

Gender Perspectives of Environmental Management in Nigeria

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Abstract: Environmental management in Nigeria has gender perspectives including girl-child education, gender roles and social cultural factors. The strategic actions needed for sound environmental management require a holistic, multidisciplinary and intersectoral approach. Women's participation and leadership are essential to every aspect of that approach. The study concludes that every environmental management strategies in Nigeria should bring gender issues into the perspective for sound implementation of policies in the pre-colonial era.

Key words: Environment management, gender perspectives, social cultural, factors, education, Nigeria

INTRODUCTION

In the pre-colonial era and the early pre-colonial era, a typical African girl is not sent to school. It is believed that girls could only play the role of helping their mothers at home so that they can become good housewives like their mothers.

However, the story began to change after the introduction of the Universal Primary Education in the 1950's. The fate of the girl-child as regards education positively increase again with the commencement of the Universal Basic Education (UBE) scheme by the Nigerian Government in 1999; a free and compulsory education for all from primary to junior secondary school (JSS 1-JSS 3).

In 2000, The Millennium Development Goals set up by World Bank emphasizes the girl child education in its goals 2 and 3. These are:

- Goal (2) achieve universal primary education. It targets to ensure that by 2015, children everywhere, boys and girls alike, will be able to complete a full course of primary schooling.
- Goal (3) promote gender equality and empower women. It targets to eliminate gender disparity in primary and secondary education preferably by 2005 an in all levels of education by 2015.

Environment is referred to as the biophysical or natural world in which people, animals and plants live. The components of environment include land, water, forests, biodiversity, air, climate and ozone layer (Sadler and Verheem, 1996). The environment is important to mankind in diverse ways. It provides significant and social benefit. It provides many goods and services that sustain human life; supply raw materials for pharmaceuticals, providing aesthetic pleasure. Some

other benefits from the environment are forest timber, fuel wood, honey, mushrooms and herbs.

Current global environment issues include biodiversity conservation, land degradation, water resources, clean air, climate change and ozone layer depletion. These are discussed respectively. The situation of girl-child in a patriarchal society like ours imposes a lot of constraints on the socio-economic situation of woman. Women are generally disempowered as a result of their gender roles, the situation puts women in state of poverty and poverty stricken individuals resort into the utilization of natural resources for survival. The situation brings about unsustainable utilization of natural resources. Consequently, the environment is being degraded. It is against this background that this study, investigate the influence of gender on environmental education in Nigeria.

In a study, titled Western Education's Impact on Northern Igbo Gender Roles in Nsukka, Nigeria Abiodun Jamaine explained that "gender-role changes or perceptions of change based on students' reported interactions in formal education settings. It summarizes gender issues under students' perceptions of gender roles, norms and practices in relation to themselves, their peer group and their perceptions of generational change compared with those of their parents and grandparents. These perceptions demonstrate a pattern of gender roles shaped by Western Judeo-Christian doctrine within the formal education curriculum, minimal inclusion of local history or cultural content and loss of indigenous knowledge and practices. Gender-role change is one aspect of a general Westernizing effect of formal models of Western education on indigenous cultures. Introduction Gender perspectives are constantly changing within any society, but neocolonialism in Africa is the site of a unique cultural conflict between exogenous

knowledge, transmitted through official postcolonial institutions (government, churches, schools) and endogenous knowledge, transmitted through indigenous ethnolinguistic societal institutions....”

GIRL-CHILD EDUCATION

Education does not refer to a single process. It means different thing to different people. In thinking of the encompass nature of education, Ibukun (1996) cited Castle who defines the term as what happens to us from the day we were born to the day we die. This definition appears to be encompassing, limitless and highly generalized. John Kneeler writes of education... “As the process by which society through school deliberately transmits its cultures heritage. Emphasis on what constitutes education is placed on transmission of culture.

Whitehead in Ibukun (1996) conceives education as the acquisition of the art of the utilization of knowledge. Emphasis here appears to be on the utility aspect of education. Thus, education is a process of teaching, training and learning in schools or colleges to improve knowledge and develop skills necessary in preparing individuals for functional participation in society life (Omang *et al.*, 2002; Ibukun, 1996; World Bank, 2002).

The deprivation of educational opportunity to girls is likely to exclude them from the mainstream of development in the future, increase the dependency ratio of the population and will result in underdeveloped of a nation (Mbanefoh, 1995). Investment in children is essential investment in the future of a society at whatever stage of development. Evidence suggests that early investment in development of the child can bring improvements in the life of the child and also provide benefit to the entire society (Young, 1995). Surely, the girl-child education serves as an investment that will help facilitate the achievement of family planning objectives and the production of healthier children (World Watch Institute, 2002).

Education has been recognised as the most important factor used by man to conquer his environment and it has charted his destiny. Although, there are schools established in these communities, there are not enthusiastically patronised due to age-long cultural barriers. Stories were told of how some of the schools had to be shut down for sometime due to lack of patronage while others remain dilapidated and unkempt. While, the male child has a choice to attend, his female counterpart is strictly discouraged from pursuing even the basic elementary western education. Her ambitions are tied to the apron strings of culture and religion. This probably

explains the rot and complete backwardness of these communities because mankind’s immense progress, which is evident in many landmarks, is attributed to education. It is incontrovertible to suggest that when these communities shunned education, progress appears to have deserted them for now.

Educating girl child and women also gives them higher self-esteem, greater decision making power within the family, more confidence to participate fully in community affairs and the ability to one day become educated mothers who pass on their knowledge to their own daughters and sons (World Watch Institute, 2002). Educating the female child is a key to attaining successful implementation of population policy. World Watch Institute (2002) opines that as long as girls and woman are taught to be less able than boys and men to navigate human experience and forge their own paths in life, population policy will always be flawed. On the other hand, when girl go to school and when women reach economic, social and political parity with men, they have fewer children and give birth later on average than their mothers did.

Assuming good access to health and family planning services, fertility almost invariably decline to or below replacement level. That slows the growth of population (World Watch Institute, 2002; World Bank, 2002). The lack of investment in girls’ education not only affects the limited earning power and opportunity to escape from gender restricting roles, but also contributes to the perpetuation of the cycle of high fertility and gender discrimination (Population Briefs, 1999). Women’s average education level is everywhere lower than men’s; where food is short it is often girls that get least; and where children have to work it is often girls that work hardest.

Research has disclosed that educating girls presents a numerous benefits for girls themselves, their societies and their present and future families. According to a recent World Bank research carried out by David Dollar and Roberta Gatti, bringing the gap in education would not only help women, their families and their communities but also the economics of the country they live in. they report that, “girls” access to education creates a better environment for economic growth and the result is particularly strong for middle income countries. Thus, societies who have preference for not investing in girls pay a price for it in terms of, slower economic growth and reduced income.

The fundamental importance of female education for raising children’s nutrition is beyond question. partly because a mother uses her new knowledge and additional income, she earns from it to improve diets, acer and

sanitation for her children, female education is probably the strongest instrument we have reducing infant mortality and child malnutrition (Wamahiu and Hadad, 1999). In fact, the 1993 World Development Report notes that a 10% addition in female literacy reduced child mortality by the same amount in 13 African countries between 1975 and 1985. An increase in male literacy had little effect.

According to Wamahiu and Hadad (1999), a significant population of women in Africa is illiterates, never having enrolled into school or had access to literacy education. Others relapse into illiteracy having dropped out of school prematurely, or remain semi-literate. Many never have access to any sort of education thereafter. It is therefore, crucial that the status of adult literacy be raised by bringing it into the mainstream of educational development. Like adult education programmes, non-formal education also suffers from lower status. While some CBOs, NGOs and religious communities are undoubtedly doing commendable job in providing, continuing educating and training to school-girl drop-outs, there is a need for a greater coordination and supervision and in bringing about changes in the perceived value attitude toward non-formal education. The governments must bear greater responsibility toward the out-of-school girl and women by providing them with recognized and approved channels of continued education and training (Wamahiu and Hadad, 1999).

According to Ramachandran (1999), unless there is a change in the mind set of power elite in the region and unless we stop viewing women as recipients of welfare, perpetrators of the population problem and as a mass of ignorant 'housewives' and 'mothers' contributing little else to the evolution of our society and culture, we cannot make a breakthrough. This change can be brought about by intensive media campaigns targeted at the political elite and opinion-makers. Evidence across the region shows that where good quality and relevant education is available children, including girls, go to school.

Wamahiu and Hadad (1999) in her study shows her plight on the situation of the girl-child education in her world "...so you see when we talk about girls and about raising gender issues in education, many of us in the South Asian Region are feeling very trapped because, at one level the schools are there. Technically boys and girls can go to school, technically all the colleges and universities are open to boys and girls. It is the social barrier, the cultural barrier, which prevent girls and women from entering the educational mainstream and this is something we have not addressed. There is no point in opening more schools unless you can address the

question of how women can actually come out of their homes and participate in educational processes. And even if they do, in fact almost 98% of all women who enter the school system drop out after 6 or 7 years. So, it is not just literacy, it is education at various levels. May be the only conclusion that we can draw is that we really need a very strong advocacy movement in this region".

Gender roles and relationships in environmental management and access to environmental assets are a key dimension of the poverty-environment nexus and must be taken into account for effective policy and programme design. Women play a critical and often primary role in food production and natural resource management activities. Rigid gender roles contribute to inefficiencies in natural resources management (World Bank, 2002) and equity between women and men in gaining access to natural resources is essential to improving food security and livelihoods. And women are at higher risk and more vulnerable than men to many environmental hazards because of their particular social and economic roles. "The European commission carried out surveys of public opinion towards the environment and environmental problem in 1987, 1989 and 1991. Of those who were asked in 1991, 88% considered environmental protection to be a very important problem (Ulhol *et al.*, 1996).

According to Wickramasinghe (1997) during recent decades, women have been displaced in resource management. Traditional soil and water conservation practices and organic fertilizer and pest control techniques have been replaced by externally-designed, more expensive methods. New hybrid varieties grown for cash revenue have become increasingly dominant. Replacing women's low-cost, self-sustaining management practices with short-term crop specific external inputs have exhausted the resource base of the land. Soil, water, organic compounds and the wealth of wild plant species-frequently used for mulching, fodder and medicinal purposes are threatened.

With the realization of the negative affects of deforestation and the resulting environmental crisis, some attempts are being made, with women's participation, to reclaim the livable environment. But women's labour is not a solution in itself. Women need to contribute to formulating strategies, for conserving forests; managers of forest conservation programmes must reformulate policies to accommodate women's knowledge and needs (Wickramasinghe, 1997).

It is hard to achieve gender equity in access to resources management decisions on the grounds of women's potential contributions to conservation. It requires the transformation of social attitudes, commercial

interests, policies and politics. Resources policies need to be restructured to reflect grassroots needs. Women want to be contributors to the sustainable management of resources. Policy-makers however, remain reluctant (Wickramansinghe, 1997).

Much information is still needed to sensitize decision-makers, about the potential contribution of woman. In some countries, a shortage of information and poor awareness of issues remains a constraint to the grassroots' approach required. Moreover, most women have no formally organized institutions to influence national policy. Special efforts are required. Moreover, most women have no formally organized institutions to influence national policy. Special efforts are required of policy-makers and programme designers if women are to contribute to resources management strategies (Wickramansinghe, 1997).

How can women be empowered to modify the systems that damage natural resources? How can these happen in countries where cultural constraints exclude women from decision-making structures? One prerequisite is recognition of equal rights to resources, including household land. This requires the acceptant of women as well as legal owners to the land (Wickramansinghe, 1997).

Women's autonomy over resources management should be treated as a key issue if resources are to be sustained. Unless such a transition is accepted, powerful, male dominated institutions will control the resources and deepen the problems faced by rural women. The solution lies in providing a fair share and opportunity to women who have the knowledge, experience and desire to take care of resources for the sustenance of future generations (Wickramansinghe, 1997).

EFFECTS OF THE ACTIVITIES OF THE GIRL-CHILD ON THE ENVIRONMENT

Women are responsible for half of the world's food products and between 60 and 80% of the food produced in most low and middle income nations (World Watch Institute, 2002; Satterthwaite, 2003) Not only are women the main stay of agricultural production, they are also largely responsible for post-harvest activities. Their specialized knowledge about natural resources makes them essential custodians of agricultural biodiversity (FAO, 2003).

Women have often played leadership roles or taken the lead in promoting an environmental ethic, reducing resource use and reusing and recycling resources to minimize waste and excessive consumption. Women can have a particularly powerful role in influencing

sustainable consumption decisions. In addition, women's contributions to environmental management, including through grass-roots and youth campaigns to protect the environment, have often taken place at the local level, where decentralized action on environmental issues is most needed and decisive. Women, especially indigenous women, have particular knowledge of ecological linkages and fragile ecosystem management. Women in many communities provide the main labour force for subsistence production, including production of seafood; hence, their role is crucial to the provision of food and nutrition, the enhancement of the subsistence and informal sectors and the preservation of the environment. In certain regions, women are generally the most stable members of the community, as men often pursue work in distant locations, leaving women to safeguard the natural environment and ensure adequate and sustainable resource allocation within the household and the community ([http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/beijing/platform/ environ.htm](http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/beijing/platform/environ.htm)).

The girl-child is responsible for fetching firewood that the mother uses in preparing food for the entire family (Satterthwaite, 2003). Other activities carried out by the girl-child that impact the environment include, bush burning, dumping of waste of animal and excretes on land and streams, over-fishing with the use of germalins to aid plenteous catch of fish and misuse of fertilizers on land during framing (Satterthwaite, 2003; Roe, 2004; World Bank, 2002).

The consequences or effects of the above girl-child activity as stated by Roe (2004) include degradation of ecosystem resulting in drought, flood, landslides and other natural disasters. Scherr (1999) opined that excessive use and poor management of crop nutrients, pesticides and penned livestock wastes are major causes of habitat pollution that can kill wildlife directly or impair reproduction. Due to global warming environmental problems are exacerbated, the resultant effect is rising sea level which will cause the loss of land mass (Red Cross, 2001). In FAO (2003) and Red Cross (2001) drought in the dry season will be more severe and rain in the wet season more intense, flood and cyclones are likely to be more frequent and more severe.

Moreover, it means that impacts arising from the loss of natural resources and ecosystem services fall mostly on the poor (Roe, 2004). This implies that women and the female children are the ones to be mostly affected since they are mostly responsible for crop production and use of natural resources (Satterthwaite, 2005; World Watch Institute, 2002). Environmental degradation leads to greater expenditures of energy by women and girls

because they must travel farther each day for firewood or clean water (World Watch, 2002). Indoor pollution can be a serious threat for women (Red Cross, 2001). The higher concentrations of pollutants released indoor mean that they are 1,000 times more likely to reach people's lungs than pollutants released outdoor, as a result cooking camp be a high-risky activity for women who depend upon biomass (wood, dung and agricultural waste) or coal as fuel for preparing meals (World Bank, 2002; World Watch, 2002). In Roe (2004) environmental change affects the poor people who use it resources in three key dimension of human poverty; livelihoods, health and vulnerability. Indeed women are the main target.

Finally, women traditionally have been responsible for the care and welfare of families, which makes them especially sensitive to the importance of clean air and safe water. As mothers they know that their bodies provide the first environment for a child and that they will be primarily responsible for the nourishment, safety and well-being of their children.

Homemakers were the foot-soldiers of the environmental movement-the volunteers who gave freely of their time and energy in support of environmental causes. Many important environmental decisions have been based on the concern of local activists, who many times were homemakers. This is not strictly an American phenomenon but occurs anywhere that pollution poses a threat to people; the women of Minamata, Japan, were in the forefront of the battle against mercury poisoning in their fishing village.

The research many women initiated continues wherever people care about their world (<http://www.epa.gov/history/topics/perspect/women.htm>).

CONCLUSION

Environmental protection strategies: The government should enact a policy that will:

- Ensure that the knowledge of women is made available in the design and management of an environmental protection initiative. This is particularly important in communities where the primary responsibility for agriculture and natural resource harvesting lies with women.
- Explicitly acknowledges the importance of the role and contribution of women in the environment.
- Project women from having to bear unforeseen and unacknowledged costs, which may result from the environmental protection initiative.

- Enable constraints on women participation to be addressed to facilitate their participation in environmental protection initiative.
- Patience and sensitivity are required of the initiative staff if women show reluctant to participate (due to shyness, male opposition).
- Addressing gender difference may be seen as a threat or criticism of the local culture and cause some resentment towards the management of the environmental protection initiative. Courage should be exercised.

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