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## **GENDER AND NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT: POSITION OF EDUCATED WOMEN IN NIGERIA**

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### **Abstract**

*Adequate development has to do with how effectively the people in a particular location are taken care of and how efficiently they are educated. Education is one of the key achievement to measure the development of any nation. Giving equal education to the citizens irrespective of gender or where they live means the nation has liberated her people from the shackles of ignorance and inferiority complex with other nations. One of the major threats to the developing nation is gender inequality, a phenomenon that is peculiar to developing nations; particularly in Africa, Nigeria inclusive. Africa setting does not really value the education of the women because they are considered property owned by men despite their contributions to their homes and communities. Roles taking in leadership position by women are not something that is appreciated by the community because women are seen as inferior to men or passive creatures that have no say or should not be heard openly. Some women are depressed because culture forbids them to be outspoken. This makes the ratio of power distribution to women to be low when compared to their male counterparts, despite their contributions to their different homes, communities and the nation at large. This attitude contradicts the popular saying that, what a man can do a woman can do better if not best. There are women who have made this country proud both within and outside the country because they are educated. On this note, this paper discusses education to national development despite the syndrome of gender inequality, the importance of women education, defines the concept of women education, reviews some women who had made the country proud home and Diaspora because they are educated. On a final note, suggestions are made on how to improve women education for better participation in national development. For no reason should the girls be withdraw from school, if the parents are financially handicap the government should make provision for the completion of their education.*

**Keywords:** *National development, Gender inequality, Women education, Society*

### **Introduction**

National development encompasses the growth of a nation. A nation is considered to grow when all her members are equally treated and given their rights as at when due irrespective of status, location and gender. Provision of social amenities such as good road network, health facilities, job opportunities, adequate power supply and education to all and many more are what make a nation to develop. Where all these are lacking the nation is underdeveloped. Education of citizens is one of the factors that promote the development of a nation irrespective of gender. Gender inequality is one of the threats to the developing nation. Given equal opportunity to women connotes given equal livelihood, equal education and equal participation in decision making. Equal right to women should not be seen as privilege but a right that must be enjoyed by them. Educating women means making their homes and the society a better place to live. Going inwardly into African setting, education of the women is not given much attention as expected.

Some of those who are educated among women have parents who belong to a particular class i.e educated or are rich enough to send their children to school. Even at that, priority is set on who should be educated. Obviously, the male will be preferred to go to school. Ignorance on part of some parents who see the education of the women as a waste of resources or not necessary for them to be educated because they maybe impregnated while in school; which will bring shame to the family. Some parents are of the opinions that; the women responsibility should be handled by their husbands. According to Adesope (2015), the women have limited period with their parents, their responsibilities are to their husbands.

Marriage is perceived as a severance of father and daughter relationship. While their place of work is the husband's kitchen fully equipped with domestic training to be able to perform the tasks ahead of them in their homes. Whereas, their participation in the family lives go beyond the kitchen if they do not want to remain novice who have nothing to contribute. Giving women the honour to make their feeling known will help in building strong homes and equal right to decision making that can move the nation forward. Women should be seen as creature who can think, act, react and contribute to the development of the nation. Allowing them to take active part on matters that concern them and their homes is an indication that they are also parts of the family. Their participation should also extend to the community, active participation in community development go a long way to help them know what is happening around them and how to help and contribute equally. But the situation in most of the developing countries does not allow women active participation in decision making. A critical look at the Nigeria political system, show low women participation in decision because they do not have the required qualifications to be properly placed where their voice can be loudly heard. Participation in decision requires sound education which will in turn serves as a weapon to liberate them from any form of oppression and victimization against any threat that maybe affecting them and their family members.

Apparently, those who are opportune to be educated among the women had contributed meaningfully well to the development of the nation by taken lead in their respective positions. They are seen in different sectors/professions and had used their positions to make impacts and contributions on the lives of others especially the less privilege among women in the society. They were able to contribute socially, morally, intellectually and economically to the well-being of their various families and the nation at large.

### **Conceptual Definition**

#### **Woman**

Woman is a mature girl, female offspring or generic term that embraces all the categories of female folk including daughters, sisters, wife and mother etc regardless of age. Merriam Webster (2019) defines a woman as an adult female person belonging to a particular category as by birth, residence, membership or occupation. A distinctively feminine in nature that is capable of giving birth, who has a body structure that is different from man. In essence, an adult female is referred to as woman.

#### **Women Education**

Education can be informal or formal, whichever way, both are very important to the girl upbringing. Education is a universal and basic concept that requires training of an individual right from birth to death is a basic rudiment that everybody needs to be a functioning member of the society to which one belongs to. Human beings generally, need training and retraining to enable them to acquire the basic skills to meet life challenges. According to Anisudo (2013), education is the training an individual receives which aims at balanced growth of the total personality through the training of his spirit via intellect, rational, self-feeling and body sense. The first set of people a child gets contact with is the family members. The child receives different types of training from the family members and the members of the community. This is building up the child to be a responsible person and to know what is right from what is bad. The male and female in the family do not receive the same training; the girl receives additional training because of the challenges and responsibilities ahead of her as a mother to be. She learns how to take care of the house and her younger ones even if she has brothers who are older than her.

House chore is her major responsibility which she must embrace and put in her best whether she likes it or not. This training has equipped her to know that she has a challenging responsibility ahead of her. According to Karim (2015), education prepared a person, especially the girl child to fit properly into web of life for social communication and interaction and equally enhance better performance in the social roles in the society. The type of education she receives prepares her to take active role in the society, participating in decision making, how to react to issues and provide solution to problems. Fadun (2015), confirmed that, the kind of education given to woman with worthy knowledge prepares her to achieve self-fulfillment and see herself as a contributor to the development of environment.

Woman education according to Sehgel (2015) is any kind of education given to women which aims at improving their knowledge, skills and their total well-being. Which will assist them to function properly both in their homes and community and have input in the development of the nation. Furthermore, Babatunde (2015) attested that, educating woman is an important tool for promoting socio- economic development of any nation. A woman plays significant roles in the society and educating her will go a long way to impact positively to her family and the society. Her contributions towards her society will eradicate the suffering of other female counterparts particularly in such issues as child trafficking, reduction in both maternal and child mortality, protection against diseases and infections, control of unwanted pregnancies etc. She will also provide her family with good health care, giving good suggestions on the education of her children and support her husband in taking care of house expenses.

### **Gender Inequality**

The World Health Organization (2019) defined gender as the socially constructed characteristics of women and men, such as norms, roles and relationship of and between groups of women and men. It varies from society to society and can be changed. Gender is a social term which refers to social and cultural differences the society attached to people as a result of their sexes. Gender refers to either male or female especially when it requires given priority or preference to either of the two sexes socially, culturally, politically or educationally without necessarily identifying or differentiating the sexes biologically. Newman (2018) viewed gender as a technical or difficult term which refers to assigning role to both the male and female in the society. Gender denotes the social and cultural role to the sexes in a particular society. Therefore, gender inequality means unequal treatment, care, opportunity and discrimination of a person or group of people based on their sexes. Gender and sex at times are used interchangeably but are not the same. Sex refers to biological traits of either male or female, while gender refers to the social role assigned to each of them by the society.

According to Ikegbu (2018), gender is a social construct which differentiates the roles, rights, responsibilities and obligations of women and men which form the basis of social norms that defines appropriate behaviours for women and men and determine the differential social, economic and political power between the sexes. While, inequality is disparities between male and female in the distribution of power or position and responsibilities to either male or female.

The word gender inequality refers to the opportunities given to one person above the other or preference given to a particular sex. Gender inequality implies that equal treatment or right is not given to the members in a particular geographical location, society or nation. Gender inequality can also be interpreted as discrimination against opposite sex in terms of power distribution.

### **National Development**

A nation can be regarded as community of people in a particular place in large number who are united by common interest, language, culture, history and are living in the area for a long period of time. It is an association of people who share common interest who are related by culture, language, descent and ethnicity. It can also be viewed as an aggregate of people who share common interest and are related by

culture, race, language, descent and ethnicity. Vocabulary.com (2019), defines a nation as a community of people who speak common or related language, sharing the same cultural heritage, with slightly different ethnicity, with common historical background. The people in a nation have a common territory and with her own government ruling them. A community is also a nation with race of people with shared culture, tradition, history and language whether scattered or confined to one country (Business Dictionary, 2019).

Development can be interpreted in many ways but for the sake of what is meant for here, it is whatever can make life meaningful to the people or things that give comfort, enhance smooth running of the society. Development implies improvement in the totality of the lives of citizens in terms of education, politics, social, culture, economic and religion that can make life better for all the citizens. Development involves exploiting the resources of the nation to meet the demand of the people. Satisfying the needs of the people has to do with providing the essential services that will make life better for them. Ogunlade (2012) opined that development is the changes or progresses which enhance better quality of the generality of the people in the society. Such desirable and positive changes are observable in human endeavours with particular reference to social, economic, political and cultural ways of life that results in the achievement of overall benefit of entire population of the nation. Ajegena (2013) viewed development as a multi-dimensional process that involves positive changes that occurs to society. It has to do with giving the people equal right and freedom, eradication of poverty, improving the economic, active participation in politics, provision of social amenities and education for all.

National development, therefore, is all changes a nation undergoes as a result of continuous and adequate provision of the needs of the people. It is a wide and broad concept that is related to how well the people of nation are being taken care in terms of providing all what could make life enjoyable to them irrespective of distance, status and gender. It can also be viewed in terms of providing education to all that will invariably change their living condition from idle to productive citizens. National development has to do with totality of the lives of the people in term of good economy, stable political system, provision of social facilities, and quality education to all etc. National development is a concept that embraces the whole nation with a collective socio economic expansion, religion and political advancement. Bawa (2019) defined national development as all aspects of life of the people in a nation. It is a process of reconstruction and expansion in various aspects which includes extension and construction of industries, adequate electricity, improving productivity in agriculture sector, quality education for all. Provision of social amenities, preservation of cultural heritage and religious tolerance. National development is the ability of a nation to be able to cater for the people by improving and providing the basic needs and total eradication of mass illiteracy, poverty alleviation, and eradication of gender inequality and elimination of diseases.

### **Inequality in Power Distribution to Women**

One of the basic needs of individual in the society is the right to qualitative education. Development can be viewed through proper education of the citizens whether male or female at affordable price or free to all in a conducive environment. Discrimination against women education does not give room for proper placement in term of power sharing. Presently, the power distribution to women in political system is low when compared with their population. Women constitute 49% of total population in the country yet; the representation is low when it comes to power sharing. In the civil service and private organizations, men are occupying key positions as a result of lower educational qualifications which hinder their full participation in decision making and occupying key positions. According to Policy and Legal Advocacy Centre (2019), in Nigeria and across the globe women are underrepresented in politics and decision making and other areas. The Premium Time (2019), attested that the 8<sup>th</sup> National Assembly, recorded low percentage of women at the federal, state and local levels. In the senate, the women had 7 seats out of 109 senators, this translates to 6.2 % and the men 93.8%. While in the house of representative, out of 360 seats, the women had 22 seats. At the governorship election out of 36 states only Kaduna state has a woman as her deputy governor in 2019. The low output cut across the state and local government and even at the state assembly. At the state assembly, all over the country women had 51 out of 990 members representing

5.2%. Where there are women representatives to represent their various constituencies, they do not have the required educational qualification to be represented. Some of them are made women leaders whose voice could not be heard beyond their various constituencies.

Giving women equal education is one of the criteria to measure development as they also have significant roles to play in national development. The contributions of women to the development cannot be over emphasized because of the dual role they play as mothers and as contributors who are making impacts in building the nation to greater height and supporter to their families. What a nation needs to move forward is the efforts of every individual toward the development of the country not discrimination against a particular sex. The bias against women folk could hinder national development if they are deprived of their right to contribute meaningful well where their opinions are needed. Equal education to women are bedrock to nation building. There are many women out there who have contributed in one or the other to the development of Nigeria.

### **Some Prominent Educated Women in Nigeria**

Despite the prevailing threats toward women education, there are still some women who had succeeded in liberating themselves and becoming achievers in their various fields of endeavours by becoming the first to attain the different positions among these women are; Grace Alele-Williams an educator, the first woman to attain doctorate degree in mathematics education and who made history to become the first female Vice –Chancellor of University of Benin now in Edo state. She has served the nation in different capacities both in Nigeria diaspora as member of governing council UNESCO. Institution of Education, a consultant at Institute of International Education Planning. A member of Africa Mathematics Programme, Vice - president of the World Organization for Early Childhood Education to mention but few. She took special interest in the education of the women by introducing innovation in-service training for women, a non-degree programme to assist the elderly women to work as elementary teachers .She is an author, who has written many books which add to her credibility.

Felicia Adetoun Omolara Ogunseye was the first woman to become a professor in the history of Nigeria, an educationalist. She is a member of Banjo commission, a committee set to review the educational system of Western Nigeria. She initiated a programme which helped in empowerment of the women and some other activities to help women. She was the president of Association of Women in the University. An advocate of free education to children up to secondary level. She was one of the matron of the Senior Citizens Care Foundation (SSCF).

Florence Nwanzuruahu Nikru Nwapa, she was the first Africa woman to write novel and regarded as the mother of Africa literature .Her first novel gained her international recognition. She also promotes well-being of the women in the society. Her major objective is women education in Nigeria to help the women to be self-reliant and self-independent and responsible wives and mothers to their husbands and children. She was the president of Association of Nigerian Authors (ANA).

Folake Solanke, the first female Senior Advocate of Nigeria (SAN) she was an administrator, a social critics, a lawyer and the first Nigerian female lawyer to wear the silk gown as the Senior Counsel. She was appointed the first commissioner of the Western State and chairperson of the Western Nigeria Television Broadcasting Corporation (WNTBC). She was raised to the rank of Zonta international as the first serving District Governor for Africa and as International Vice-president. She was honored with International Bar Association's as an Outstanding International Woman in recognition. Of her contribution to the advancement of the female lawyers and also honored with Life Achievement Award by The Sun Newspaper.

Elizabeth Abimbola Awoliyi, the first female medical doctor and the first Africa female to receive license of Royal Surgeon in Dublin as a gynecologist and obstetrics. She was outstanding philanthropist who had



used her position to serve humanity .She was appointed as by Federal Ministry of Health as Senior Specialist Gynecologist and Obstetrician ,honored with many wards among which Most Excellent Order of British Empire (MBA).

Mariam Aloma Mukhar, the first woman to raise to top as the head of Nigerian Judiciary in the court of appeal also the first female justice of Supreme Court. As the Chief Justice of Nigeria (CJN). She has being very resourceful and making impact in the judiciary by sanitizing her noble profession. She was the pioneer of female magistrate in Northern Nigeria. She is a life Bencher, fellow The Nigeria Institute of Advanced Legal Studies, Fellow Chartered Institute of Arbitrators, and Fellow of Nigeria Law School. She is a rare gem honored with three highest Nigerian National Honors namely Grand Commander of Order of Niger (CON), Commander of the Federal Republic (CFR) and Grand Commander of Order of the Niger (GCON).

Chinyere Kalu a commercial pilot, was the first Nigerian female to fly an aircraft. She was appointed as the Rector and Chief Executive of the Nigeria College of Aviation Technology. Honored with International Achievers Merit Award and Rare Gems Professional Achievements Ward. Pauline Tallen, she is politician appointed as the first female minister of Science and Technology. She was the first woman in north to rise to the position of deputy governor. She was appointed as the chairman of National Agency for Control of AIDS ( NACA).

### **Conclusion**

The essence of this paper is to let the parents know why they should educate their female children. All the women mentioned above were recognized locally and internationally because they are educated. They have in one way or the other made the country proud and contributed to the development of the country through the education they received. They use their different positions to make life better for the less privilege among the women and made impact in the development of their various homes, communities and the nation at large. Those that were deprived of education can hardly contribute to the development of the nation. And as such, shatter their dreams. Given equal right to women to be educated like the men do not make them superior to men instead; it makes them intellectual citizens who have contributed to development of country. Besides, on how to move the nation forward requires the contributions of educated intellectuals; as the saying goes two good heads are better than one. Making decision on how to move the country forward should be collective responsibilities of both the men and women, issues can be addressed from different perceptive. Opinions differ in making judgment and it requires intellectual minds to draw conclusions on how to help move the nation forward. The only weapon through which women can be liberated is education. The government should endeavour to make education free at the grass root to enable the children of less privilege to go to school. Parents should give equal education to their children irrespective of sexes.

### **Recommendations**

Women have contributed immensely to the development of this country therefore; their education should not be taken for granted. The little opportunity given to them to take charge of different positions, have shown their performance in discharging their duties tremendously and leading by examples. They have display high senses of leadership by changing the lives of those around them positively and making their impact to national development. They have used their different offices to assist other women and those around them. On this note, women education is paramount to development of any nation and the following measures should be put in place to improve proper education of the women.

1. Equal opportunity should be giving to all the children, the bias against women education should be stop, what is important is performance if this is actualize, the sky should be starting point for the girls to pursue their education.

2. The country is under developed because she does not set her priority. One of the ways to achieve development is to give equal right to people, equal placement and equal education. These will go a long way to help the country.
3. Provision of social amenities in irrespective of place and location. This will enable rural dwellers to benefit from dividend of democracy.
4. Thorough supervision and monitoring to ensure that all children of school age properly enroll in school especially in rural areas.
5. For no reason should the girls be withdraw from school, if the parents are financially handicap the government should make provision for the completion of their education.
6. There should be proper awareness for the parents and girls to appreciate the importance of education and why they need to be educated.
7. There should be employment opportunity to absorb the women into labour market because this is the argument of some parents for not sending their girls to school that after schooling no job for them.
8. Government should be ready to sponsor brilliant students among the girls by giving scholarship to further their education.
9. There should be total eradication of early marriage, child trafficking, child labour and hawking. - Government should sanction those involved and proper punishment should be given to stop these ugly acts.
10. Adult education campaign for the women especially those in the rural areas to enable them take active role in decision making and full participation in political system.

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