyzed the concepts of women education and sustainable development, it is quite evident that the role educated women play in the society cannot be overemphasized. There are some factors that affect education of women. These include: illiteracy, culture, religious practices polygyny/polygyny, early marriage, and lack of confidence.

Women's education is crucial for numerous reasons, encompassing social, economic, and health aspects. In other words, educating women promotes economic growth, health and well being, human advancement, national and sustainable development. To achieve these, all hands must be on deck. The family, church, government and NGOs have their various roles to play to make these a reality. When this is done, the society will not

Ikea, C.S
just development, but human and national development that is sustainable.

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