



## FEMALE EDUCATION AND POVERTY REDUCTION IN NIGERIA

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<p><b>Received:</b> 17<sup>th</sup> July 2022 <b>Accepted:</b> 17<sup>th</sup> August 2022 <b>Published:</b> 30<sup>th</sup> September 2022</p>	<p>The major objective of this study is to examine the contribution of female education to poverty reduction in Nigeria. It posits on the correction of educational imbalance that existed between the females and their male counterparts in Nigeria during the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Analytical survey design was used to enumerate the various advantages and contributions of female education to poverty reduction in Nigeria. According to 2010 National census, more than 58percent of Nigeria's population are females. Denying the female folk their rightful place Nigeria's economic development does not only result in prejudice but economic sabotage. Females in Nigeria have the ability to engage in well-paid jobs, contribute to household economic welfare, maintain the health functions of the family, thereby contributing meaningfully to the country's Gross Domestic Product. The study therefore recommends that: females should be given equal opportunity with their male counterparts in educational pursuits; there should be legislation against forced and early marriages in the country; the illiterate idea of subjecting the female to slavery status should be abolish and women fertility rates especially in the rural settings should be reduced through formal education</p>

**Keywords:** Female Education, Poverty Reduction and Nigeria.

### INTRODUCTION:

Among factors that breed poverty in Nigeria, women illiteracy has been identified as one of the institutional factors that inhibit the growth of personal income. Others may include gender discrimination in educational opportunities, corruption, income inequality, political insecurity and the lopsided development of the country. The economic policies of many developing countries of the world such as Cuba, Argentina, Ghana and Nigeria are centered on poverty reduction especially, the eradication of extreme poverty. Some of the roots causes of poverty in any society include women illiteracy, poor health services and low income consumption.

### CONCEPTUAL ISSUES

#### Female Education in Nigeria

Women in Nigeria have had several challenges in obtaining equal education with their male counterparts. Formal Education was introduced to Nigeria alongside Colonization and Christianity by the Britons at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. Due to rigid ideas about female participation in education, there was always preference of the male child to the female in terms of educational opportunities. The female child's

role in the family was restricted to sexual and commercial labour such as weeding in the farm, carrying loads, tending babies and preparing food. Sometimes the choice of who to educate in the family favoured not only gender but birth order and endowments. This disempowering mentality became the springboard for gender educational imbalance in most parts of Africa.

Generally, the Nigerian society (both historical and contemporary) is replete with cultural practices that are averse to women development. These include early/ forced marriage, wife inheritance and widowhood practice as observed by Ubek (2010). In many developing communities in Nigeria poverty takes a feminine gender, despite women's contribution to income generation activities such as fishing, farming, trading and cattle rearing. They are always considered among the poorest of the poor in the society despite their roles in the continuation of human species, community and social development (Amir, *et.al*, 2010).

In the developing countries plagued by poverty, women have less nutrition, less access to clothing and shelter, less health care and less education than their male counterparts. A One-time President of the world Bank, Barber Conabel decried this dreadful gender



apartheid and observed that even in the industrial economies, jobs are often made easier for men than women despite their educational status whereas women do two third of the world's work, yet they earn one tenth of the world's income and own less than one percent of world's property.

During the immediate post-colonial Nigeria, educations curricular especially in secondary schools were tailored towards developing women as teachers, nurses and clerks. Men were better disposed to becoming engineers, medical doctors, lawyers, architects and politicians. This professional disparity led to acute shortage of qualified female manpower at the top echelon of civil and public service jobs as well as leadership positions in governance. This situation was further aggravated by patriarchal practices which gave the girl child no right to traditional succession (Achume, 2004).

#### **Nigeria's Poverty Profile**

The institutional factors that breed poverty in Nigerian include: corruption, income inequality, long term ethnic conflict and civil unrest, political instability and lop-sided development programmes (UNICEF, 2014). Apart from these institutional factors, illiteracy, poor health consumption and gender discrimination have also inhibited the growth of personal income. Gender discrimination and feminization of poverty has become a global challenge. This may be defined as prejudice on a certain gender (mostly women and girls) as a result of illiteracy, lack of civilization, religious taboos or tradition. These go with the erroneous belief that one gender (especially men) is superior to the women whereas poverty reduction and rapid socio-economic development of a nation can be achieved when the women are as educated as their male counterparts (Alderman et al, 2013).

Other factors contributing to the evolution of poverty in Nigeria include problems in the productive sector, widening income inequality, weak governance, social conflict, and inter - sectorial and environmental issues. Nigerian economy has a very narrow and weak base, depending mostly on exportation of petroleum crude oil as a major source of income. The agricultural base of the economy has been long frustrated. High and growing unemployment has also exacerbated the level of poverty in Nigerian (World Bank, 2013)

Apart from structural and institutional causes, one of the most identifiable causes of poverty in Nigeria is corruption. Those vested with the constitutional powers to allocate resources among various sectors of the economy rather choose to enrich themselves by staking away the nation's hard earnings into personal accounts in foreign countries. Following Nigeria's political history, the economy is often looted by a few

privileged persons at the detriment of the entire populace.

The economy of Nigeria in the past four decades has been 80 percent dependent on crude oil sales. Government earnings on the sales of crude oil decreased from US\$85 to about US\$35 per barrel in 2015 due to down pricing of crude petroleum in the international market. Consequently, the Buhari administration began a gradual removal of government subsidies on petroleum products. This led to sudden and astronomical increases in the prices of petroleum products such as Premium Motor Spirit (PMS) and other petroleum products. With the exertion of excessive financial burdens on consumers in the downstream sectors, the entire country experiences high inflation and general poverty.

There is prevalence of high unemployment which affects wage rate adversely. Wage rate reduces as unemployment rate increases. The low wage rate in Nigeria can also be attributed to the inefficient distribution of National income, inflation and the low Purchasing Power Parity (PPP) of the Naira which value has depreciated, over time. With the country's high dependence on crude oil revenue and the non-diversification of her economy, there is persistent unfavorable balance of payment (BOP) in Nigeria's foreign trade. The spillover effect is that of persistent dependence on foreign goods at the detriment of domestic industries. This results in leakages of the country's domestic and foreign reserves.

The increasing crime rate in the Nigerian society also engenders poverty. The civil unrest perpetrated by Boko Haram in the North-East and the Militants in the South-South regions of Nigeria have become unbearable since 2012. The country's resources have been diverted to fighting of wars with insurgent groups with extra-budgetary expenditure for the execution of this warfare. This leads to some several distortions of macro-economic variables in the economy. Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) and refugees of insurgencies in various communities are vulnerable to hardship and poverty.

Like many developing countries, poverty in Nigeria was considered to be a rural phenomenon. This fails to hold sway in the present decade in that urban centers and cities are also ravaged by poverty. However, rural dwellers suffer more from poverty by being predominantly low income earners through farming, fishing, and cattle rearing, hunting and other petty occupations. They lack basic life amenities and social infrastructure such as good roads, electricity, pipe borne water and recreational facilities. This trend is depicted on the Urban/Rural incidence of poverty by different poverty measures on table 1, below.



**Table 1: Rural Incidence of Poverty by Different Poverty Measures**

SECTOR	FOOD POOR	ABSOLUTE POOR	RELATIVE POOR	DOLLAR PER DAY
Urban	27.7	52.0	61.8	52.4
Rural	48.3	66.1	73.8	66.3

Source: The Nigeria Poverty Report, CBN 2017.

## THEORITICAL ISSUES

### Human Capital Theory on Health

In the words of Yesufu (2000); education and training are generally indicated as the most important means of upgrading the human intellect and skills for productive employment". However, human capital development transcends mere acquisition of intellectual ability through formal education system. It is dynamic and multi-institutional, including the family, the educational system, formal an informal institution, special professions and training organization; enterprise in-house arrangement; and even individual self- efforts. Education has positive impacts on the economy. Therefore, investment in education and training is imperative if the aim is to propel the economy to higher levels of productivity and income and thereby accelerate the rate of economic and technological growth.

Education increases the number of knowledgeable workers by improving their skills and enabling them to meet new challenges. In addition, education enhances occupational mobility, reduces the level of unemployment in the economy, increases the earning capacity and productivity of the country's workforce, improves access to health information which increases life expectancy and at the same time lowers the fertility rate. Education also enhances income distribution and social equity. For example, the success story of East Asia was largely because of successful education strategies (World Bank, 2010). In other words the economic benefits of human capital accumulation stem from the fact that people are made more productive by improving their nutritional health, education and other social indices through adequate and proper investments.

Quite unfortunately, the Nigerian educational system is not properly tailored toward the country's industrial development objectives. Despite the number of trained engineers and scientist produced by polytechnics and universities, there is no significant contribution towards the country's indigenous technological advancement. The major motive of being educated has been that of securing white collar jobs with the government. This has led to bloated growth of the public sector whereas the private sector economy has remained underdeveloped.

Another factor affecting educational development in Nigeria is gender inequality in educational opportunities, depending on the cultural values of different segments of the society. For instance, among the Igbo speaking states, female enrollment in both primary and secondary institutions exceed that of their male counterparts. Male children engage more in petty trading, hawking and learning of vocation. Whereas in the North Eastern parts of Nigeria and other patriarchal societies, investment in female education is considered a waste either because of poverty, tradition or religious bias, therefore reducing gender inequality through greater access to education and labour market will help to reduce poverty in Nigeria. It has the potential of increasing the rate of economic, technological and industrial advancement.

### Female Education and Poverty Reduction

Educated women play positive roles in societal development and are likely to earn income, have fewer unwanted pregnancies and break the cycle of poverty. There is a multiplier effect to educating women in that more educated women tend to be healthier, participate more in formal labour market, earn more income, have fewer children, all of which eventually improve the well-being of the society through poverty reduction. As the primary health producer of the family, she is able to develop skill for labour market participation. This attracts high wages which gives social and economic security to other members of the family. This in turn helps to reduce poverty in the society (Ubek, 2010).

Women education has been identified by kishor & Limlim (2006) as the strongest factor of tackling household poverty through its improvement of the socio-economic status of the family. Nwabu (2007) identifies women education as a crucial factor to rapid economic transformation and poverty reduction. The most important ingredient of employment opportunity is education, especially higher education. Education enhances the woman's ability to learn a trade or secure a white collar job thereby increasing her productivity and reducing household poverty. Education bestows on a woman the disposition for a lifelong acquisition of knowledge, values, attitudes, competence and skills (Aliu, 2001). Education is a basic human right and has



been recognized as such since the 1948 adoption of the Universal Declaration on Human Rights.

Among other factors responsible for societal poverty, illiteracy makes a woman vulnerable to health hazards, sexually transmitted diseases (including HIV/AIDs), and unwanted pregnancies as well as social and family abuse (Umoh, 2012). This is probably so because uneducated women are denied property rights and access to borrow funds for self-development in the society. Women in Nigeria are harder-hit by poverty than their male counterparts due to high illiteracy rates and early marriages. Most rural women lack access to good nutrition, clothing, and shelter and health facility utilization. A positive correlation exists between the enrolment of girls in primary school and Gross National Product (GNP) as well as increase of life expectancy (Ojo , 2010). Based of this correlation, enrolments in schools represent the largest component of the investment in human capital in any society (Schultz, 2013).

Rapid socio-economic development of a nation has been observed to depend on the caliber of women and their education in that country (Nussbaum &Martha, 2003). According to the International Center for Research on Women, the girl education is the strongest predictor of the age she will marry and a critical factor in reducing child marriage (Jain et al, 2006). Estimates by World Bank (2010) have it that an additional year of schooling for 1000 women can prevent two maternal deaths. In the same vein each additional year of a mother's formal education translates to her children staying in school for a school year. Herz and Spellings (2004) articulate the benefits of women education to include, availability of women who are capable to resist debilitating practices against them, such as; Female genital mutilation, early marriage, and domestic abuse of female by the male.

Many policy analysts consider women literacy rates as a crucial measure to a region's human capital. This is based on the fact that literate women can be trained less expensively than illiterate ones. Educated women have a higher socio-economic status and enjoy better health and employment prospects (Mark et al., 2014). Illiterate women are more vulnerable to poverty as working class women are economically more beneficial to their families.

Women education has contributed immensely to the socio-economic, cultural, political, scientific and technological advancement of Nigeria. Educated women in Nigeria, have greater access to land, jobs and financial resources. Their increased earning power in turn raises household incomes. Enhancing women's control over decision-making in the community has

translated into better prospect and greater well-being of their children. This also reduces poverty for future generations. Educating women is not only one of the biggest moral challenges of our generation; it is also a necessary investment for a peaceful and poverty-free world.

Women education has brought a commensurate rise in the standard of living, life expectancy and social well-being in Nigeria. Educating the girl child is known to be the basis for sound economic and social development as it produces mothers who in turn educate their children, care for their families and provide their children with adequate nutrition.

Within the past three decades, Nigerian Government has shown much commitment to women education and development in compliance with many international conventions on the rights of women. There is a commensurate rise in female enrolment at all levels of education in Nigeria. Gender disparity in educational opportunities is now a thing of the past. Consequently, women in Nigeria have contributed immensely to the socio- economic, cultural political, scientific and technological advancement of Nigeria. Women education in Nigeria has brought about enormous economic benefits, including decreased social burdens on government, increased family income, greater workforce participation and a larger better prepaid workforce.

As means of economic and social empowerment, wives of state Governors have set-up skill acquisition centers for females to expose and enable them achieve useful livelihood. Some of these projects are technical and vocationally oriented. This has attracted the support of various local and International Non-Governmental and Faith-based Organizations. The last decade has also witnessed a relative increase in women political participation which is measured in terms of women who vote in election, the number of public offices held by women, and number of women related policies implemented by government.

The greater participation of women and their unique contributions to political and economic decisions has led to their advocacy for affirmative action on one-third of all political seats in the country. Nigerian women have taken over the reign of affairs in the country's governance and political arena by becoming Chairmen of various Local Government Areas, Secretaries to Government in various states and Legislators both at the state and national office. Some of the women have acquired the pedigree for appointment into key positions in government and politics.



Others have contributed to the rapid development of Nigeria through their professions as medical doctors, high court judges, teachers, members of the clergy, counselors and University Dons. Nigerian women have become captains of industry, high ranking military officers and international celebrities in their fields of endeavor. Even in rural settings, some women groups have undertaken 'Better life' projects for their communities like electricity generating plants, water bore-hole, and building of houses for the aged people and widows.

UNICEF (2013) noted that women education is the best investment on poverty reduction because it is a key to achieving gender equality in the workplace and can bring about enormous economic benefits including decreased social burden on government, increased family income, gender workforce participation and a larger better prepaid workforce. The greater participation of women in economic activities and their unique contribution to development cannot be easily neglected in any progressive economy.

Educating women is not only one of the biggest moral challenges of our generation, it is also a necessary investment for the peaceful and poverty free world. Until we give women equal access to a good quality education, the world will continue to suffer from child and maternal mortality, disease and other by-products of poverty.

## CONCLUSION

The study concluded that women's education contributes positively to societal development. The socioeconomic, cultural, political, scientific, and technical growth of Nigeria is greatly aided by the education of women. According to the study, educating women is essential for accelerating economic change and reducing poverty. Education increases a woman's participation in the formal labor force, her income, and the number of children she bears, all of which contribute to a society's improvement through the reduction of poverty.

However, more than 58percent of Nigeria's population are females which signifies that denying the female folk their rightful place Nigeria's economic development does not only result in prejudice but economic sabotage. Finally, it was concluded that females in Nigeria have the ability to engage in well-paid jobs, contribute to household economic welfare, maintain the health functions of the family, thereby contributing meaningfully to the country's Gross Domestic Product.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Having discovered that female education is a sine-qua-non to lowering poverty prevalence rates in Nigeria, several actions ought to be taken by governments and all stake holders in the education sector to secure the rights and privileges of the girl child as follows:

1. Equal education opportunity must be given to both the female and the male child from birth by abolishing certain traditional values, norms and practices that uphold the superiority of the male child to the female.
2. Despite the implementation of some international conventions on the rights and privileges of the female child, Nigeria should legislate against certain obnoxious practices against women such as; wife inheritance, widowhood practice and forced / early marriages.
3. Adult and non-formal education centers should be established and properly run in all local government areas in the country so as to increase the literacy rates among women.
4. There should be public enlightenment programmes by government on the radio, television and in the streets; on issues such as utilization of health care facilities, use of contraceptives and family planning as means of reducing women fertility rates and mortality rates while giving birth.
5. Primary and post primary education should be made free and compulsory to children of school age (both male and female) with adequate provision of books and other accessories.

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