

## WOMEN EDUCATION ACCESSIBILITY AND EMPOWERMENT IN SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN POST COVID-19 ERA IN NIGERIA

BY

\*DR (MRS) CHRISTIANA.N. NWADIOKWU

### **Abstract**

*Women are vital to the development of a nation. No country can aspire to achieve its full development potentials without full participation of gender equality. The issues of women empowerment and the rights of women has become a subject of debate in public among scholars and international campaigners. The traditional and cultural definition of women in relation to men dominated society led to the gross under-development of women not to participate in any social, economic and political matters. The problems of oppression, exploitation, discrimination and subjugation of women are neither new phenomenon nor peculiar to Nigeria alone but the world at large. Efforts should be made right from home to empower young women to regard themselves as important members of the society. This paper discusses the following: concept of women education, benefit of promoting women education in Nigeria, accessibility versus gender, reasons for women education, women empowerment, obstacles besetting women empowerment and so on. The paper concluded by saying that efforts must be made to fight against obnoxious gender inequalities for a better and more progressive society. Some recommendations were made to direct the attention of government to increase financial support to women to reduce problems of drop-out rate of women/girls from school.*

**Keywords:** Women education, accessibility versus gender, empowerment, obstacles, Nigeria.

### **Introduction**

Controversies always arise whenever issues pertaining to gender are raised even in enlightened circles. The issues of women empowerment and the rights of women has become a subject of debate in public for a most especially among Scholars and International Campaigners. It bothers on discrimination of the female sex in a patriarchal society right from home to the larger society. This paper is quite significant as it is expected to create and re-awaken the government and Nigerian women to consciousness on the roles everyone must play in nation building and sustainability of national development. (Udedibie, 2016).

The empowerment of women is very essential to nation's sustainable development especially when adequate education is given to the womenfolk to enable them participate in governance, politics and contribute to the development of their immediate environment and the society at large thereby enhancing sustainable empowerment (Johnson, 2016). According to Asuru (2017) A good number of the goals address women issues and the matter of their health thus women empowerment goals should be rationally based. Unfortunately, a number of circumstances have

\*Department of Arts and Social Sciences Education, Faculty of Education University of Delta, Agbor, Delta state.



brought about situations where women are poorer of the two genders causing uneven development in Nigeria. This happens when societies fail to make the best use of their female populations. By so doing, they are under investing in the human capital needed to ensure women empowerment.

This paper therefore explain the following: concept of women education, benefits of promoting women education in Nigeria, accessibility versus gender, reasons for women education, women empowerment, obstacles besetting women empowerment and so on.

#### **i Concepts of Women Education**

Education creates the avenue for man's greatest invention for survival, which is how to learn. It is pertinent to state that every nation's development and sustainability depends on its education sector. Invariably, Nigeria's development rests basically on its imparting knowledge and skills to the citizenry of the nation as well as ensuring that every educated person becomes relevant in nation building. For the fact education transforms the citizenry of the nation to full functioning members of the society, the government of every nation must through its national building policies prioritize improving and widening access to education for both genders for national development and sustainability (Nwabah, 2016).

Women Education is basic to all round development. Education by its nature is regarded as one of the most important instruments of change in the world as any fundamental change in the intellectual and social outlook of any society has to be preceded by an educational revolution. From a conceptual definition of education as an orderly accumulation of factual knowledge and progressive ability to interpret and apply that knowledge to human needs, it becomes imperative that everybody irrespective of tribe, tongue and gender in Nigeria be granted easy accessibility to education. Put differently, education being the gateway to knowledge and development both for the individual citizen and the nation as a whole cannot be undermined in the process of mindset re-engineering and cultural re-assessment for women empowerment (Kulaski, 2012).

The relevance of education for national development and its accessibility must be made available for both male and female genders. The obnoxious acts of depriving the female gender access to education as being practiced in some parts of Nigeria must stop. the advocacy on education for all is neither gender-dependent nor sex-dependent. The fact that every child (boy or girl) born into the society came through the same biological pathway, the same human rights apply to both.

**Table 1: Statistical analysis of school enrolment in Nigeria (2020)**

Geo-political zone	Enrolment	Gender Percentage
North-Eastern States	Boys	32%
	Girls	30%
South-Western States	Boys	75.6%
	Girls	75.5%
South-South States	Boys	72.5%
	Girls	77.6%
South -Eastern States	Boys	70.80%
	Girls	52.2%
North-Central States	Boys	52.2%
	Girls	48.6%

Source: Federal government statistics on education

In 2016, Federal Ministry of Education report revealed that in the Northern part of Nigeria there was a low enrolment, retention and performance of girls in Basic Education level than boys. This was more glaring in Northern-Eastern states of Borno, Yobe and Adamawa. The federal government statistics on education and youth development indicate secondary school attendance in North-Eastern states recorded the lowest in Nigeria at 32% for boys and 30% for girls. This has created a wider social base of uneducated and unemployed persons hostile towards education. By comparison, secondary school attendance in South-West for boys is a much higher with 75% for boys and 75.5% for girls; in South-South 72.5% for boys and 77.6% for girls and South-East 67.7% for boys and 70.80% for girls. In North-Central Nigeria 52.2% for boys and 48.6% for girls.

## ii. Benefits of Promoting Women Education in Nigeria for Empowerment

Women education is not only seen as an end in itself, but as a prerequisite for the achievement of sustainable empowerment. According to Federal Republic of Nigeria (2012), Nigeria reckons that for it to meet its developmental challenges and follow the path of sustainable development, it will focus its efforts at:



- Creating consistent demand for good governance including addressing socio-economic and political marginalization that seem to fuel conflicts;
- Tackling poverty and reducing inequality through inclusive policies and people-centred development programmes, as well as addressing critical factors of poverty, underdevelopment, joblessness and lack of economic diversification;
- Promoting environmental sustainability;
- Addressing the challenge of climate change;
- Greening various sectors of its economy to capitalize on emerging opportunities to leapfrog development, and
- Promoting massive investment in people to tap unto the latest potential offered by globalization and new information technology.

Women empowerment is a social construct that establishes and differentiates statuses and roles between men and women particularly in the way they contribute to, participate in, and are rewarded by the economy and most social institutions. Potentials of women are often underutilized and where they contribute, their contributions are undervalued. Women in Nigeria, as in most countries, must be systematically included in development efforts in order to change their subordinate status in society. Their participation is crucial for the achievement of sustainable development. Many development agencies, having recognized that attaining gender equity could lead to sound social and economic development, are pursuing projects. Nigeria should not be left in the dark if it wants to ensure sustainable women empowerment.

### iii. Education Accessibility vs Gender

**Table 2: Male and Female enrolment in various educational levels in 2019**

Level of Education	2019	
	% of Male	% of Female
Primary School	55.8	44.2
Junior Secondary School Enrolment	59.6	40.4
Senior Secondary School Enrolment	57.4	42.6
Polytechnic Enrolment	58.9	41.1
University Enrolment	63.5	36.5

**Source:** Nigerian Statistics Digest, Federal Ministry of Women Affairs, 2019.

**Figure 2:** Diagrammatic representation of certificate level of education in Nigeria 2019

Table 2 revealed that enrolment rates of boys are consistently higher than those of girls in primary and senior secondary education. Although the gender gap is closing, the results further revealed that the gross enrolment ratio of girls is still significantly lower than that of boys. A further assessment of Table 2 shows that most boys and girls who attend primary schools do not enroll in senior secondary school. However, the rate of transition from secondary schools to the tertiary institutions is low and could be improved upon. Gender stereotyping, commonly held indigenous traditional and religious beliefs, early marriage misplaced value system, policy somerasult among others inhibit women's access to education.

According to Nwabah, (2016) Although tremendous progress has been made toward achieving gender parity in education, the data presented in the Tables suggest that the equalization objective of the National Policy on Education has not been fully met at the basic and senior secondary education levels in Nigeria.

#### **iv. Reasons for Women Education**

There are reasons for women education as stated below;

- a. **Upgrade:** Women need to upgrade and their knowledge in order to be visible in the society and community they belong. Technology has brought about new knowledge and skills thereby making women to live in a changing and dynamic environment in post covid-19 era.
- b. **Education for all (EFA):** Education is a right for every human being for self-development. Today the world emphasizes education for all (EFA). This implies that education must be provided for every citizen in every community, irrespective of individual's age, sex, location, race, or occupation. This is because education has been accepted as the only powerful means for development of individuals and the society (Gerba, 20018).
- c. **Global view:** Women need to be educated to enable them live well and participate actively in the affairs that concern them. Nowadays, the world view focuses on democracy, human rights, global peace, sustainable development, health for all and war against terrorism. Women must be encouraged to become active participants in decision-making processes (Ifeanacho, 2019).



**v. Empowerment**

Empowerment can be defined as the process of increasing the capability of individuals or group to make choices and to transform those choices into desired actions and outcomes. Empowerment is thus one of the top priorities in the fight against ignorance and poverty. According Ifeanacho (2012), people who have been culturized into gender disparity and its attendant peace and opportunity, denials to be deculturized from it, and then be culturized into genders equality and its peaceful co-existence, education is probably the panacea. Through inculcation of knowledge, life skills, psychological and sociological competence can only be achieved through education for empowerment which can develop the culture of equality among human beings.

**vi. Women Empowerment**

The issue of women empowerment came into lime light during the United Nations decade for women 1975-1985. The Beijing, China Conference raised the status of women for development process (Karl, 2005). Nigeria participated in the conference and later came up with a National Policy on Women in 1998. The policy concluded that women empowerment can only be achieved and sustained through enlightenment campaigns, skills acquisition, functional literacy and numeracy. Following the conference proceedings of Beijing China Conference, 191 United Nation members pledged to achieve the following goals known as Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) by the year 2015: Eradication of extreme poverty and hunger; achievement of universal primary education; promotion of gender equality and empowerment of women; reduction of child mortality; improvement of maternal health; combating of HIV/AIDs, malaria and other diseases; ensuring of environmental sustainability and developing a global partnership for development. All the seven (7) items relate to women development and empowerment except item eight (8). Although at the end of 2015, the goals have not been fully achieved.

**vii. Obstacles Besetting Women Education and Empowerment in Nigeria**

The following are some of the obstacles facing Nigerian women education and empowerment:

- a. **Early marriage:** Early marriage is one of the challenges facing women education in Nigeria. By nature, girl children are advised to marry at tender age especially in Northern part of Nigeria. Early marriage disrupts girl-child education and render them incapacitated.

- b. **Culture:** African culture believes that male-child is superior and the successor of the family lineage. They believe that a girl-child is another man's property therefore, educating her is a waste for her maiden family.
- c. **Gender Disparity:** From God's creation, women are seen as weaker sex and inferior to men. This discriminatory attitude often leads to relegating of women to background. They are regarded as second class human beings on to be seen and not to be heard.
- d. **Value System:** The value system of a nation affects its regard to certain areas of their lives. This factor affects the education of girls/women in Nigeria. In a family, where the resources are not enough to take charge of every child, they will choose to educate the male-child first before the girl-child.

### **Conclusion**

Education has been recognized as a basic human right since the 1948 adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. It bestows on women a disposition for a lifelong acquisition of knowledge, values, attitudes, competence and skills. According to Mandakinit (2011), Empowerment education has empowered women to acquire cognitive skills such as literacy and numeracy that helps them in problem solving, vocational skills that form more basis for acquiring more job-specific knowledge; business skills that help them set up and manage the business enterprises with proper and efficient record keep; social skills build up social relationship with people thereby enables them to form cooperative societies legible for accessing credit loans and political skills which helps women to participate in decision-making in their homes, communities and the society at large for good governance.

### **Recommendations**

Women, when empowered with the desired resources and tools for decision-making are effective in the nation. Below are some recommendations:

- Government should create awareness on what women education and empowerment is, its benefits to individual and to the society.
- Every woman has the right in development initiatives, women should be exposed and empowered. Women should be liberated from the complexes which the negative social and cultural practices have inflicted on them.



- Government to create an enabling environment for recognition, promotion and enforcement of all rights pertaining to women and girl-child.
- More female students should be admitted with the required minimum academic qualification in all institutions of Higher learning in Nigeria.
- The Nigerian nation owes the women folk the responsibility of removing those artificial and institutional barriers based on religion, culture or traditional considerations which have incapacitated the ability of Nigerian women to participate effectively and freely in national affairs particularly at the political and economic levels.
- The ministries of Women Affairs all over the Federation should play a great role in bringing to focus the fundamental challenges of the women folk which the government and other institutions of state owe the responsibility to tackle. To achieve this, constant pressure should be brought to bear on the authorities to create positions of responsibility and advancement for women folk.
- Government should also increase financial support to women to reduce problems of drop-out rate of women/girls.



## REFERENCES

- Asuru, C. (2017). Gender Equality and Sustainable Development in Nigeria. *International Journal of Advanced Studies in Economics and Public Sector Management*, 5(1), 74-88.
- Federal Republic of Nigeria (2012). Nigeria's Path to Sustainable Development Through Green Economy. *Country Report to Federal Republic of Nigeria Summit*. 1-95.
- Garber, E. (2018). Empowering Women in Senegal with numbers. Germany: Role and Impact of ADE in *dvv International Journal of Adult Education*. 18, 44-48.
- Ifeanacho, V.A. (2012). Sustaining the Rights of Women Through Adult Education Programmes in Challenges of Girl-Child Education in the Contemporary Society, Nigeria: *International Journal of African Women Educationists in Nigeria*. 3 (2), 163-172.
- Ifeanacho, V.A. (2019). Transformative Education: A Panacea for Women Empowerment. Nigeria: *Journal of National Association of Women in Colleges of Education (WICE)*. 4(3), 10-13.
- Johnson, U. (2016). In Modupe, A.N. (2009) Right of Women in the Pre-colonial and Post-Colonial Era, Prospects and Challenges.
- Karl, G.I. (2005). Empowering Women Through Life Skills. Germany: dvv publications.
- Kularski, C. and Moller, S. (2012). The Digital Divide as a Continuation of Traditional System. *Sociology*. 51 (51) 1-23.
- Mandakinit, E.A. (2011). Women Empowerment in Adult Education and Development. Germany: *Journal of dvv International*.
- Nwabah, G.M. (2016). Improving Female Gender Capabilities: The Case for Renewed Emphasis. Oruwari Y. (ed) *Women Development and the Nigeria Environment*, Ibadan: Vintage Publisher Ltd.
- Udedibie, U.J. (2016). Issues in Women and National Development. *Paper presented at the Forum for African Women Educationalists*. Owerri, Imo State.

47

# INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF THE FORUM FOR AFRICAN WOMEN EDUCATIONALISTS (IJOFAWE)



**9TH**  
EDITION  
2022

ISSN: 2505 - 0389