

## **Socio-Cultural Impediments to the Effective Education of Women in Nigeria: A Re-Appraisal**

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**ABSTRACT:** This paper focuses on the socio-cultural impediments to the effective education of women in our society. The “African women” noted that, there are some impediments that stall women socio-economic development. It is common knowledge that education is an important tool in enhancing the development of any nation worldwide. There is also this saying that, if you educate a woman, you educate the nation at large but this is not the same for our women in Nigeria as there are impediments to socio-cultural to their education. For instance, lack of entrepreneurship skills, non-availability of capital, scarcity of functional programmes that can lead to acquisition of knowledge, awareness, emancipation and empowerment of women. Late Mary Babangida in 1987 blamed it on the backwardness of the women. In a newspaper statement headlined “past government neglected women’s needs, she claimed that the past governments of Nigeria did not make much effort in trying to alleviate the plight and position of the rural women. Socio-cultural impediments are those factors or things that are barriers to women education in our society especially in the rural areas. The researcher concluded and made some recommendations amongst which are; special scholarship scheme should be provided for women to enable more of them go to school. Schools in rural areas should be well equipped to attract qualified teachers and to give quality education to the rural dwellers.

**KEYWORD:** Education, Socio-cultural, Women Education.

### **Introduction**

This issue of women education has been a topical one in recent times especially in developing countries like ours (Nigeria) and Rivers State in particular. The question on whether women should be educated or not attracted the attention of many scholars; people have questioned the rational, if any behind the transparent issue of sexism existing between male and female in the sphere of educational opportunity and life chances. It is perhaps recently in third world countries that women are getting reawakened and forming themselves into formidable associations like the National Women Liberation Council, National Council of Women Societies to mention a few to address the issues of their education.

There seems to be a consensus among scholars down through the ages and in almost the whole nations of the world that women have always been suppressed socially, economically, politically and educationally. Biblically, it is said that women were created from the ribs of man (Genesis 2:21). From this statement therefore, the inequality between male and female is as old as history.

In most developing countries like ours and in our state in the rural areas, most parents still hold the view that educating women is an unprofitable venture since they will end up in other families as housewives. Also contributing to the issue of women education was Fafunwa (1974) who saw Nigerian education within the 1920s as not very encouraging. At the post-primary level of education, women were discriminated against. He went further to state that out of the thirteen teacher training colleges with a population of three hundred and twenty (320) students in the country, only thirty (30) were women.

### **Women Education in Nigeria**

The neglect of women education has its origin in the colonial era because they were so busy with the exploitation of the people that they forget about planning for education generally and that of the women in particular (Nduka, 1964) in Oyet (2004). He regrets that this situation still prevails, though the education of women had long been advocated. For example, the advisory committee on native education which was established by the British Colonial Secretary in 1973 came out with a policy statement in 1935 which stated that “so far local conditions allows, women and girls education must be attempted wherever possible (Nduka, 1964) in Oyet (2004). The report further explained that in keeping the recommendation girls education made a recognized progress especially in the North. But this progress was hampered by Islamic customs such as the Purdah and Seclusion of the women-folk.

In the late 1930s with the relaxation of these customs, girls began to progress educationally in some urban areas of the north. This part of the review shows how customs and religious belief(s) affect the education of women.

In the Southern part of the country, girls’ education made some remarkable progress but his was slowed down by parents who saw their daughters as real assets to wealth through marriage.

According to Nduka, parents that western education would affect their daughters and since the investment on education was not likely to yield quick dividends and the girls were likely to be married out of the parent’s families, boy’s education was then emphasized instead. It was observed after all, that girls’ education was not totally unprofitable which enhanced progress in girls’ education.

Another factor was the attitudes of women themselves which contributed to this ugly situation. According to UNESCO (1964):

***In rural areas girls attitude affect their education. A greater percentage of them in rural area could not be educated because they don’t wish to be educated or are too lazy and lack interest and desire to learn.***

Solomon (1976) also observed “the attitude of women themselves as well as the attitudes of the male educators towards women is responsible for women’s low level of education”.

Jibowu in Oyet (2004) addressing the National Curriculum Conference on education of women notes in general terms progress in Nigeria indicated that marriage and housekeeping should not be the only role of women in modern society like Nigeria. That education should prepare women for the society and economic needs that might be made on them. To back her point, she cited the following quotation from the United Nation’s Reports:

***Women constitute half of world population; they are home makers and centers of the family. They are the main custodians of social, cultural and fundamental values of society and permanent***

*change is often best achieved through them. Hence, full community development is not possible without their understanding, co-operation and effective participation.*

She gave more reasons for the education of women which include the following:

*That they are mothers and molders of children especially during the formative years of children, it is the mother who is directly responsible for their physical and intellectual development.*

Furthermore, she continued in the worlds of Aggrey “if you educate a man you educate an individual but if you educate a woman you educate a family. Education determines the status of a woman in society. Education of women is vital in many of the modern roles which women are expected to play in the society. Education does not only equip women with the knowledge and expertise which will upgrade their status but also widens their cognitive ways and enables them to compare their positions in the society vis-versa men.

Education frees the mind from bondage of authority and oppression and provides adequate frame of reference to give meanings to political civil obligation. There is also this belief in some quarters that women cannot attain higher education because they have “dull brains compared to their male counterparts. Women are also believed to be gripped with fear, the fear of not succeeding like the men. The researcher agrees with this as one of the reasons for women backwardness in education. Most women would prefer to hide under their husbands, in other not to be notice as succeeding more than men, so that they are not nicknamed “iron lady”.

### **Socio-Cultural Impediments to the effective Education of Women in Nigeria**

In another vein, women avoid dabbling into some professions tagged for men, like engineering, geology, medicine, driving, mechanics, building, plumbing and what have you; because of our cultural values and orientation and instead go for profession like, nursing, teaching, hair dressing, sewing which the society believe is good for women for them not be able to combine with their motherly roles. But thank God for the awareness and re-orientation going on in the State on the latest empowerment programme (E.S.I.) Lady’s Cabbies Empowerment Support Initiatives for Ladies in Rivers State by the Rivers State Governor’s Wife, Lady Judith C. Amaechi.

Also, RSTV News on 24<sup>th</sup> February had it that, for women and youth empowerment, a land, for agricultural development and commerce has been donated to the people in Etche Local Government Area to better the lot of women and youths in the State. There is also this belief in some of our communities that if a woman acquires too much of higher degrees, can hinder their marriage because men will be afraid of approaching them for marriage. For this reason, most women either stop advancing their education after a level in order to get married or get married before taking their education to higher levels.

In some cases, their husbands prevent them from furthering their education. Most men are advised by their parents and relatives not to marry educated girls as they tend to be disobedient and display arrogance in the marriage process. Others have this notion that highly educated women may have the problem of infertility after incessant abortions due to their long time of studies.

Teenage pregnancy was another major problem in Rivers State. According to report credited to Nwokidu (Newswatch, 1987). A former commissioner of Health in Rivers State, teenage pregnancy is believed to be approaching epidemic proportion. Despite the alarming rise in teenage pregnancy, there are no programmes on the round designed to arrest or assist the affected victims to result their studies.

Addressing the issue of teenage pregnancy, Omotunde (1987) in Oyet (2004) has the following to say:

*...an environment that is charged with immoral tendencies can only breeds sex-charged children who will eventually graduate into premature baby mothers. The masses tend to adopt a compromising attitude towards the problem of teenage pregnancy by believing that it is merely a passing phase in the life of a youth, which cannot be ... Society fuels this situation of promiscuity by promoting pornographic films and books. These allowances lure the youths into making trials in sex practices which results in pregnancy which of course they do not want at the time of occurrence.*

The society has major role both in the cause and solution of the problem. Environment plays a vital role on women’s education. The effect of physical environment stands out. The nature of the rural and urban environment stands out. The nature of the rural and urban environment affects the education of women. It is believed that rural women are not as aspiring as urban ones, because of the kind of things the former category sees which the later does not.

Osuji, (1976) in Oyet (2004) opined that “rural dwelling unlike the urban inhabitants have less changes of benefiting from such services as career counselling, seminars and symposia”. As he puts it, “the rural settings lack basic amenities like the mass media that provide educational services to the masses. For him, the peasant kind of life characteristics of rural setting, most parents in these rural areas are illiterate and poor.

Consequently, the pupils’ parents are incapacitated of seeing their children through the formal and even informal education process under this condition; the female children suffer mostly due to the usual reasoning of the parents that meager funds at their disposal be used on the males who are the permanent occupants of the house and not the women members whose family life is seen as temporary, terminating with their marriages.

**Conclusion**

Few schools characterized women’s education compared to those of men. Daminabo (1989) observed that only one girls’ school was established in the state and that was the Archdeacon Crowther Memorial Girls School in Port Harcourt in 1943. This really affected women’s educational advancement in the state.

Musgrave et al (1972) in Oyet posits that “throughout the world, females are always the victims of educational inequalities”. For them, the problem is not an isolated one rather it affects directly the kind of monopoly enjoyed by men in the highest level of the economy and policy. Traditionally, women are seen as home makers, this also enhanced their low educational advancement as men were looked upon as the “bread winners”.

Lastly, although the paper showed that socio-cultural factors hampered women educational attainment which affected their socio-economic development in the state and Nigeria at large. Impediments like traditional belief(s), early marriage, teenage pregnancy, environmental and religion amongst others, there is still need to follow up these studies at various levels to confirm and update available data.

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