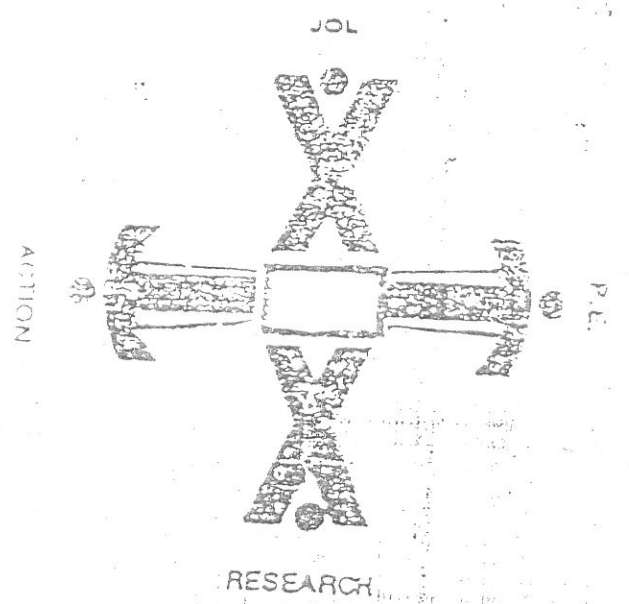


JOURNAL OF PHYSICAL EDUCATION AND RESEARCH (JOPER)



Editorial

JOPER, an International Journal is delighted to publish the 5th issue in this edition for the year 2000. Articles in the issue covers areas bordering on: Playing ability of elite squash players; Saturation of some cooking oils; Computerized scheduling of referees to Matches; Movement of Professional Librarians within academic library; Physical Education in Nation building; Self reported gender Behavioural Characteristics and Sports officiating.

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TOWARDS THE MAXIMISATION OF WOMEN'S POTENTIALS FOR DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

Women constitute a fairly high percentage of the population, and yet, they are in the background of national activities, development and education. For developmental purposes, it is necessary to educate the female population, who lag behind the males and to maximize their potentials. The present paper delves into this, with specific focus on maximizing their potentials for national development.

INTRODUCTION

In Nigeria, women are at the background in many areas of the national life such as Education. This could be as a result of the way females are perceived in the community. Nwabara, (1985) noted that women are traditionally regarded as inferior to men. Therefore, the culture places much premium on the male child. For example, the birth of a male child calls for celebration, while some fathers do not count it necessary to do likewise when a female child is born into the family. In fact, it is customary for men without male offspring to take on more wives, with the hope of having at least a male child. Many parents also perceive that after marriage, they no longer have any responsibility to the female child. Since she "belongs" to the family she has married into and no more the one she was born into. This is why many parents are reluctant to invest in female children and also why many parents would want to marry off their female wards as early as possible, so that they (the parent) do not invest too much on the wards. If a female child resists such a move, she is harassed and pressurized by the family, relatives, friends and society until she gets married (Nwabara, 1995).

The upbringing of the male child and the female child may be different in the home. Usually, the female is expected to help with the house hold chores in most families, while the boy goes out to play. From an early age, the female child is trained towards her future roles of a wife, mother and homemaker. The training towards the future role of the father is

usually not deemed necessary in some homes for the male child.

In poor homes, the female child may be deprived of the opportunity to be educated to enable her brothers go to school. In school, achievement expectations differ for males and females. Emphasis is frequently placed on a boy to do well and achieve high placed on a girl. This type of achievement training often influence the achievement level of a girl. Quite often, high status professions like Engineering and Technology oriented professions are usually deemed suitable for males but not for females. One may therefore find that at the end of the day, a girl may not go far educationally or may not achieve as high as she can even when she has the potential to do so. Under these circumstances, the potentialities of females in the society may not be tapped appropriately when she is not "channeled" into appropriate work roles and professions.

In addition, on entering the workforce, the discrimination in dealing with male and female employees may continue. For instance, a man may qualify for accommodation and some other facilities, but the same opportunities may not be extended to the woman. A woman may also find that she is taxed more heavily than her male counterpart. And in some instances, such as getting international passport, a woman needs the consent of a male, before it can be granted. Treatments such as these bring about a poor self image in females and

can prevent many females from aspiring and improving on their talents and potentials.

Of note and importance is the fact that early life messages received about self as a females, affect one's self image and concept. Such messages may affect life assumptions, which inevitably affect one's self esteem, achievement motivation and orientation, and one's success. Furthermore, robust differences have been found between self role identity and self-esteem. Masculine males have been found to have higher self-esteem and to be more competent than

feminine females. (Barret and Tisley, 1977) Moreover, individuals with low self-esteem have been found to perform poorly in achievement setting than individuals with high self-esteem. Females, who are usually low in self-esteem may choose occupations below their ability, personality and interest (Greenhaus, 1971). Hollander and Parker (1971) also believed that occupational choices depend on self description and vocational stereotypes. This probably explains why more females are found in low cadre of professions as table one will reveal

TABLE ONE: MALES AND FEMALES IN SELECTED PROFESSIONS

	30 - 6 - 83		31 - 3 - 84		30 - 6 - 84	
	No. of male	No. of female	No. of male	No. of female	No. of male	No. of female
Admin Officer	1533	295	1179	260	1179	258
Professional & Scientific	10360	1823	9865	2033	9870	2100
Sub-Prof. Scientific & Technical	9284	792	11638	766	12057	823
Executive Grade	4055	724	3720	647	3841	652
Clerical Officer	18370	2590	16300	2329	16146	2418
Mino Supervisory Grades, etc.	18110	859	21385	842	21499	934
Messengers, Cleaners, Stewards, etc.	34980	9637	39372	11664	39499	11474

Source: Ekpiken, 1990

Nigerian Women: Labour and employment. A publication of Nigerian Association of University women.

In Nigeria today, it is no more a taboo for women to read Law, political Science, medicine, engineering, architecture, and most of other professions, which were hitherto the exclusive preserve of men. No doubt, the gradual increase of women in the above mentioned professions are due to the opportunity of having basic education. Women are also making a gradual impact in the other areas of the nation's life.

TOWARD THE MAXIMIZATION OF WOMEN'S POTENTIALS FOR DEVELOPMENT

In Nigeria today, it is no more a taboo for women to read Law, political Science, Medicine, engineering, architecture, and most of other professions, which were hitherto the exclusive preserve of men. No doubt, the gradual increase of women in the above mentioned professions is due to the opportunity of having basic education. Women are also making a gradual impact in the other areas of the nation's life.

TOWARDS THE MAXIMIZATION OF WOMEN'S POTENTIALS FOR DEVELOPMENT

Development involves growth and transformations geared towards improvement in the quality of life of a nation's citizens, (Alele-Williams, 1986). Women have been known to contribute their quota to Nigeria's development. Women in the traditional setting are farmers, traders, weavers and so on. In their own way, they contribute to the nation's economy. They can however still do more. The first step to do to realize this is by equipping them with education, the Western way. For as noted by Alele-Williams, (1986), education is an investment in human capital that equips the individual with knowledge and skill to participate in economic activities. Towards these goals, the disparity in education of males and females which widens at every other successive level of education needs to be bridged.

Women are usually disadvantaged in any sphere even in education. They constitute the majority of illiterates anywhere in the world. Yet, most children spend more time with their mothers than their fathers, and there is a limit to the extent that an illiterate mother be able to train up her child to bring about a blended personality, that would be able to function well in today's changing world. Yet, the sum total of individual personalities is the sum total of the entity called Nigeria.

Women are believed to constitute 78.4% of the world's illiterates and constitute only 2.5% of people in higher positions in Africa, (Canadian council for international cooperation, 1991), and in a country like Nigeria that ranks fifth on the world's illiterates ladder, the answer as to what percentage of women in Nigeria are literates cannot be far-fetched. Therefore, any meaningful efforts towards gearing the nation for full participation in the challenges of the 21st century cannot leave women behind.

Yet, in this context, the level of literacy amongst Nigerians is still not encouraging.

For example, according to a Federal Ministry of Education bulletin "Education today", September 1992, school enrolment fell to 13.76 million in 1991, from 16.15 million recorded in 1983. This is in a country that should be increasing its literate population.

There are many advantages in educating more women. For example, the health of the nation can be improved if more women are educated. (Imam, Pitt and Oniele, 1985). Furthermore, since women constitute about fifty percentage of the population, (Nigerian Tribune, March 20, 1992, p.1), leaving such a high percentage of the population not adequately educated as the men would bring setback to the development of the country. Moreover, by tapping women's potentials, the country would be making strides towards its dream of technological advancement. The women would be able to contribute their quota to the political, social and economic development of the country.

If women, by virtue of their being important socializing agents as mothers, are equipped with education, they would be able to help rid the country of ignorance, cultural taboos, and superstitious beliefs. These are issues that can retard the nation's development and advancement. Therefore, the government should give women the necessary tools or equipment to make them (women) participate fully in national development. This can only be made possible when the larger percentage of women are literate rather than being illiterate. To achieve this goal, it will be necessary to make education free and compulsory for all female children of school age, and to any level the child can go. There ought to be stiff penalties for guardians of wards who may try to sabotage the efforts of the government. In furtherance of this, asking female children to be hawking and trading at any period of the day must be stopped. For this directive to be made most effective, the government should make provisions for most people to live comfortably, so that the need to send children out to hawk, which more often than

lot, falls on the female child, would not be here.

The pathetic situation of the present where there are just a few female scientists, technologists and mathematicians can be changed by the government, parents and the schools. The female child should be allowed to go in for what her potentials and capabilities can take. An intelligent female child should not in any form be misled to hide her "intelligence". She should not be scared out of her wits by encouraging her to believe that it is "unfeminine" to be intelligent. If mechanical things and their operations catch her fancy, by all means, leave it to her. That is the only road to facilitate the innovations and technological development that Nigeria is seeking, and these can come from a female just as it can come from a male.

Educational textbooks, materials and equipments should be made free. Where this cannot be made possible for every female child, there should be a sort of education fund, at every state or local government level where a poor female child, who cannot be provided with the basic educational equipments would be able to go to seek aid, so that she can have what she needs in school. Successful private companies especially foreign ones should be made to contribute towards such. On successful completion of her schooling, she can be allowed to pay back instalmentally the loans she took while in school.

Adult literacy centers should be established at various centers in the rural areas and strategic places in urban areas. Such centers should pay special attention to women and their peculiar needs. Incentives to class members like loans for small scale industry may encourage people to attend. Also there should be appointment of capable women to executive positions within and outside the government. It may be necessary to make a policy that would make room for more women to be in parliament in the future. This will allow young females to have more role models. It will also show the notion that women cannot get to certain positions or should not be in certain

professions because of their sex, to be a myth.

The nation's population increases daily. And the irony remains that it is among the poor and the illiterates that you find a high density of population. Yet, the circle remains a vicious one. Thus, there must be a new orientation and greater awareness among this class of citizenry to curtail the number of children to the most minimum that they can train.

There is the need to collaborate other agencies apart from the agency for mass education in the attempt to eradicate illiteracy. Therefore, agencies such as DFRRI, national directorate of employment (NDE), the commission for nomadic education, and the family support programme must have as part of their campaigns, mass literacy of the people and practical steps towards his agenda must be put in place. The non-governmental organizations (NGOS) expertise must be harnessed to these efforts.

It must be noted that there is no where in the world where education is cheap. Thus, mass literacy for the people would be an expensive exercise. The government, can seek the assistance of the private sector in this regard and international organization World Health Organisation, United Nations Development Programme and United Nations International Children Education Fund. But for these sectors to contribute meaningfully, it must be seen that the country is not out on a goose chase, or that she has again embarked on one of her "elephant" projects. They would then not be tired of continuing their contributions.

Particular attention must be focused on women and children as noted before, because they constitute the vast majority of the illiterate population and special programmes could be put in place for them, that aims specifically on education.

The neglected minorities should also be focused. And in this wise, special programmes should be put in place for the nomads, street children, the disabled in the society and the riverine people. The local governments impacts must be felt in these

different areas practically. Peoples' awareness should be raised to the dangers of illiteracy in the society and should then be encouraged to help educate at least one person in their environment if they have the means.

Different organizations in the country and voluntary organizations like the Rotary International, the Lions Club can be brought in to help fund such mass literacy programmes and provide materials. Different classes could be established for market women or bricklayers for instance. Such classes should be close to where there is a conglomeration of such people. The unemployed youths could be employed as instructors and supervisors for the different classes. A special scheme could be put in place to force street children back to the classroom. A legislation could be put in place to discourage parents from withdrawing their wards from schools.

Again, religious organizations should begin to think of how to make themselves relevant to social issues where they are. The tendency to attend only to souls of members should be looked into. They must be able to touch the lives of their congregation in practical ways and means. There can be no sermon that would be greater than that. There are many issues that should be looked into what are they able to do about children whose parents cannot afford school fees, parents who do not see the relevance of education and therefore withdraw their kids from school, parents who think investing in a girls education is waste of resources.

They should be able to attend to the needs of illiterate adults in their midst too, by having adults classes just like some have day care centers and private schools these days. Knowing that adults have their own needs too, and the advantages accrued to even children from having literate parents. This would be highly commendable. They themselves must not be seen as being agents of oppression, for though every religion believes women to be submissive, submission must not be seen as being

correlates of oppression. There is a wide gap between the two.

They should also see the need to put into motion, the mechanisms of reducing the poverty level among the poor members in their midst either through loans, cooperative societies and the like such that the economic power of parents can be enhanced and there would be no need to withdraw wards from school. They should also help to put up an awareness of the responsibilities of parents to their wards, which includes training in character and God's ways, and also the training that would make them function in today's world.

Religious leaders must be courageous, to save facts from fallacies. Opinions and injunctions, indeed, remembering that God watches every action of man and that all must be pleasing to him.

Within the religious circles, the practice of relegating women to the background should stop. It must be realized that women having being created from men, means in effect that men are incomplete without women. This perception should not stop, in the home, but in every sphere of life, women must be partners in development.

Women by virtue of their motherly "functions" are the most important agents of socialization, they therefore can and should be the most important "vehicle" for change. They need to appreciate themselves as females and place great premium on their own self confidence. When this is achieved they can instill this idea in their own female children. When this starts from individual homes, it will permeate the society.

Furthermore, stereotypical beliefs such as the belief that women are weak, should not be taken as "gospel truth." As noted by Miller, (1973), everyone either male or female, is weak, but just in different areas. In the home, the slogan should not just be "what a boy can do, a girl can do better" but also that "what a girl can do better" do better. Nothing debars a boy from cleaning the house and nothing says he cannot cook. When this happens, even the burden on mothers, especially the working

mothers would be greatly reduced and such stereotypes can begin to crumble.

Parents must also be aware of the important roles they can play in the lives of their female children. They should be encouraged to shape the future of their children and to train them towards occupational roles rather than just domesticity. Further, men need to be trained too in a new way, if efforts at improving the conditions of women is to make any significant progress. They men need not feel threatened to see a female striving to achieve as high as they are doing, nor feel that she is out of place in a "man's field".

The government too should strive to take steps that would improve the condition of the working mother. There should be adequate provision and improvement in our health care facilities, such that there will be adequate number of clinics and hospitals, well equipped with necessary drugs and personnel. When this is done, the stress on the working mothers will be reduced to a great extent. For, she will be able to take her sick child to a clinic close to her place of work, keep the child there if necessary, confident that the child is being taken care of properly.

If she is at work, she will not have undue tension about what is happening at home, since she knows that if there is an emergency, her child will be taken to the nearest clinic or hospital, and there will be no undue damage done to her child as a result of her being a working mother. This will also reduce incidences whereby mothers are called away from work to attend to their children.

Nigeria also needs to, as a nation, find other ways of helping to care for children when father and mother are working. Some countries of the world like Sweden take this as a national problem which must be solved (Ross, 1991). Nigeria must take a cue from such countries. Therefore day care centers and even night centers well equipped and comfortable for children must be established, and supervised by Government. Street hawking by girls should be discouraged.

Within the school setting, school psychologists and counselors should counsel the female students without bias. There is also the need to encourage girls to put out their maximum best in whatever they can do. Special counseling sessions may be necessary for them while seminars, where eminent women can be called to participate in, could also be organized. It will also be necessary for counselors to engage in periodic talk sessions with parents and guardians. In such sessions, it would be necessary to encourage counselors to talk about the training at home, which will make female wards embrace achievement within and outside the schools, without fear.

Finally, women organizations and non-governmental organizations in the country should also intensify their efforts at voicing out the plight of the womenfolk. Positive efforts at improving the lot of the womenfolk should be sought and effected. Some could take specific area of effort or location they want to focus attention on and even seek international aid toward their goals like some other organizations in other parts of the world.

There must be a special focus on the education of women that is practical and not a paper-work. It must not only aim at educating them but empowering them in attitudes and behavioural orientations. Such literacy programme must axe the problem from the roots, such that archaic value systems can be discarded and there can be a new orientation in the thinking of the average Nigerian. When this is achieved, many problems that relates to even women would have been solved. When it is said that women are gossips I often wonder what they should be doing when most often than not, they have all the time in the world to do that. Nature abhors vacuum you must be doing something - positively or negatively. Men too gossip - the only difference is in the number of hours spent. They often leave theirs for social times because they are free then. I am sure that if a research is carried out on the world's gossips - illiterate nations would still rank highest and developing nations especially black Africa would still

have places of honour since their people usually do not expend time and energy on innovations.

The sum total of it all is that the home and the nation stand to gain when women are empowered educationally. For, it is a truism that the level of development of a nation is highly correlated with her level of citizenry literacy.

To conclude, the point must be stressed that there are pointers that the 21st century will be a century of dynamic change in every sphere of life. No nation can afford to be an on-looker. If Nigeria is not to continue to be an on-looker, steps must be taken to rectify national mistakes of the past. The dangers and tasks ahead for Nigeria as a nation bedridden by illiteracy are enormous and may look daunting, yet it is not impossible where the will is. The problems can be taken as challenges. Really, to join the global world village in the 21st century or not. The choice is ours.

CONCLUSION

For national developmental purposes, it is necessary that women be developed and their potentials maximized. They can then be able to contribute their quota toward the development of their country. To achieve this goal, nothing would be too much to do. For, as rightly noted by Aminu (1989), a nation can never do too much for its womenfolk. The nation owes a duty to the womenfolk to develop them. And, considering the fact that women constitute a high percentage of the country's population, equipping them with the necessary tools of development, will allow them to contribute meaningfully to the development of the country.

This is most essential now, as the country moves on, in its quest for economic, scientific and technological advancement. Women should be seen and encouraged to play complementary roles, rather competitive roles with men in the society.

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