

## WOMEN EDUCATION AS IMPETUS FOR PEACE AND NATIONAL UNITY

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***Abstract:** A state is a political entity that is in many cases made of more than one nationality group. This reality imposes the need to integrate the distinct ethnic groups to become a monolithic whole that shares a common identity and destiny. Essentially therefore, peace and national unity is achieved through the breakdown of ethnic barriers, the elimination of primordial ethnic loyalties, and the development of a sense of common identity. This paper looked at women education as an impetus for peace and national unity. It examined the contribution of women education to peace and national unity, why women in peace and national unity. It also highlighted some of the challenges facing women education in Nigeria. The paper recommend among others; the need for policy formulation of the National Unity and Peace Commission so as to ensure a strong focus interventions aimed at strengthening women's participation and contribution in peace building and unity processes, the government should put in place a system of working with women councils and women NGOs to disseminate the message of peace and unity to the community in a practical approach such as functional adult literacy and other integrated community development initiatives.*

**Keywords:** Women Education, Peace, National Unity, Integration.

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### INTRODUCTION

The greatest challenge facing Nigeria today is the threat to national unity, as centrifugal tensions, resource control and self-determination, ethnicity based identity politics and religious cleavages have enveloped national consciousness. Since independence in 1960, national integration has been a top priority of governments in Nigeria. The National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) Scheme, the Unity Schools, the Federal Character Principle, and State Creation are examples of state policies intended to achieve this goal. (Alapiki, 2005).

Modern Nigeria is increasingly forced to confront the tensions arising from this fount of diversity, and the politics of tribe and religion. Nigeria has witnessed a number of ethnic clashes in the past; as such there remains much room for Nigerians to understand one another and to see each other as equal parts of an indivisible nation. Alapiki, H. and Barikor, I.B. (2002).

However, numerous government policies and laws differentiate between Nigerians on the basis of ethnic background, to the point that many feel they have been the target of discrimination. Overall, Nigerians are pleased with the progress the country has made in coming to terms with its plural and diverse nature. Yet, there is still significant room for improvement and ensuring that every Nigerians believes there is a place for them under the Nigerian sun. Goteb, M.G. (2000).

It is quite obvious that education makes man moral and ethical; inducts the individual into the shared values of society; develops commitment to societal goals in the individual; prepares the young members of society for the future; defines behavioral patterns of individuals and society; and also enhances the productive capabilities of individuals and by extension the society. Alapiki, H. (1998).

Education is very essential for every one because it is the only way by which we can differentiate between human beings and animals. Education tells us that how we can live in a society that's why education is important for everyone, for both men and women. In the past, women were denied education. They were not allowed to come out of the four walls of their houses. Domestic works were their only occupation. But now we are living in 21th centaury where there is no any difference between men and women. In this century women have the same respect as men have. They help each other in every sphere. So education should be given to both men and women. (Daiyabu, A., 2008).

### THE CONCEPT NATIONAL UNITY

National Unity is define as "a situation in which all citizens from the various ethnic groups, religions, and states live in peace as one united nationality, giving full commitment to national identity. It means that though we belong to different castes, religions and regions and speak different languages we recognize the fact that we are all one. This kind of integration is very important in the building of a strong and prosperous nation. Mohanty, T. (2006).

Unity refers to harmony or agreement between people or groups. In other words, it is the status or quality of being in accord. With unity, more can be accomplished with everyone having the same goal. A nation is found to be developed if the country has the unity among the people in different region. (Rashid, N.A., 2012).

In other to attain national unit, social equity and restitution, so that all the constituents of the federation can be involved in the affairs of the nation especially the ethnic minority, the constitution in section 14 (3), based on the principle of affirmative action provided that; the composition of the government of the federation or any of its agencies and the conduct of its affairs shall be carried out in such a manner as to reflect the federal character of Nigeria and the need to promote national loyalty, thereby ensuring that there shall be no predominance of persons from a few states or from a few ethnic or other sectional groups in that government or any of the agencies. (Mohanty, T. 2006).

## **WOMEN EDUCATION IN NIGERIA**

Women are over half of the world's population, yet they do two-thirds of the world's work, earn one-tenth of the world's income, and own less than one-tenth of the world's poverty (UN, 2007 in Akinpelu, 2007).

UNICEF (2003) noted that in the global political arena, the ongoing debate and action for the upliftment of the girl-child continue to stimulate the involvement of designated UN agencies. Notable among the range of initiatives is that of the United Nations Girls Education Initiative (UNGE) which an aspect of the Millennium Development Goals is. The later was established in April 2000. It draws from the constitution of 13 UN entities and charges like-minded national and international actors to work in concert with the programme to obtain Universal Primary Education and also, by 2015, to bridge the gender status encountered in primary and secondary education.

According to UNICEF (2008), Nigeria is among the West African Countries that have highest number of girls that were out of school. UNICEF (op cit) added that girls make up the majority of the nearly 120 million children who are out of school and even greater majority of those who get opportunity of education do not reach the fifth grade.

UNESCO (2005) identified some attempts by Nigeria to promote the girl-child education. Such attempts include: - Universal Primary Education (1976), the National Policy on Education (NPE) (1977); lowering of cut-off points for admission of girls into secondary schools; scholarships into Science/Technology and Mathematics Education (STME); the promulgation of an edict banning the withdrawal of girls from schools for marriage, the production of blue print on women education by the Federal Ministry of Education (1987) and the declaration of free education for girls in many states in Nigeria (1988). Yet, many girls have not gone to school or have withdrawn from school especially in the northern Nigeria.

It should be emphasized that education gives a good means of livelihood and sustenance to women; gives support for their economic role and development, gives and support the education of children education. Children education does not depend on the father's income alone but also that of the mother. It makes the total burden of parenthood to be borne by both man and woman. Since one's level of education to an extent determines ones income and capacity, it is expedient, therefore, that girls get education for better contribution to their families, society and world over. (Magajin, 2010).

## **CONTRIBUTION OF WOMEN EDUCATION TO PEACE AND NATIONAL UNITY**

Women education plays a key role in the social and economic development of the country. Educating a woman uplifts her life as well as the quality of her life and her entire family. It is a fact that any educated woman will definitely support the education of her children especially a girl child and provide a better guidance to her children. An educated woman will easily imbibe an independent and progressive outlook in her children. More

importantly, an educated woman in any society will assist in reducing the infant mortality rate and control the blossoming of the population. (Rebecca S., 2000).

Across the country there are living testimonies of success stories of women's role in peace and reconciliation in the area of security, justice, socio-economic initiatives, decision making organs, gender based violence and HIV/AIDS and good governance. (Ebigbo, P., 1990).

Right from the start of the reconstruction programmes after the civil war, the Government put in place a national mechanism to ensure that women play an active role in post war and construction process. Besides the emergency programmes the ministry in charge of Women's Affairs was established and among its priority programmes was the birth of women committees or structures that ran from cell up to national level. The overall objective of these committees was to provide Nigerian women with a forum through which their views, interests' issues of national reconstruction would be expressed with the intention of shaping the country's recovery and reconstruction of the national unity processes. (Daiyabu, A. T., 2008).

After the civil war, there was a great need to mobilize and guide the population to reconstruct its own lives as well as their communities and country. Nigerian women in different positions of leadership played critical roles in mobilizing fellow women to live together and to find common solutions to their own problems and those of their country. Examples of Unity club, forum of Nigerian Women Parliamentarians.

The Government of Nigeria demonstrated its will to give women the trust and responsibility of rebuilding the nation by appointing them to all positions of leadership and responsibility in society. For example, women are serving in the executive, legislative and judiciary arms of the government. (Daiyabu, A.T., 2008).

In the last ten years women have stood as exemplary leaders at policy level as well as community level. The mere presence of women in cabinet, parliament, judiciary, and all spheres of life served as role models and also helped to develop confidence among women and this opened up women's role in decision making and national unity. Women worked together to forge solidarity, and unity among themselves as the first step toward mobilization of other women for example the Unity Club as a forum of top women leaders and spouses of top leaders in government aimed at creating unity among themselves; and then be able to preach the message of unity and reconciliation among the communities. (Joanna, Kerr.1999).

They conducted concrete activities such as helping orphans, fostering them, supporting victims of famine and flood and always championing unity as their goal.

### **WHY WOMEN IN PEACE BUILDING AND NATIONAL UNITY PROCESS?**

The civil war and conflicts in many parts of the world had disproportionately strong impact on women, turning many women into widows, and heads of households and care takers of orphans; that is the position of women as victims and participants in the war and their unique post conflict needs, their long experiences in their role as peacemakers, women in the family as mothers, wives and sisters where they prefer problem solving through open communication, honest discussions of differences and dialogue among all concerned parties. They are used to resolve disputes through the best means of ensuring that at least some of the concerns of all conflicting parties are met. (Asseffa, H., 2002).

Further, as bearers of life, women can offer a special perspective and experience which will help to overcome prevailing life-destroying methods of dealing with human problems and conflicts. Since military conflicts and diplomacy, which have traditionally been exclusively orchestrated by men, have failed to be a reliable system to safeguard peace, the inclusion of women in all stages of the peace process becomes imperative. (Faiza, A.Z., 2000). The Government of Nigeria is strongly committed to the promotion of gender equality in all aspects of national development including the critical area of peace and unity. Women's contribution to peace and unity is timely as Nigeria looks forward to the next decade. New direction and impetus on the functioning of the National Unity and peace commission should be equally important.

### **CHALLENGES FACING WOMEN EDUCATION IN NIGERIA**

The existence of gendered perceptions about the capacity and potential of women in society remains a major barrier to women role in peace building and reconciliation. Women's contribution to peace building and reconciliation is still hampered by constraints such as abject poverty, gender based violence, poor organizational capacity among women, limited motivation and facilitation of women initiatives. Peace and reconciliation programmes remain largely centralized and not adequately coordinated. (Ebigbo, P., 1990).

Although tangible improvements in terms of women empowerment have been registered, their participation in the various domains of national development is still low. Challenges remain in the areas of limited experience and capacity, as well as overcoming the mentality of negative attitude towards women's role in politics and decision-making. This is further compounded by the gender-based division of labour where women are still over-burdened with a lot of responsibilities and very high expectations from society. (Abolarin, E.E., 2010).

Although there is no gender difference in enrolment rates at primary school, various studies have highlighted higher repetition, dropout and low performance rates for girls compared to boys. Because of gender stereotypes, proportion of girls in Science and Technology is still low compared to boys. In addition to the women marginalization from economic opportunities, certain legal measures in Nigeria are discriminatory against

women and others do not exist yet while some are known but not understood. However, discriminatory laws against women have been identified and elaboration of the new constitution has created an opportunity to remove them. Gender based violence is still a serious problem in Nigeria. Cases of rape of girls and women, assault and defilement are on the increase with the age of the victim getting lower over the years. Most acts of violence against women take place in the home, which sometime makes it difficult for the law enforcement personnel to intervene. Although there has been no research done, sexual harassment at work places and schools can be a major tool of oppression and discrimination against women. (Bagudo, A. A., 2007).

There are thousands of women who are victims of rape, trauma, physical injuries, and above all social trust has dissolved. Abject poverty is still high and it is affecting mainly women from the rural areas. Increasing rates of HIV/Aids victims, women who were tested positive and other infectious diseases coupled with limited health facilities further deteriorate their situation. This situation had an impact not only on the mental health of women but also on their physical well-being. (Liliane De Pauli, 2000).

In most of the Nigerian societies, women's roles are secondary, yet "women are traditionally peacemakers because they give birth and raise children. However, women in Nigeria have been portrayed as the primary victims of violence and conflict. It is imperative to examine the role of women as agents of peace in the peace and unity building process. (Magajin, R.J., 2010).

## CONCLUSION

From the foregoing, it is pertinent to note that the contribution of women education to peace and national unity in any nation cannot be overemphasized. When the elements of peace and unity are combined, it makes a balanced, harmonious, complete whole and its presence, your eye and brain are pleased to see. Giving women education the desired attention will enhance not just peace and unity of the nation, but it represents an investment in the future productivity of Nigeria's workforce. This can be achieved through major commitment of resources, support from stakeholders, NGO's, educational agencies and sufficient fund for the upliftment of women education.

## RECOMMENDATION

- For any Sustainable and durable peace and national unity to be achieved it requires women and girls participation as well as the integration of gender perspective in all reconstruction processes.
- There need for policy formulation of the National Unity and peace Commission; so as to ensure a strong focus interventions aimed at strengthening women's participation and contribution in peace building and unity processes.

- The visibility of women's role in peace building and reconciliation should be increase as well as highlighting the key issues affecting women that need stronger advocacy in the future.
- There is need to re-cent the attitude of men and women toward formal education at the higher level beyond the secondary school. Happily the Nigeria Association of Women in Science, Technology and Mathematics, formed in 1989 is trying to promote the education of girls and women. It has been awarding scholarships to girls who excelled in Senior Secondary School Certificate Examinations. It has also planned to established and equip 200 women education centers across the country.
- There is need therefore for the Federal Government to come to the aid of women Associations, and others in the vanguard of promoting female education, with financial and material support in order to be able to implement its programmes.
- The Commission for Women Affairs should creates awareness among fellow women and men too, on importance of active participation of women in politics and government thorough campaigns, talks, rail and radio and television broadcasts.
- For poor parents who, incidentally, are in the majority when choice has to be made the female child is scarified (Anumn, 1996). Therefore there is need to exempt female students from payment of fees at all levels at least for some time to come.
- Lack of support and clear follow up should be addressed by establishing a strong monitoring and evaluation system that will permit the tracking of performance indicators and outcomes and enable the government realize the extent to which peace and unity is being achieved and the persistent constraint that require special attention.
- The government should encourage women to identify economic opportunities aiming to alleviate poverty that is widespread among women and the society in general, by doing this; the commission will be able to contribute towards the achievements of lasting peace and unity.
- The government should put in place a system of working with women councils, women NGOs to disseminate the message of peace and unity to the community in a practical approach such as functional adult literacy, other integrated community development initiatives.

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