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SOURCE



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WOMEN'S EDUCATION IN A DEVELOPING COUNTRY

CASE STUDY: DUDUGURU PLATEAU STATE NIGERIA

Sophia Onuora SHCJ

THERE is an urgent need to pay attention to women's education in a developing country like Nigeria, not just because women will discover themselves through it but because of the obvious impact educated women will make on the economic, social and political development of Nigeria.

My research in Lafia Local Government Area of Plateau State shows:

	No. of Schools	% Boys	% Girls
Primary	9	61.3	38.7
Post Primary	5	80.3	19.7

When the figures are put together the imbalance is glaring. It is clear that fewer girls than boys are admitted into primary schools. After primary school some girls are given out in marriage by their parents. As a result even fewer girls proceed to post primary institutions. This sex imbalance necessarily continues beyond post primary institutions.

Factors besides early marriage that account for this sex imbalance in our schools include cultural and societal expectations, the nature of the school curriculum, the media and the negative attitudes and ignorance of parents. In many societies the chief role girls are expected to play is that of wife and mother. In fact many people in Nigeria consider marriage as most important for a woman. A substantial percentage do consider education necessary for women but are not yet concerned that they have jobs.

Another fundamental reason why more boys than girls enjoy the advantage of education is ignorance on the part of parents. Some mothers in particular are completely unaware of the need for women's education. This problem is compounded by the influence on their culture of the Islamic religion which relegates women to the background. In fact some aspects of religion, tradition, superstition and legends reduce women to the point where they are incapable of questioning their rights and privileges as human beings.

More than 85% of Duduguru people hold the view that parents should train their male children before their female children. In addition the general impression is that highly educated women find it difficult to get married and that women's education should be geared towards making them marriageable.

Although there is a negative attitude towards women's education, one cannot assume or conclude that this is invariable. Society is changing, and very fast too. A significant change of opinion has been brought about by the successes of women in Nigerian

education and politics. For some time now the State Governments have had at least one female commissioner in their cabinets. In Duduguru itself people have built a school for girls. One may, therefore, assume that there is growing awareness of the role of women in contemporary society.

Everywhere one hears of changes in the position of women in terms of 'women's liberation' or of the erosion of traditional values. Usually this talk is accompanied by fears about the emergence of a new breed of liberated women. Some people are afraid that the position of women is changing so rapidly that moral standards are falling and society is endangered. The pessimism of the menfolk is based on the belief that feminine duties which Nigerian society continues to see as the cornerstone of social and cultural stability are now neglected because of women's pursuit of academic success and improved status in society. Many writers have pointed out, however, that mass literacy campaigns, family planning education etc cannot succeed if women remain steeped in ignorance as is still the case in many parts of Nigeria. Furthermore, women need a good level of education to be able to feed their children with the right quality and quantity of food. The present war on hunger and malnutrition will be meaningless unless women from developing nations are well educated. Only with education can diseases arising from malnutrition and unbalanced diet be eradicated.

It is clear that the need to educate women is not a philanthropic undertaking but a matter of life or death for the future of humanity. UNESCO stress the need for educating women; the whole of tomorrow, despite male scientists, astronauts and nuclear physicists, will be meaningless if the education of women continues to receive little or inadequate attention. The negative attitude to women's education in Duduguru is largely man-made. It stems from culture, social structures and ignorance. Changing attitudes today are improving women's education and opening up more and better prospects for the future. Once the position of women and their education are adequately addressed the structure and future of Nigeria will be in better hands.

WOMEN WITNESSES TO THE LIVING

Elizabeth Barber SHCJ

ONE cannot live long in Chile — or, perhaps, in any Latin-American country — without being impressed by the tremendous influence exerted by the families of those arrested-disappeared over the last fifteen years. For the most part it is women — wives, mothers and sisters — who have organised themselves with determination, continuing to hope against all hope. At the protests or other large gatherings of poor and oppressed, they shout out the names of their missing loved ones, and all respond as one, 'Presente!' These women have taught us the meaning of solidarity.

They seem to know that their husbands and sons and brothers continue to walk with us whenever risks are taken together and the cause of freedom and justice is proclaimed. Listening to the testimonies of these valiant women one begins to understand and experience their search vicariously. Their visits to the police stations, jails, military tribunals and courts, detention camps, morgues and cemeteries have been part of a project which is a much more profound journey than the search for a cadaver.