

Education: A Solution to the Contemporary Challenges of a Common Woman in a typical Hausa-Fulani Dominated Society in Nigeria

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Abstract- The common woman of a typical Hausa-Fulani society in Northern Nigeria faces problems similar to what is obtainable in the dark ages of centuries ago. Many women were denied some of the legal and political rights accorded men. The paper review the challenges faced by the women in the said society namely: maturity, married life and education. A highlight was made on how these became a challenge to the common woman and conclusively singled out education which is a right as the way out.

Index Terms- Education, common woman, Hausa-Fulani

I. BACKGROUND

Nigeria, a multicultural, multi-ethnic and multi-religious most popular black nation of the world has women in very significant positions of every body's life. Until the end of the second half of the 20th century, women in almost all localities of the nation were denied some of the legal and political rights accorded men. Throughout much of the history of Nigeria, deep-seated cultural, traditional or religious beliefs allowed women only limited roles in the society chief among which are child bearing and homemaking rather than involvement in the public life of business or politics. Many societies agreed that women are best suited for the above mentioned. Some even wrongfully believe in the intellectual inferiority of women to men and thence women education is limited to domestic skills of homemaking. If this is not the case, then why men controlled most positions of employment and power/leadership in the Nigerian Society?

Unfortunately, until the middle of 20th century, this denial of equal rights to women met infinitesimal or no protests to draw the attention of most people. This prompted women, for quite a very long time, to accept their inferior status as the only option since they lacked the educational and economic resources that would enable them opportunity to challenge the prevailing social order.

Fortunately, towards the end of the 20th century, there emerged organized efforts by women to achieve greater rights, which gave birth to some women organization such as: Women Rights Advancement and Protection Agency (WRAPA); National Agency for the Prohibition of Traffic in Persons (NAPTIP); Women Trafficking and Child Labour Eradication Fund (WOTCLEF). There is also National Council for Women Societies (NCWS) and the Federation of Muslim Women Associations of Nigeria (FOMWAN) etc. The education sector has not stayed aloof, hence the emergence of Women in Colleges

of Education (WICE) in all the Federal and State Colleges of Education. One of the activities of such an intellectual women organization is sensitizing the entire Nigerian Society the value of women through publications, seminars, and conferences. To contribute to the success of this noble objective prompted the need to write this paper to compliment the efforts of all women in Nigeria by exposing the challenges a common woman in our society.

II. WHO IS A WOMAN?

Simply put, a woman is a female adult of human being. A woman can always take the position of a wife, girlfriend, mother and grandmother. Whichever one is called or referred, what comes to our mind is certainly a woman must be that wife, must be that mother and so on. Nevertheless, what does it take to be a wife? What does it take to be a girlfriend, mother etc? All wives are women but not all women are wives! All mothers, grandmother and girlfriends are women but not all women are mothers and so on. One major aspect worthy of understanding here is that what are the functions or activities and qualities that qualify a woman to be referred to as a girlfriend, wife, mother and grandmother. Certainly, it can be unanimously agreed that there are certain tedious functions and activities that needs extra carefulness, cautions, concentration, time, dedication, honesty and transparency for every woman before she can be qualified as a girlfriend, wife, mother and so on.

However, common woman in discharging her duties, as a wife etc is prone to so many challenges because of the current notion of her status in the society. Despite the fact that there is need for her exposure to religious and western education for a more efficient and effective discharge of such duties, concerned people and societies turned deaf ears and blind eyes to the challenges facing such a woman today. Although some of the challenges, as they are made to be believed, has to do with the protection of the society's (or family's) integrity and prestige.

III. WHAT ARE THESE CONTEMPORARY CHALLENGES?

Maturity

Maturity is a biological state or quality of being fully-grown or developed. It is a state of adulthood after attaining the legal age. This resulted in to some physical changes of the female's body among which are the emergence of pubic and bodily hair, enlarged breast and broader hips. This stage of woman life is a

very complex one because she faces many problems ranging from those within her family and other people outside including her friends, males and elders of the immediate society. However, her ability to tackle or solve such complex problems is a function of her accumulated learning and education (Jones and Mayer,

2006). The problems, their complexity, description and what is needed to support her in solving them has been tabulated below:

Table 1: showing a common woman’s problem at maturity and solutions

Type of problem	DESCRIPTION	DEGREE OF COMPLEXITY	SUGGESTED SOLUTION
Family	All members of the family superior to her keep an eye on her. Purpose: To protect her integrity and the family’s	Low	She needs proper education to understand herself and others so that she can comply with all rules.
Her friends	Whether good or bad she may adopt some of their behaviours, activities and they can influence her much more than any body Purpose: To suit their friendship.	Very high	Same as above
Boyfriends	Befriend her to find love. Some times there may be threat from some guys if she tries to resist Purpose: To marry her or to satisfy their lust	Extremely high	Need proper education & counseling for choosing who to befriend, indulge in love affairs or not and subsequently marry to be husband & wife.
Married life	Satisfying husband’s lusts, children upbringing, domestic chores, husband’s family interference etc	Very high	Needs good education, active employment and good income here is highly recommended

From the above table, it is clearly shown that in all the problems a matured girl is bound to face, education and accumulated learning are very important for tackling and or solving them. This means that every woman needs good education and counselling so that she can better understand the problem and its degree of complexity, and subsequently design her own measures to overcome them. Yet, education itself is today a challenge to common woman, as can be seen shortly, despite the fact that there are efforts to make it free and compulsory by government of the federation. Her proximity to university has nothing to do with her continuing education.

Education

This is one of the most important challenges of a common woman today. Although as many girls as possible are attending school in the society, their parents are not willing to send them to the University after secondary education. The following is an extract from the results of face-to-face interview administered to twenty (20) school attending girls between the ages 16 and 18 in September 2011 to January 2012 from one school in Gombe metropolitan:

Table 2: Responses of 20 school attending girls to oral interview in Gombe in September 2011 (n = 20).

S/No	Questions	% Yes	% No	Remarks
1	Do you wish to gain admission a university some day?	100	00	very encouraging
2	Are you sure, your parents will allow you?	00	100	very disappointing
3	Do you wish to be employed?	90	10	very disappointing
4	Are you sure of having it (i.e. the employment)?	NIL	85	very disappointing
5	Can your parents listen to your plea?	20	80	very disappointing

Source: Women Empowerment Advocacy -- Provisional Document.

The above table was extracted from an unpublished document of a research on women empowerment advocacy. It indicated that out of the 20 girls playfully interviewed, all of them wish to continue their education to the University but none is sure of continuing. Of the reasons given by these girls among others are: they are going to be given out for marriage; their families would not allow it for fear of losing the family's prestige in case the girl join bad friends; that girls at such liberty could no longer be controlled by anybody.

When they were asked whether their parents can listen and reason with them, only very few (20%) agreed that their parents can do that and out of these few some confessed that even when the parents hear their pleas, they would not agree and this is generally, as confessed, associated to ignorance or religious faith. However, very little could be done here because there is very limited or no amount of influence that can convince and change the minds of such parents especially in this part of Nigeria, the North.

One important thing that all should remember is we cannot run away from accepting the fact that education is a right of every Nigerian child, girls inclusive. However, there is a flagrant denial of this right as shown in the table above. The main reason ranges from social to economic. The former has to do with the fear of the girl's interaction with different people who can influence her to be stubborn and not ready to listen to her elders. The latter being the economic status of the family where the males were given much attention in terms of financial assistance for higher education.

The challenge here to the common woman is how can she overcome these challenges? Do we still believe that women's

education is a waste of time? In fact time has come when all should agree to the fact that woman be given the chance to actively participate in every endeavour of life with education as the backbone of her success. Credit to the new Zealand's labour-led government who in 2004 launched a five year plan of action to ensure women's full participation in the work place and that their employment opportunity and rewards are not affected by gender. This was not only to help women get recognition in the jobs they carry out but will assist in participation in wider range of higher level jobs. Did a common woman not deserve this? If given the chance to study further Laban, (2007) contended that it would mean women have access to a wider range of jobs and are able to move between compatible positions. Both men and women will have greater choice around caring and working responsibilities without gender predetermining their choice. In her speech in the World Conference of Women in Beijing, 1995, the then U.S first lady Hillary Clinton delivered that Women's Rights are also Human Rights therefore must be protected at all cost.

The case of a common woman is not the government, but the society and the socioeconomic status of the family. The society is the type in which the majority of members see nothing good in woman except the barbaric and degrading belief that she should only be given out for marriage. If married, how many husbands are willing to allow their wives to continue their education or actively and profitably gain employment whether in the public or the private sectors? How many husbands (and parents) are willing to assist their wives (and daughters) with active self-employment? Indeed very few, that is the simple answer. To hit

the nail on the head, we shall never progress with this belief in mind.

Married life

Let us start by quoting Francis Bacon, an English Philosopher, statesman and a lawyer who lived in 1561–1626, who once said ‘Wives are young men’s mistresses, companions for middle age and old men’s nurses’, a practical truth. For a woman in to act practically, indeed effectively, and efficiently as young men’s mistress, companion for middle ages as well as a nurse for old men is a very challenging task. Once again, education is a sin-qua-non to successful execution of these tasks. Yet married life to many women in Nigeria, is a vehicle of frustrations, uncertainties, harassment and insecurity instead of happy, secured and life full of hopes, progresses and appreciation as can be found in some homes.

The common woman is frustrated once if what she was told or is expecting to find in her home are fairy tales. Moreover, if the one she trusted betrayed her because she is now his own “property” and would decide to “operate” her the way he likes regardless of her value and the love she has towards him, resulted to nothing other than frustration. Besides, if she were married to somebody who she does not love, her life would be a miserable one, to cut it short.

Uncertainties happen to every woman’s married life if she can no longer trust her husband based on clear and genuine reasons. That is for instance, his affairs with other women illegally, his way of income and system of catering for the family. Failure to reason with her is total rejection of the fact that all men and women are borne free and equally entitled to certain inalienable rights among which are life, some liberty and happiness. However, very little do some husbands realize the obloquy this cast in their married life. In fact, some husbands’ grosser insult offered to women is the insinuation that she is honest and virtuous only because her parents ruled that, or she is aiming at something lucrative or it is the traditional law.

In such a married life, how can a woman find liberty and happiness? A question that need to be answered here is can man live successfully without woman? Can therefore be a development in a society or a nation at large without women’s influence? Definitely the response to these interrogations is NO. Harper, (2006) helps us with an answer in his speech delivered at the Columbian Exposition of the 1893 World’s fair.

If before sin had cast its deepest shadows or sorrow had distilled its bitterest tears, it was true that it was not good for man to be alone, it is no less true, since the shadows have deepened and life’s sorrows have increased, that the world has need of all the spiritual aid that a woman can give for the social advancement and moral development of the human race. The tendency of the present age with its restlessness, religious upheavals, failures, blunders, and crimes is towards broader freedom, an increase of knowledge, the emancipation of thought, and recognition of the brotherhood of man; in this movement woman, as the companion of man must be a sharer. So close is the bond between man and woman that you cannot raise one without lifting the other. The world cannot move without woman’s sharing in the movement, and to help give a right impetus to that movement is woman’s highest privilege.

If All Could Understand

If both men and women could understand the value of a woman, we shall witness tremendous changes in our lives and in the pace of our national development. What keeps on lingering in a typical Hausa-Fulani society today is somewhat indifferent from that of five thousand years ago as far as women’s value is concerned, which depended solely on the benefit she could provide men, either as pleasurable sexual object or as a vehicle for procreation and servitude. This has put aside the values of her personhood, talents and unique contribution to humanity and economic development. Many damages have been done to these since the belief in her sole value is based on her procreative abilities and sexual attractiveness; hence, the focus of her life is inevitably her ability to attract a man. Some questions that need concrete answers here are critical; when shall the society value women for their unique contribution to the world’s economy? When will men value woman regardless of her attractiveness? When will woman see herself as incredible human being regardless of how sexually valuable she is to men? (Jones and Meyer, 2006)

The way out would be appreciated

Conclusively, to every problem, there is a solution but sometimes the approach to solving a problem can also be a problem. However, the following has been suggested as the ways out of some or all of the contemporary challenges facing the common woman.

Education: - All members of the society ought to understand that education is a fundamental girls’ right and therefore under no circumstances a girl be denied her right. This will help her understand her worth, respect her superiors, be actively employed (self or otherwise) for contribution to the household’s economy, create liberty and happy life for herself and her family but to mention a few. In order to achieve the above stated, governments at all levels should declare free and compulsory girl-child education in all categories of learning since doing that would contribute in no small amount to nation’s economic development.

Value Reorientation: - The woman must understand herself and her importance in the society. She must admit that she is that part of human life, happiness, and progress without which nothing could be possible. A lot of work here is needed of women to sensitize themselves. Men on the other hand, must recognize the value of woman far beyond lust satisfaction rather, a companion without whom their existence could not be possible. Many men suffered the consequence of their deeds and mischief if only they listen to simple advice of their wives, and many a man rejoices their successes having listened to some simple advices of their wives. A good example of this is the success of Patrick J. O’Haire, who suffered from inferiority and discouraged as a sales man received an invitation to attend a course in public speaking. He did not want to attend but listened to the simple advice of his wife and attended. The results made him advanced in sales

department and valued and much liked member of his company (Carnegie, 1981: 297-298). Therefore, men, women, media, leaders, adults, parents, teachers, community members, producers and consumers must collectively stop emphasizing the need for girls and women to be attractive to men in order to feel valuable. We must stop emphasizing female's sexuality above her unique self.

Girls must be supported at all costs to find their unique talents, gifts and interests for effective economic development of the society and the nation at large. If they find ways to express themselves in positive, up lifting and productive ways, the less they will feel their value is exclusive to their form. Hence, the better they feel about their individuality and the less need they will feel for sexual validation (Jones, 2006).

By so doing, we can bring a new sense of appreciation and respect for all women and we must all understand that valuing woman as human beings is essential to making change in our nation and the world at large.

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