

WHAT DOES GLOBALISATION HAVE TO DO WITH THE EDUCATION OF WOMEN AND THE GIRL-CHILD IN NIGERIA?

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Abstract - *International conventions that canvass for 'education for all' are at the forefront of increased participation of women and the girl child in education programmes across the globe. Notwithstanding, many African countries, Nigeria included, lag behind in the education of women and the girl-child. Statistics indicate 60% and 40% as literacy rates for men and women respectively in Nigeria. This paper addresses the lingering problem of low literacy rates among women by looking at: diverse ways for perceiving the role of globalisation in enhancing the education of Nigerian women and the girl-child. The paper asserts that enhancing the education of women in Nigeria requires attention to the country's peculiar situation in designing the school curriculum and implementing programmes that encourage rather than hinder the education of women. The paper concludes that ignoring cultural, religious and gender-based practices that militate against equal access to education for both males and females in Nigeria impedes upon the attainment of global education for women and the girl child.*

Keywords: *Globalisation and female education, Globalisation and women and girl-child, education of women and girl-child in Nigeria, women and girls in Nigeria*

1. INTRODUCTION

The bane of successive governments in Nigeria is the realisation that illiteracy rates are high, school enrolment rates low and school dropout rates are getting higher for those children opting for trade in preference to education. Official statistics show that 56.9% of Nigerians are literate (UNESCO, 2012). There is also a wide gender disparity with 62.5% and 39.5% as the literacy rates for the male and female population respectively (Tide online, 2006). Further, female literacy and achievement rates are much lower in certain states of the federation (UNESCO,

2012). For instance, girls net enrolment in Sokoto State is 15% compared to 59% for boys (UNICEF, 2002). Notwithstanding, there is the increasing acceptance that education is a viable vehicle for sustainable development especially for those marginalised segments of the population made up of females, the poor and those residing in remote areas. With increased interaction, there is the realisation that education is the key vehicle for empowering the masses, eradicating poverty from local and urban communities and economic development.

Nigeria made efforts toward building sustainable lifelong learning with the introduction of first, the Universal Primary Education (UPE) with its gender equality component and subsequently, the Universal Basic Education (UBE) by President Obasanjo's administration in 1999 (Aluede, 2006; Ejere, 2011). The goals of basic education could also be to - promote learning and equality in the society; and provide people with knowledge and skills, relevant to support their growth and development into dependable members of their society. It follows that basic education could mean different things within the legislations of diverse countries. For instance, the Act on free Compulsory Universal Basic Education of the Republic of Nigeria (2004), although providing for Basic Education, makes a distinction between Basic Education and Universal Basic Education. The Act describes Basic Education as "...early childhood care and education and nine years of formal schooling." While the Universal Basic Education is described as "...early childhood care and education, nine years of formal schooling, literacy and non-formal education, skills acquisition programmes and the education of special groups such as nomadic and migrants, girl-child and women, almajiri, street children and disabled groups" (article 15 (1)). To enhance sustainable lifelong learning, the policy offered reading, writing and numeracy skills to a large segment of the population lacking basic education tenable from primary,

junior secondary and within nomadic or adult education programmes. Jaiyeoba (2007) sees basic education as essential to national development because it lays the basis for sustainable and enduring education. Nevertheless, to make meaningful headway in the hierarchy of educational development, Nigeria must move further than the hankering for basic education and the call for a literate nation, which is only the foundation for a nation seeking a taste of literacy. Clinging to the allure of literacy will keep Nigeria lagging behind, only dwelling on issues revolving around primary and secondary education; rather than the subject of secondary and tertiary education that will make it a leading player in educational development in the world.

This paper will look at a persistent problem in Nigeria's aspiration for a more literate society, the issue of the education of women and the girl-child. The paper will address the recurring theme of literacy with focus on women and the girl-child; why aspirations for a literate female population is suppressed in Nigeria, why attention is given to the global education of women; and what can be done to promote the education of the female population in Nigeria.

2. LITERACY, WOMEN AND THE GIRL CHILD IN NIGERIAN

Developing countries, especially those in Africa and South-Central Asia have more literacy problems than countries in other parts of the world (UNSTATS, 2010). Nigeria for instance has literacy rates of 40% and 25.6% for adult females and males respectively. Younger males and females between 13 to 20 years have literacy rates of 9.3% and 13.5% respectively (UNICEF, 2010).

Edem, Mbaba, Udosen and Isioma (2011) describe literacy as the ability to read, write, speak, listen and enumerate. It therefore implies one's ability to function in a particular language by exhibiting essentially reading and writing skills. Other scholars may view literacy differently. Some may lay more emphasis not just on literacy but also on functional literacy, which is attainable through basic education and will enable countries like Nigeria meet their development goals. Further, Edem, Mbaba, Udosen and Isioma (2011) see functional literacy as an activity which: "... enables people to use their acquired knowledge to promote activities for economic gains or academic performance or gains." (p. 15). With problems such as: early marriage, widowhood rites, sex trafficking and female genital mutilation faced by women worldwide, Nigeria included, providing better access to literacy skills for women, will ultimately, elevate the status of women, reduce poverty, maternal deaths and raise the target country's standard of

living. If acquiring literacy skills is important to the wellbeing of developing countries, with Nigeria as the current focus, why is the education of women receiving such low investment or attention?

2.1. NIGERIA AND THE STATE OF FEMALE EDUCATION

All internal efforts towards eliminating poverty through universal education worldwide will be impossible if policy makers fail to address the problem of low literacy rates among women. Indeed, there have been 'efforts' by successive leaderships and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) to improve the situation of women in Nigeria. These include the Fourth World Conference on Women (Beijing, 1995), Accelerating Action strategy on Girls' Education (UNICEF), and the International decade of women (1995). Despite these and other initiatives turned out by concerned networks, the discrimination of women in relation to access to education persists. Why?

There are various reasons why women's education in developing countries is perpetually behind that of their counterparts in developed countries. These factors linger along the gnawing areas of: geographic differences, access to formal education, school dropout rates, ethnicity, language and social stigma that keep the school enrolment of the girl child at low levels (Obaji, 2005; UNICEF, 2002). Rather than tackle these issues, policy makers offer the excuse that the environment most female children live in make it difficult to reach them, ensure that they are enrolled in school, perform their assignments and complete their education as would their male counterparts. It remains a puzzle why boys and girls are able to reside in the same debilitating home environments and the boys can sustain their attendance at school while the girls cannot. How can girls cope with all the demands that their environment and situations in life demand of them? Girls have to contend with cooking, farming, selling family farm produce in the market, attending to younger siblings, fetching water from the stream and still cope with the stressful demands of school attendance.

When those charged with formulating and implementing educational policies take out time to conduct intensive research, they would discover the silent role culture plays in suppressing attempts at the educational development of women and the girl-child. The traditional Nigerian father would rather spend his hard-earned money sending the male child to school because it is a waste of funds sending females to school who will move over to their husband's house, therefore not present to carry on the

family name. Of what benefit is the professional skill garnered by the female child when such skills will only benefit her husband's people or family who did not contribute to her education?

Studies have asserted that it will be difficult eliminating discriminatory processes, ideas or practices in our traditionally male-dominated structures that have made Nigerian women accept a lower status to that of their male counterparts. To buttress the issue of male-dominance, Bugaje (1997) observed that:

Men have always assumed some superiority over women and have sought to dominate the world and relegate women to the background. Cultures and civilisation have sought to confer legitimacy to this male superiority and have accordingly developed myths and conventions that tend to perpetuate them. Through time women have consistently, if grudgingly, borne the brunt of this male domination. Such inequities have been a feature of all human societies, from antiquity to our contemporary times.

While male-dominance and the discrimination it breeds continues to linger in all cultures irrespective of levels of development, it is still distressing that despite the role of industrialisation, urbanisation and globalisation on the behavioural pattern of Nigerian citizens, the education of women is still suppressed under the guise of traditional practices or customs that should have been long abandoned. Many such practices militating against the education of women, include early marriage, or the trend where under-age girls are still constantly sacrificed to older men either to obtain funds to educate their male siblings or as a way of keeping them as second class citizens, subservient to the male folk. Discriminatory practices towards women and the girl child are sustained within traditional beliefs holding that when women are over educated, women will acquire too much wisdom eventually leading to disrespecting their husbands. Apart from discriminatory traditional practices or beliefs, the practice of Purdah, also hinders the education of Moslem women. The practice of Purdah, disallows women from benefitting from literacy programmes that are likely to elevate their position and allow them seek equal rights with their husbands. Women in this situation allow the self-centred decisions of their husbands and fathers hold sway mostly because they are illiterate.

In some situations, educated women have put their educational ambition on hold because society has made them believe that an 'over-educated' Nigerian woman is likely to remain unmarried. Moreover, some married women aspirations to move beyond their first degree may result in broken homes. In other words, the life of an

ideal Nigerian woman should revolve around her family and household needs. The stigma of having a failed marriage has caused several women to sacrifice their graduate school ambitions. These sacrifices though a plus for the suppressive male-dominated system, is indeed a loss to a nation intent on competing in global development. With the way, women give in to the dictates of crippling traditional practices that deny them access to one of the greatest gifts of the century-education; one should then wonder the premium women place on the potential of the same education having positive impact on their lives and that of their children.

2.2. 'GENDER INEQUALITY' AND WOMEN AND THE GIRL-CHILD'S ACCESS TO EDUCATION IN NIGERIA

Nigeria has a population of 170 million people and over 250 ethnic groups. Also, thirty-three out of the country's fifty-five years of independence was under military rule. However, 44% of the nation's population comprising women are illiterate with adult literacy at 36% (Gunawardena, Kwesiga, Lihamba, Morley, Odejide, Shackleton and Sorhaindo, 2004). International conventions that canvass for education for all are at the forefront of the participation of the girl child and women in education programmes.

Several studies have blamed lower participation of girls in educational programmes in Nigeria on: non-completion of school absenteeism; cultural beliefs; religious practices; economic constraints (Okpukpara and Chukwuone, 2005; Dimkpa, 2009). Other studies identified: child labour, poverty, bereavement, truancy, broken home and children recruited as domestic servants as factors hampering the education of the girl-child (Okeke, Nzewi and Njoku, 2008). Similarly, a study conducted by UNICEF reports that the number of female children that are out of school has risen from 20 million in 1990 to 24 million in 2002 in 15 countries in Sub-Saharan Africa. Nigerian was one of the countries selected for the study (UNICEF, 2003). There are also regional differences in the participation of the girl child in educational programmes with Northern Nigeria having the lowest participation rates (Okpukpara and Chukwuone, 2005; Obaji, 2005; Dimkpa, 2009). Alumana (2005) mentions that to advance the education of women and the girl child in Nigeria, several Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) have to go hand in hand with promoting gender equality and women empowerment. While Zwart (1992) adds that to enhance the development of women, it is important to identify and address factors that reinforce their inequality in their different geographical locations.

It remains uncertain why the girl child's faces discrimination concerning access to education when the Nigerian constitution specifically states that all citizens are treated equally and prohibits discrimination of citizens based on their sex (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1999). To Zwart (1992), the idea of gender refers to socially and culturally created characteristics, which differ from sex, which is biologically determined. He adds that the fact that gender is socially and culturally determined makes it easy to change using gradual processes. Gender is an issue in the development of any country. Policy makers cannot pretend that gender conflicts exist and affect or influence access to resources and overall national development.

There are unvoiced expectations in Nigeria across gender: male and female. Male children schooled to consider themselves the dominant gender, the leaders, the stronger sex and people to be idolised. When males fail to meet these expectations, it may be difficult for them to relate to their peers. Female children on the other hand, are socialised by their parents to be submissive, dependant on their brothers and fathers. There are also cultural and religious beliefs across regions in the country that determine the level of education the girl child should be allowed to acquire or have access to. Alumana (2005) holds that discrimination very early in the girl child's life may lead to lifelong exclusion from social amenities that include teaching and learning facilities. In situations where the girl child has inhibited access to education, further insight may uncover discriminatory practices that are so deep-seated that it is almost a family tradition. For instance, as a child, a mother may have experienced discriminatory practices in accessing education that culminates in feelings of low self-esteem or self-worth that are consciously or unconsciously transferred to her female children. This situation leads to female children accepting their right to accessing educational opportunities, only after their brothers must have had full, unchallenged rights to education.

This paper acknowledges that there are early social, cultural and religious factors contributing in unequal access to education in Nigeria that should be addressed to curtail, the internalisation of the socialisation of discrimination among female children. It will be impossible to involve women and girls in third world countries in the global discourse on education until they are equipped with the resources to rise above poverty, cultural and religious impediments militating against their access to education.

3. WHY THE GLOBAL CALL FOR THE EDUCATION OF WOMEN AND THE GIRL-CHILD?

The call for the education of women is entrenched in the belief that an educated citizenry will be an asset rather than a burden to any nation. The trend of development worldwide has shown that a country where a large proportion of the citizenry is illiterate, uninformed, unemployed and unempowered is likely to battle with hunger, starvation, social unrest, war and gross over-dependence on foreign aids. Certainly, when a woman is educated, we open up a whole new being that is more assertive, more confident, more aware of the environment she lives in, more aware of her relevance in making positive contributions to the wellbeing of her family and nation, and more willing to take independent decisions for personal and societal growth. More fittingly, the Basic Education Coalition (2014) summarised that any country investing in the education of women and the girl child:

- *Boosts economic productivity and reduces poverty*
- *Lowers maternal and infant mortality rates*
- *Reduces fertility rates*
- *Helps protect against HIV/AIDS*
- *Increases life expectancy*
- *Improves the health, well-being, and educational prospects of the next generation*
- *Promotes better management of environmental resources*
- *Increases per capita income*
- *Contributes to the development and deepening of Democracy*

Moreover, the educated woman is equipped to be gainfully employed and likely to contribute to household income.

3.1. GLOBALISATION AND EDUCATION OF WOMEN AND THE GIRL-CHILD IN NIGERIA

It should come as no surprise that there is growing concern about the education of women (Tjomsland, 2009). Research has shown that education is a compelling tool for the liberation of individuals (Azikwe, 1992). Moreover, with independence, Nigeria had a renewed opportunity to seek an effective education delivery strategy by becoming part of the global village of shared assistance and networking. The global incursion into education is manifested in article 26 (1) of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which

stipulates that everyone has the right to education, which shall be free at least in the elementary and fundamental stages. The declaration adds that education shall foster the full development of the human personality and strengthen the respect of human rights and fundamental freedoms (UNITED NATION).

Globalisation increases the interconnectivity of people and activities in different parts of the world (Baylis and Smith, 1997). Globalisation affects different facets of human life including their access to education (Chinnammai, 2005). In other words, globalisation could then refer to an activity with dual implications. It encompasses the relationship that diverse parts of the world have as well as the relationship that societies across the globe have with each other.

With globalisation, a new culture of competitiveness in access to information and learning aids is introduced among different societies. Globalisation has also ignited the need for skilled workers competitive enough to understand diverse languages and cultures. Moreover, one of the essential gains of globalisation is the demand for and attractiveness of higher education especially in an increasingly competitive world. This increased demand for higher education has spurred the establishment of private and public centres of learning that would promote quality education. In essence, education has a major role to play in this global trend because with education comes the assurance of competitiveness, employment, prestige and class. With women having the highest illiteracy ranking in Nigeria, how can they compete in this global evolution?

3.2. THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY AND GLOBAL EDUCATION

With Nigeria's independence, also came interaction with international organisations concerned about doing something to elevate literacy levels in developing countries. Several developing countries with Nigeria as a case in point were also desperate to operate in a global community but lacked both the resources (capital and manpower), and the enabling environment with its restrictive volatile political climate, cultural practices and taboos to map out a dynamic strategy for its citizens' education and see it through. Considering these delimiting constraints, professional assistance became necessary. Professional assistance is only meaningful when their directives meet with the needy country's terrain and are followed (directives) to produce desired results. The key actors in global education: UNESCO, the World Bank, the UNDP and UNICEF provided a

platform for achieving the six goals of the Dakar Framework for Action. The goals are:

- (i) *Expanding and improving comprehensive early childhood care and education, especially for the most vulnerable and disadvantaged children;*
- (ii) *Ensuring that by 2015 all children, particularly girls, children in difficult circumstances and those belonging to ethnic minorities, have access to and complete free and compulsory primary education of good quality;*
- (iii) *Ensuring that the learning needs of all young people and adults are met through equitable access to appropriate learning and life skills programmes;*
- (iv) *Achieving a 50 per cent improvement in levels of adult literacy by 2015, especially for women, and equitable access to basic and continuing education for all adults;*
- (v) *Eliminating gender disparities in primary and secondary education* (vi) *Improving all aspects of the quality of education and ensuring excellence of all so that recognized and measurable learning outcomes are achieved by all, especially in literacy, numeracy and essential life skills (UNESCO, 2015).*

There is also support provided by the World Bank, governments, international organisations and other development partners to eradicate extreme poverty, improve health, ensure the sustainable environment that will improve the standard of education in developing countries. This support is contained in the Eight United Nations Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) endorsed by 189 countries and signed by 147 heads of States and governments at the 2000 United Nations Millennium General Assembly in New York (UNITED NATIONS, 2001). The MDGs had the target of achieving goals ranging from: eradicating extreme poverty and hunger; achieving universal primary education; promoting gender equality and empowering women; reducing child mortality; improving maternal health; combatting HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases; ensuring environmental sustainability; to developing a global partnership for development by 2015 (UNDP, 2006). It is still uncertain where developing countries, especially those in Africa stand in meeting these millennium development goals particularly concerning education, which is the focus of this paper. Currently, building on the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), 193 countries have set the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) which forms part of the broader 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (Thomson, 2015).

Developing countries often attribute falling behind in the education of women and the girl-child, on limited resources and limited capacity to implement programmes. The implication is that education-acquisition directed interventions must align with national budget realities, using straightforward designs that are technically and economically practicable, considering the country's circumstances. Another factor that plays an integral role in determining access to education for women and girls is governance. Not only is governance in most developing countries weak, but corruption has eaten so deep into the system that integral issues pertaining to national development are often accorded the least priority next to the selfish pursuits of legislators, policy makers or leaders. In essence, the programmes spurred by corrupt intentions take precedence in allocation of funds over programmes aimed at enhancing the education of such disadvantaged groups as women and young girls.

4. CONCLUSION

When one considers discriminatory practices in certain parts of Nigeria that de-bar some female children from acquiring literacy skills, it becomes important to make education more attractive for women and girls living in those educationally disadvantaged parts of the country. Parents are likely to offer different excuses for keeping some children out of the classrooms. However, these excuses will be minimal when there are assurances that: children who attend school will meet teachers in the classroom; that teachers will turn up every day of the school calendar; and that teachers in each school are qualified to make reading materials interesting enough for students that came to their schoolrooms. Moreover, if good teachers are an important input to achieving development initiatives then, it is the duty of policy makers to develop adequate training programmes as well as equip the universities producing and grooming them. Similarly, government through their ministries of education should also make efforts to appoint school administrators (school administrators) possessing appropriate professional qualifications that ensure that they understand the needs of diverse students in their establishments- and bear this in mind in designing the school calendar and curriculum.

Clearly, despite the persistent call for globalisation, not every country can benefit from the allure of globalisation. For any country irrespective of size to benefit from globalisation, the living standard or situation of its population must be above average in relation to the quality of education offered and employment opportunities available to school leavers or university

graduates. Much as the international community claims to be concerned about improving literacy levels among women and girls in Nigeria, as Nigerians, we should be interested in our own development. This means taking our own destiny in our hands and striving to encourage the enrolment of women and girls in secondary and higher levels of education for their own societal and economic advancement.

Ultimately, addressing the education of women and girls should be a continuous process that is not restricted to providing access to educational training or materials to a particular woman or group of women and girls, as we find with our poverty alleviation or empowerment programmes in Nigeria, but a countrywide process of educating and training all Nigerian women and girls.

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