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Women Education and the Challenges of the 21st Century

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Abstract

In the past, women were only seen and not heard. Their place was relegated to the background and had no fair share in the various aspect of life. Women suffered bias and inequality in the society they belong. However, women like men are endowed with capabilities and potentials that are waiting to be explore. This can be possible through access to education which is a basic tool for achieving change. This paper discusses the role of education in women development to face the challenge of the 21st century.

Introduction

All human society attached great importance to the differences between men and women especially at birth. It is the society that elaborates the biological fact into notions of males and females. This is the beginning of the woes for the girl. In the face of any problem, the girl is considered for sacrifice such as, she is the one to stay at home while her brother goes to school, when there is no enough money to pay school fees, she is to be dropped, she eats last, hawks goods on the streets, given into marriage early and so on (Venessa,1974). These and more are some of the dangers women are exposed to. It makes them to be under value and unutilized. They are full of fears, marginalized, unsecure and intimidated because of their status.

Women are still subjected to oppressive laws and attitudes which are meant to keep them in a permanent subservient, dependent and marginalized position. They suffer a lot of societal ills perpetuated against them such as sexual harassment, rape, physical and psychological battering, un-wanted pregnancies, acid bath and divorce. All these prevailing situations are to make them feel inferior and detrimental to men. Men desire women to stay at home and look after their children and this way have them in total or perpetual subjugation.

Access to education by women is still full of constraints even as they desire to attend school and acquire knowledge. Women suffer lack of support from their parents, husband, and even siblings who are educated. Even the women who succeed in persuading their husband, parents or siblings to allow them attend school or give them support, from time to time, are made to suffer deprivation in terms of finance, materials for school work such as books or uniform. This is a serious setback as they have no finance of their own (Maisamari, 2006). They are left with no option except that their education suffers. These circle of challenges that faces women year in year out, generation to generation, is a monster that is yet to be surmount.

Education as a Tool of Change

Education is the process of unfolding of a nurture and nature element of the individual. It is a process of learning about facts, ideas and using them to bring about change in ones thoughts, behavior and attitude towards life. Through education, an individual develops desirable skills and attitudes which make the person a good citizen. That is, the person has learned and is living as a useful and acceptable member of the society. Education is the acquiring of knowledge and using it to influence ones attitude and behavior resulting in positive outlook to life. It brings about the acquisition of new skills which benefits the individual and the society at large. As a process, education focuses at the development of a total person's intellectual potentials, skills to increase productivity, development of character, psychological adjustment, balance, social skills, political and artistic values (Maisamari, 2006).

Education therefore, enhances the status of an individual in the socio cultural setting he finds himself. Hence, women need be educated to enhance their status and self esteem. When women are educated, they would be of benefit to self, parents, family, children, and the society at large.

An adage says, educate a woman, you educate the society. Educate a man, you educate an individual. This adage is glaring before us today among the opportune few women to received education within our communities. Their contribution is not limited to their families but it is spread around the community and beyond (Mallum, 2001). Hence, education is a basic human right and an essential tool for achieving change. When education is properly and equally given, it gives both sexes dignity and self worth.

Thus, education when acquired and used effectively can break down deep rooted gender attitudes and mind set among men and women. It can also establish new grounds for mutual respect, freedom and value. Individuals can achieve their full potentials for growth and development. In addition, women naturally are agents of change because they play a strong role in shaping the welfare of the future generation. Gender education can start from where the mother with the support of the father, treat their children equally thereby creating awareness and sensitivity among both sexes(Nwonkwo, 2001). This will result in development of positive attitudes and behaviours in which discrimination is non- existent and there would be a just society for all.

Challenges for the 21st Century

Education is a tool for the realization of women empowerment which can help them eradicate the shackles of bondage that held them captive for long. The United Nations have organized various conferences on human, women and children and rights, came out with resolutions on major strategies for combating the abuses of human rights of women and children. One of such strategy is equal access to education (UN,1995). The Federal Government of Nigeria has set the machinery ready through its Constitution and National policy on education which states that 'every Nigeria child shall have a right to equal educational opportunities irrespective of any or imagined disabilities, each according to his/ her ability'. This is an encouraging effort especially for women and the girl child to have access to education.

Furthermore, the policy went on to state that; "education shall continue to be highly rated in the national development plans because it is the most important instrument of change, any fundamental change in the intellectual and social outlook of any society has to be preceded by an educational revolution" (2004:8). This is a laudable approach and well stated. However, is the implementation laudable also in terms of its administration, funding, structural facilities, inspection and supervision, quality and control?. Is there need for involvement by all stakeholders?

The society ascribes social roles to both sexes and it also elaborate this fact into notions of males representing masculinity and females representing femininity. The birth of a boy is heralded by the father with smiles, while that of a female receives a frown, or a nod of the shoulder. There are culturally learnt differences between men and women in regards to what is eaten, types of jobs to be performed, where to go and where to live. Moreover, many religious practices encourage gender inequality with regards to how to participate in worship. The various socially

ascribe roles and the negative attitudes towards especially women, places a lot of restriction and discrimination thereby limiting the involvement and contribution of the females (Zamani, 2003).

The world is gradually becoming a global village where nothing can be hidden. This is so as a result of advancement in technology where internet and handset have made interaction and communication easier and affordable. With just a dial, you can talk to someone in a far country, made purchases, transfer money, document, arrange business meetings, plan and participate in different events. The internet provides similar opportunities and even more. In a similar vein, the problems encountered through the use of this technology are enormous and overwhelming. As there are benefits so also are there difficulties, pains, hurts, betrayal, disappointment and so on. The reality is that women suffer from its consequences just like men do or even more.

Conclusion

Education is a tool that will produce the requisite manpower of which women are part of it, endowed with appropriate knowledge, skills, and understanding to meet the present and future needs of our society. It can serve as a powerful means that can be used to bring about change in the lives of females to enable them acquire knowledge and make their contribution to the society positively. It will give them confidence to compete with their male counterpart and grow towards fulfillment in life. It will also set them free from the shackles of societal ills and prejudice against them.

Recommendations

Based on the challenges women experience in life, the following recommendations are made to enable them engage in acquiring education that can change their life for better.

1. That parent's need show same type of love to their children regardless of their gender because they are God's creation and not man. They are to be valued as human beings.
2. That parent's trained and assigned house chores to their children to teach them experience what it is to perform roles of either a male or female as ascribed by society.
3. That community members be sensitized about not discriminating against the female gender to favour the males, both are gifts from the Creator who gives consulting the parents.
4. That religious leader's be fair in teaching the tenets of their faith to give equal support to both sexes without favouritism.
5. That government should show genuine interest and commitment in implementing policies that will empower her citizens and develop the nation so as to compete with others favourably.
6. That government leader's shoulder with the responsibility of releasing funding and provision of structural facilities do so without delay or doing shabby work that may not last.

7. That women need to stand up for themselves and request for assistance to enable them take part in acquiring education without engaging in anti social behavior that are detrimental to learning and womanhood.
8. That wealthy person's should encourage women education by being supportive in provision of either facilities where women with babies can keep them, school materials like textbooks, scholars, free education for women or uniforms.
9. Women are human beings and do not need sympathy but opportunities to enable them go to school to better their lives and contribute to the development and growth of the society.
10. That there is need for laws to regulate how the internet and handsets are used in order to monitor and give users some security.

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