

A REVIEW OF THE EFFECTS OF WOMEN LITERACY AND POVERTY REDUCTION ON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

Despite the potential of the strategies put in place by successive governments in Nigeria, women's literacy and poverty reduction for sustainable development, Nigeria continue to grapple with persistent challenges in realizing the full transformative impact of educated and empowered women in the country. This paper examined the effects of women literacy and poverty alleviation on sustainable development in Nigeria. The paper relied on documentary sources of data obtained from textbooks, journal articles, official gazettes, conference papers and the internet. The paper deployed the Liberal Feminism theory to provide a theoretical guide for the study. The paper observed that the relationship between women's literacy, poverty alleviation, and sustainable development in Nigeria is complex and multifaceted and emphasized that empowering women is not only a matter of social justice but a catalyst for sustainable development. It recommends a conscious implementation of policies and programs that should aim to eliminate barriers to education for girls and women, including addressing financial constraints, cultural norms, and discriminatory practices as well as the development and implementation of targeted economic empowerment initiatives, such as vocational training and entrepreneurship programs, to enhance women's skills and make them job creators rather than job seekers, thereby increasing their participation in the formal economy.

Keywords: Cultural Norms; Feminist Theory; Women Literacy; Poverty Reduction; Sustainable Development,

Introduction

One of the most difficult problems Nigeria is currently facing is the scourge of poverty, especially among women. Poverty is one of the most pervasive and urgent issues facing countries around the world, notably in Africa, where the problem has grown particularly severe, especially in the sub-Sahara region where Nigeria is located (Atkinson, et. al., 2016), compromising human dignity and obstructing the advancement of sustainable development. Due to its complexity, a thorough and sophisticated strategy that goes beyond simple economic concerns is necessary. An integrated approach that includes social security, work, healthcare, and education is necessary to reduce poverty.

Women in Nigeria are overrepresented in vulnerable/informal employment and underrepresented in formal wage jobs requiring higher education and specialized skills. According to Enhancing Financial Innovation and Access (EFInA)'s Access to Financial Services in Nigeria (A2F) 2020 survey). Those are all essential to economic expansion. Nigerian women have historically engaged in subsistence-level enterprises, which means they possess entrepreneurial skills, knowledge, and experience that can be utilized to promote inclusive growth and long-term national success.

Global Data (2021) indicates that Nigeria has had a modest female literacy rate since 2010. The percentage of female literacy in 2010 was 60.01%. Eventually, the rate has gone up with time. Nigeria's female literacy rate rose by 18.9% between 2010 and 2021. The rate was 71.35% in 2021. In 2021, there was a 1.5% annual rise in the literacy rate. According to estimates from the 2022 Multi-dimensional Poverty Index survey conducted in Nigeria, 133 million people, or 63% of the country's population, live in multidimensional poverty. According to the National Multi-dimensional Poverty Index (MPI), which stands at 0.257, the absence of access to health care, education, standard employment, and security causes just over 25% of all conceivable deprivation among Nigerians. 86 million people, or 65% of this total, reside in the North (MDPI, 2022).

Once more, the Nigeria MPI for married girls is higher—0.338—than the 0.256 for single girls. Even though the numbers are minor, the disparities in poverty are significant, highlighting the necessity of addressing child marriage and multifaceted poverty together. With 1 in 7 impoverished people (19.1 million) living in a household where a man has completed basic school but no woman has, gender gaps still have a significant impact on the general population. (MDPI, 2022). According to the 2019 Poverty and Inequality in Nigeria study, over 83 million people - more women than men - or 40% of the country's total population live below the poverty line (World Bank, 2020).

Numerous programs have been developed to address the complex issue of poverty in Nigeria, a country where there is both economic opportunity and pervasive suffering. In order to address this trend, a number of interventions were instituted by successive Nigerian governments. These include the National Social Investment Programs (NSIP), the Directorate for Food and Rural Infrastructures (DFRRI, 1986), the National Directorate of Employment (NDE, 1986). Better Life for Rural Women (1987), the Community Bank (CB, 1991), Family Economic Advancement Programs (FEAP, 1996), the National Poverty Eradication Programs (NAPEP, 2001), the Youth Empowerment Scheme (YES, 2004), and the Subsidy Re-investment and Empowerment Programs (Sure-P, 2012), the National Funding for Women's Economic Empowerment (NFWCC, 2015 & 2020), and Youth Empowerment Scheme (YES, 2004). Others were the Home Grown School Feeding Program (HGSF), Government Enterprise and Empowerment Program (GEEP), Conditional Cash Transfer (CCT), and N-Power Program (Kudu, Binta & Suleiman, 2023).

Nigeria continues to struggle with enduring obstacles in achieving the full transformative impact of educated and empowered women, despite the potential of the policies implemented by successive governments in the country, women's literacy and poverty reduction for sustainable development (Goodness, 2022). The confluence of gender-based poverty and poor literacy rates is a formidable obstacle to the country's endeavors towards attaining sustainable development objectives. The ineffective integration of women into the educational and economic realms is made worse by a number of socioeconomic circumstances, cultural norms, and systemic problems. It is in the light of this, that the paper reviews the effects of women's literacy and poverty reduction on sustainable development in Nigeria.

Objectives of the study

- (a) To examine the effects of women literacy and poverty reduction on sustainable development in Nigeria.
- (b) To examine the level of participation of indigenous women in poverty reduction and alleviation programs in Nigeria.

Conceptual Clarification and Literature Review

The concept of Literacy

It has been shown that literacy is a crucial aspect of education and a useful instrument for decreasing poverty and promoting sustainable development. There is no exact definition for literacy. The UNESCO and other international organizations have had difficulty over the years coming up with a universally recognized definition of literacy. However, according to Patrick and Ijah (2013), literacy is the capacity to meet every day needs by being able to read, write, and compute in an official national language with functional competence. The ability to read and write clearly, as well as the ability to write one's name and a brief message, are all considered forms of literacy in the broadest sense. These skills allow a person to participate successfully in all the activities that are typically associated with literacy in their culture or group. Since literacy is the cornerstone of universal basic education, achieving gender equality, ending poverty, lowering child mortality, slowing population growth, and ensuring sustainable development, peace, and democracy are all made possible by it (UNESCO, 2002).

Eliminating ignorance among women and promoting development via education are deemed essential for Nigeria's economic progress. Adult education is a key strategy for assuring poverty reduction, claims Akande (2016). Because it places a strong emphasis on the pressing need to address the issues impeding community development, it presents the prospect of change for better living. Through adult literacy education programs, women are empowered and given the opportunity to learn the skills of reading, writing, and calculation. They can also learn useful skills that will increase their productivity. The way they do in the adult literacy education program influences every other aspect of the development process. Not only can adult literacy education help with professional advancement, but a woman's level and kind of education also affects how she views her roles in the home and at work. This is where the relative rise in education among women is first perceived as a shift. Second, a shift that has impacted her ability to teach her kids. In a similar vein, adult literacy education generates independent women who take charge of their own growth and do not always wait for a change agent to make decisions

Concept of Women Poverty

The term "women's poverty" describes the unique and disproportionate ways that women face financial hardship and deprivation in comparison to men. It acknowledges that because of a

variety of social, cultural, and structural variables, poverty affects men and women differently. According to Mubecua and David (2019), women's poverty is a widespread and intricate issue that represents the particular difficulties and disparities that women encounter in all economic domains around the world. It includes the various ways that women experience deprivation and economic suffering differently from males, extending beyond the simple lack of cash means. The notion of women's poverty acknowledges that women experience a unique pattern of economic vulnerability due to gender-based disadvantages that are founded in social, cultural, and structural factors. Being in poverty entails not having enough money for clothing and food, not having access to credit, and lacking the fundamental ability to engage in society. (Ogu and others, 2016).

Hunger and malnutrition, restricted access to education and other essential services, social isolation and discrimination, and a lack of involvement in decision-making are all examples of poverty, according to the UN (United Nations, 2020). Every country in the world has attempted to find a long-term solution to the pressing issue of poverty. The UN 2030 plan envisions less than 3% of the world's population living in extreme poverty, however despite efforts by governments, NGOs, international organizations, and corporate actors, this goal is not expected to be met (Moyer & Hedden, 2020).

According to Castañeda et al. (2018), 80 percent of those who are classified as being in severe poverty live in rural areas. Globally, poverty in rural areas still outpaces that in urban areas (Ali & Thorbecke, 2017). Compared to urban residents, rural people are more likely to fall into poverty and remain there for a longer period of time (Cotter, 2002; Kyzyma, 2019). According to Cuaresma et al. (2018), people in rural areas, particularly women, continue to live in extreme poverty and entrenched deprivation that is frequently made worse by violent conflicts and a predisposition to catastrophes. According to several forecasts, extreme poverty in sub-Saharan Africa is expected to persist until 2030 unless governments in the region adopt significant policy changes (Mubecua & David, 2019).

Nigeria has been measuring poverty using both monetary poverty and multidimensional poverty in recent decades. (Mbada & Aluko, 2020). The multidimensional poverty measure takes into account pertinent non-financial aspects of poverty like food insecurity, unemployment, deteriorating housing, a lack of access to healthcare, low educational attainment, etc., while the monetary poverty measure evaluates income or consumption and expenditure poverty in accordance with national poverty lines. Kim (2019).

Like many other sub-Saharan African (SSA) nations, Nigeria is predominately a rural nation with a substantial female population (Madu, 2010; Farrel, 2018). Despite being largely less powerful and socioeconomically disadvantaged than men (Enfield, 2019; Obayelu and Chime, 2020), these women make up roughly 45.5% of Nigeria's labor force (World Bank, 2019). The feminization of poverty is believed to be fueled by gender inequality in the labor market, which affects both urban and rural communities. Women are employed in Nigeria's formal, informal, and agricultural sectors, with a greater proportion of women working in the latter. These women are mostly found in low-skill manual labor markets, which include the agricultural sector, as well as non-agricultural labor markets, particularly in rural areas. It's possible that poor literacy and skill levels contribute to the concentration of women in low-paid specialized employment in rural areas. (Mbada and Aluko, 2020).

According to the International Labour Organization (2018), Nigeria's female employment population ratio began well in 2000 but declined in the following years relative to the male ratio. According to the data, the proportion of females in the years 2000, 2010, 2015, and 2019 was 25.9%, 26.3%, 21.9%, and 21.2%, respectively. In contrast, the male ratios for the same years were

29.9%, 28.8%, 29.1%, and 29.3% (Goodness, 2023). However, boosting income, consumption, and human development is the broadest definition of poverty alleviation, according to Sindzingre (2008) in Musa (2021). Therefore, reducing poverty entails raising people's standards of life via more income, higher spending, higher consumption, and easier access to healthcare and education. Abang (2015) defines poverty alleviation as a reduction in the quantity and size of physical instances of poverty. He underlined that creating an atmosphere that is supportive of empowerment and capacity building may effectively reduce poverty.

In general, the term "poverty reduction" or "poverty alleviation" refers to a set of mostly humanitarian or economic actions meant to help individuals escape poverty once and for all (Slikkerveer, 2019). Raising the level of living for those who are in an unpleasant situation and moving them toward a desirable one is the goal of poverty alleviation. It refers to the process of lowering poverty among individuals as a result of their involvement in the establishment of an indigenous school feeding program in this study. Therefore, in order to improve women's literacy in Nigeria, many national governments and international donor agencies have developed a number of poverty alleviation programs during the course of the year, such as the Better Life for Rural Women Programme (BLP). It was started with the intention of eradicating ignorance and poverty among rural residents, especially women. Under a military regime, the program changed its name to the Family Support Programme (FSP) in 1994. By 1997, the Federal Government had created a new version of the BLP and FSP known as the Family Economic Advancement Programme (FEAP). This is an empowerment program created especially for prospective cottage industry entrepreneurs and regionally based producers of goods and services.

By promoting suitable economic activity in each of the country's local government areas' several wards, the initiative sought to raise the standard of living for low-income groups (Obasi and Oguiche, 1995). All of these earlier programs were combined under the Poverty Alleviation Programs (PAPs) by 1999. All these old and new programmes follow the same approach of micro credit and promotion of rural-based Small Scale Enterprises (Iwuchukwu & Igbokwe, 2012 in Kolawale, 2021).

The different programs were not prepared for and were poorly thought out. They were light on content and heavy on propaganda, if not outright noise-making. Because sustainability was not incorporated into their planning, program names were always changed when a new administration took office. The institutions set up to oversee the program benefited the program managers alone. The programs misled rural households into developing self-sustaining enterprises instead of empowering them to do so. They imposed a beggar-like mindset and dependency syndrome on them, failing to equip them with the necessary market and political clout to demand and obtain their entitlements from the government (Akinyosoye, 2005; Iwuchukwu and Igbokwe, 2012 in Kolawale, 2021).

In order to actualize women's rights and gender equality, Women's Economic Empowerment (WEE) and Women's Financial Inclusion (WFI) WEE were founded in 2015 and 2020, respectively. This is what happens when women's agency, skill, control over their resources, and bargaining power are increased. These attributes allow women to participate in the economy and acquire the resources required for self-sufficiency. Women's Financial Inclusion (WFI): WFI is the meaningful use, access, and management of financial services that produce social and economic benefits, which are necessary for achieving WEE, gender equality, and economic rights. Meaningful involvement in the financial sector for women extends beyond the 14 official and 15 informal banking services available for individual, corporate, or personal usage. WFI

acknowledges the various ways in which financial services improve the social and economic standing of women, particularly when those services are tailored to meet their specific needs.

Concept of Sustainable Development

Todaro and Smith (1985) in Adebayo (2020) aver that sustainable development is the guiding concept for achieving human development goals, according to which it is morally required of the present generation to provide for the basic necessities of their descendants' sustainable living conditions. Meeting everyone's immediate needs and increasing their chances of leading satisfying lives are essential components of sustainable development (Arejiogbe, et. al., 2023). To raise the standard of living for the people of a nation, sustainable development is necessary (Ugwoji, 2022). Thus, social entrepreneurship, youth empowerment, and poverty reduction (Ugoani, 2019; Waziri & Idris, 2019) are seen as essential steps towards achieving sustainable development in Nigeria (which encompasses the environmental, economic, social, and political domains). Joel & Nel-Sanders (2021) state that. Development that can meet the demands of the present generation without endangering the ability of future generations to meet their own needs is known as sustainable development.

Review of Empirical Literature

Muhingi, Mutisya, and Kandie (2023), analyzed the impact of specific women's economic empowerment initiatives on the reduction of poverty in Marigat Ward, Baringo County, Kenya. The study used a cross-sectional methodology and concentrated on women who had benefited from empowerment initiatives. A sample size of 334 people was obtained by using stratified random sampling. Furthermore, 15 Key Informant Interviewees (KIIs) who are leaders of empowerment programs were specifically chosen for in-person interviews. Questionnaire and interview schedules were used in the data gathering process. Filtering, coding, and input into SPSS version 26.0 were the next steps in the analysis process. Both quantitative and qualitative data were collected, and descriptive statistics such as percentages, frequencies, and tables were utilized in the analysis. Thematic analysis was done on qualitative data in accordance with the objectives of the study. With correlation values of.233, .129, and.248, respectively, it was found that women's skill development, market linkages, mentorship and networking, and poverty reduction are positively and strongly correlated. At a 95% significance level, the study found that, with respective values of.001, .010, and.001, and skill development, market contacts, mentoring, and networking significantly improved women's poverty reduction. Table banking, on the other hand, showed a negligible effect on women's poverty reduction ($p = .659$). Remarkably, networking and mentorship were shown to be the most important variables in reducing women's poverty, with skill building, market contacts, and table banking coming in second and third, respectively. These results highlighted the critical role that social work plays in promoting gender equality and reducing poverty through focused initiatives and useful advice.

Nyongesa, Odhiambo, and Omondi, (2023), conducted a study on how cash transfers among female-headed households in Siaya County, Kenya, affected poverty reduction in the context of achieving sustainable development goals. The main goal of the Inua Jamii-CT program, which was the subject of this study, was to determine how cash transfers affected the decrease of poverty and the attainment of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in Siaya County's female-headed families. The Household Welfare Theory, which bases the study's methodology on household spending and income decisions, suggests that the best way to quantify household welfare is through these factors. The 109,680 female-headed families in Siaya County were the focus of the investigation. A sample of 399 homes was selected using the Yamane formula. A total

of 377 respondents were found using a correlational design. It was discovered that 163 households did not get financial transfers, while 214 households did, according to a study of descriptive statistics of respondent household demographics. The average household spent money on groceries and agricultural supplies. The average age of the female head was 49, 52.2% were in good health and 85.7% had only completed elementary school. Five people on average, made up the household. A social group was represented by 51.7% of the female heads. 36.3% of the female head's income came from small companies, while 41.4% came from farming.

With P values of less than 0.05, a binary logit regression model showed that household consumption, cash transfers, and income were important predictors of SDGs among FHHs in Siaya County. The model's 30% goodness of fit was shown by the R^2 of 0.3. Since income and cash transfers have values of $\beta_2 = -0.689$ and $\beta_1 = -0.935$, respectively, raising both of these factors lowers poverty. The household spending and SDGs had a minor connection ($\beta_3 = 0.0004$). It was concluded that CT had a major role in achieving the SDGs. The study suggests designing a tailored program to guarantee more revenue-generating activities and ethical farming methods.

Johnwest & Nnodim (2022), conducted research in the Ogba/Egbema/Ndoni Local Government Area of Rivers State on the impact of adult and non-formal education on reducing poverty among rural women. For the study, a descriptive survey design was adopted. Out of the fifty-eight (58) rural settlements in Ogba/Egbema/Ndoni (ONELGA), forty (40) were randomly selected. Ten (10) program beneficiaries and ten (10) non-beneficiaries made up the sample of twenty (20) respondents drawn from each of the communities that were chosen. Data were gathered using a standardized questionnaire that was created using a 5-point Likert scale. The Z-test was utilized to test the null hypothesis at the 0.05% significant level of significance, and percentage, mean, and standard deviation were employed in the analysis of the gathered data.

According to the survey, the majority of rural women made their living through farming and trading, with the majority of beneficiaries earning an average monthly income of between N50,000 and N60,000 as opposed to N20,000 to N30,000 for non-beneficiaries. Rural women in ONELGA were given access to the majority of adult and non-formal education programs, including literacy, environmental education, vocational training, and aesthetic education. The study made the following recommendations: rural women should participate more in adult and non-formal education programs because the evidence suggests that doing so will help them develop the necessary skills, knowledge, aptitude, and attitudes to reduce poverty. The state government should work with local government areas to establish and implement more adult and non-formal education programs as well as other programs within rural areas.

Aghamelu's (2020), study on techniques for empowering women in Nigeria by encouraging adult literacy among rural women noted that women have historically endured various sorts of discrimination in Nigeria and other African and Asian nations because of the unique cultural and theological uncertainties inherent in these regions. But unlike in Saudi Arabia, where women - both educated and uneducated, are denied the ability to operate a motor vehicle, the issue of women's liberation in Nigeria and other African nations is impeded by the low level of basic literacy among women. Women in Nigeria's rural areas are the most severely affected by the illiteracy epidemic. These women typically lack access to education because of their poverty and inability to access schools, which are typically found in urban regions. According to the author, low adult literacy has contributed to the spread of HIV/AIDS, increased susceptibility to exploitation and manipulation, low self-esteem, and poverty among women.

It is thought that by acquiring adult literacy skills, women in rural communities would experience improvements in their economic empowerment, level of living, social interaction,

political involvement, ability to solve issues pertaining to women and the community, and ability to make decisions for their families and communities. But it seems that people have not paid enough attention to the importance of literacy among citizens in general and women in particular. In light of these considerations, the author advises using tactics free from political exploitation. Increasing funding for adult literacy at all governmental levels in Nigeria is one of these tactics. In order to finance adult literacy centers and supply them with instructional materials, it is also advised that managers of adult literacy programs work more closely with private organizations.

Gautam (2020), carried out a study on "Evidence from the Poverty Alleviation Fund, Nepal: The Impact of Government Policy on Women Empowerment." The research used a combination of methods. The study found that women are currently undergoing the process of becoming more powerful. They require support and assistance from their families, communities, and nation as a whole. The nation should create programs and policies that are gender-friendly to address this. When the government's poverty reduction policy was first proposed, it was advised that it should prioritize solving multidimensional poverty among the impoverished and marginalized population, in line with women's empowerment. It has created, put into practice, evaluated, and declared a unique model of poverty alleviation that is inclusive and successful in raising the targeted communities' degree of functionality and ownership.

Women Literacy Programmes in Nigeria

To address the issue of women literacy, Nigeria has established a number of literacy initiatives and programs tailored to help women contribute to their communities and the nation's overall growth by increasing their education and skill set. Among the noteworthy instances are:

1. **National Mass Education Commission (NMEC).** Founded in 1976, the NMEC was established as a government organization to plan and advance non-formal and adult education across the nation. In order to solve literacy issues and increase educational possibilities for a range of demographic groups, including adults and youth who are not enrolled in school, NMEC is essential. The commission's primary goal is to adopt policies and initiatives that will increase literacy rates and increase access to education, hence advancing the general development of Nigeria's human capital.

2. **Girls' Education Project (GEP):** This project, which is funded by the World Bank and other institutions, aims to increase girls' access to high-quality education in Nigeria. Through tackling obstacles to education, such as prejudice based on gender, GEP helps raise the rates of literacy among women and girls. I suggest contacting reputable sources like the World Bank, the Nigerian Ministry of Education, or groups actively engaged in the project's execution to get the most precise and current information about the inception of the Girls' Education Project in Nigeria. These sources' official announcements, reports, or records may contain particulars regarding the start and development of the Girls' Education Project in Nigeria.

3. **Universal Basic Education Commission (UBEC).** The UBEC was founded in 1999, as a statutory authority to oversee and advance the nation's Universal Basic Education (UBE) program. With an emphasis on enhancing access, equity, and quality in basic education, the UBE initiative seeks to offer free and required basic education to every child in Nigeria. UBEC collaborates with state and municipal authorities to oversee and administer the UBE program nationwide.

4. **Literacy and Non-Formal Education (LIFE).** The initiative, which aims to assist adults and out-of-school youth-including women, who are deficient in fundamental literacy skills. Enhancing literacy, numeracy and life skills.

5. **Community-Based Adult Learning Centers:** Adult learning centers are run by a variety of community-based and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in Nigeria. These facilities provide literacy initiatives specifically designed to meet the needs of nearby women.

6. **The role of International Organizations and NGOs:** Women's literacy is actively promoted in Nigeria by organizations like UNESCO, UNICEF, and NGOs like the Plan International and Save the Children, which frequently work with regional partners to put into action, initiatives that remove obstacles to education and improve women's literacy.

7. **Digital Literacy Programs:** With a growing emphasis on digital literacy in the digital age, certain programs concentrate on providing women with fundamental digital skills, which can improve their communication and access to information, and economic prospects.

8. **Programs for Empowerment and Skill Acquisition:** Some literacy efforts incorporate elements of skill acquisition in addition to basic education. These initiatives seek to empower women by giving them useful skills that may open doors to chances for earning a living.

Women Literacy and poverty Alleviation in Nigeria

In Nigeria, as in many other developing nations, increasing women's literacy can be extremely important to reducing poverty. Nnodim & Johnwest (2022), revealed that literacy empowers women by providing them with knowledge and skills. Educated women are more likely to make informed decisions about their lives, health, and family. This empowerment can lead to better economic opportunities and improved overall well-being. On the contrary, Literate women are better equipped to access job opportunities and engage in income-generating activities. This can be particularly important in a country like Nigeria, where economic opportunities are often limited, especially for women. Gaining more literacy offered up job and entrepreneurial opportunities (Akande, 2016).

Literate women are more likely to comprehend and implement good hygiene and health habits, which improve their own and their families' health, according to Aluko & Mbada (2020). This may lead to lower healthcare costs, which will help to lower poverty. Educated women are more inclined to place a high value on and make financial contributions to their children's education. By giving kids the resources they need to succeed, this breaks the cycle of poverty and benefits future generations. In the growth of communities, women frequently take the lead. Women who are literate can take an active role in community efforts, pushing for improvements in healthcare, education, and infrastructure, which will help to reduce poverty generally.

Enfield (2019) discovered a correlation between decreased birth rates and education, especially for women. Having access to education makes women less likely to have children and more capable of raising the ones they do have. This can lessen the financial strain on families and aid in ending the cycle of poverty. By questioning prevailing gender roles and conventions, literacy can advance gender equality. An educated woman is more likely to advocate for equal rights and opportunities for women, which promotes an inclusive and just society. But in order to solve the problem of women's literacy in Nigeria, we must concentrate on expanding girls' and women's access to school and removing obstacles like poverty, discrimination based on gender, and cultural norms. Government policies, community initiatives, and international collaborations can all play a role in promoting women's literacy and, in turn, contribute to poverty alleviation in the country.

Effects of Women Literacy on Sustainable Development in Nigeria

In Nigeria, women's literacy has a significant influence on sustainable development. Moyer & Hedden (2020) asserted that educated women are more likely to engage in the formal job market, which boosts the nation's economy. Women can participate in a wide range of fields by developing their knowledge and abilities, which will boost overall production and support the nation's economic growth. Once more, literate women are more qualified to launch and run companies. This spirit of entrepreneurship promotes economic variety and innovation. In order to create sustainable business practices that support environmental, social, and economic sustainability, women entrepreneurs can play a significant role.

Improved health outcomes are strongly correlated with women's literacy levels. Women with higher levels of education are also more likely to use healthcare services, take up healthier habits, and make well-informed decisions regarding the welfare of their families. The population's general health and productivity are greatly impacted by this. Conversely, women's literacy increased environmental sustainability since educated women are more likely to participate in sustainable practices and to be aware of environmental challenges. Among these are implementing eco-friendly habits at home, taking part in neighborhood conservation initiatives, and supporting sustainable resource management (Obayelu & Chime, 2020).

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Obstacles to women's Literacy vis-a-vis Poverty Alleviation Programmes in Nigeria

Like in other nations, cultural variables have a big impact on women's literacy and the effectiveness of programs aimed at reducing poverty in Nigeria. Initiatives aiming at increasing women's literacy and decreasing poverty must be implemented effectively, which require an understanding of and attention to these cultural variables. According to Ogu, Ezeonwuka, and Sule (2016), patriarchy - a deeply embedded system of social organization that prioritizes males over women - can have a substantial impact on women's literacy and their involvement in initiatives aimed at reducing poverty. Within households, patriarchal traditions place a higher value on men's education than on women's. Girls' access to educational opportunities, particularly literacy initiatives in Nigeria, is consequently restricted. Gender differences in literacy may persist when families choose to invest more in the education of their male offspring due to patriarchal beliefs, particularly in times of resource scarcity (Fatima, 2020). On the other hand, in patriarchal society, the low visibility of educated and accomplished women greatly contributes to the dearth of female role models.

Women's aspirations and confidence in pursuing reading and education are greatly impacted by the lack of role models, particularly in environments where traditional gender roles are strictly enforced. According to Daniel (2015), there is a low level of female engagement in literacy programs in the Maiha Local Government Area of Adamawa State. These factors include poverty, sociocultural attitudes, gender stereotypes, and a lack of understanding. Nwaoduh (2016), found out that the social structure of Nigerian exacerbates female poverty due to factors like

limited access to resources, low income, work discrimination, lack of good health care services, and socio-cultural exclusions. On the other hand Adisa., Mordi, Simpson, & Iwowo, (2020) identified cultural barriers impacting women's literacy in Nigeria to include discrimination, corruption, familial/domestic responsibilities, cultural perceptions of gender, and ingrained religious beliefs. Again, Bawa noted that that northern Nigeria being patriarchal in nature features a traditional society where powerful cultural traditions undermine the rights of women who are discriminated against, in most cases, from acquiring formal education. Girl's educational opportunities tend to be circumscribed by patriarchy, parent's preference of education of boys than girls.

In spite of the social pressures on women such as early marriage, and other extraneous factors as well as practices, many women are breaking the glass ceiling and contributing greatly in educational development in Northern Nigeria. Zvokuomba & Batisai (2022) revealed that access to and control over land are crucial for economic stability and livelihoods in many societies. In patriarchal systems, women may have limited or no rights to own or inherit land. Landownership is often passed down through the male lineage, excluding women from this crucial economic asset. inheritance laws and customs, influenced by patriarchal norms, may favor male heirs over female heirs which result in women being denied their rightful share of family assets, including land, leaving them economically vulnerable

Methodology Being a theoretical paper, this study relied heavily on documentary sources of data obtained from textbooks, journal articles, official gazettes, conference papers and the internet.

Theoretical paper Framework

The adopted Liberal Feminism as its theoretical framework. The proponents of the liberal feminist theory include Mary Wollstonecraft (1759-1797), John Stuart Mill (1806-1873, 1989); Elizabeth Cady Stanton (1815-1902). Liberal feminism posits that all people are created equal and that culture and attitude of individuals are responsible for promoting women under representation and that nobody benefits from making one gender subordinate to the other. The theory emphasizes that the potentials of both men and women alike are suppressed. The creation of equal opportunities particularly in socio cultural and work is at the heart of the liberal feminist theory.

Liberal feminists argue that society holds the false belief that women are, by nature, less intellectually and physically capable than men; thus, it tends to discriminate against women in the socio-culture aspect, the forum, and the market place. Liberal feminists believe that "female subordination is rooted in a set of customary and legal constraints that block women's entrance to and success in the so-called public world", and they work hard to emphasize the equality of men and women through political and legal reform. The theory posits that men and women are similar to one another because of their shared humanity, as such; the theory emphasizes human progress through rational thought. Looking further into the ideas of inequality under a liberal feminist perspective, the division of labour is a predominant issue (Fatima, 2020).

The application of liberal feminism theory to the analysis of women's literacy, poverty alleviation, and sustainable development in Nigeria derives from the need to advocate for equal access to education, economic empowerment, legal and policy reforms, women's empowerment, breaking of gender stereotypes, and addressing health and reproductive rights, towards achieving a more equitable and sustainable future.

Discussion

As stated in the methodology, the study relies on documentary sources of information.

Therefore, the discussion of the study is based on the inferences from the findings of empirical studies relating to women literacy and poverty reduction among women. Literature evidence indicates that Nigeria has had a modest female literacy rate since 2010. The percentage of female literacy in 2010 was 60.01%, but the rate has gone up with time. Nigeria's female literacy rate rose by 18.9% between 2010 and 2021 (Global data, 2021). This simply connotes that the more educated the women, the lesser would be the intensity of poverty and deprivation among women in Nigeria.

Data further revealed that 1 in 7 impoverished people (19.1 million) living in a household, a man has completed basic school but no woman has, indicating that gender gaps still have a significant impact on the general population. (MDPI, 2022). To buttress this, the World Bank (2020) noted in the 2019 Poverty and Inequality in Nigeria study that of the over 83 million poor people in the country, more women than men or 40% of the country's total population live below the poverty line. This clearly substantiated the disparity and deprivation of women in Nigeria to access western education that seeks to empower and emancipate the women from poverty and to access basic life necessities.

One fact that is incontrovertible is that women in Nigeria are overrepresented in vulnerable/informal employment and underrepresented in formal wage jobs requiring higher education and specialized skills (A2F, 2020 survey). Thus, Nigerian women have historically engaged in subsistence-level enterprises, which means they possess entrepreneurial skills, knowledge, and experience that can be utilized to promote inclusive growth and long-term national success if the women folks are given the opportunity to access literacy capacity that will enhance their capacity to meet every day needs by being able to read, write, and communicate in an official national language with functional competence.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the relationship between women's literacy, poverty alleviation, and sustainable development in Nigeria is complex and multifaceted. The integration of a liberal feminist theoretical framework provides valuable insights into potential avenues for progress. By examining the nexus between gender equality, education, economic empowerment, and legal reforms, it becomes evident that empowering women is not only a matter of social justice but a catalyst for sustainable development. The strides made in improving women's literacy rates in Nigeria have far-reaching implications. Education equips women with the skills and knowledge necessary to actively participate in the workforce, breaking down traditional barriers and contributing to economic growth. As women become more integrated into the formal economy, poverty alleviation efforts gain momentum, leading to improved living standards for families and communities.

Moreover, the liberal feminist emphasis on legal and policy reforms is crucial for dismantling discriminatory practices that hinder women's progress. Ensuring equal access to education, employment opportunities, and participation in decision-making processes lays the foundation for a more inclusive and just society. As gender stereotypes are challenged and cultural norms evolve, the potential for sustainable development in Nigeria becomes even more promising.

Recommendations

- (a) Both the Federal and State governments in Nigeria, should adopt policies and initiatives that address financial limitations, cultural norms, and discriminatory behaviors in order to remove obstacles that prevent women and girls from pursuing higher education.

- (b) To improve women's abilities and boost their involvement in the formal sector, specific economic empowerment programs, like entrepreneurial courses and vocational training, should be designed and implemented.
- (c) Target-specific policies should be adopted to make it easier for women-led enterprises and projects to obtain financial resources, such as credit and micro lending options.
- (d) Relevant law making bodies should enact legislations that advance gender equality in the workplace, in education, and in other areas of public life to break down barriers that tend to undermine the potentials of the women folk.
- (e) Governments at all levels should carry out community-based awareness initiatives to dispel gender stereotypes and highlight the achievements that women have made to society.

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