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## **Needed Reforms and Innovations in Motherhood/Gender Education for Attaining the Millennium Development Goals (MDGS) for Sustainable Development in Africa** *(Pp. 239-252)*

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### **Abstract**

*In rural communities of Africa, a mother carrying a bundle of firewood, with a child strapped on her back and another toddling behind her is common identity. It is a reflection of abject poverty happening at the same time women astronauts in America are leading teams to outer space! In Brazil, about 42 percent of the work force is women, and, a Newspaper in Sao Paulo called mothers who raise children full-time an “endangered species” implying that this category of women will soon disappear in the economy of Brazil! This is one reason Brazil is today one of the fastest growing economies of the Third World. These women contribute in no small way to family and nation building. It is for this reason that this study sought needed reforms/innovations in motherhood/gender education in enhancing attainment of the Millennium Development Goals in Africa for sustainable development. In doing this, responses of 1,672 working mothers, randomly selected from North, South, East, and West Africa were analyzed which identified top among ten others as providing mid-day heavy meals for children at school, free formal and continuing education for mothers, free transportation for children to and from school, free well-equipped hospitals inside schools.*

**Keywords:** Motherhood, Gender Education Reforms, Empowerment, MDGS, Sustainable Development

### **Introduction**

Motherhood is a marvelous and complicated venture. Mothers enjoy precious moments they would never trade for the world, yet, sometimes, they feel they are on the verge of breakdown due to the many demanding tasks tied to motherhood. Mothers sacrifice free time and much of their social life to ensure that their children are well catered for. One mother once remarked, though with joy, that she had traded relaxing baths for quick showers, and romantic dinners for micro-waved food. For her, there were travels untraveled, places unseen, and things undone; but the laundry was always done, neatly folded, and placed in appropriate drawers and closets, while breakfast, lunch, and supper were always on the table at the right time. She jokingly added that she was always “on call” but never studied medicine! According to her, the reward and the fuel that kept her going were “the occasional smiles, warm hugs, loving eyes and expressions that say thank you mommy” from the children (Awake, 2002).

However, a major hurdle that has complicated motherhood is that many are meeting traditional family responsibilities while also taking on the demands of a job to help support the family financially. In African societies, the family that must be supported goes beyond the nuclear including the extended one even up to third cousins. Thus, many of these mothers whether highly educated or not educated at all, work outside the home, usually not out of choice, but out of necessity. They understand that if they stayed at home, their families, and especially their children would go without many needs. Their salaries, often lower than those of their male counterparts, are of great importance to the family and as such go through great stress keeping their jobs. In some cases, the job market may require women to put in long hours at work, with the demands not stopping there. For instance, cases abound where women were asked by employers to sign agreements that they would not become pregnant at work for periods as long as five years, nor get married at all (if yet unmarried). If they breached such agreements, they were summarily fired. In industrialized countries, the good news is that women have begun to challenge these policies in court with remarkable success. Some banks in Africa do not grant maternity leave to certain categories of female staff whereas in developed countries, people are considering introducing paternity leave for husbands whose wives put to bed. In less extreme cases, employers may pressure mothers to return to work as soon as

possible after giving birth without any reductions in hours at work. There is therefore no accommodation for the fact that they now have responsibilities toward very young babies. They cannot take much time off without financial hardship and may have to cope with poor child-care facilities and inadequate wage benefits. Some get sacked if they indulged even very little in sneaking out to breast-feed their babies. This is why in the African culture where family ties are very strong, mothers are forced to abandon their jobs to raise children full-time against unimaginable pecuniary sufferings.

On the other hand, some mothers work, not for financial needs but for self-fulfillment. This is mostly seen in developed countries where mothers have the choice of leaving work to attend to the children and the home, and returning to work just for the fun of it or to evade boredom. In such places, their jobs often wait for them or they can easily find another. In Africa, however, there is hardly any mother that is working just for self-fulfillment or the fun of it. The salary or wage, no matter how meager is important and very much needed to offset the ever rising cost of living in an already impoverished situation. Besides, jobs are scarce and highly competitive, and a working mother cannot afford to quit at wish.

Furthermore, the task of balancing work and home is not easy. Many mothers today agree that juggling the stresses of work with the responsibilities of home leaves them overworked, overstrained, and underpaid! In Germany, for instance, over 70 percent of mothers feel stressed; about 51 percent have complaints involving the spine and inter-vertebral disks; over 35 percent are constantly tired and despondent, and almost 30 percent suffer from headaches or migraines. A mother from the Netherlands said: "Tired, tired, tired. I even wake up tired. When I come home from work, I am overcome with tiredness. The children are already saying Mom is always tired, and that makes me feel guilty. I do not want to miss work, but I also want to be that sociable mother who makes everything possible" (Awake, 2002: 5).

When women spend long hours away from their children, the children do not get what they need most – the time and attention of their mother. In this regard, the first two years in a child's life are most critical. The child is still too young to understand why the mother is not there for her. A survey in Hong Kong revealed that 60 percent of working mothers do not devote what they consider to be enough time to their children. Also during the workweek, 20 percent of children up to age three of working parents live away from their homes, usually with grandparents. Research has shown that no one can

fulfill a mother's role as well as a mother can. A substitute figure can alleviate a child's need for the mother but cannot take her place since the child can sense that she is not getting her own mother's loving care. Mothers know this too and they live and work struggling with this guilt. Guilt is a psychological slow killer and destroyer (Duze, 2009). In Africa, cultural demands of motherhood may force many to abandon their jobs to raise children full-time. For same reasons, they abandon their education too. Thus there is a band of such mothers who would have been working and probably better educated to contribute better to the economy of home and nation if certain reforms and innovations could be introduced that would help empower women.

In another dimension, some mothers have been physically abused especially for failing to put food on the table at the required or demanded time. In Hong Kong, four percent of women surveyed said that they had been abused during pregnancy, while one out of six mothers in Germany admitted they been attacked physically by a child at least once because of this. In Africa such physical abuse by husbands are common (Duze, 2009).

On the other hand, women who stay at home full-time to look after their children complain that they have to endure being downgraded by a society geared towards glorifying paid work. In Ireland, for instance, 60 percent of women stay home to take care of children. In Greece, Italy, and Spain, 40 percent of the women do the same. In most modern societies being a full-time house-wife is no longer considered honourable, so women are pushed to have their own careers even if the extra income was not necessary. This is probably why 42 percent of women in Brazil make up the labour force in that country (Awake, 2002). Today, Brazil is the 8<sup>th</sup> world fastest growing economy because women are highly empowered in this Third World country.

In all these, the most disquieting is that in tackling the challenges of home and work women are often left to struggle alone. Tired from a full day's work, a mother comes home, not to rest, but to continue with the regular household chores. Even though they can engage the services of house-helps, they are seen as the main ones responsible for caring for the house and the children and therefore must ensure proper supervision, which is another huge task on its own. Fathers do not always compensate for mothers' equally long working office hours in the home. In Japan, 80 percent of housewives said that they wished a family member would help them with household chores, especially when they were sick. In the Netherlands, women spend about three

hours with the children and 1.7 hours doing household chores, while men spend about two hours a day with the children and 0.7 hours doing household chores. Research findings in Britain revealed that Britain is a nation of absent fathers, where men spend as little as fifteen minutes a day with their children when compared with the ninety minutes a day British professional mothers will spend with their children (Awake, 2002). Many husbands complain that their wives find it difficult to delegate tasks because they never got satisfied with others doing things for them. They claim that most women insist that everything be done exactly the way they want it done, otherwise, it is wrongly done! Husbands often use this argument as an excuse to do nothing at home. This ought not to be so because mothers, whether working or not, need every kind of useful helping-hand especially those of husbands and fathers.

The feat of millions of hardworking and self-sacrificing mothers, schooled or unschooled, working outside the home or not, who do their best to fulfill one of the noblest causes of mankind – that of raising the future generations of the human family – is salutary. What then can be done to help women in Africa fulfill their domestic functions well and contribute greater to sustainable development? Scholars, economists, and educators have agreed that education, whether formal or informal, is the key to elimination of poverty, hunger, disease, unnecessary death, and all that militate against the healthy and happy well-being of the individual, home and the society (UNESCO, 1978; World Bank, 1996). Education has long been earmarked to be a salient tool for uplifting living standards and when the right types are provided, development is not only attained but also sustained. This is why the United Nations advocates Education for All (EFA) and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) especially in developing countries. This is pertains to the thrust of this study. What are the needed reforms/innovations in motherhood/gender education for achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) for sustainable development in Africa? This is the problem of this study. How could working mothers be empowered to achieve this in Africa? To boost the background of the study, it was necessary to explain briefly some of the concepts involved.

### **Gender Education**

That education is an instrument for national development is not debatable. What it important is how to make education deliver the goods of national development to its uttermost as fast as possible. This has been identified in gender education, a term that loosely refers to the education of the girl-child

and women in all nations of the world who had been hitherto ignored and neglected due to various traditional, religious, and cultural factors, as compared to their male counterparts. It must be accepted that this feminine gender, like the masculine gender, also possesses potentials that education must tap for sustainable national development. Education is not only instilling knowledge, but also awakening the enormous creative potentials that lie within individuals, enabling them to develop to the fullest potentials, and thereby contribute better to developing themselves as well as the societies in which they live. African women must therefore be empowered educationally at all levels to contribute their quota to national development.

### **Sustainable Development**

The term “Sustainable Development” can be seen as that development that meets the needs of the present without compromising or jeopardizing the ability and capability of the future generations to meet their own needs. It involves using resources to create increased wealth that is environment-friendly. It concerns the development of the individual and his community in whatever positive form to boost socio-political activities that raise living standards and Gross Domestic Product. It concerns tapping all observable potentials of all citizens of a nation for optimal productivity. It must be noted however, that general or basic education is good for promoting functional literacy and numeracy while specific education is the one that builds on basic education and involves the acquisition of special knowledge, skills, and competencies in peculiar areas for peculiar outcomes. This is where we talk about classical, vocational, technical, business, entrepreneurship, science and technology education, ICT education, etc and the reforms/innovations in them that would boost sustainable development in a nation. It usually targets education for self-reliance which is considered by economists and educators as the highest form of human capital development. Oladeji and Abiola (1998) noted that the rapid economic growth of the four “Tigers” in Asia – Korea, Taiwan, Hong Kong and Singapore – was the development of human capital, men and women alike.

### **Reforms and Innovations in Education**

Reforms and innovations in education cover all inputs of new ideas and strategies into the educational system in order to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of a targeted aspect or particular area thereby enhancing productivity and maximizing output. Involve the injection of new ideas or strategies into the educational system so as to improve both internal and external efficiency and arrangements of the system for greater social,

economic, political, cultural, or technological and scientific development. This implies that reforms and innovations do not necessarily mean changing the status quo but also adding and subtracting to improve the system's quality aimed at increased goal accomplishment.

### **The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)**

In the Millennium Summit held in September 2000, the world leaders placed development at the centre of the global agenda by adopting what is referred to as the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). This set a vivid target for arresting the decline in average living standards of especially the developing countries. These goals comprise:

- Eradication of extreme poverty and hunger
- Achievement of universal primary education
- Promotion of gender equality and empowerment of women
- Reduction in child mortality
- Improvement in maternal health
- Combating HIV/AIDS, malaria, and other diseases
- Ensuring environmental stability and development of global partnership for development.

It is ten years today since the summit happened, and most African countries in comparison to their Asian Third World nations, are lagging far behind in accomplishing any of these goals. There is nothing very tangible to show that these objectives are being practically achieved in most African nations. Nigeria is guilty of talking too much and doing very little. There are all sorts of committees, agencies, boards, directorates, commissions, bodies and meetings with loads of paper work and nothing on the ground to show that these goals are being effectively and efficiently accomplished. The fear that the EFA and the MDG goals may be difficult to achieve in the LDCs by 2015 led to the Ministerial Meeting convened by UNESCO in June, 2010 in Nigeria of the nine countries (Nigeria, Egypt, China, India, Indonesia, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Brazil, and Mexico) with the largest population of the world's illiterates. Nigeria, for example, being one of the e9 countries had only achieved minimal targets of the EFA and MDG goals.

### **Needed Reforms and Innovations in Gender Education in Africa**

In 2010, the generality of Nigerians still waddle in abject poverty and the women and children bear the greatest brunt of this gruesome ordeal. That is why the picture of the African woman in the vast rural communities of Africa

has not changed from a woman carrying a bundle of firewood on her head with a child strapped on her back, and another toddling behind or beside her and all looking wasted. Sadly, this is happening at the same time that women astronauts are leading teams to outer space in the United States of America!

It is believed that the height of one's education should keep one above the poverty line, therefore reforms/innovations in motherhood/gender education in Africa should include education that would empower women to contribute greater to sustainable development and reducing their domestic burdens without jeopardizing the safety and welfare of their children. It is known that the best economies of the world today (America, Japan, Russia, Germany, China) have a well known connection between technical/vocational education as well as entrepreneurship education and the growth of productivity but in Africa people look down on technical/vocational education mainly because they do not guarantee white collar jobs, and are male-stereotyped (Okeke and Okolocha, 2005). There is therefore need to bring women education to embrace these forms of education. This is also bearing in mind that the development of educated people, men and women alike, is the most important capital formation, their numbers, quality, and utilization the most meaningful index of the wealth-producing capacity of a country. It becomes a double tragedy when the women that have been educated cannot be utilized but raise children fulltime due to the anomalies in workplace and society that force them back to the kitchen. Also, there is no education that will be too high for women today as long as the impediments that push them behind are removed or reduced. These impediments, after all said and done, fall back on their domestic responsibilities. It is not enough to sit down at round tables and deduce, formulate, and plan what we think will be good for the women. It is better to first ask the women who are wearing the shoes and therefore know where they pinch most about how to remove the discomfort since it is generally believed that any needs assessment begins and ends with the user. This should be a starting-point. Besides, it is part of gender equity to allow women decide for themselves what is good for them. Thus, in seeking needed reforms/innovations in motherhood/gender education for attaining the millennium development goals (MDGs) in Africa for sustainable development, a survey was carried out to get the desired reforms/innovations from the African women themselves. Based on this background, one research question and one hypothesis guided the study:

What are the needed reforms/innovations in motherhood/gender education for attaining the MDGs for sustainable development in Africa?



There is no significant difference in needed reforms/innovations amongst respondents from the North, South, East, and West Africa.

### **Methodology**

This survey focused on African mothers from North, South, East, and West Africa irrespective of level of education attained and who are working for paid jobs outside the confines of their homes. In an international conference on Higher Education at Kampala International University, Uganda, in 2009, the author got some women participants from different parts of Africa to help distribute and retrieve the research instrument for this study which was a questionnaire on desired reforms/innovations in motherhood/gender education in Africa for the attainment of the MDGs for sustainable development. It elicited demographic data and required subjects to respond to the ten items using a 4-point Likert-type scale of Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree, and Strongly Disagree. Weighted mean scores of 2.50 (62.50%) and above were considered to be needed reforms/innovations. The instrument was scrutinized by senior colleagues in the Faculty of Education and the final copy used was ascertained valid. Its reliability coefficient ( $r$ ) computed through test-retest method was 0.88. The sample was a total of 1,672 working mothers selected from North (404), South (427), East (412), and West (429) Africa through simple random sampling. The average age was 23 years, the youngest 19 and the oldest 44; 77 were single parents who were never married and 158 were divorced; their educational qualifications included 3 Ph.D.s, 104 Master's degree, 427 Bachelor's degree and equivalents, 383 post-secondary diplomas, 288 West African Secondary School Certificate and equivalents, and 395 others below secondary school qualifications. The responses were analyzed using frequencies, means, percentages, and One-way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA).

### **Results and Discussion**

The research question was answered by analyzing the responses to the ten items of the questionnaire using frequencies, means and percentages, and result presented in Table 1.

The result in Table 1 is vivid and self-explanatory, showing the weighted mean scores for the four distinct groups and the corresponding percentage scores for each of the ten items of the questionnaire. It revealed that the major desired or needed reforms/innovations were provision of heavy mid-day meals for children at school, free formal and continuing education for mothers, free transportation for children to and from school, free well-

equipped hospitals inside school premises, automatic six months maternity leave for mothers with full pay in public and private employments, introduction of information and communication technology (ICT) education right from primary school, and introduction of entrepreneurship education as core curriculum content from the secondary school level. Others were allowing mothers return to school after long periods of child-care without facing rigorous bureaucratic bottlenecks especially at the tertiary level, allowing nursing mothers two hours off every day to breast-feed their babies, and enforcing technical/vocational education at all levels of education.

The null hypothesis was tested by subjecting the computed mean scores of the four groups of respondents to the ANOVA at  $0.05\alpha$  level. To make use of the robustness of the F-test to violation of assumption of homogeneity of variances, 72 respondents were randomly dropped from the four groups to make the four groups compared of same sample size ( $n_1 = n_2 = n_3 = n_4 = 400$ ). The result was presented in Table 2.

The result in Table 2 showed that the null hypothesis was retained since the calculated F-ratio of 0.64 was less than the Table-ratio 3.00, meaning that there was no significant difference in their responses. This implied that the perceptions of working mothers from North, South, East, and West Africa, as to the needed reforms/innovations in motherhood/gender education that will quicken the accomplishment of the MDGs for Africa's sustainable development were altogether the same.

Since this study appears to be the first to examine women empowerment from the motherhood/gender education context, there was no study found that directly relates to this. However, studies on technical/vocational/business education and women empowerment (Abu-Absi, 1996; Okeke and Okolocha, 2005; Egun & Tibi, 2010) have consistently reported the shying away of females from technical/vocational education as career options whereas this is an area found to make recipients of such education really self-reliant, and a viable strategy for poverty alleviation, youth/women empowerment, and gainful self-employment (World Bank, 1996; Ayesha and Aina, 1997; Haynes and Jackson, 1997; Youngman, 2000; Asiegbu and Kpolovie, 2007). This was reflected in this study where technical/vocational education scored the least percentage in the continuum of needed reforms/innovations. However, the preference of ICT and entrepreneurship education by women in this study suggested that they understood the need for competence in ICT and experience in business ventures given the global trends in science and

technology sophistication, digitization, competitiveness etc (Ogundipe-Leslie, 1994; Shirley, 1997; Oladeji and Abiola, 1998; Egun and Tibi, 2010).

The high percentages recorded and significant agreement on hypothesis tested seriously underscored the fact that they understood that if their children were well catered for in school, in terms of food, health-care, transportation, then their domestic burdens would be reduced to provide room for effective involvement in the labour force and in enhancing their educational status even as adults in formal and continuing education. They understood that investing in formal and non-formal education in training of females is one of the best means of achieving fast development and economic growth that are both sustained and sustainable as indicated in the World Bank's (1996) cost-benefit analysis which revealed that investment in the education of females has the highest rate of return than any possible type of investment in developing nations. Such benefits include greater and higher economic production, improved family and child nutrition, better resources utilization and longer life expectancy for both men and women. Therefore education of women will harness their potentials thereby bringing about positive attitude to life, and improvement in their economic status, individual, family and the nation's living standard. This is why Bagshaw (2006) acclaimed that women are better leaders, out-passing on such skills as creating and articulating vision, setting clear directions, taking charge, being an inspirational model, setting high standard performance and assuming responsibilities, just like the virtuous woman of the Holy Bible (Proverbs 31: 10-31). Also, UNESCO (1978) declared that adult education will contribute to the achievement of a more rational and more equitable distribution of educational resources between young people and different social groups and ensuring better understanding of economic equality and the sexes.

Furthermore, African women have indicated in this study that given better opportunities as working mothers to take care of their babies and infants, would keep them emotionally and psychologically prepared to tackle other social, economic, political and educational issues that would contribute immensely to sustainable development.

### **Conclusion**

The needed reforms/innovations on motherhood/gender education by African women irrespective of geographical location and educational qualification have been ascertained in this study by African women themselves. Their

desires reflected the MDGs. It will therefore pay for policy-makers in Africa to consider these needed reforms/innovations critically and evolve strategies for implementation to ensure fast attainment of the MDGs for sustainable development in Africa. This way, the picture of the African woman would begin to change.

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**Table 1:** Distribution of Mean (X) Responses of Needed Reforms in Motherhood/Gender Education for Attaining the MDGs for Sustainable Development in Africa (N=1,672)

Needed Reforms/Innovations	North Africa n = 404 X <sub>1</sub>	South Africa n = 427 X <sub>2</sub>	East Africa n = 412 X <sub>3</sub>	West Africa n = 429 X <sub>4</sub>	*Weighted Mean and Percentage N = 1,672
Provision of heavy mid-day meals for children at school	3.97	3.96	3.98	3.97	3.97 99.25
Free formal and continuing education for mothers	3.93	3.96	3.92	3.95	3.94 98.50
Free transportation for children to and from school	3.95	3.91	3.90	3.93	3.92 98.00
Free well-equipped hospitals inside school premises	3.90	3.91	3.89	3.92	3.91 97.75
Automatic six months maternity leave for mothers with full pay in public and private employments	3.86	3.88	3.95	3.90	3.90 97.50
Introduction of information and communication technology (ICT) education right from primary school	3.80	3.81	3.78	3.84	3.81 95.25

Introduction of entrepreneurship education as core curriculum content from the secondary school level	3.73	3.76	3.75	3.78	3.76 94.00
Allowing mothers return to school after long periods of child-care without facing rigorous bureaucratic bottlenecks especially at the tertiary level	3.70	3.71	3.74	3.72	3.72 93.00
Allowing nursing mothers two hours off every day to breast-feed their babies	3.72	3.69	3.68	3.71	3.70 92.50
Enforcing technical/vocational education at all levels of education.	2.92	2.65	2.94	2.76	2.82 70.50

\*Weighted Mean =  $(X_1 + X_2 + X_3 + X_4) / 4$

**Table 2:** Summary Table One Way ANOVA on Needed Reforms/Innovations

Sources of Variation	Df	SS	MS	F-cal.	F-critical	Decision ( $p \leq 0.05$ )
Between Groups	3	3031.5	1010.5	0.64	3.00	Not Significant
Within Groups	1667	2632026.3	1578.9			
Total	1670	2635057.8	-			