

SECURING WOMEN'S EDUCATION FOR SUSTAINABLE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT IN RIVERS STATE

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Abstract

The paper focuses on securing women's education for sustainable economic development in Rivers State. The concepts of education, woman, and women's education were explained. The meanings of sustainable development, the role of women in ensuring sustainable development, and factors hindering the education of women in Rivers State were highlighted. Ways to improve the education of women and women's contribution to economic development in Rivers State was equally examined. It was therefore recommended that for women to acquire formal education, the government should formulate at various levels, proper laws and policies to defend their rights and privileges. There should be aggressive re-orientation towards the education of the girl child, sensitization of female education and role modeling technique for mentorship should be sustained. There should be adequate provision of facilities/ infrastructures and equal access to education for the girl child. Sex education should be part of the curriculum to avoid teenage pregnancy and the Rivers State House of Assembly should make stringent laws on the age at which a girl child should get.

Keywords: Women education, Economic, Security, Sustainable development, Rivers State.

Introduction

The United Nations General Assembly adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development as the agreed framework for international development on 25th September 2015. It is a successor to the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) but unlike the MDGs, the 2030 Agenda presents a much wider scope by deliberately and more fully incorporating economic and environmental sustainability economic and environmental sustainability. Also included is a stand-alone goal on gender equality targets and the empowerment of women and girls (United Nations, 2015). Education today is the determinant for the growth and development of any country. It is an important factor in human resource development (Gbenu, 2012).

Education is the most important ingredient for human improvement and advancement in this modern life. It is the fundamental means of transformation and empowering the individual to effect vital developmental changes in any society. The meaningful co-existence of human beings in the march towards societal advancement depends on it. Adequate access to quality education will empower individuals to acquire knowledge and skills necessary for harnessing available natural resources within the environment for self-improvement and actualization in order to overcome the ancient twin plagues called poverty and hunger (Otunu-Ogbi, 2008).

Education of women and girls is equally or more important than education for men and boys. Educated mothers are more likely to adopt desirable health and nutritional practices than uneducated ones (Abubakar and Kwashabawa, 2021). Educated mothers are more likely to train their daughters most efficiently and ensure that they benefit socially and economically from the education they receive (World Bank, 2008). Women's education is very important for the overall development of Rivers State and Nigeria at large. The place of women in the development of any society is fundamental such that any deliberate neglect of their education could point to danger for the entire society. As it is often said, to teach a man is to teach an individual but to teach a woman is to teach a family and the whole nation (Abbagana, 2013).

Education is an important instrument for knowledge, skills, and building self-confidence. Through education, women are able to contribute most effectively to the transformation of their environment and improve the socio-economic status of their families. No nation is considered truly developed if her female component still wallows in primitive conditions, engulfed in co-habitation with ignorance and dehumanization. Recently

Nigerian women have become conscious of that social status and their potential roles in nation-building. They have developed a positive self-image and are now willing to take advantage of available educational opportunities (Robert-Okah, 2011).

The Concept of Woman

In the face of the recent debate on the child marriage bill in the Nigerian National Assembly over who exactly is a woman, it may be difficult to define and identify who exactly is a woman. This is because the child marriage proponents declared that any girl who is married automatically becomes a woman (Eseyin, Okafor & Uchendu, 2014).

However, Webster's Online Dictionary (2013) defined a woman as a human specie that belongs to the female class and has attained the age of puberty. In the same vein, Wikipedia (2013) noted that the term "woman" is reserved for adult females while a young female is a girl. A woman can simply then be referred to as any female who is mature enough to handle matters that pertain to livelihood. For a person to be referred to as a woman, she needs to be a female who can handle the challenges of life and take appropriate decisions. She may or may not however be married since a female who is advanced in age would not be addressed as a girl but also a woman.

Meaning of Women's Education

Ogbuagu (1990) and Damar (1999) respectively in Yahya (2008) assert that women's education is a sinequanon for the social, economic, and political development of a nation. The indications show that in most societies, especially in developing countries like Nigeria, women's education is given secondary consideration vis-à-vis the education of men. Where parents have to make a choice because of economic or other constraints, boys are more often than not, given the option of attaining education in preference to the girls. Available statistics indicate that in the developing regions of the world, there are significantly more female than male illiterates. The problem of gender disparity in school enrolment and educational opportunities is real and possess a challenge to womanhood. Robert-Okah (2011) opines that Nigerian women contributed to the sustenance of the kinship groups during the pre-colonial period. The pre-colonial Nigerian economy was basically at a subsistence level and Nigerian women participated effectively. Apart from playing the roles of mothers, and wives and taking charge of the domestic sector, women

contributed substantially to the production and distribution of goods and services particularly in agriculture. The colonial economy was export-oriented and seriously undermined the prestige of the traditional occupations of Nigerian women. While it placed women at a great disadvantage, it enhanced the economic status of the western world and a few male Nigerian merchants. The education curriculum for girls at that time only encouraged them to become housewives instead of income earners.

Concept of Sustainable Development

According to Ominyi and Opa (2008), the relationship between education and sustainable development is so intimate and cohesive that one cannot be dispensed for the other. Education is the instrument of social change, reconstruction, and rehabilitation and cannot be taken for granted. The National Policy on Education (2004) takes cognizance of this fact when it states: education shall continue to be highly rated in the national development plans because education is the most important instruction for change and any fundamental change in the intellectual and social outlook of any society has to be preceded by educational revolution.

Ominyi and Opa (2008) further stated that development as a concept is a multi-faceted process. At the level of the individual, it implies increased skill and capacity, greater freedom, creativity, self-discipline responsibility, and material wellbeing. Though some of these are virtually moral categories and consequently are difficult to evaluate, the achievement of any of the aspects of personal development is very much associated with the state of society as a whole. In its expanded perspective, development is a fundamental transformation of the society's mode of production so as to bring about quantitative changes in the community's living conditions. Development then is the advancement whereupon a nation attains economic viability. For development to be sustainable, it must have to be dynamic and lifelong in order to sustain.

The International Institute of Sustainable Development (IISD) (2013) in Eseyin, Okafor, and Uchendu (2014) defined sustainable development as development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. Development is sustainable when the level of qualitative and quantitative output from the various sectors of the economy is able to meet the needs of the present and future generations respectively.

The Role of Women in ensuring Sustainable Development

Robert-Okah (2011) asserts that the role of women in national development will enhance their abilities to become masters of their own lives and destiny. It will not only enable them to acquire skills that are necessary to understand the fast-changing realities of life, but it will also give them the confidence to realize their potential and not succumb to inhuman and subservient conditions. Therefore, women should no longer be regarded as objects to be tossed about... women should be encouraged to take a greater interest in the destiny of their countries. The promotion of gender equity and women empowerment are identified as effective means to combat poverty, hunger, and disease in order to stimulate sustainable development.

Similarly, Eseyin, Okafor, and Uchendu (2014) posit that the role of women in ensuring sustainable development cannot be overemphasized. Development in the country is a product of the effort of the productive members of the country. As such, women in society have important roles to play in sustaining the development of the nation. This role can be effectively achieved when women are given equal opportunity to contribute to the standard of the economy like their male counterparts. Contrary to this, the level of sustainable development that will be recorded in the country will remain far below the optimum capacity of the entire sector of the nation.

Factors hindering the Education of Women in Rivers State

Factors hindering the education of women generally are determined by several variables. According to Robert -Okah (2012) they include affordability of women enrolment, access to high institutions, socio-cultural factors, early marriage, and teenage pregnancy amongst others. Uche and Jephthah (2011) cited in Robert-Okah (2012) opine that female education generally lags behind male education because females are believed to be subservient and end up in marriage and in the kitchen. Hitherto in Rivers State, female education was regarded as a waste of time, money, efforts, and resources in another man's house. However, socio-economic and cultural factors inhibit female access to primary and secondary education and by extension to the tertiary level. These factors include inadequate educational facilities, male-biased or inappropriate curricula, and the devaluation of girls' education. Others include teenage pregnancies, financial consideration, early marriages, the timing of girls' initiation

ceremonies, and psychological, social, and cultural barriers that portray females as perpetual minors.

From another perspective, Brennen (2003) in Robert-Okah (2012) noted that female under-representation in educational institutions did not evolve in a vacuum but is embedded in the attitudinal, causal, and methodological behavior of teachers first in early childhood. Parents of primary educators make the first contact with students. They are models for the effective transmission of ideas and information that are permanently retained. Where the primary educators (parents) lack the needed skills for effective parenting and the secondary educators (teachers) are not properly trained to deal with gender differences, inequality becomes inevitable.

Ways to Improve the Education of Women

Various educational stakeholders have continued to reiterate the need to improve women's education in the state, country, and world at large as a way of empowering women in society. The education of women according to Eseyin, Okafor, and Uchendu (2014), has been linked to having a positive relationship with national development. It is, therefore, needful that women's education is given the needed attention in society. Some of the ways through which women's education can be improved in the society include the following: ensuring gender equality in the admission process, provision of educational grants, proper legislation (to correct the African tradition that places more importance on the male counterparts), employment of quality female teachers (to motivate and mentor others), provision of appropriate infrastructures (as women require a comfortable and organized environment for effective learning unlike men that are naturally wired to succeed under pressure) and encouraging women to take up decision making and leadership roles.

Women Contribution to Economic Development in Rivers State.

Ezeano (2012) highlights that Nigerian women and Rivers State women, in particular, play important roles in rural development. Rivers State women possess some intrinsic characteristics that influence their participation in rural development. Therefore, they should be empowered politically by electing and appointing them into leadership positions in the three tiers of government, financially by giving them interest-free loans in banks, and educationally by giving them more chances in our educational institutions. This will enable them to participate more in rural developments which will have a multiplier and trickling down effect on the society.

Invariably when the aforementioned strategies are effectively secured, they will improve the socio-economic life of the famine gender and as such improve productivity, increase employment and income is enhanced in Rivers State and by way of extension to Nigeria and the world.

Conclusion

The paper addressed ‘securing women’s education for sustainable economic development in Rives State’. The concepts of education, women’s education, and sustainable development have been properly articulated. The role of women in ensuring sustainable development and factors hindering the education of women in Rivers state have been outlined. Also, ways to improve the education of women and women contributing to economic development in Rivers State were not left out. It was thus concluded that since education remains a means of social mobility and transformation (considering women’s education as a comparative advantage) there should be equal access, rather than being deprived which invariably results in an immeasurable loss in the various sectors of the economy.

Recommendations

1. The government should formulate at various levels, proper laws and policies that will help defend the rights and privileges of women to acquire formal education in Rivers State.
2. There should be aggressive re-orientation of parents and the community leaders towards the education of the girl-child.
3. There should be sensitization of female education and educated women themselves as models should mentor others.
4. Adequate provision of facilities and infrastructure to enhance teachers’ productivity should be made a priority by the concerned government agencies.
5. There should be equal access to education by both genders to enhance teamwork.
6. There should be stringent legislation on the age at which a girl-child should get married by the Rivers State House of Assembly.
7. Sexuality education should be introduced as part of the curriculum in both primary and secondary schools in order to check teenage pregnancy.

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