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EDUCATION FOR ALL (EFA): A CATALYST FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF WOMEN IN CONFLICTS-PEACE MOVEMENT IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

Studies have shown that women have been traditionally playing the role of peace and reconciliation at a local level. However as result of illiteracy and educational marginalization Nigerian women are not able to play any significant role as advocate for global peace and reconciliation. Education for all (EFA) is a veritable tool that can help achieve gender parity. All efforts should therefore be directed towards the achievement of the goals of EFA so as to be able to attain gender parity.

Key Words: Education, Women, Nigeria.

Introduction

Women are becoming more assertive in the role they play in the transformation of conflicts in Nigeria and indeed Africa through their active participation in politics, religion, and ethnic affiliation. De Maio (2009) observed that African women are more involved in conflict management at the local level. She observed that their efforts can be the first steps towards reconciliation in communities devastated by violence. Resolution 1325 of the United Nation Security Council have reaffirmed the important role of women in the prevention and resolution of conflicts and solicited their equal participation as well as their full involvement in the maintenance and promotion of peace and security.

Although Scholars like Whitworth (1998) Beilstein (1998); Olsson (1999) and Fleshman (2003) have discussed extensively on the subject of gender and conflict resolution, this paper however, agrees with De Maio (2009) that there is a gross lack of systematic research on the issues of women in peace processes as most of the literature continues to cast women as victims rather than as necessary and proactive participants at the peace table. Given the traditional roles women have been playing in conflict resolution this paper is of the opinion that education can help serve as a catalyst to help expand the role of women in conflict resolution more specifically as it relate to the global perspective.

Education and Women Empowerment

Okafor (1984) defines education as a process of acculturation through which the individual is helped to attain the development of all his potentialities and their maximum activation when necessary, according to right reason and thereby achieve his perfect self-fulfilment. Education is the aggregate of all the processes by which a child or young adult (male or female) develops the abilities, attitudes and other forms of behaviour which are of positive value to the society in which he/she lives. It is therefore a process that enables an individual to acquire knowledge, skills, habits and values that enable the individual to function effectively as a member of the society. Education helps people to fully and adequately exploit their physical, mental and emotional capabilities which are useful for them and their society. Subsequently therefore, women education can be said to means the process by which women

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acquire the knowledge, skills, norms and values that are necessary for their development and that of the society.

Education is recognized in many countries of the world, as the basis for sustainable development. It is a pivot on which the political, socio-economic and human resources development of any country revolves. It is to this end that, the Nigeria's National Policy on Education (FME 2004) pointed out that education is the greatest investment that the nation can make for the development of any nation. Education is therefore a vehicle for effective national development. It is also a viable instrument for positive change more specifically as it relates to the promotion and improvement of gender equality.

Apart from serving to improve the living standard of women, education is as veritable tool that can enable women to fulfil their role as full members of the society (United Nations 1985). According to Ojobo (2008) the educational empowerment of Nigerian women is the spring board to every other form of empowerment (political, social, economic etc) which also includes conflict resolution. He further asserted that since women form a great percentage of the population, in Nigeria they should be able to contribute their quota to the development of the country. It is crucial that girls and female adults are enabled to acquire formal education for national development.

Unfortunately, a perfunctory look at the pattern of women's involvement in education in Nigeria reveals rather low levels. Regardless of all the admirable goals and objectives of education, Nigerian women still suffer a lot of constraints and inhibitions which militate against their personal and national development. The 1991 census in Nigeria revealed that 61% of the Nigerian are Women and that out of this figure 30% suffer from intellectual poverty (Ojuolape, 2000). In fact a look at the early history of education in Nigeria confirmed that women lacked easy access to formal education. Data provided by Sanni (2001) show that by 1965, 37.7% of pupils in primary schools were girls while only 9% of undergraduates were female students. The figure rose to 25.5% by 1974 and the students were mainly enrolled in such courses as teaching and the Social Sciences. Statistical data available indicate that the total enrolment of female's students on full time in the University stood at 50,652 as against male population of 138,334 in 1992 (Federal Office of Statistics, Abuja, 1994). These figures are indicative of the fact that there is strong evidence of educational imbalance among gender in Nigeria.

Four Key Points in Support of the Increased Participation of Women in the Amelioration of Conflict.

The Institute for Peace and Conflict Resolution, (2003) have provided four major reasons that support the increased participation of women in the amelioration of conflict.

The first point is that across the world, women's experiences of conflict are very different from those of men. In their needs and concerns, pain and suffering, they often have more in common with women from opposing sides, than with the men in their own societies. Increasingly, women feel that their perspectives should have equal weight in the conflict resolution process, which is an important part of the peace-building process. There is a shared notion that women as over fifty percent of the electorate have an overwhelming claim to participate in decision-making, not in terms of their racial, ethnic, political or communal identities, but in terms of their gender.

The second point is that despite the low visibility of women in the political and public arena, they are nevertheless extremely influential in society. The Strategic Conflict Assessment of Nigeria, SCA notes that women have been very active in traditional methods of conflict resolution from the earliest time, as educators, nurses and community workers, farmers and parliamentarians, mothers, wives and sisters as they play a crucial role in shaping the society. Moreover, most war-torn regions, women are not only involved in protecting families and communities, they are also active in grass root peace-making processes and inter-community exchanges.

Thirdly, they are extremely effective in mobilising other women and building consensus for co-operation and partnership in peace. They have been victims of sexual abuse and violence, who have suffered the loss of their children and relatives, but have nevertheless taken up the struggle to bring peace risking their lives, homes and their families.

Fourthly, women have been facing threats and abuses from their own communities in their effort to reach out and create space for dialogue and cooperation. This determination and perseverance should however not be underestimated.

How can women effectively do this in Nigeria without adequate education? The fact is that more Nigerian women need to be more educated so as to be able to get involved in the political process. Oluyemi-Kusa (2009) asserted that more women need to become politicians because it is by being involved that they can contribute directly to decisions in the area of conflict prevention, management and resolution.

Conflict and Gender Relations

Oluyemi-Kusa (2009) examined Women and gender relations under three broad categories *vis-a-vis* social and psychological, economic, and political. For him physical security in post-conflict societies is a critical issue for women since they are very vulnerable to low-level violence during the early stages of post-conflict transition. Oluyemi-Kusa (2009) observed that fear of violence and sexual abuse traps women in their homes and prevents them from engaging in important economic activities leading in the trauma experienced by women during the conflict. A Recent report provided by USAID (2000) revealed that conflicts have highlighted the use of rape as a tool of warfare. A good example is in Rwanda where women were raped as a means of ethnic cleansing, serving not only to terrorise individual victims but also to inflict collective terror on an ethnic group. In countries, like Angola and Mozambique, combatants kidnapped women to use as sex slaves; a tactic for terrorising and dehumanising young women from particular ethnic groups.

The social and psychological impact of conflict has transformed gender relations both during and after conflict. In the face of extreme hardship, traditional roles are adapted to meet the new realities imposed by conflict. Women assume greater economic responsibilities of caring for the many children left orphaned or abandoned during conflict. Domestic violence against women increases as a result of the stress trauma and social disorder that emerges during and after conflict.

Oluyemi-Kusa (2009) further stated that when ex-combatants return home to their communities, women are among those to lose their jobs consequently resulting in economic collapse. This worsens the situation of the women, given her status culturally, socially, and economically, especially in Africa. The bottom-line is a decline of their nutritional status as well as that of their health and education levels.

Studies have revealed however that impact of conflict creates opportunities for women to increase their public roles and responsibilities and that in the absence of men, women take on leadership roles in both civic and political Institutions. In fact they take on exceptionally active and visible role in peace processes and reconciliation efforts. It for this reason that the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 of October 2000 recognises the importance of women in the peace process. Similarly, Articles 40(4) and 44(e) of the ECOWAS Protocol relating to the Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management, Resolution, Peace-keeping and Security also reiterate the importance of women in conflict resolution. However, the political will to actualise these lofty ideals beautifully articulated in print is still lacking.

Women's involvement in the Advocacy for Peace

Since the beginning of the 20th century women have mobilized themselves in support of peace and disarmament resulting in the establishment of women's organizations and movements. Several examples abound of national, regional and international women's organizations and movements focused on peace or disarmament. A good example, took place during World War I, when nearly 1,200 women from warring and neutral countries came together to protest the conflict. They eventually formed the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF). The organization continues today and advocates internationally for a range of issues from nuclear disarmament to human rights (UN 2001). Another example took place during the cold war, when women lobbied against the stockpiling and possible use of nuclear weapons. In fact by 1959 the European Women Against Nuclear Armament organized a conference on the responsibility of women in the atomic age in Brunate, Italy. Roseneil, (1995 and 2000) reported that by 1980s a global Women's Peace Movement spread across Europe, the US, Canada and Australia, with women's peace camps, modelled on the Greenham experience, in at least 11 countries. He observed that the women's peace movement was also strong in German Democratic Republic and contributed to the fall of the Berlin wall. There are other organizations in all parts of the world that have and are still contributing to the development of peace advocacy. Some of them like the

Pacific women have organized against nuclear testing and Japanese women set up a peace camp at the base of Mount Fuji (UN2001).

African women have also not been left out and have contributed their fair share to the development of Women's groups that have been actively involved in advocating for world peace and reconstruction. A good example is the women group in Angola, Burundi, Somalia and Niger. Lately, organizations and campaigns are being propagated to promote women's equitable participation in peace negotiations and post-conflict reconstruction. Women's groups and networks are also advocating for the development of a culture of peace.

A United Nations (2001) report observed that women's peace petition gained over 150 organizational sponsors and hundreds of thousands of signatures (mostly from the less developed countries). The report further observed that this petition called for governments to transfer a minimum of five percent of their military budgets over the next five years to health, education, employment and peace education programmes. It also called for the de-legitimization of war as an acceptable form of social behaviour, in the same way that slavery, colonialism and apartheid have been de-legitimized. The global perspective of women peace and reconciliation initiatives have been made possible due to capacity developed through education.

Education as a Major Factor Militating Against Active Participation of Women in Peace Advocacy

Several studies by scholars have identified education as a major militating against the woman to participate fully in the process of peace advocacy in Nigeria. Results of studies point to the fact that the literacy level among Nigerian women has been very low compared to that of men. According to Ojob (2008) Nigerian women occupy very low educational status compared with their male counterparts. A study conducted by Singh et al (1992)¹ revealed that about 70% of the adult female population are illiterate compared to adult male illiteracy of 46% in Nigeria.

Odili et al, (2000) asserted that despite the efforts by government to increase the supply of female education as evident by the massive campaign employed the demand for female education is still very low in Nigeria. According to a report in *Education Today* (2000) gender disparity which puts the girls and women at a disadvantage is a prevalent feature in the Nigerian educational environment. This situation is compounded by geographical as well as social disparities, with the disadvantaged states and the socially disadvantaged groups of the population bearing a heavier burden of gender inequality.

In Nigerian gender bias seem to have strongly interacted with culture to create sex role, stereotypes and demands which have enormously influenced the attitudes of males and females in many issues more specifically as it relates to education. According to Onyemelukwe (1995) sex difference in the performance of students (boys and girls) in some school subjects could be attributed to factors such as gender and attitude. Even those in schools are faced with a lot of obstacles.

Okeke (1990) identified the obstacles encountered by female in education to include the followings:

- Lack of support from educational policy makers,
- Differential socialization patterns for boys and girls at early stages of life,
- Limited access to education of girls,
- Sex differences in the quality of education experiences for boys and girls,
- Perceived irrelevance of school for girls,
- Absence of career education,
- Masculine image of education.

As Nigeria pursues and prosecutes the lofty goal of educational advancement in the millennium, findings reveal that gender inequality still characterized the educational advancement of the country.

¹ Cited in Odili, J.N.; Omotor. D.G and Pessu. E.J. (2000). "Gender Equality as Development Framework for Women Integration in Economic Development: A Theoretical Perspective", *African Journal of Social and Policy Studies Vol. 1. No. 2*, Development Africa Consortium.

From primary school level to the university, gender inequality subsists as more males are admitted to the tertiary educational level than females.

Education for All (EFA): A Way Forward

Indeed the problem of gender disparity requires a proactive and a pragmatic solution. Only about one-third of countries are reported to have been able to reach parity in both primary and secondary education in 2005, with only three reaching it since 1999 (UN 2008). Education for All (EFA) was adopted in 2000 in Dakar by 164 governments in the world alongside partner instructions so as to achieve six goals among two (goal 4 and goal 5) of which both on the provision of quality education to women and the girl child. While goal 4 focused on achieving a 50 per cent improvement in levels of adult literacy by 2015, especially for women, and equitable access to basic and continuing education for all adults, goal 5 centred on Eliminating gender disparities in primary and secondary education by 2005, and achieving gender equality in education by 2015, with focus on ensuring girl child full and equal access to and achievement in basic education of good quality. What this means is the provision of the girl child access to primary and secondary schools, while improving, remains a major issue in countries where overall participation levels are still low.

The realization of the objective of EFA will certainly help to achieve the goal of education for all and create educational equality among gender in Nigeria. When quality education is provide made available equally to both gender then women in Nigeria be able to play more active role in the advocacy for peace and conflict resolution not just with their local community but global peace.

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