

GENDER EQUALITY, WOMEN EMPOWERMENT AND SUSTAINABLE NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT: THE ROLE OF NIGERIAN LIBRARIES

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Abstract

Sustainable national development refers to present developments that are supposed to be devoid of negative consequences for future generations. Equal access to information, equal opportunities for men and women, women empowerment and girl child education are the catalysts for attaining sustainable national development. This paper examined the imperative of gender equality, women empowerment and the role of libraries in promoting gender equality and women empowerment for sustainable development in Nigeria. The paper noted that if all women get equal chance and freedom to make positive contributions to the development of their respective communities, there will be economic growth and informed citizens. The paper recommends that the Nigerian government should provide enabling environment for women to excel and contribute to nation building. Libraries should be properly funded by both government and well-meaning Nigerians to enable them deliver effective services that will foster growth and national development.

Keywords: Gender equality; Information literacy; National development, Women empowerment; Sustainable national development.

Introduction

Sustainable national development begins with the capability of a nation to satisfactorily provide meals, adequate infrastructure, precise health care services and enabling surroundings, which are needed with the aid of its people. The era of globalization is surrounded with a growing number of hopes for women and men. Mostly, a large number of investors recognize the importance of women as employees, project managers, leaders, buyers, retailers, entrepreneurs, and caretakers/ givers. They are adapting their policies, programmes and initiatives to create environments where women and girls thrive, sustainable national development is achievable provided the government and its citizens knows the right thing to do and how to do it. In knowing the right thing to do, people must have access to right information at right time meaning that there must be constant provision of current, adequate and relevant information in the society.

The role of Nigerian libraries in providing current information and literacy capabilities and competencies for men and women to benefit a competitive edge that will make them active global players in the knowledge-based economy, where information is a commodity and power for them to be on top of the current happenings around the globe. Men and women must engage in information seeking for research, personal development and effective decision-making. Effective decision-making can easily be accomplished by having access to the right information, in the right format at the right time, every citizen needs equal access to information regardless of their gender. Gender has been defined by the USAID (2007) as “the arrays of socially constructed roles and relationships personality traits, attitudes, behaviours, values and relative power and influence that society ascribes to the two sexes on a differential basis”.

Thus, no nation can record any significant development without utilising women’s potentials, in other words; national development requires gender equality for sustainability. Gender equality means the different behaviours, potentials and needs of women and men are considered, valued and favoured equally without any form of discrimination Uduigwomen (2004). It does not mean that women and men have to become the same, what it means is that their rights, duties and opportunities will not be shared according to their sex. Gender inequality in Africa is age-long issue that has greatly affects virtually every sector and all developmental process of many developing nation. This view was corroborated by Anaeme (2012) who reported that women and girl-child still have unequal access to education, healthcare, adequate housing, information, training and employment which is connected with traditional or cultural practices and as well as cultural beliefs in some African society.

Every African society has its own peculiar culture and believes that have been reported by previous scholars to have directly impacted negatively on the enrolment of girl child education in most African countries particularly in the northern part of Nigeria. Studies of Mango (2008) unveiled the setback posed by the cultural and religious practices of some Muslim women in the Northern states of Nigeria to include marriage practices and Purdah, stereotype. Fear of the contents of the curriculum and school life experiences leading to moral decadence of girls or fear of educated women being a threat to a man as a result of their level of exposure or their interaction with people from different background coupled with the parents’ financial status and so on were among the reasons reported by Mango as factors that contributed to the uneven gap between girl child and boy’s education.

Similarly, the UNICEF (2002), reported the prevalence of out of school girls to have dominance over that of boys among the 120 million children who have never been to school in the developing world; to buttress this point Tuwora and Sossoub (2008) reported that "most research works conducted in developing countries observed that females’ education level is very low as a

result of factors such as cultural, political and job inequalities when compared with males”. Despite the fact that women representing half of the global population, research still shows that only 20 % of women are found in the world's legislators, cases of violence against women have been on the increase, women are more than 40 percent in the agriculture labour force but 3 to 20% are landowners which shows that gender inequality is still high in some developing countries like Nigeria particularly in terms of empowerment opportunities.

Women's empowerment has become one of the global issues that attract different researchers, non-governmental and government agencies due to the fact that the role of women in national development can never be over-emphasized; it is part of the developmental strategies which is targeted at gender balance, poverty reduction, zero hunger, citizens improved standard of living, good governance and profitably productive entrepreneurship that are crucial to the creation of an enlarged economy that provides men and women with equal opportunity and free access to decision-making, policy formulation and implementation (Mango, 2006). In view of the need for women to actively participate in nation building and developmental processes, the Nigerian libraries have tailored their operations, services and conferences towards the attainment of the national development.

Libraries are established to cater for the information needs of its users and the user communities are the citizens of the country and or the foreigners who resides in the community where the library is located or the researchers who are in need of data from the library. Among the types of libraries that are found in Nigeria are school, public, state, national, academic, special, research and so on. All these types of libraries are headed by the key players (Librarians) who oversees the affairs of the library for effective library delivery. To deliver effective services, libraries must acquire or subscribe to books and journals both in print and non-print formats, process, store, create awareness, organize seminars, workshops on career development and capability building through access to current. Knowledge and training on entrepreneurial and employment skills provided by libraries will enable Nigerian women to identify and utilize their potentials to improve the situation.

Libraries need to partner with vocational institutions to increase the visions and ideas of the users' communities for sustainable development. Young women and adults can be tutored on different apprenticeship skills that improve their knowledge in wealth creation, enable them to be creative and self-confidence; derive fulfillment in their areas of interest, enable the reduction of poverty and increase of employment opportunity and improve standard of living of the users' community.

Bradly (2015) posited that library services aid the development of sustainable development goals in enhancing an excellent and better result through improvement in the provision of universal literacy. Library can subscribe to online employment related information resources, these information resources are to be accessed and used by the girls, young adult and old women for personal, societal and national development provided they have the literacy skills required to utilize them.

Statement of the Problem

Sustainable global goals have been adopted by 193 countries around the world to eradicate poverty, end discrimination against women and girls, to reduce inequality and promote just cities among others. Despite efforts made particularly by Nigerian government, studies still show that nearly “98 million girls were not in school, globally, 1 in 3% of women would experience gender-based violence in her lifetime, in the developing world, 1 in 7 girls is married before her 15th

birthday, some child brides as young as eight or nine” (UN, 2012). Report has shown that in every year more than 287,000 women, 99 percent of them in developing countries, die from pregnancy- and childbirth-related complications, Nigerian President (2017) said that “about 65 million Nigerians are illiterate” Vanguard, (Sept. 2017) which females forms the largest part. It is against this backdrop that the researchers deem it fit to determine the role of libraries in the attainment of sustainable national development through gender equality and women empowerment. Arising from the foregoing, this paper examined the imperative of gender equality, women empowerment and the role of libraries in promoting gender equality and women empowerment for sustainable development in Nigeria

Conceptualization

Information literacy

Access to information is key, knowing how to search and use information is crucial as it helps to support the rapid attainment of national development. The role of information literacy in the attainment of sustainable development can never be over emphasized due to the fact that a well-informed woman will know the information she needs to make effective decisions in her life, home, community and the society at large. While doing this, such woman will be able to support her family, community members and the federal government in the fight against misinformation and mal-information by filtering or fact checking information that comes her way before disseminating it to other people. Women who are literate and educated see the potential and need to filter information before sharing.

Who is an information literate woman? A woman who is literate is she that can determine the extent of information needed in her life; access the needed information effectively and efficiently; evaluate information and its sources critically; add the selected information to her stock of knowledge; use information effectively to accomplish a specific goal; understand the economic, legal, and social issues surrounding the use of information; and access and use information ethically and legally, without infringing on the right of the owner.

Discussion

Role of Gender Equality in Sustainable National Development

Gender inequality is still deep-rooted in every society. Women suffer from lack of access to decent work and face occupational segregation and gender wage gaps. In many situations, they are denied access to basic education, health care and are victims of violence and discrimination. They are under-represented in political and economic decision-making processes.

With the aim of better addressing these challenges and to identify a single recognized driver to lead and coordinate United Nations (UN) activities on gender equality issues, the UN Women was established in 2010. The motive behind the establishment was to eliminate any form of discrimination against women and girls, empowerment of women, and achievement of equality between women and men as partners and beneficiaries of development, human rights, humanitarian action, peace and security. For women and girls to reach their full potential requires that they have equal opportunities with men and boys. This means eliminating all forms of discrimination and violence against them, including violence by intimate partners, sexual violence and other harmful practices. The goals of the UN Women initiative include to ensure:

- i. positive improvement in women and girl child’s education through regular sensitization programmes will increase population of educated and literate women in the society;

- ii. free access to quality education for adolescent girls will encourage more parents to send their female children to schools and that will boost level of literacy in Nigeria;
- iii. political development and good governance through equal access to current and relevant information resources will give women the opportunity to contribute to national development;
- iv. general infrastructural development through equal access to job creation resources and entrepreneurship will prosper women to be employers of labour for sustainable growth.
- v. improved economic growth through equal participation of men and women in business activities;
- vi. promote health care delivery (local, state and global level) through access to health information and free medical services will reduce maternal mortality thereby reduce the risk associated with pregnancies and child delivery.
- vii. Promote social development of families, communities and nations through current sensitization exercises, job creation, wealth creation projects and conditioner cash transfers;
- viii. Establish more stable and just societies through sustainable cities, equal treatment, human right protection etc.
- ix. Increase the capacity of law enforcement agencies to address, investigate and prosecute the high prevalence of child marriage and all forms of harmful practices that will jeopardize women growth.

Impact of Women Empowerment on Sustainable Development

Empowerment plays a vital role in the lives of women, their families, friends, and society at large as it fosters women and girls' empowerment. In view of the need to reduce all forms of violence against women and for women to contribute to national development, the authors have identified and underlisted the roles of women empowerment in national development. When women have equal opportunity with their men counter parts, it will lead to the following:

- i. Reduce corruption by changing the conditions that led to economic instability in the country because the pressure on men and quest for men to make ends meet as a result of being the only provider of daily needs in the family will reduce, since the women are also taking care of some financial aspects of the day-to-day running of their immediate family, thus the cash inflow in every family will be from both parents;
- ii. Reduce poverty level by engaging women in wealth creation activities which gives them the opportunity of becoming employers of labour;
- iii. Reduce the risk of child and maternal mortality through regular antenatal and sensitization programmes, access to current information and health tips will change the perception of the rural women and those who believes in traditional child delivery and health care systems; get above 50% or more likely to have their child immunized;
- iv. Make girl informed as a well-informed girl child will develop self-defense mechanisms against being taken advantage of;
- v. Sensitize women on regular basis to make them less likely to contact HIV/AIDS through regular attendance of sensitization programmes;
- vi. Makes women or girls less likely to become victims of domestic or sexual abuse;
- vii. Gives women enabling environment to trade and contribute to their family's income
- viii. Ensure women stays healthier and tend to have greater self-esteem and self-confidence at all times;

- ix. Reduce discrimination and stereotypes or labeling of women in the society

Role of Library in Promoting Sustainable Development

The role played by libraries in national development can never be over emphasized. A well-informed society contributes greatly to the development of any given nation as the availability and utilisation of relevant and current information resources will promote peaceful and all inclusive societies for sustainable development, providing access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels (Bradley, 2015). The role of libraries in promoting sustainable development are underscored by the following:

- i. Library provides access to current and relevant information resources in print and electronic formats to ensure citizens are well informed and possibly through literacy sensitization programmes.
- ii. Effective library services contribute to improved outcomes across the sustainable development by promoting universal young and adult literacy, digital literacy, media and information literacy.
- iii. Library services close information gaps between government and the citizens through provision of current governmental information and access to Information & Communications Technologies (ICT).
- iv. Library provides access to information on health, environmental, education, agricultural information, economic, political, social, cultural, legal and other ground breaking development which will greatly enhance national development.
- v. Library organizes workshop and training on entrepreneurial skills for women and girls in order to equip them with the relevant skills.
- vi. Library create awareness on how women can prevent all forms of abuse to avoid becoming victims of domestic or sexual abuse.
- vii. Library creates conducive environment for impactful gathering, makerspaces where women ideas can be turned into realities, spaces for collaboration and networking for serious business engagements.
- viii. Library create serene environment for innovation and creativity.
- ix. Library provide access to information resources that can help women to learn how to do what they are doing better and to know how to do what the intend doing better and easier.

All the aforementioned roles are possible and achievable if the libraries are well equipped and funded.

Conclusion

As women empowerment is vital to the development of any nation, so also must gender equality be seen as a right that is as fundamental as any other in the national and international bills of rights. This is because in the long run, discrimination against a gender consequently breeds violation of the discriminated persons' other basic rights such as education and right to expression. Women make up for a very vital part of Nigeria's economic, social and political lives. However, due to discrimination against them, their potentials are under-utilized. It is therefore imperative for the Nigerian government to provide enabling environment for women to excel in order to effectively contribute to nation building.

Recommendations

- (a) Government and well-meaning Nigerians should empower women and use their labour force for sustainable economic and national growth.
- (b) Protecting the rights of women by creating enabling environment for them to make positive contributions to national development is a necessary step to ensure equality and sustainable development.
- (c) Libraries should be properly funded to deliver effective services to foster growth and national development.
- (d) Librarians should commit to sensitizing the community on the importance of gender equity and women empowerment to enhance the attainment of sustainable development.

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