INCLUSIVE GOVERNANCE AND GENDER EQUITY FOR SUSTAINABLE EDUCATION IN AFRICA: REALITIES AND CHALLENGES

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Abstract
The paper looks at inclusive government and gender equity as the ways of achieving sustainable education. The author is of the position that even though inequity in education to the disadvantage of the African woman has persisted, many global and regional frameworks that support gender equity and women empowerment have narrowed the gap. However, the paper submits that for education in Africa to continue to be sustained, government must fully include women as women also have something to contribute. The transformation agenda of the United Nations with 17 goal expectation for 15 years will be a mirage in most African countries if not strategically planned and managed as gender inequity is still high in Africa. The author worries about the attainment of sustainable development goals in 2030 and therefore recommends the adoption of inclusive governance in a gender equity platform for attainment of sustainable education in Africa.

Keywords: Inclusive governance, Gender equality, Sustainable education

INTRODUCTION
Education in traditional Africa has been seen as a social institution. According to Ekwerike (2016), a social institution is a culturally developed means of meeting needs and causing the perpetuation of what has been defined and accepted as necessary for harmonious living in the society. The traditional Africa education is the socialization of the learner into the cherished cultural norms, values, customs and traditions of the society so as to fully integrate them into the environment. Ike (2017) opined that aims and purposes of Education in Africa were directly relevant to the needs of the immediate society. The leaders were educated to effectively function in the socio economic and political framework of the community as well as to acquire necessary skills to enable them function effectively as future leaders. Nnaji (2017) asserted that education in the traditional African setting had a collective orientation inspite of a slightly inherent competitive character. This suggests that education is a fundamental factor in the economic development and growth of Africa as well as a gainful economic investment with its unique characteristics and features.

Ogu (2016) claimed that not minding that African education was originally informal in nature yet it was functional and target oriented. African education emphasized social
responsibility, job orientation, and political participation, spiritual and moral values though with some limitations and poor practices from its cultural heritage which gradually gave way with the advent of western education. Education took another shape with the advent of the Europeans in Africa with formal or western education. The western education came with a different objective which hardly meets the needs of Africa and was gradually reviewed to the present day. Many contemporary issues still remained unresolved and leaves question mark till date. One of the issues that this paper will address is the issue of inclusive governance and gender equality for sustainable education in Africa.

Education in the contemporary Africa is described as the acquisition of mental, moral and physical development which enables one to fit in properly in the society. It can therefore be the teaching and learning process for the enhancement of human potentials towards desirable changes in behavior. Iwu (2016) opined education as the process of facilitating learning by the transfer of knowledge, skills, values, beliefs and habit of a group of people through storytelling, discussion, teaching, training or research. Education in Africa is commonly and formally divided into stages though not stereotyped as; preschool, primary school, secondary school and higher education. In most Africa countries education has been legalized as a right to every citizen. This is as a result of global best practices of the world. The global level Article B of the United Nations 1966 international covenant on economic, social and cultural rights recognizes the right of everyone to education. Ikeagwu (2017) opined that education has been recognized as important instrument since the 1948 adoption of the universal declaration of Human Rights. The human treaties have since then reaffirmed these rights and have supported entitlements for free compulsory education for all children. The world nations including Africa have agreed that everyone has the right to education and again, education is compulsory in most countries especially at the basic or primary level.

As earlier pointed out, education is a universal human right as well as a means of achieving other human rights as it relates to social, political and economic endeavours. Despite all these the situation of education in most African countries still left much doubt in the minds of scholars and concerned stakeholders. The UNESCO (2017) reported that 90 million children in Africa are not in school and majority of them are girls. The girl child is often saddled with responsibilities which may limit her access to quality education irrespective of all the proclamation of free and compulsory education (Nnaji, 2017). The fifth goal of the “transformation agenda” on gender equity and women empowerment has not received priority attention in most African states. Nwoko (2017) claimed that Nigeria and most other African countries inherited and maintained a cultural practice of male domination. Ejiofor (2018)
opined that education of the girl child has not received serious attention. The general apathy in this regards especially among illiterate parents is the belief that the girl will eventually marry and leave the family with whatever material benefits derivable from her education to her husband’s home. They would rather prefer to invest in the education of the male child who is expected to marry in the family name (Nnaji, 2017). Ikeagwu (2017) opined that in traditional African setting, the girl child is prepared from childhood with the ability of cooking and learning all kinds of chores in the home, all directed towards becoming a better house wife. No wonder Nwoko (2017) claimed that the predicament of the African girl child is enormous and better imagined; thus, she is faced with a lot of problems and constraints which are serious impediments towards her education not minding the fact that the girl child is the dawn, the bedrock and future of any society. Ibe (2016) in his assertion, claimed that the exclusion and marginalization of women in education and political matters has never helped matters in Africa. He further stated that including women in the decision making process of educational, political and economic issues will afford Africa speedy accomplishment and achievement of sustainable development goals. This paper intends to review inclusive governance and gender equity as a measure for the attainment of sustainable education in Africa with the realities on ground.

This paper is based on the theory of justice by John Rawls (1971) in which Rawls attempted to solve the problem of distributive justice, the socially just distribution of goods in a society. From the theory, some principles were derived:

1. Principle of liberty
2. Principle of equality

**The Principle of Liberty**: This principle states that every individual has an equal right to basic liberties (right to life, property, association, vote, movement etc.). They are inalienable rights that no government can amend, infringe on or remove.

**The Principle of Equality**: This is the component of justice as fairness establishing distributive justice. It stated that society cannot arrange inequalities to maximize the share of the least advantaged not allowing access to certain offices or positions. The author further stated that offices and positions should be open to any individual regardless of his or her social background, ethnicity or sex. An individual should not only have the right to opportunities but have an effective equal chance as another of similar natural ability.

Finally, if there is such a beneficial inequity, this inequality should not make it harder for those without resources to occupy positions of power or public office. These principles are always applied so as to ensure that the least advantaged are benefitted and not hurt or forgotten.
CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATION

For better comprehension, the major concepts will be clarified.

Inclusive Governance

Governance is a decision-making process that gets more people and stakeholders involved (OECD, 2017). The aim is to come up with common good and decisions that satisfy the majority. It is the effect of political struggles which involves law, order, power and justice. It is not just an abstract study that involves the government day to day performance. Okolo (2018) asserted that governance is the way in which society understand and orders the social affairs and acquire greater control over the situation.

It is also the strategy for maintaining corporation among people with different needs and ideas in life or for resolving the conflict within the group, be it family, tribe, village, nation or continent. Obizue (2018) claimed that the issue of governance is more or less politically based to the extent that the use of political power affects the lives and wellbeing of citizens. The citizens are made up of male and female who benefit and suffer the outcome of political decisions and governance. Nwoko (2017) pointed out, that in every government, the citizens or inhabitants are expected to take part in the political activities regardless of sex. This goes to buttress the point that there exist no restrictions on the chances of any sex to participate in politics. The traditional African education never prepared the girl child for this, hence the public outcry for inclusive governance.

Inclusive governance entails incorporation of all stakeholders especially the minority or marginalized group in governance. In Africa context, the women are marginalized in politics (Okoro, 2018). Ibe (2016) claimed that both men and women are equally endowed with intelligence, wisdom and character to pilot the affairs of government. Out of idiosyncratic considerations and traditional practices, many African nations see women as the weaker sex not only physically but mentally and also as dunces who have insignificant impact to make in the process of nation building, development and governance (Aligwo, 2018). Nwosu (2018) added that this is where governance is seen as the effect of political struggles and a process of acquisition of political power, the apparent display of unwholesome physical strength, economic capacity and undue cultural practices that put women at a disadvantaged position in political participation and the reaping of the dividends. There is no doubt that the poor participation of women in politics stems from original or traditional education in Africa and the marginalization of the women folk as the weaker sex. This informed the inclusion of gender equity and women empowerment as the fifth item in the 17th goals of United Nations under the auspices of sustainable development goals (SDGS). Aligwo (2018) pointed out some
reasons for women inactive and prominent participation in governance as lack of financial base to meet up with the increasing financial requirement for registration of political parties. In this issue, Nnaji (2018) opined that the political parties formed by women are often not favored in registration because of god-fatherism and political redtapism. In another assertion, obizue (2018) opined that from inception, men have taken the upper hand and have refused to release the power. Ikeagwu (2017) claimed that in many political associations, men always hold the sensitive positions within the organization or political party which they use to perpetrate male dominance in governance. Okoro (2018) posed that the major challenges which impedes women in governance as the problem of developing capacity for mainstreaming gender and implementing existing policies, including the policy on women and domestication of convention on the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women. This the author suggested should start from proper educational system, inclusive governance and gender equity policies.

Secondly, in most African cultural practices, sons are preferred to daughters. It is an undeniable fact that the African culture attaches more importance to sons while daughters are taken as minority members in the society. One of the largest countries in Africa, Nigeria to be precise, inherited a patriarchal tradition that is inimical to quality education for women.

According to Ibe (2018), this has made it difficult to achieve a satisfactory level of women involvement especially in governance and in decision making. Okoro (2018) asserted that women participation in governance is inhibited by several factors which wrong educational culture and gender bias in governance rank high. He maintained that there is a problem of selecting a woman leader in governance in Africa. African women are used to mobilize support for male candidates during elections. They mobilize and brainwash their fellow women in support of their choice candidate. It is worthy of note that women who were giving the opportunity to participate in various political positions have proven that they were forces to be reckoned with. Women like Margret Thatcher of Britain, Indira Ghandi of India, Golder Meirh of Israel and German Chancellor Angela Merkel all did well in governance. This implies that abilities and potentials do not lie in sex and therefore suggests gender equity in governance and educational opportunity for sustainability.

**Gender Equity**

Gender equity is one of the contemporary issues that is receiving great attention all over the globe. Nwosu (2018) claimed that the concept of gender in public matters is drawing serious attention in Nigeria, Africa and world at large. The word gender simply connotes the condition of being male or female. Gender is described in grammatical classification of character such as
masculine, feminine or neutral or manner of existence. It is also defined as cultural constraint that disguises the role or behavior, mental and emotional characteristics which females and males produce or develop by Society. Some cultures especially in Africa, stereotypes certain roles as feminine and others as masculine. A man is perceived to be superordinate in most of the activities in a traditional setting while the woman is the subordinate. Simply put, gender has to do with social and cultural roles assigned to men and women in a society.

Ekwerike (2016) defined gender as the socially constructed relationship between men and women and the stereotyped functions in the society attached to their means of livelihood. The demand on gender issues has been on the need for equity in education opportunities, governance, resources, public participations and management of national affairs without discrimination between men and women. The constant agitation by African women to be seen, heard and to fulfil their aspirations and talents in this society like their male counterpart as it is in developed world will help Africa to achieve sustainable quality education and good governance. Okoro (2018) unfolded the innate abilities and potentials in great women of Africa, pointing out some great African women who did exploits in education and governance like Professor Alele Williams, Prof Dora Akunyili, Dr Oby Ezekwesili, Dr Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala, Chioma Ajunwa, Chinyere Kalu all of Nigeria and Ellen Johnson of Liberia and a host of others. Okoro suggested that gender balanced educational opportunity will better women’s economic development and sustain same in Africa. Nwosu (2018) claimed that giving women opportunities with men will allow observers the chance or proper assessment of the similarities and differences in the possible achievements of both. Igwe (2018) opined that men and women should be given equal opportunity to display their potential so as to end or promote gender equality among scholars. The true ability of women as compared to men is only one equal opportunity is given. Obizue (2018) opined that empowerment of women should be recognized not only as a goal in itself, but also as an essential step for achieving all other goals. She stated that empowering women will constitute the basis for wealth creation and sustainability in families with the following benefits:

- A prerequisite for a sustainable development generally and educational and inclusive governance in particular
- Self- sustainability and improved situation in households and the society at large.
- A means for reducing poverty and food insecurity.
- It yields the highest returns of all development investments;
- It has multiplier effect on productivity, efficiency and sustainable economic growth.
It is fundamental to strengthening women’s right and enabling them have control over their lives and exert influence in society.

- It is part of the solution to the financial and economic crises.
- It has broad multiplier effect on human development and reduction in women violence and maltreatment at home and work.
- It puts women in a stronger position and gives them the power to participate together with men, in the shaping of the society to influence development at all levels.

The fact is that gender equity and women empowerment as proposed by the United Nations as the 5th item in the 17 goals of the transformation agenda propagates the inclusion of women in more productive roles and equal participation in governance and all other aspects of the society including decision making related to policy development especially education so as to make up for the past years of stigmatization and neglect. Gender balance is a key governance issue related to fairness, transparency and inclusive policy outcomes. There is the need to close the gender divide in public life. This will be an assured way of moving faster towards sustainable economic development.

**Education and its Sustainability**

Ikeagwu (2017) asserted that no country can really develop unless its citizens are properly educated in a platform where gender equity and gender diversity is well embraced. It is worthy of note that the primitive mind which is not gender conscious cannot deliver well on inclusive governance towards sustainable education. It takes the government policies to enhance girl child education which in turn will improve educational opportunities of men and women. Scholars have criticized the marginalization of women in their educational pursuit which has also been accused of constituting underdevelopment tendencies in Africa. It is a fact that the overall wellbeing of a nation is fully dependent on the quality of education. One of the indices of quality education is in the proportion of the population that has been exposed to it (Nwosu, 2018). The secret of most developed world lies in their educational system (Ibe, 2016). The great Indian statesman who laid the foundation for much of the economic development that India is making today, recognized this fact when he said that “all is well with a nation if its educational system is in good shape and functional”.

Gone are the days when India was seen as a country of snake charmers, rope tricks and pompous maharajas; it is now being seen as a country producing entrepreneurs, efficient male and female doctors, and IT gurus. This is the result of attention given to quality education on a gender equity platform (Nwosu, 2018). Sustainable education is the pathway to sustainable development which in turn is the future we want for all Africans. Sustainable education offers
the framework to generate economic growth, achieve social justice, exercise environmental stewardship and strengthen governance. Taking a look at the 4th and 5th items on the SDGS, and the 2030 agenda of the UNESCO, which aims at ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education for all; promoting lifelong learning opportunities for all, recognizing the importance of gender equity in provision of education for all children and expanding access to education for all and the ultimate use of education as an instrument for the attainment of national development and the proposed sustainable development goals SDGS in Africa particularly where gender equity and education related challenges are high, one may conclude that inclusive governance is a necessity at this time in Africa. It is equally worthy of note that setting the standard of gender equality policies right from the educational system would be a right step towards the attainment of sustainable development.

**Challenges of Girl-Child Education in Africa**

There are several reasons that prevent girls from having equal access to education in Africa. These are culture, values and tradition.

Various cultural and social values have historically contributed to gender disparity in education. According to work done by Denga, one prominent cultural view is that it is better for the women to stay home and learn to tend to their families instead of attending school (Denga, 1993). To explain the fact that more boys than girls participated in education. Top on the list is tradition that attaches higher value to a man than a woman whose place is believed to be the kitchen. A study by the University of Ibadan linked the imbalance in boys’ and girls’ participation in schooling was to the long held belief in male superiority and female subordination (Uwakwe, Ajibola, Benedict & Omobola, 2008). This situation was further aggravated by patriarchal practices which gave girls no tradition rights to inheritance or succession. Therefore, the same patriarchal practices encouraged preference to be given to the education of a boy rather than a girl.

The African society both historical and contemporary has been dotted with peculiar cultural practices that patently hurtful to women’s emancipation such as early and forced marriages, wife inheritance and widowhood practices. As daughters self-identify as females with their mother and sisters, and sons as males with their father and brothers, gender stereotyping becomes institutionalized within the family unit (Haraway, 1991). The dominant narratives religion privileges men at the detriment of women even in educational accessibility.

The decline of economic activities has made education a luxury in many African countries especially those in the rural areas (Adenira & Adebusuyi, 2007). Because parents are known to invest according to sex, birth order or natural endowments, boys and girls are not
exact substitutes. Often the family can only afford to send one child to school. Because daughters have assumed responsibilities in the home, they are less likely to be the ones to attend.

The disempowering colonial ideology of domesticity as espoused by the practice of ‘housewife’ provided the springboard for women’s educational imbalance in parts of Africa. The woman’s role has come to be limited to sexual and commercial labour; satisfying the sexual needs of men, working in the fields, carrying loads, tending babies and preparing food (Hammond & Jalow, 1992) (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/female education in Nigeria).

Ways to Achieve Gender Equality in Africa
Ikediugwu (2017) suggested ways to achieve gender equality:

- Provide quality education for women
- Sensitizing women
- Empower mothers
- Give proper value to women’s work
- Encourage women into nontraditional vocational vocation
- Stop child marriage and sexual harassment
- Stop violence against women.

Benefits of Girls Education to African society

- Girls’ education is a powerful tool for catalysing the vicious cycle of positive development outcomes.
- More educated girls and women aspire to become leaders and thus expand a country’s leadership and entrepreneurial talent.
- Girls and women have the confidence and skills to be change makers.
- The economic growth is faster when girls are educated.
- Empirical studies find that gender equity in education is correlated with higher economic growth.
- More equal education means greater economic empowerment for women through more equal work opportunities for men and women.
- Education opens doors of opportunities for young women especially they count on family health, wealth and property or business connections.
- Educated women operate productive farms and firms and earn higher wages.
- More educated mothers have more educated children because researches have shown that mothers’ education is critical for investments in the human capital of the next generation.
• Educated women are better able to protect themselves and their families from the effects of economic and environmental shocks.

• Education is a valuable for girls and of itself (Sahni, 2015).


SUGGESTIONS

The researcher suggests that government should encourage the inclusion of proportional men and women in governance and the empowerment of girl-child in education as well as strengthen the educational system through government policies that favour gender equity.

- The government should ensure education that is qualitative, functional, inclusive and equitable in order to promote lifelong learning opportunities for all and facilitate sustainable development.

- The government should improve gender equality in education and political affairs since education and development of the woman and girl child will enhance family nutrition and improve life chances.

- The composition of public institutions must reflect society if it is perceived to be legitimate capable of delivering just policies and upholding equality before the law.

- The government should establish a legal framework to monitor public policies and performance.

CONCLUSION

Gender inequity in governance, education, economic, social, psycho-social, cultural and religious life of the African woman has been persistent. However, in the recent past, the wide gap appears to be narrowing down with the intervention of international treaties and conventions like the African Protocol on People’s Rights and the Rights of Women (APPRRW), the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination among Women (CEDAW) and other global and regional frameworks that support gender equality and women empowerment. These organizations believe that women empowerment has good to offer in the development of the society as well as education. Education has been severally proved as the key to unlock development and sustain it. It therefore becomes imperative to empower women in governance and education to attain a height in development as well as sustain it.

REFERENCES


