

Empowering Female Youth for Leadership through Higher Education in Nigeria

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Abstract

*The contributions of females in the home, workplace, community participation, community management cannot be overlooked. Despite these, female's access to Leadership position has been observed to be limited in the political arena, economy, employment and policy positions due to low level of education. This situation calls for higher education for females due to possible direct relationship between female youth's educational levels and their participation in the labour force. The Nigerian society cannot afford not to have females in leadership positions. The activities of females in management positions in the country presently has convinced all that if more Nigerian female youths are given the right type of education, greater participation among females will emerge in the future. It is in this context that this paper discussed how higher education can empower female youth for future leadership in the nation. The paper highlighted the status of female education in Nigeria, the role of higher education in leadership development as well as the strategies that could be employed to empower female youths for future leadership. Some of these strategies include exposing female youth to leadership initiatives, career concepts and inspiring role models, enriching the curriculum to incorporate courses in leadership education and so on. Empowering females for future leadership has high prospects. It could include increasing female's potentials that will could to building a virile nation, producing better women, better home makers, better future leaders and a better society. **NO KEY WORDS***

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INTRODUCTION

Education is an important tool for promoting gender equality and advancement of female youths in socio-economic and political development of nation. Female youths who later translate to women are at the center of activities in the family, society, the community and all facets of life. Their contributions to the household chores, income earning activities, community participation, community management roles and other areas of life cannot be overlooked. Despite these, female youths' access to power has been observed to be limited because of their low level of education (Aina, 1994). Disparity is noticed in the pattern of student's enrolment in various faculties in the universities and the colleges. Ajayi, Goma and Johnson (1996) stressed that the ratio of men to women on enrolment confirms the fact that lukewarm attitude towards female's education is a common phenomenon. Bush (2006) stressed that females are greatly underrepresented in senior positions in education as in many other occupations. He stated further that men dominate numerically in senior positions in all phases of education with the exception of nursery and infant schools. According to UN African Recovery, No. 11 of April 1998, only six percent females are in professional, technical, administrative or managerial positions (Aina 1994).

Access to education is an indication of females' status in a nation (Aina 1994). This is supported by Onokala and Onah (1998) while Duyilemi (2007) noted that the percentage of female in the academic sector is still very low. The co-existence of male and female has been observed to witness inequalities and discrimination against females. Okiyi (2005) for example emphasised that females are marginalized, subjugated and discriminated against in the areas of decision making, the economy, politics, employment and so on. The Millennium Development Goals (2000), the Education for All (EFA 1990), Dakar (2000) and the Beijing platform have consistently placed emphasis on the importance of education in promoting gender equality and advancement. The society cannot afford not to have females in leadership positions. It is noticed that females occupy positions in the junior cadre of the civil service; most females are teachers, nurses and clerical officers (Bush 2006). Even in tertiary institutions most females are in the junior cadre of administration. (Duyilemi, 2007).

Access to higher education for females at this junction is very vital so as to attain a higher status that will enable them occupy higher positions of leadership. A saying goes thus, educate a female and

you educate a nation and if you educate a man you educate only an individual. It is on this premise that this paper focuses on the strategies of empowering female youths for leadership positions. The higher the educational background of an individual is; the higher the status, earnings, participation in public activities as well as the efficiency. There is no doubt that the University and Colleges will provide access to female education, increase the efficiency of female and build them up as part of the national human resources.

Status of Female Education in Nigeria

Over the years, it has been discovered that both male and female students have the potentials to be great and to contribute meaningfully to nation building, but the girl child is disadvantaged as a result of limitations. In Nigeria, as in many developing countries, there is gender gap in terms of access to education for a long time. Females constitute the majority of illiterates in Nigeria at all levels of education (primary, secondary and tertiary). Males represent higher proportion than females. (FOS, 1995, and Yusuf-Ajibade, 2008) According to UNESCO (2006) report, girls make up 60% of all out of school children and represent two-third of illiterate adults (www/savethechildren.ca/resources/pdf/state-of-the-worlds-mothers-2005.pot). Most Nigerian females live in rural areas and they are either semi-illiterates or non-literate (Aboyade, 1987 and Onwubike 1999). The studies of Adegbesan (2007) revealed that 33.7% of females had no form of education in the North Eastern states of Nigeria (Borno, Yola, Adamawa and Bauchi). In the North Western States, (Kano, Kebbi, Sokoto and Jigawa etc). 87.8% of female had no formal education. The case of southern states was slightly better. In the South East (Abia, Akwa-Ibom, Rivers, Imo, Cross-River, Anambra) only 36.2% of female have no formal education. In the South West (Ogun, Lagos, Oyo, Osun, Ondo and Ekiti) at least 26.1% of females had no formal education. The Middle Belt states (Plateau, Benue, Taraba, Kwara, Niger, Kogi) are in between the South and North in terms of average figures of female illiteracy (Adelabu and Adepoju 2007, (FMS 2005), and UNICEF, 2002).

This revealed the extent of gender gap and disparity in formal education. It also revealed the status of female formal education in the nation. It is imperative that girls should be further exposed to higher education where they can acquire the appropriate education that can develop them to become better citizens and good leader in future. This is the more reason why female youths have been receiving so much attention from agencies like UNDP, United Nations, UNESCO, FAWA and other numerous national and international non-governmental organizations aimed at reducing

gender inequality problems in our society. In addition to the contributions of the various agencies concerned with female education, the higher institutions have a lot of roles to play in the empowering process for higher education. The Role of Higher Education in Female Youth Leadership Empowerment

Education is believed to be the most powerful and dynamic instrument for social, economic, political scientific and technological development of nations (Olutola 1983, Fadipe 2000, Aghenta, 2001). As emphasized by Wood hall (1970) education is universally recognized as a form of investment in human capital, which in turn yields economic benefits and contributes to a country's future wealth by increasing the productive capacity of its people. The Higher institutions had historically been a place where the society looked up to for ideas and visions for meeting its perennial need for change. The expected changes should focus on both the political, social and economic life of man. The history of female's participation in higher education during the past decades has been of general interest to the society. Aniegbuna (1990), expresses that studies on female in general, continues to be a fascinating subject and generating curiosities. Adegbesan (2007) stressed that higher education influences the lives of participants by increasing their options, enlarging their aspirations and self-concepts and even expressing their views about what is just and equitable. Higher Education is supposed to improve the socio-economic positions and enhance earnings of individual and the entire society. Obanya (2002) stressed that education in all its forms and at all levels is expected to enrich the individuals through enculturation, acculturation, intellectual skills acquisition, affective traits development manipulative and psychomotor skills development as well as inculcation of lifelong learning skills.

Universities and colleges all over the world are accepted as the citadel of knowledge, education and human resource development. The Nigerian university system sprang out of the need for the development of high-level manpower to take the challenge of national building after independence. It is the hope of the people that universities shall produce the right type of manpower in sufficient quantity and quality for the transformation of the nation from a developing country to a developed country, (Fadipe 2000). Higher Education is supposed to build members both male and female into leadership positions. Leadership, according to Rost (1993) is not the work of a single person; rather it is explained and defined as a collaborative endeavor among group members. Producing more effective leaders is essential to building a better society and better world and the issue of leadership

development should be a critical part of the university and college experience. According to (Rost 1993), leadership is useful because it can enrich the undergraduate experience, and give them a greater sense of control over their lives. Good leaders develop through a never ending process of self study, education, training and experience. This should be transmitted by the higher institutions. Leadership is a process of influencing others to accomplish an objective and direct the organization in a way that makes it more cohesive and coherent. A leader must be trustworthy and be able to communicate a vision of where the organization needs to go. She also needs to acquire certain leadership qualities, which could be attained through learning and sharing with lecturers, co-students as well as various programmes and activities within the institutions.

Strategies for Empowering female youth for Leadership through Higher Education

Empowerment has been defined in so many ways. Obanya (2004) defined empowerment as a continuous and life-long process and therefore should be in the form of a systematic set of continuous, continued, sustained, never-ending (but ever improving) goal-directed efforts. While Duyilemi (2007) defined it as a process, through which people or communities increase their power and control over their own lives, which may be economic, political or educational. The empowerment of female youth is the empowerment of all humanity. This is because the woman is the pivot of the family. Empowerment is a drive towards realization of the innate potentials found in an individual. Thus, the potentials found in the female youth could be enhanced if empowered. The following strategies are thus suggested as ways of empowering female youths to become qualified for placement into leadership positions in future.

Admission Policy:

The higher education policy makers should be willing to reduce gender imbalance. This should reflect right from the admission policy and enrolment figures. Williams (1987), has revealed that the world-wide problem of low participation in Science and Technology Education for example is compounded by low enrolment rates of girls in formal education when compared with boys with the gap widening at the higher level of education. The management of universities and colleges should be concerned with building up both male and female leaders. The gender balance should be at all levels of education academic structure. They should focus on educating female youth for leadership roles in contemporary society.

Teaching and Research:

Encouraging teaching and research on gender related issues could be a way out. Through this, some peculiar gender problems can be identified and

solved. Issues like relegation of females to the home, parental perceptions of costs /benefits of educating females, seclusion practices and early marriages among others had been identified through research. Further research into gender matters could reveal other ways of assisting females to attaining greater heights and becoming exemplary leaders. Major emphasis should be placed on leadership development.

Innovation of the Curriculum:

The Curriculum of Higher education should be broad-based and diverse to cater for the need of both male and female. The curriculum must be relevant, flexible, non-moribund and applicable to the needs of female youths in the society. Emphasis should not only be on some courses like Science and Technology. Humanities, Arts and Technical Education should also be encouraged. The issue of leadership development must be entrenched in all courses offered. Discussion and debate about current events and other topics fostering independent thinking and nurturing leadership potentials should be emphasized. Leadership concepts and skills should be infused into the curriculum. Mainstreaming of gender into academic curricula in each department should also be encouraged. The curriculum should also include courses that will foster critical reasoning skills, peace education, political education, entrepreneurship studies and others that can inculcate leadership qualities and potentials. Most especially building leadership interest in girls should be included.

Training of Women:

Exposing females to training that will help them display high level of professionalism and moral rectitude should also be the concern of higher education institutions. Female youth should be exposed to studies on the laws of the land so that they are armed with the right things to do.

Environmental Safety:

The University/College environment when made conducive for women to live could be a source of empowerment. In view of the fact that women are severe victims of moral fall-out, authorities should design policies that should make girls safe from sexual harassment, cultist attacks, sexual abuse, rape, and other social problems that may affect the them. These policies should be enacted and made enforceable.

Gender Orientation:

Organizing special gender orientation workshops and short training programmes for females youths on campus are sources of empowerment. Female youths should be encouraged to get involved in campus leadership among their colleagues. Various associations, clubs, student union activities should not leave out the female sex when appointing officers. They should be allowed to assume leadership roles and responsibilities. This is the

small stage of developing leadership potentials and they can build on this foundation throughout life.

Scholarship and Fellowship:

Awarding Scholarships and Fellowship to female students could be a motivating factor. Special opportunities in terms of sponsorship could bail them out of poverty and penury thus making them become great leaders in future. A quota of fifty-percent to both male and female is advocated at issuing scholarship and fellowship opportunities so as to reduce the gender disparity in terms of academic opportunities. Introduction of various activities on campus like the female youth week and female based association can bring about special advocacy for females to develop leadership potentials. Introducing publication of Gender Bulletin and other outreach programmes like the gender forum on the air could become powerful outlets for the dissemination of gender sensitization issues.

Counseling Unit:

Developing counseling units in universities and colleges where female youths can be counseled on issues and problems confronting them especially their future can be a way of empowerment. Higher education authorities should also appoint more female Lecturers in all faculties in the institutions. These female lecturers are to serve as role models to the female students. Attention of the females could also be directed to other females in the society who are role models. These females based on fulfilling the criteria for selection could be listed as Commissioners, Ministers, Vice-chancellors, Permanent secretaries, Professors, Registrars of Institutions, Provosts, Chief executives of Banks, Directors of Companies, Media Houses, Deputy governors, senators, Chief justice, top rank officers in Nigeria Armed forces, Chairpersons of Boards and so on, (Adegbesan 2007).

Prospects of Empowering female youths for Leadership

There is no gainsaying that the future of Nigeria could be better if more female are placed in leadership position. Providing females with better education would provide better women, better home maker and better nation. There is the possibility for a better tomorrow in this nation if females are placed as leaders or put in positions of authority. The contributions of females in top management positions revealed that females are up to the task. Some of the activities of females cannot even be likened to the men's. In fact it now seems as if females are now succeeding where men have failed. These activities do support the recent claim that what a man can do, a woman can do better. Women of integrity, honesty, uprightness, dedication and commitment to their professions have been seen as role models. Such women include Professor (Mrs) Akunyili, Director, National Agency for Food Drugs

Administration and Control NAFDAC), Dr (Mrs) Okonjo Iweala, Former Minister for Finance and Foreign Affairs, Dr (Mrs) Obiageri Ezikwesili, Former Minister for Education, Prof Mrs Grace Alele Williams First Female Vice Chancellor in Nigeria, Arc (Mrs) Halima Tayo Alao, Minister for Housing and Urban development and many others.

Generally, females have thrown their weight and shown unparalleled ability in issues of initiating and making policy when they are in direct control. Many policies and decisions have been influenced by females through their linkages whenever they are opportuned. They have been found to be very dynamic, firm and fair. Examples are Queen Amina of Zaria, Idia of Benin, Moremi of Ile-Ife, and many others. If Nigerian females are exposed to higher education, great names will emerge among them in future. Furthermore, it has been observed that higher education is a veritable weapon for female youth empowerment in all facets of life and a source of strength for national development. As a result of this, if females received higher education and proper orientation they can lead nations. They can achieve greater self-fulfillment and would be able to contribute meaningfully to the social and economic development of their societies. Socially, more females in leadership positions will affect people's attitude in social circles, because of women's natural endowment as home makers, they can conserve and manage the resources prudently than men. Besides, gone are the days when men manage the home alone by providing for all the needs of the women and the children. The present economic recession has turned things round. Both male and female now cooperatively maintain the home even though the man is still regarded as the head of the family especially in the Nigerian Culture. In such instance, women with higher education will be able to earn additional salaries and support the husband and the standard of their living will be high and they can easily survive hard times.

CONCLUSION

From the discussions, it can be concluded that higher education can serve as a veritable tool for female empowerment and national development. The placement of females in leadership position has been and will continue to be based on their level of education. Hence, if more females are encouraged to acquire higher education, the more females we shall have in leadership position in future. Equal rights and privileges should be enjoyed by both male and female at whatever level in the nation. This will promote national unity and development.

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