

## Women Empowerment For Self-Reliance: Educational Management Strategies in Nigeria Case

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### Abstract

*In spite of the fact that women are integral part of a nation's development, the disadvantaged position of women in Nigeria, particularly when compared to men, and the fact that they are ravaged by poverty, make case for efforts to be geared towards their empowerment. If this is achieved, it can have positive effect on the social, political, economic, and cultural development of Nigeria. Against this backdrop, this paper examines the educational management strategies for empowering women such as: increasing the access to female education, sustaining female children in educational institutions; and attending to adult illiterate women in the society.*

**Keywords:** *Women, empowerment, self-reliance, strategies.*

### Introduction

UNESCO Institute of Statistics, (2009) indicates that women constitute significant proportion of the world population. In 2006, Nigeria women constitute 68,298,683 millions (48.78%) of the total population of 140,003,542 millions as reported by National Population Commission. Women's roles in national development cannot however be overemphasized. There is the usual saying that 'behind every successful man is a woman'. This potently indicates that women contribute to the success attained by great men in the world. At the home setting, women play domestic but crucial roles such as caring for children and the entire family, farming, petty trading, cooking of food, washing of clothes, and a host of others. In spite of these roles, women are disadvantaged sex in Nigeria (Nzeribe, 2008; Esere, 2001; Durosaro, 1998) because:

- few among them have secured paid job;
- they do not have equal responsibilities for decision making as men. Only 7.3% of women are members of the Nigeria Federal Legislative House (World Development Report, 2011);
- there is violence against women in the society (Angya, 2009). A lot of women are used for rituals. In some cultures, teenage female children (the virgins) are used to appease gods while women are forced to carry calabash and other materials for sacrifices to gods;
- they are fully engaged in agriculture. In some cultures, while women go to farm to cultivate, men sit at home waiting for women to feed them with the proceeds from such farming activities;

- they do not have right to inherit properties in some cultures;
- they are regarded as witches at home. There is a belief that the more a woman becomes aged, the most likely she is regarded as a witch;
- many female children who are used as house helps are subjected to in-human treatments by their masters. Some are often raped by the overzealous masters. A lot of women are also working as attendants in cafeteria, restaurants and other non-economically viable places. Such women are thus subjected to decent lives in abject poverty.
- many cultures in Nigeria subject widows to harrowing experiences as revealed by (UNICEF, 1995, cited in Udosen, Sesugh and Madaki, 2009; Utulu, 2009). They face harsh treatments during widowhood. Their hairs are often shaved, forced to sleep on bare floor, cry for days and made to wear black clothes. They are incarcerated for months to mourn their departed husbands. Some women are also forced to drink concoction and swear to oath, to prove their innocence when circumstances surrounding the death of their husbands are controversial;
- due to poverty, some do engage in commercial sex to make ends meet. Many are exported to foreign countries to attract international clients as prostitutes. Consequently, they are often prone to the vulnerability of HIV/AIDS diseases;
- many are victims of rape and sexual abuse, female genital mutilation, wife battering, women trafficking (Nnadozie, 2007);
- they are subjected to inhuman treatments from entrusted husbands such as divorce and assault (Ochonogor, 2005).

However, the world has recognized the role of women in the socio-economic transformation and political development of the society. It is against this background that leaders of 189 countries in the world at the United Nations Millennium Summit, held from 6<sup>th</sup> – 8<sup>th</sup> September, 2000 at New York, endorsed the Millennium Development Goals framework for women empowerment. Nigeria being a signatory to the declaration has over the years been making efforts to achieve the goals before the year 2015. As observed by Ugwu, Ofuebe & Etiubon (2011), the goals can be effectively pursued, achieved and sustained through efficient, relevant, and functional educational management system. Worthy of note also is that the issue of women empowerment is a basic human right that lies at the heart of equitable development and a veritable tool for poverty eradication and advancement of development (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2009).

## Theoretical Framework

The Education-Economy Linkage theory of Akangbou (1987) will provide a thrust for this paper. The theory argues that there is a two-dimensional relationship between education and economy of a nation. While the economy allocates to the education sector, the resources (both financial, human and materials) which are needed for the training of manpower such as teachers, bankers, lawyers, accountants, doctors, among others, the products of the education sector are absorbed into the economy to contribute to its development. This paper is thus based on the belief that if education is provided for the citizens including women, the citizens will be employed into different sectors of the economy and thus contributes to the growth and development of the country's economy.

## Women Roles in National Development

It is no gainsaying that women are catalysts for economic development of a nation. Many are into petty trading while some are into other economic activities. Apart from the buffer they provide, the tax on their activities, go a long way in improving the state of the economy. A sizeable number of women today are also holding key positions in banking industries, insurance companies, multi-national companies and host of others. Through these activities they help in strengthening the economy of their countries. Many women, particularly in the rural areas and villages are large scale farmers who specialize in planting food crops which help in achieving food security for the country. Even though the percentage of women is very low in the world, the impact of women in political development of a nation cannot be dismissed with waive of hand. Apart from serving as pillars for political leaders in the country, the few women in political positions also exert their influence in ensuring sustainable democracy in the country. Wives of political leaders serve as informal advisers to their husbands for good governance. A few women in the world today are Presidents, Commissioners, Senators, Special Advisers, just to mention but a few. They therefore help in achieving political development of their countries. The impact of women in social development cannot be overemphasized. At the heart of

cultural development and entertainment industry, women are distinguished. They are involved in cultural shows and displays involving dancing, singing and acting. They also produce ornamental objects like beads, bangles and pottery work which are of tremendous socio-cultural values in the society.

## **Women Empowerment and What It Entails**

Women empowerment is a synergy of the words 'women' and 'empowerment.' According to Oxford Advanced Learners Dictionary, 'women' are 'adult female human beings', the opposite sex created by nature in addition to men. According to Sako (1999), cited in James (2008:8), "empowerment is the process of strengthening the existing capacities and capabilities of disadvantaged groups in the society to enable them perform towards improving themselves, their families, and society as a whole". It is a multi-dimensional process involving the transformation of economic, social, psychological, political, and legal circumstances of the powerless (Sandbrook & Halfani, as cited in Enemu, 1999). It is the process of articulating plans, aimed at bridging the gap between the advantaged and disadvantaged groups in the society, so as to achieve growth or equitable distribution of income (Etiemana, 2009). Women empowerment can thus be described as all purposeful efforts aimed at imparting education to women with the aim of repositioning the knowledge, skills, and competences required of them. It is also the process of equipping women with functional skills that can make them live as useful members of the society.

## **Perspectives of Women Empowerment in Nigeria's Context**

The issue of women empowerment can be viewed from different perspectives such as: education, politics, social, economic, and technology.

### **Education Empowerment**

One of the indicators of human capital development is the level of educational attainment of all citizens of a country irrespective of gender difference. To achieve this, the National Millennium Development Goals in Nigeria is aimed at eliminating gender disparity at all levels of education by 2015 amongst other objectives (National Millennium Development Goals Report, 2004). In spite of the efforts of Nigeria government towards achieving this goal for all citizens by 2015, many female children still do not have access to formal education.

Okeke (2001), Uwadiae (2004), Njoku (2000), Oguche (2006) and Mohammed (2006) at various intervals confirmed that there is gender disparity in enrolment at primary and secondary educational levels in Nigeria. This implies that there is a dim hope in realizing the goal of education for all by 2015 in Nigeria. According to Ajayi and Mbah (2008), Adiuoku (2009), Adeyemi and Adu (2012) a lot of female children drop out of school prematurely due to multifarious factors such as poverty of parents, early marriage, and associated 'bride price,' religion, socio-cultural, school based problems among others. The inability of most female children to have access to formal education is consequent upon the high level of illiteracy among women folk and its attendant poverty rate. Sustainable structures and opportunities that can be used to empower women through the acquisition of formal education should therefore be encouraged.

### **Political Empowerment**

A few women in the world have demonstrated effective political leadership skill through their political activities. This fact was asserted by Anyanwu (2005) and Ocheke (2006). However, the political landscape of Nigeria has remained an all-men-affair while women have been relegated to the background as mere babies manufacturers. Obayuwane and Iheanacho (2003) observed that in Nigeria, there is discrimination against women in politics and government. Confirming this observation, Aina (2002) and Tersoo (2009) expressed that only negligible women are thus occupying political positions in Nigeria. The situation seems to be changing as women who were hitherto despised as weaklings are becoming visible in the political atmosphere of Nigeria since the third republic.

Pockets of educated women in the new political dispensation are elected local government chairpersons, State Houses of Assembly members. Moreso, a negligible percent of them are occupying seats at the National Assembly and members of Federal Executive Council. Women can thus be empowered if there are more appointments to political positions to enhance their contribution to national development.

## Economic Empowerment

Most women in Nigeria need economic empowerment. Majority of them live below poverty margin. Many women are into menial jobs, peasant farming, petty trading with only a few of them gainfully employed. This observation was contained in the UNICEF report of 1998, cited in Udosen (2009) that in Nigeria only a few women occupy managerial positions in public and private sectors. As part of the productive sector of the economy, women need economic break-through if the current campaign against women illiteracy, ignorance, poverty, diseases, and high mortality rate will be achieved.

## Social Empowerment

In Nigeria, women unlike men are not socially developed because of several restrictions placed on them. It is thus imperative that cultural and religious barriers, superstitions, and all manners of discriminations against women be removed to accelerate their social development.

## Rationale for Women Empowerment Through Education in Nigeria

Many issues make it imperative for women empowerment to be taken seriously and be given the needed attention in Nigeria because of the following reasons:

**Number of female school-age children without access to education** – It needs not be overemphasized that many female children do not have access to education in Nigeria due to factors such as poverty of parents, religious belief, cultural practices, natural disaster, insecurity, just to mention a few. Data in Table 1 and 2 show the statistics on primary and secondary education enrolment in Nigeria.

**Table 1: Primary Schools Statistics in Nigeria: 2004-2008**

	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008
Total Schools	60,189	60,189	54,434	54,434	54,434
Total Enrolment	21,395,510	22,115,432	23,017,124	21,632,070	21,294,518
Total Enrolment Male	11,824,494	12,189,073	12,575,689	11,683,503	11,483,943
Total Enrolment Female	9,571,016	9,926,359	10,441,435	9,948,567	9,810,575
Total Teachers	591,474	599,172	586,749	468,202	586,930
Total Teachers Male	291,384	294,434	323,798	241,826	300,931
Total Teachers Female	300,090	304,738	262,951	226,376	285,999
Total Classrooms	254,319	254,319	319,590	319,590	319,590
Teacher / Pupil Ratio	36	37	39	46	36

*Sources: Federal Ministry of Education/Universal Basic Education Commission (UBEC) (2009)*

**Table 2: Post-Primary Schools Statistics in Nigeria: 2004-2008**

	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008
Total Schools	10,913	10,913	18,238	18,238	18,238
Total Enrolment	6,279,462	6,398,343	6,536,038	6,068,160	6,625,943
Total Enrolment Male	3,539,708	3,543,625	3,642,871	3,460,146	3,682,141
Total Enrolment Female	2,739,754	2,854,718	2,893,167	2,608,014	2,943,802
Total Teachers	154,594	144,413	199,163	207,283	270,650
Total Teachers Male	99,403	102,469	122,462	136,285	167,527
Total Teachers Female	55,191	56,814	76,701	70,998	103,123
Total Classrooms	98,077	98,077	98,077	98,077	98,077
Teacher / Student Ratio	40	44	32	29	24

*Sources: Federal Ministry of Education (2009)*

**Number and percentage of female children who dropped out of school:** In Nigeria, many female children are dropping out of school without the completion of their studies, thus terminating their studies abruptly. The implication is

that women will continue to be economically dependent on their male counterparts with unanticipated consequences.

**Table 3: Grade Dropout Rates in Nigeria as at year 2008**

Background Characteristics	School Grade					
	1	2	3	4	5	6
Sex	Dropout Rates					
Male	0.4	0.2	0.3	0.4	0.4	10.3
Female	0.5	0.2	0.3	0.4	0.6	12.9

*Source: Federal Ministry of Education (2009)*

Data in Table 3 show the pattern of dropout rates in primary schools in Nigeria in year 2008. As indicated in the Table, dropout rate was highest in grade 6 (10.3% and 12.9%) while the least was in grade 2 (0.2% for both sexes).

**Total percentage of male and female children who completed primary education:** Primary education is the foundation on which man's success in life via education is hinged upon. Table 4 contains data which indicates the primary six completion rate from 1999 to 2005 of male and female pupils in Nigeria.

**Table 4: Primary Six Percentage Completion Rate: 1999-2005**

	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005
Male (%)	74	96	88	84	102	82	85
Female (%)	72	75	71	71	85	68	70
<b>Total</b>	<b>73</b>	<b>85</b>	<b>80</b>	<b>78</b>	<b>94</b>	<b>75</b>	<b>78</b>

*Source: Federal Ministry of Education (2007)*

As indicated in Table 4, total percentage completion rate as at 1999 was 73%, which increased to 85% in 2000 but decreased to 80% in 2001 and further to 78% in 2002. In 2003, the rate increased tremendously to 75% in 2004 and 78% in 2005. Completion rate approaching 100% indicates a high level of retention and low incidence of dropout. The data further reveals that throughout the period, there was no year when the completion rate was 100percent, which is expected in an ideal situation. What this implies is that many pupils did not graduate from primary schools during the period, which is an indication of wastage in the educational system.

**Table 5: Net Enrolment & Completion Rates in Primary Education in Nigeria.**

	Enrolment Rates (%)			Completion Rates (%)		
	1991	2008	Change(%)	1991	2008	Change(%)
Male	64.6	63.5	-1.70	93.3	81.8	-12.33
Female	50.8	56.5	11.22	77.5	68.2	-12.00

*Source: United Nations statistics (2011)*

As indicated in Table 5, male enrolment rate was 64.6% in 1991 but decreased to 63.5% in 2008. Female enrolment was 50.8% but increased to 56.5% in 2008. Male completion rate was 93.3% in 1991 but decreased to 81.8% in 2008. The female completion rate was 77.55% in 1991 while it was 68.2% in 2008. Relevant authorities especially the government need to provide educational opportunities for female education mostly at the basic level. This will serve as a viable tool to close the gap of gender inequality in economic opportunities, social status and political activities of Nigeria women.

## Strategies for Empowering Women through Education

The place of education as a catalyst for women empowerment is indubitable globally. Empowering women through education can therefore be achieved through several strategies. In Nigeria's context, it can be achieved through the following educational management strategies:

**Increasing Access of Female Children to Education:** This can be achieved through increased advocacy and orientation of the masses in rural and traditional communities especially on the need to educate the girl-child in formal schools.

**Sustaining Female Children in Educational Institutions:** Government should strive to tackle the barriers to female/women education in Nigeria such as dropout, societal and institutional discriminations, early marriage and cultural practices. This can be achieved through provision of scholarships and bursaries for female children; supply of teachers, infrastructure, facilities and instructional materials to schools. Recruitment and deployment of qualified teachers to schools for effective teaching and learning should be prioritize by the Federal and States Ministries of Education. The concentration of qualified and large number of teachers in urban areas at the expense of schools in remote and rural areas should be discouraged.

**Revitalization of Adult and Non-formal Education Centres:** This can be achieved through the establishment of more adult literacy centres in every part of the country. National Agency for Formal and Non-formal Education should step up its advocacy on the need for illiterate women to enroll in such centres. These adult literacy centres should be equipped with modern pedagogical infrastructure, instructional materials and qualified teachers. The curriculum should be redesigned in a robust way to accommodate the needs of the adult learners. Vocational and entrepreneurial skills training centres for rural women should not be mere political wish. They should be adequately funded to achieve the goal of self-reliance for women especially. Government should also establish the 'National Empowerment Fund' for economic activities for women entrepreneurs as well as establishing and strengthening the financial institutions where they can access loans for small and medium scale enterprises at reduced interest rate.

Lastly, entrepreneurship education should be made compulsory in Nigeria educational system at all levels. This will help to reduce the high rate of unemployment and overdependence in government for paid jobs.

## Conclusion

The need for women empowerment in Nigeria cannot be over-emphasized. This is on the basis that despite their large population, women are at disadvantaged position when compared to men in Nigeria. Among other indicators, participation of women in education is low in Nigeria while there is prevalence of poverty among the women-folk. In this paper, issue of women empowerment was examined, from the perspectives of the meaning and what it entails, as well as the strategies for achieving it through effective educational management strategies. Government however needs to provide the enabling environment for women empowerment to be achieved holistically in Nigeria. If women are empowered, not only will their status change, Nigeria economy will become stronger. There will be socio-political stability while the high maternal mortality rate exacerbated by poverty and diseases in Africa will be reduced drastically.

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