

The Imperativeness of Female Education in Some Selected Rural Communities of Kano State, Nigeria

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Abstract

Women function in various capacities ranging from family to professional roles. Their activities are of immense importance in national development. This paper is a modest attempt at examining the neglect of women education in rural communities of Kano State, Nigeria. It is however evident that, rural women in Kano State are educationally disadvantage, backward and the challenging facing them are multifarious and sophisticated. The paper highlights the importance of educating rural women in view of its numerous benefits to women, individual and society at large. This paper sought opinions on discrimination against women in the area of education; it looks at the studies of women in educational development in Kano State, Nigeria. The orientation efforts of the government and the gains such portends for overall national development. Finally, the paper suggest the type of education rural women need, in addition to some strategies for developing adequate intervention programme the will be meaningful and effective.

Keywords: Women, education, girl – child, imperativeness, rural, communities, development, strategies

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Introduction

In all countries of the world education is recognized as the cornerstone for sustainable development. It is a fulcrum around which the quick development of economic, political, sociological and human resources of any country revolves. (Ojobo, 2008). Education is a process that helps an individual to develop his/her whole being, physically, mentally, personally, politically, socially and technologically to enable him/her function in any environment in which he/she may find him/herself. Although Nigeria has had a National Policy on Education since 1981, it has not been implemented effectively and efficiently due to rapid population growth, insufficient political will, a long period of undemocratic governance and poor management of resources. Women and girls have been most affected by these negative factors. Education in northern Nigeria is in a poor shape; statistics have shown that some states in the north record girls' completion rates as low as 7.8%. Although there is a policy of free education in most of the states in Nigeria, data suggest that there are still significant disparities between girls and boys education (Duze Yar'Zever ,2013). It is a paradox and concerned that the states with the poorest education statistics are predominantly Muslim states.

In the traditional Nigerian society, there exists the degenerate believe that women are second class citizens. A woman is considered as a man's property or pleasure object. She is also considered as a 'machine' meant for producing children. This situation has resulted in unfair treatment of woman especially with regards to education. The average rural Nigeria parents would rather invest in the education of the son rather than the daughter. Gender inequality in Nigeria is promoted by religious and communal customs. Young girls particular in Kano (the area of this study) are denied the benefit of education. This has grave consequences for both the individual and the society at large. Early marriage is common in the rural areas and girls often married shortly after puberty within the ages of 12 – 13 and this is the period when most are expected to transit to secondary school (Tahir, 2005). This high rate of early marriage not only deprives them from pursuing their education but it also linked to early sexual initiation and early exposure to reproductive risk, early and unattended stillbirth, and other related health and social problems like VVF, divorce, broken homes which by extension has its attendant problems on society. (Duze and Yar'Zever, 2013).

Adeyokunu (1981) has reported that women in rural areas are more involved than men in virtually all areas of agricultural ranging from farm clearing to processing. In spite of this the women suffer and are victims of a social order that treats them largely as second position role players. This gender bias against women ranges from labour market discriminations to exclusion from policy making. According to Mamman (1996), this discrimination exacerbates poverty by preventing the majority of women from obtaining the credit, training, health services, child care legal status and education need, to improve their prospects. One clear area of noted imbalance against women has been in the area of education. It is therefore not surprising that women's inadequate access to education has been seen as the source of the various discriminations they suffer. Women in urban areas are making their foot prints in the sands of time. Women in urban areas are closing the educational gap between the male and female enrolment. The disparity between the male and female enrolment still remain wide in rural communities. The challenges facing the rural women of the day are both multifarious and sophisticated in politics social and economic development. Euler – Ajayi (1989) posited that it is universally accepted that women

constitute more than 50% of a country's population. It is however, a source of concern in many quarters that there is generally a wide gap between men and women in educational attainment in favour of the former. Marinho (1990) grouped rural women among the educationally disadvantage groups; others are the nomads, migrant, fishermen and special education groups.

With almost 70% of the Nigerian population living below poverty line, girls are often sent to hawk ware on the streets. Kano state like every other state in northern Nigeria, grapples with low girl – child enrolment in school and colleges. This has become a major source of concern and worries to Kano State government, non – governmental organizations and other stakeholders in the educational sector. This ugly trend has over the years, continued to deepen the educational and economic inequality between the men and women in the rural communities of Kano State. Furthermore, the rural areas in Kano State are the worst hit; they do not only lack good schools but also see no need for enrolment of the girl – child. This dehumanizing ignorance has continued to plague most rural dwellers in the rural communities from year to year. It is really a pathetic situation where people, from generation to generation, fail to realize that they could be of any use not only to themselves but to the larger society.

This paper focus on rural communities in Bichi Local Government Area of Kano State, they are Badume, Kwa, Santar – Sabo, Buden Waje, Dungurawa and Dangawo. These rural communities have their own major challenges of providing basic education to their citizenry especially the girl – child. The inability to encourage and provide adequate basic education for the girl child has continued to heighten the inequality between the male and female folk enrolment in schools. Low enrolment of the female in schools is widening the educational and economic gap between men and women in rural communities addressing the problems and challenges of women education in rural communities of Kano State has become imperative in view of not only the ignorance of rural dwellers on the importance of education but the dehumanizing practices of keeping the females out of schools.

It is against this background that the paper is aimed at examining the imperativeness of women education in rural communities of Kano State focusing on low participation of female in education when compare to that of male counterparts. To achieve this aim the paper look at the male and female enrolments in rural communities of Kano State, disparity between boys and girls school enrolment, imperativeness of women education in rural communities, socio – economic factors inhibiting women's education that which have contributed significantly toward female mass literacy in rural areas. It also discussed efforts and strategies needed to promote women's education. The paper thereafter rounded with some concluding remarks.

Male and Female Enrolment in Rural Communities of Kano State

In spite of efforts to create awareness about equal access to education for both boys and girls, not much has been achieved at rural communities. Statistics and records obtained from relevant agencies in the Local Government still paint a gloomy picture of girl – child education and access to education for girls in a mirage (Collins, 2014). From the table below, it can be seen that the percentage of girls to boys for each year average maximally 40% that was in 2014 when girls accounted for 9,565 out of total enrolment of 25,187 which represented 40%. This means that on average about 65% of students are boys.

Table 1 Bichi Local Government Summary of Some Selected Primary Schools Statistics for Ten Years (2005 – 2014).

Year	No. of Schools	Total Enrolment	Male	%	Female	%
2005	30	22,321	17,102	76.6%	5,219	23.4%
2006	32	22,452	17,213	76.7%	5,239	23.4%
2007	35	22,942	15,100	65.8%	7,842	34.2%
2008	35	22,001	15,320	66.6%	7,681	33.4%
2009	35	23,100	15,412	66.7%	7,688	33.4%
2010	40	23,201	15,461	66.6%	7,740	33.3%
2011	40	23,400	15,511	66.3%	7,889	33.4%
2012	45	23,482	15,561	66.3%	7,921	33.7%
2013	47	24,113	18,109	75.1%	6,109	24.9%
2014	50	25,187	15,622	60.0%	9,565	40%

Source; Local Government Primary School Education Board

Gender inequality has been identified by many as a major problem in the selected rural communities of Kano State and this has created a very wide disparity in the enrolment between boys in various academic institutions in the locality.

Imperativeness of Women Education

Many issues make it imperative for women education to be taken seriously and be given the needed attention. It should be emphasized that education gives a good means of livelihood and sustenance to women; gives support for their economic role and development, gives and support the education of children. Since one's level of education to an extent determines ones income and capacity, it is expedient therefore, that women gets education for better contribution to their families, society and world over (Eweniyi, 2013).

Adekola and Abanum (2010) in Alonge (2014) argue that development cannot take place without education. They stress that development requires an educated and enlightened populace, and that the difference between the developed and underdeveloped countries of the world is related to the level of literacy among the populace. In addition Belivia (2010) states that investing in women's literacy carries very high returns; it improves livelihood, housing, leads to better child and maternal health, clothing, transport, communication, entertainment and gainful use of leisure. He further emphasized that when women are literate, it is the society that gains. Education is seen as a powerful agent of socialization in that it plays a tremendous role in preparing an individual to render active and useful service both to the family and society in general.

Half of the world's population are women and two third of the work is done by them. About 75 percent of agricultural output in Nigeria is produced through women's efforts. Ironically, the people that participate most in and agricultural production are rural women and the least educated. Therefore, provision of basic literacy and skill acquisition for illiterate females will no doubt ensure bomber agricultural production. It is also pertinent to mention here that the higher the level of education the greater the likelihood that a women will stay in the labour force.

Women can also help government to achieve its laudable goals and objectives through public enlightenment and national mobilization campaigns. In general education wipes away ignorance, political apathy and encourages mutual understanding and co-operation among the various strata of society. The role of women in economic development of the nation cannot be overemphasized. The most important measurable forms of economic benefits include employment, earning, enhance general productivity, consumption behaviour, fiscal capacity, intergenerational effect, protection of girls from HIV/AIDs abuse, and exploitation. One of the most consistent correlations is between increased literacy skills and the probability of employment. Women education that is properly design and provided has the tendency of imparting skills and knowledge to participants and make them more productive in self – employment or in employment by others.

The empowering potential of women education can translate into political participation and thus contribute to the quality of public policies and to democracy. The relationship between education and political participation is well established. Educated people are more likely to vote and eschew tolerant attitudes and democratic values. Besides, Egbo (2000) asserts that literate women have been known to contribute to the political stability and peace of a country. Hence Kassim – Eghiator in Okemakinde (2014) stressed the fact that educated women participate in politics and are able to contribute their knowledge to national unity, reconstruction and development. Perhaps, with more women holding the mantle in a male – dominated political arena, the socio – political, state of affairs, the world over will definitely improve.

Socio – Economic Factors Inhibiting Women’s Education in Rural Communities

So many factors have been reported to be responsible for low enrolment of female in schools in rural communities of Kano State. To majority of the parents, girl – child education is less important because no matter what level of education the girl attains, their hope is to see the girl – child get married. To some parents, western types of education is termed to be a way of negative transformation and initiation of an individual into materialism, promiscuity and inculcation of western cultural ideologies in an Islamic dominated societies.

Williams (1960), Ojobo (2008), Muktar et al (2011) identified the following as some of the factors militating against women education in rural communities.

- **Poverty and Illiteracy:** Poverty can be seen as the condition in which one lacks the means to satisfy his basic needs in terms of nutrition, housing, clothing and other essentials of life. In this vein majority of the rural people are poor and illiterate. Under stifling economic conditions women have less access to education.
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- **Economic Constraints:** Many parents in rural areas considered women’s education as a waste of funds since she will soon be marry off, leaving only the boys to cater for their parents. Therefore, when families are faced with the option of choosing between son’s and daughter’s education, the daughter are always the victims.
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- **Religious Constraints:** Religion is an accomplice in the stereotyping of women and reinforces the barriers that prevent them from participating politically, economically, socially and educationally. The forces of religion are partly responsible for the

present plight of women's education in Nigeria. None of the three major religions in Nigeria, namely: Christianity, Islam and Traditional religions in practice endorses equality between men and women. The submission of women to men and the desire of the husband to rule over the women are the usual practiced among Christians. The practice of Sharia purdah in Islam makes it difficult for married Muslim to fully benefit from educational system. Similarly, in traditional religion women must always stay in the background.

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- **Traditional Cultural Constraints:** The culture and traditional of many ethnic groups in Nigeria are full of obvious signs of gender stereotyping. Social conventions, values and mores combine to maintain the stereotype of women as kitchen dwellers who are only gatecrashers into sphere outside their matrimonial homes. Women are socialized from birth to see their place as second to that of men. The birth of a male child is warmly received to the extent that women often feel that their marriage is not secure until they give birth to male children. Education for girls, right from the very beginning was designed to make them primarily effective mothers and housewives. Hence girls were brought up in the traditional family set – up to be passive, obedient “Lady like” and always submissive to men. Boys on the other hand, were encouraged to be aggressive, competitive and independent.

Negative Attitude of Parents and Male Chauvinism

Some parents also have negative attitudes towards women's education, especially illiterate parents in rural areas who are fond of withdrawing their daughters from school in favour of their sons. Some men are misogynists who do not believe the education of women including their female children and wives. The adherents of the belief that “The place of the women is in the kitchen” have compounded women's desire for quality education by making things difficult for women when it comes to educational development. Such men prefer to marry illiterate as wives for fear that the educated woman is too assertive, domineering, free and in general a threat to the male dominated society.

Gender Stereotype: Nigerian society believes primarily in the role model of women as perfect housewives. Most women therefore struggle to be successful house wives. They were to stay at home and inculcate in their children the virtues of life while their husbands carried on with important societal tasks such as politics and governance. The career development of women is often tailored along specific occupation without saying it loud the school system encourages the boy children to be a tough engineer or a medical doctor, lawyer, while at the same time encouraging the girl – child to become a gentle nurse or a primary school teacher.

Early Marriages and Early Pregnancies: In rural communities early marriage are a permanent feature, in which case, girls are given in marriage at the age of between twelve and thirteen years. Early pregnancies and unwanted pregnancies are another factors inhibiting female education. They drop out more often from school. In this case, the girls' opportunities are destroyed. She then misses the chance of furthering her educational career and this no doubt can upset her otherwise peaceful life.

Strategies Needed to Promote Women's Education in Rural Communities

The place of education as a catalyst for women empowerment and development is indubitable. Women education can be promoted in rural communities through the following strategies:

Increasing access of female children to education, this can be achieved through increased advocacy and orientation of the masses in rural communities, especially on the need to educate the girl child in formal schools.

The Ministries of Women Affairs all over the federation need to play a great role in bringing to focus the fundamental challenges of the women folk which the government and other institution 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 government should strive to tackle the barriers to women education in rural areas, such as drop out, societal and institutional discriminations, early marriage and cultural practices. This can be achieved through provision of scholarships and bursaries for female children, infrastructure, facilities and instructional materials to schools. Recruitment and deployment of qualified teachers to school for effective teaching and learning should be prioritize by the Federal and States Ministry of Education. The concentration of qualified and large number of teachers in urban areas at the expense of schools in remote and rural areas should be discouraged.

Every women forum, whether in the city or rural areas should be effectively utilized as an avenue to educate the illiterate ones among them on skills, knowledge and values that will help them to improve their social, economic and political life style.

Parents, guardians and the society as a whole must allow and encourage their female children to enroll in schools, overcome the paralysis of illiteracy and acquire a proper awareness of their potentials, rights and higher responsibilities in society literacy programs should be incorporated with life skills components so that women can be well equipped to perform their roles more effectively.

Government at all levels should make concerted efforts to alleviate poverty at the grassroot, as this will undoubtedly overcome the challenge of not sending the girl – children to school by parents for reason of poverty.

Another responsibility that government should take up so as to tackle this menace is to provide free and compulsory primary and secondary education. Schools should be built, well staffed and equipped to provide quality education so that children in rural areas can compete favourably with their counterparts in urban areas.

Parents should be enlightened to encouraged the girl – child to acquire basic education, at least that will make her self – reliant and to secure a better future for herself, governments, non – governmental organizations, religious leaders and traditional rulers have a major role to play in leading this awareness and enlightenment campaigns on not only the importance of western education for the girl – child but also on the need to discard the various cultural and religious misconceptions that have militated against girl – child education in northern Nigeria over the years.

Conclusion

Education is the basis for the full promotion and improvement of the status of women. This is on the basis that despite their large population, women in rural communities are at disadvantaged position when compared to men. Among other indicators enrolment of girl – child in schools is low in rural communities, while there is prevalence of poverty among the women in rural areas. However, a cursory look at the pattern of women’s involvement in education in rural communities reveals abysmal low levels. In spite of all the laudable goals, objectives and benefit derived from education, rural women still suffer a lot of constraints and inhibitions which militate against their personal national development.

Promotion of women education is a collective responsibility. Therefore, all stakeholders in the field of education have important roles to play in ensuring that girl – child benefited adequately from education. It is therefore imperative that all should show more commitment towards ensuring that quality education is provided to all, especially the females in rural areas.

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