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# Education and Women's Socio-Political Development in Nigeria: An Overview

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**Abstract:** The clamour for effective collaboration between men and women and social development has occupied a center stage in virtually all national and international conferences in the 21st Century. Women can hardly contribute meaningfully to social development amidst indefatigable barriers erected by cultural values. This paper therefore focused on the role of education in women's socio-political development particularly in Nigeria. The paper revealed that in spite of the agitation for inclusive education and the 35% affirmative action in Nigeria, traditional belief/cultural status and perception of the women, gender discrimination, early marriage, poverty, child abuse, marginalization of women are still insurmountable. Based on these findings, recommendations were made.

**Keywords:** Education, Development, Women's Development, Socio-Economic Development.

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## Introduction

The current wave of globalization has greatly improved the lives of women worldwide, particularly the lives of women in the developing world. Nevertheless, women remain disadvantaged in many areas of life, including education, employment, health, and civil rights. According to the U.S. Agency for International Development and the World Bank, 57 percent of the 72 million primary school aged children who do not attend school are females. Additionally, girls are four percent less likely than boys to complete primary schools (Gender Statistics, 2010).

While many gains have been made with regards to overall level of education worldwide and more children than ever are now attending primary school (King, 2013), there is still not world-wide gender parity in education. In every income bracket, there are more female children than male children who are not attending school. Generally, girls in the poorest 20 percent of household have the lowest chance of getting an education (Jensen, 2010). This inequality does not necessarily change in adulthood. Statistics show that of the 774 million illiterate adults worldwide, 64 percent are women a statistic virtually unchanged from the early 1990s (Gender Statistics, 2010).

The United Nations Millennium Development Goal (MDG) to promote gender equality and empower women therefore uses education as its target and the measure of gender disparity in education as its indicator of progress. Through the efforts of the international community, the UN hopes to eliminate gender disparity in primary and secondary education in all levels of education no later than 2015. What a lofty target to realize! This begs the questions can this Millennium Development Goal be achieved? What progress have countries made to achieve this goal? And specifically, how far has Nigeria as a nation gone to meet this goal?(Tomasevski, 2005).

Nigeria is still among the nations facing many challenges in reaching that target by 2015 as

well bridging gender gap in primary and secondary education. It is imperative to say that education plays a particularly important role as a foundation for girls' development towards adult life. At the time ensuring gender equality requires adapting equally to the needs and interests of girls and boys. International human rights law lays down a three-fold set of criteria where by girls should have an equal right to education, equal right in education and their equal rights should be protected and promoted through education (Tomasevski, 2005).

### **Concept of Education**

The term education as a concept is quite elusive and not easy to define. The complexity of the discipline is necessitated by the functions education has to perform in society as one of its institution. The word 'education' is derived from two Latin words "educere" which means "to lead out" and "educare" which means 'to bring up' (Okorosaye-Orubite, 2019). This means that education bring out skills in someone and build them up. Okorosaye-Orubite (2019) defined education as a social creation, designed to meet the specific needs of the society at any particular point in time. Its form, content, methodology and clientele are determined by the society. NzewuInBirabil&Ogeh (2020) sees education to play a role of preparing or nurturing individuals to live in society and thus being able to perform specific functions for society. Clark cited in Vikoo (2016) aptly describe education as an interaction between a teacher and a student under the teachers responsibility in order to bring about the expected change in the student's behaviour. He also noted that educational system of any society is a more or less elaborate mechanism design by society to instill in individuals certain skills or attitude that are judge to be useful and desirable in that society.

In a related development, Adelouro (2010) conceptualized education as an enterprise which sets out to instill values, attitude and skills in members of the society. This was aptly supported by Pauley and Buseri (2019), that see education as a socializing agent that equips all its beneficiaries with the necessary tools such as knowledge, skills, attitude, cultural values, language and social skills to enable them conform to the desires/demand of their society. To crown it all, the definition of education provided by Nwalain Birabil&Ogeh (2020) is still relevant. For Nwala, "Education whether formal or informal, is the recognized method whereby a person acquire most of his ideas, beliefs and attitude: in short this knowledge, skill and manners necessary, not only to combat the hazards and problem of life and to secure the needs of live but also to fit into the company of his fellow human being (P.242). The above definition shows that education equips the individual in all ramifications (Birabil&Ogeh, 2020).

Education emerged from the Latin word, "educare" this literally means to bring up. Different scholars have described education in various terms (Ocho, 2005). In general terms, education is the process of transmitting societal values, norms and desirable attitudes from one generation to another. Ocho (2005) sees education as the process through which individuals are made functional members of their society. Education is a process through which young people acquire knowledge and realize their potentialities and use them for self-actualization and to be useful to themselves and to others. It is a means of presenting, transmitting and improving the culture of the society. In every society, education connotes acquisition of something, good or something worthwhile (Oleforo, 2013). Education is one of the fundamental rights of individuals. Article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly on 10 December 1948, stipulates that: a) everyone has the right to education. This shall be free, at least in the elementary and fundamental stages. Elementary education shall be compulsory while technical and professional education shall be made generally available. Higher education shall be equally accessible to all on the basis of merit. For education in Nigeria to conform to

the global standard it must be in harmony with Nigeria's philosophy of education which is based on: a) The development of the individual into a sound and effective citizen b) The full integration of the individual into the community; and c) The provision of equal access to educational opportunities for all citizens of the country of the primary, secondary and tertiary levels both inside and outside the formal school system (FRN, 2004).

Education is an instrument of achieving national objectives (Federal Republic of Nigeria 2004). This is because education is the means of acquiring competence traits, abilities, and skills necessary for effective performance and participation in all areas of life. It is an acceptable fact that the social, Economic, and political advancement of any nation is to a large extent dependent on the level of education of its citizens. Access to education will give innumerable benefits to the individual and greater economic development as well as wider opportunity to participate in politics (Rita, 2015). It is in the realization of this fact that the international community and government all over the world have made enormous commitments for citizens both male and female to have access to education(Rita, 2015).

### **Concept of Women Education**

The introduction of western education in Nigeria dates back to pre-colonial years and was done by the missionaries. According to Olujuwon (2011), formal education in Nigeria was under the control of Christian Missionaries between 1842 and 1881. St Andrew's College Oyo, Hope Waddel Institute Calabar and the Baptist Training Centre Ogbomoso, were among the first set of schools set up to train teachers. These institutions provided the much needed leadership in the production of Primary school teachers in Nigeria. Anugwom (2009), posits that the missionaries venture in education was borne out of the desire to use the school and its curriculum to reinforce church doctrine.

Hence, such schools at that time were largely pious, parochial and restrictive both in curriculum and organizational principles. The need to meet the country's manpower requirement led to the intervention of the colonial government in education. Abdullahicited In Olujuwon (2011), pointed out that the various efforts of missionaries and the colonial government towards the early development of teacher education in Nigeria are noteworthy and are as follows: (1). The Colonial government became more interested in the development of education in general by enacting enabling laws and policies in order to give direction and clear government responsibilities for education. (2). Professional standards and appropriate curricular for training of teachers were set up by both missionaries and the colonial government education officers. (3).Education of youths was no longer limited to the southern part of Nigeria (Olujuwon (2011).

In the northern part similar centers for training of teachers were established in order to encourage education of children. Good as these efforts were, Salami (2002) observed that there were identifiable shortcomings inherent in the system of education offered by the missionaries then. Commenting on education in colonial times, Salami (2002) asserts that, domestic education as enshrined in the ideology of women as primary home makers which was a social engineering initiative designed to create suitable wives for indigenous colonial employees further disempowered women socially, and economically.

However, since Nigeria independence in 1960, successive Nigerian government have made several efforts aimed at repositioning Nigerian educational system and ensure women access to both formal and informal education. These efforts include the adoption and ratification of international conventions and instruments. These instruments have always emphasized that member nations put in place all the necessary mechanisms needed to eliminate gender discriminations, ensure equality and human dignity to all men and women (Ciroma, 2006).

Some of these international conventions operational in Nigeria include: Convention on the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women (CEDAW) African Protocol on People's Rights and the Rights of Women (APPRRW) Convention on the rights of the child (CRC) Millennium development goals (MDGs) Specific provisions are made in these documents concerning women education. For instance, article 10 of CEDAW in 1979, which concerns women's right to education, requires measures to ensure same opportunities for women as for men in access to programs of continuing education including adult and functional literacy programs, especially those aimed at reducing the gap in education between men and women (APPRRW, 2003).

Article 12 of APPRRW (2003) is on right to education and training. Paragraph 1 (a) of article 12 provides that "states parties shall take all appropriate measures to eliminate all forms of discrimination against women and guarantee equal opportunity and access in the sphere of education and training. Paragraph 2 of article 12 provides as follows: States parties shall take specific positive action to: a) Promote literacy among women b) Promote education and training for women at all levels and disciplines, particularly in the fields of science and technology; c) Promote the enrolment and retention of girls in schools and other training institutions and the organization of programs for women who leaves school prematurely. The UN convention on the rights of the child (CRC) adopted by heads of government at the UN world summit for children in 1990 was ratified by Nigeria in 1991 and domesticated in Nigeria through the child's Rights Act of 2003. According to UNICEF (2003), Rights protected by the child's Rights Act include "Right of a child to free, compulsory and universal primary education" The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) also makes demand for education for all by 2015 and gender equality and women empowerment (APPRRW, 2003).

The Nigeria national Gender policy also has targets aimed at improving women education in Nigeria. According to Ciroma (2006), the policy is aligned with relevant regional and international protocols and instruments such as the Beijing platform for Action (B.PF.A) New partnership for Africa's development (NEPA), A.U. solemn declaration for Gender Equality, African Protocol on People's Rights and the Rights of Women (APPRRW) the convention on the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women (CEDAW), International Conference on Population Development Plan of Action (ICPD POA), NEEDS/SEEDS, the millennium development goals (MDGs) and a wide range of sectors.

The national gender policy, like the MDGs has objectives and targets relating to women education. For instance, objective 2, target (a), aims to "Establish and strengthen appropriate educational, training, institutional and operational frameworks that link the macro-policy environment effectively with the micro level where women, men and communities are experiencing the manifestation of gender equality by 2010". Objective 7, target(a) is to "guarantee equal access of women, men girls and boys to both formal and informal education and skills development opportunities through special pro-grams and initiatives by 2015". Despite all these provisions, women have not been able to achieve equal status in education in Nigeria due to several barriers (National Gender Policy, 2006).

Women and Girls in developing world are denied opportunities to Education. The situation has now significantly improved due to so many attempts by both the government and nongovernmental organizations, such as the 1986 blue print on women education, girl child education program gender education and huge of other women/girl child education related programs to harness gender potentials for national development (Mulikat&Zuwaira, 2014). Despite all these efforts more still need to be done on this aspect as there are still several issues with regard to girl child education. The Girl child in Nigeria still faces a lot of

disadvantages that militate against her development and ability to meet the future challenges of womanhood. Education is important for the self-grooming of the women as it gives her sense of individuality which boosts her confidence. The importance of education in women life must not be under estimated and every possible resource must be provided to make sure she gets the required qualification and tempering important of her wellbeing and the wellbeing of the society. The need to expand access to education is critical because educating women and girls benefits every aspect of the society and fosters the development of all sectors which politics is a part. Only through literacy, knowledge, access to best education, and opportunities to gain competency skills can a woman truly escape living in poverty, fear, humiliation and powerlessness. This will enable them participate in new forms of economic organization and to take part in decision making processes that can better their lives and the entire nation (Nonso& Alexander, 2015).

### **Theories of Education**

This paper employs the Capability Approach (CA) and Social Role Theory (SRT). This combination serves the previously stated objectives of this study for the following reasons. The CA accommodates a social, economic and political analysis for thinking about the well-being of people across the world, through the lens of capabilities. Also, this approach emphasizes the benefits of education for women in relation to development and empowerment (Dreze&Sen, 2013, p. 108-109). Finally, with the attention on women, the CA takes center stage in addressing inequalities that women suffer in society with respect to resources and opportunities (Deneulin& McGregor, 2009, p. 39).

On the other hand, the SRT is utilized to play a supplementary role to the CA. This is done because the theory gives attention to the numerous ways in which social behaviours that differ between men and women are embedded in gender roles pertaining to family and work. Thus, SRT helps give better insight into educated women's constructs of the glass ceiling and gender spillovers in the public sphere. The SRT is compatible with the CA in studying women's successes and explains the realities of women in the public domain (Deneulin& McGregor, 2009, p. 39).

### **Education and Socio-Political Development of Women in Nigeria**

It has however been pointed out that women in traditional Nigeria did not find it so easy in politics considering that patriarchy was already in existence in pre-colonial Nigeria and the colonial patriarchy only built and consolidated in the traditional patriarchy that was already in existence. This could be true, but the type of patriarch system in the Nigerian traditional era posited complementarily as a means to attend the balance and harmony which characterized indigenous African social system. From the above exposition it is evident that Nigerian women played active role in the socio-economic and political life in traditional Nigerian society (Odionye&Ofoego, 2016).

The political involvement of women in Nigeria continued to lag far behind that of their men counterpart in contemporary times. Although a handful of women have occupied administrative and political posts in recent time. Such posts are not commensurate with women's teeming population. Ifeacho, (2004) has noted that "since independence, women have made significant impact in roads into Nigerian politics but these look abysmal when juxtaposed with the population of women in relation to men in Nigeria." One can rightly conclude that so far discrimination and marginalization of women in politics has continued. This situation has led to the proliferation of women organizations in Nigeria like the Ministry of women Affairs, the National Council of Women Societies and other non-governmental organizations (NGOs). International bodies like the United Nations (UN) is not left out in the

campaign against poor women representation in governance both in Nigeria and Worldwide.

In a similar note, Chukwuma (2004) notes that colonialism built its system on men which economically empowered the men and had the contrary effect on women. She further notes that the men by acquiring education and white collar jobs abandoned the women to the circumscribed domains of home and farm. The political implication was that women lost their economic power and became dependent on the men. They in essence became voiceless and marginalized in the political arena and ever since, they have struggled to regain their political power with little success. This situation no doubt, led to the confrontational attitude of women to colonial authority. Women demanded among other things to be included in the decision policy of the colonial administration. These agitations yielded minimal results in favour of women (Chukwuma, 2004).

History has shown that there are a lot of socio-cultural factors that have impeded the education of the girl child. Prominent among them are: traditional belief/cultural status and perception of the women, gender discrimination, early marriage, poverty, child abuse (abuse from within the home and outside the home), marginalization of women, Lack of proper awareness on the importance of education. These factors listed above hindered women tremendously, and until they are swiftly tackled and addressed the situation of women/girl child will remain unchanged and their participation in politics will remain a mirage (Rita, 2015).

Education is strongly associated with women political participation. Education is a powerful predictor of political participation. The direct effects include the acquisition of knowledge and communication skills useful for public debate, and direct training in political analysis through courses with current events contents. The indirect include but not limited to providing the young people with an early apprenticeship for politics where they can exercise leadership, develop civic skills and acquire bureaucratic and organizational skills necessary for political activity (Rita, 2015).

Historical evidences have proved that Nigerian women have for long been playing crucial role in the political life of the country and this has contributed in no small measure in shaping the political system of the nation. In 1957 during pre-independence era of Nigeria a couple of women political activists such as Mrs Margret Ekpo, Mrs Mokelu, Young, Hajiya Gambo Sawaba and the rest of the prominent women of the political history of the nation had played a significant role in Nigerian politics and waged a fierce battle for the political and cultural emancipation of women in Nigeria (Mulikat&Zuwaira, 2014). Today women are participating more actively in political issues than ever before as a result of political reawakening and awareness. More often than not they still face serious challenges of which discrimination is rife. Despite all the difficulties faced by women in politics women over the years have recorded some political achievements meeting their political objective with the limited support and resources at their disposal (Mulikat&Zuwaira, 2014). Ensuring women political participation is essential to bring legitimacy to government and establish democracy in its real and practical manner as democracy is questionable if females who are 50% of the population stay marginalized or segregated from the political and public institutions of the society. Therefore increasing women representation and participation in the political and public decision making positions to make them more assertive of their roles in social activities like politics and take initiatives for themselves rather than waiting for others to take decision on their behalf should be a question of democracy (Mulikat&Zuwaira, 2014).

### **The Way Forward**

For the women to achieved their full potentials in life and contributed meaningfully and immensely to the development of the society and the nation as the whole the following recommendations are proffered:

Nigeria as nation should lay more emphasis towomen and child education by providing more schools that will cater for the needs of girls and ensuring that the schools atmosphere are conducive for learning.

There should also be an equal treatment of boys andgirls in schools there by making the schools gender balanced and inclusive in nature.

The mothers themselves should be more committed and make sure both their male and female children attend school without any preference.

Awareness campaigns should be launched by government bodies at all level as regard women participation in politics, so as to alert the women across the nation on the need for them to contribute their quota in the development of their societies and the entire nation.

Women should encourage their fellow women whohas the ambition and intention to contribute towards the development of their societies, this can be done by supporting and giving them their votes to make sure they scale up to certain political of offices.

There should be a greater awareness in the communities that women are equal to men in terms of political participation to wipe away the prejudice women are facing in the society.

### **Conclusion**

Women's political participation has been recognized as crucial to national development, hence their representation seem to be very low in decision making process making it virtually impossible for them to contribute meaningfully to the development of their societies. It has also been observed that so many factors are behind the poor participation of women in politics prominent among which are lack of Education and political awareness, personal constraints, intimidation, discrimination, socio-cultural, religious ,socio economic and family work which have great influence in women's participating in politics. However in order to make women actively and effectively participate in politics therefore all these factors must be looked in to and address squarely. Education which is a tool to all forms of development should be given emphasis by both the women and the society at large. The women should have access to modern education because that's the only way they will be fully equipped with the needed knowledge, skills and political awareness that can make them confident and competent in discharging what is expected of them not only mere participation.

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