EDUCATION FOR ALL WOMEN BY THE YEAR 2015: WOMEN CENTRE FOR CONTINUING EDUCATION, SOKOTO NIGERIA AS A CASE STUDY.

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ABSTRACT

Education for all women by year 2015 to many still seems to be a tall dream, and without proper planning and political will, will remain an illusion. Putting necessary structures to enlighten and educate the men folk on the importance of women education is an essential antidote for the rescue. Since most reasons for denying women their rights to education are based on religious and cultural values.
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INTRODUCTION

Education at every level is a means by which society intends to transmit what is worthwhile to people who should be committed to it (Peters 1970). The realization of the fact that the nation cannot go too far in the elimination of illiteracy by neglecting those who were not opportuned to be literate when young or even dropped out of school due to reasons beyond their control such as poverty, ignorance, teenage pregnancy, early and forced marriage, socio-cultural and erroneous misinterpretation of religious injunctions, etc. necessitated the National Policy on Education (1981) to give adult education an autonomous treatment with a separate chapter of its own as a part of the educational system.

If the Millennium Development Goal No. 3 i.e. “Promoting Gender Equality and Empowerment of Women” is to be achieved, it makes sense therefore that access to education, economic resources, cultural significance and political empowerment and every other opportunity, privilege and right to develop to their full potentials should be given to women.

Akinlami (2007) opines that the stalk reality facing mankind in the 21st century is that women especially in the developing countries suffer growing inequalities index of human development. Junaid (1995), states that the underlying truth militating against unusual literacy and education for all is that it cannot be achieved without some considerable quantitative expansion.

The question is “how do we give education to the women that were not opportuned to be educated or even dropped out of school due to reasons beyond their control e.g. teenage pregnancy, early and forced marriage, socio-cultural beliefs, erroneous misinterpretation of religious injunctions and economic hardships per se?"

The answer to the above question is nothing but the establishment of continuing education centres in all the developing countries of the world within the reach of these women, very close to their houses.

Continuing education has been severally defined depending on each author’s perception and understanding of what it involves. Ononuyi (1982), defines it as education after primary school later in life or education pursued after marriage
or skilled education for non-literate members of the society or informal education. According to the year book on adult and continuing education (1975–1976: 235), whether continuing education goes by the name of open university, extended or external degree or university with wall does not matter. The important thing is that concurrently several hundreds of schools, colleges and universities are finding new ways to focus their resources upon life-long educational needs of all adult members of their society for their full development.

Ballantine (1993:150) observes that, each new national administration presents its goals for education. And so, the fifth goal of “America 2000: An Education Strategy” states inter alia: Ensure that all our adults are literate and have the skills needed to compete in a global economy and exercise rights of citizenship”.

EFA Global Monitoring Report (2008:60) also agreed that “equivalency or second chance programmes are commonly used strategies to provide learning opportunities for young people.

In 1995, Nwabueze revealed that only 39.5% of the female population in Nigeria was literate. X-raying how far MD Goal number 3 can be realized in Nigeria in year 2005, Nigeria Millennium Development Goals (2005:1)’ Report categorically state that girls and women were likely to miss the 2005 gender parity target; and concrete steps were required in specific regions and democratic process of the country to reverse the trends. As that report was in 2005 so it is in this 2008 and if nothing concrete is being done, the realization of that goal even in 2015 will remain elusive.

The main cause of the backwardness of women in education which invariably affects their under-participation and under representations in all facets of life was summed up by Zanden (1996: 290), thus:

\[
\text{Across an entire spectrum of societies, women have been seen as sexual property, taken as booty in war, used by their fathers in economic bargaining, and considered as owned by their husbands.}
\]

Viewed and treated as above, by their fathers and husbands, it became useless to “them” to put the girl-child in school or even to allow them go further in their academic pursuits. Hence the maxim: “women’s education end in kitchen”. However the realization of the importance of women education is based on the fact that training a woman is training a nation much can be achieved.
In this paper, the effort of Sokoto State Government in Nigeria to bridge this gap despite all religious and cultural obstacles is highlighted.

**WOMEN EDUCATION IN SOKOTO STATE**

Sokoto State of Nigeria is purely an Islamic State with majority of the Christians inhabiting there as Non-Indigenes. Based on their religious inclinations, the women there are to be in purdah which means not to be seen and heard at the same time. With this background, the women are “erroneously” and “selfishly” deprived of the acquisition of western education by the men that it was an Islamic injunction. The non-education of women indeed is a misinterpretation and misrepresentation of Islam.

As a matter of fact, knowledge and acquisition of that knowledge is a basic principle in Islam. Haw (1998:56) also agreed that in Islam knowledge is highly prized. The first verse revealed to Prophet Muhammad (P.B.U.H.) instructed him to “read” to acquire knowledge. This message is for all people irrespective of gender, male and female are instructed to acquire knowledge, ‘even to the borders of china’ (Muslim Educational Quarterly vol. 12, 3, 1995: 13), without any gendered discriminations. The Prophet taught men and women in the Mosque in Medina, and when the women once complained that the specific teaching time did not suit them because of the nature of their work, the Prophet immediately conceded and made the required alterations (Mernissi 1991)

There is also this erroneous believe that all educated girls are prostitute no wonder that they are given out to early marriage at times even before the age of thirteen (13).

Along side that, men are also fearing that because of the exposure and economic empowerment of western education, that educated ladies cannot be controlled by their husbands.

There is also this misconception that girl-child education is suppose to teach them how to take care of themselves, their children, husbands and general home-management which to them can be learned through their mothers, aunties and elderly women around. So, the girl-child does not require Western education in order to fulfill that obligation.

Moreover, co-educational schooling is not tolerated at all more especially at the adolescent stage in that it will lead to promiscuity.

Poverty–Difficulty in making ends meet in the running of the families. So in order to supplement the meager resources, the girl-child is send to go and hawk
such commodities as groundnut, “fura de nono”, bean cake, bread, condiments like fresh tomatoes, pepper, onions, plantains, etc. and this hawking has its attendant problems in that the girls are somehow exposed to sexual abuse, rape, kidnapping and their spiraling effects e.g. teenage and unwanted pregnancy, V.V.F., and STD’s and worst of all AIDS.

Some parents also feel that sending the girl-child to school will also deprive them of the needed helping hand to carry out household chores like washing, cooking, sweeping and taking care of their little siblings.

Asuka (2006), summed up the reasons for the backwardness of women in education thus:

*Although, there were no laws restricting or banning women from being educated, cultural, social, political, economical and religious factors are forces that seem to have militated against the education of the female sex in Nigeria.*

The resultant effect of all the aforementioned flimsy reasons is that most of the married women are either stalk illiterates or school drop-outs i.e. those that were forced out of primary school or junior secondary schools into early marriage.

**ESTABLISHMENT OF WOMEN CENTRE FOR CONTINUING EDUCATION, SOKOTO NIGERIA AS THE WAY OUT.**

The education of girls and women had generally lagged behind that of men (William 1986). The world conference of the International women’s year (1975) noted that without the involvement of women, the motivation for change so badly needed to improve the quality of life for all will fail, for in most societies it is the mother who is responsible for the training of her children during the formative years.

The realization of the backwardness of women in this area, lead to the establishment of the Women Centre For Continuing Education (W.C.C.E.), Sokoto. This school was opened on the 8th Day of September, 1997 with a principal, ten members of staff and one hundred and ten students in its roll. It was officially commissioned by the then Military Governor of Sokoto State, Navy Captain Abdul Rasheed Adisa Raji with Hajiya Kulu Haruna Abubakar, as the then Commissioner of Education in the State.

The essence of establishing the school was in compliance with the section six of the National Policy of Education (NPE, 1981) i.e. Mass literacy, Adult and
Non-formal Education which consists of functional literacy, remedial continuing education, vocational education, aesthetic, cultural and civic education for youth and adults outside formal school system.

Calcott (1970: 128) states that continuing education should cover: “All systems of education which help people who have finished formal schooling of whatever stage, or who have passed the generally accepted age range for school children to improve or develop any or all aspect of their lives. It ranges from institutional courses to impact of political, social and infrastructural changes which impinge upon them. It covers the planned and unplanned methods, balanced and imbalanced, social and economic development indeed everything in a valued change for the individual and community.

The National Policy on Education (1981) states that the objectives of adult and continuing education in Nigeria should be:

(A) To provide functional literacy education for adults who have never had the advantage of any formal education.

(B) To provide functional and remedial education for those young people who prematurely dropped out of the formal school system.

(C) To provide further education for different categories of completers of the formal education system in order to improve their basic knowledge and skills.

(D) To provide in-service-on-the-job, vocational and professional training for different categories of workers and professionals in order to improve their skills.

(E) To give the adult citizens of the country necessary aesthetic, cultural and civic education for public enlightenment.

And so, the W.C.C.E., Sokoto was established to give a second chance opportunity to adult female members of the society who had not been opportune to have formal education or those that dropped out of school due to one reason or the other. The essence is for them to benefit, improve and fit in properly into our rapidly changing society in all facets of life viz: educationally, socially, economically etc; to curb the problems of malnutrition, under-nutrition, over nutrition, poor health status, broken marriages, juvenile delinquencies which have been on the increase in our society. It was based on this that Hopper (2007), suggests that the learning needs of young people and adults are not just about basic competencies but refer to a broader conception of learning that is
“life-wide” and ‘life-long’ Brine (1999:3) cautions that without this education, these women will stand very little chance in the competition of jobs, without it they are less prepared for the tedium and the poverty of unemployment; and without it they are hampered in their understanding of the world and the consequently their ability to change the world.

ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE OF W.C.C.E.

To ensure that the centre lived up to its expectation of giving continuing education to all cadre of adults, illiterates, semi-literate and dropped-outs, as the case may be, the school is categorically divided into five sections viz:

1. Vocational Section
2. Primary Section
3. Junior Secondary
4. Senior Secondary and
5. Day Care Centre.

VOCATIONAL SECTION

In order to ensure that all women are literate at least to the extent of being able to read and write this section is meant only for those with the minimum of First School Leaving Certificate. They are taught to acquire the following skills:

1. Sewing
2. Knitting
3. Weaving
4. Baking and cookery

The duration of study varies between 1 – 3 years depending on how efficient and talented the student is after which certificate is issued to the graduating student. It is also worthy to note that even graduates from universities and other tertiary institutions due register in this vocation section in order to acquire one skill or the other in order to be self employed.

PRIMARY SCHOOL SECTION

Bearing in mind that the school is not a conventional school, the primary school is made up of 3 classes namely:

Adult class
Primary four and;
Primary six
The adult class is meant for those that have never attended school. Students here come in as stalk illiterates, being unable to identify alphabets and numbers. They cannot write their names and so, they start with number and alphabet identifications, recitation of A – Z, 1 – 100 and being able to write their names.

Again, it is worthy to mention here that some students can stay in this adult class for three years while those that can cope easily stay one year and proceed to primary four. In essence, the students are supposed to cover the syllabus of primary one to three while in the adult class.

From the adult class, they proceed to primary four (4). They are expected to have known how to write their names, be able to read and write simple passages in English and solve simple Mathematical problems. The more intelligent students stay here for only an academic session and proceed to primary six while those that could not pass at the end of the year are made to ‘repeat’ the same class. Those that were able to pass through to primary six at the end of the day were issued with First School Leaving Certificate (F.S.L.C.) and those that want to proceed also sit for the state Common Entrance Examination into Junior Secondary School.

Subjects being offered at the primary school level are:

Mathematics
English
Social Studies
Primary Science
Health Education
Hausa
Arabic and;
Islamic Religious Studies

Okeke (1999), opines that the important role of women in the home during the traditional and present periods necessitates among other things that health education forms part of the educational programmes planned for the female population since women are mainly responsible for the quality and quantity of children’s food intake, clothing, interpersonal relationships and body care it becomes crucial that women acquire knowledge of health care for them to impact the right information to members of their entire family. Whatever the mother teaches the children is carried, along by the children, albeit modified, as they grow and interact with the other members of society.
JUNIOR SECONDARY SCHOOL

This section is made up of JSS 1 – 3. The students are exposed to virtually all the subjects obtainable in the other conventional secondary schools namely:

Mathematics
English
Integrated Science
Social Studies
Agricultural Science
Introductory Technology
Home Economics
Business Studies
Fine and Applied Arts
Islamic Religious Studies
Arabic and;
Hausa

The subjects they are not offering are:
(1) Computer Science
(2) Literature in English
(3) French and;
(4) Christian Religious Studies

At the end of three years, the students also sit for the state Junior Secondary School Examination. Successful candidates proceed to the Senior Secondary School Section.

SENIOR SECONDARY SCHOOL SECTION

Subjects offered here are:

Mathematics
English
Biology
Agricultural Science / Food & Nutrition
History / Government
Hausa
Economics
Geography
Islamic Religious Studies
A critical look at the curriculum of W.C.C.E. (Senior Secondary School Section) shows that Physics, Chemistry and Computer Science are not included in the school timetable. The implication of this is that to the planners of the curriculum and educationists, these subjects are either not necessary or they are too difficult for the women or even both of them (Meighan, 1986). From another perspective, Bowles and Gintis (1979), argue that the major role of education in capitalist societies is the reproduction of labour power. According to them, education is subservient to the needs of those who control the workforce and the owners of the means of production. Macionis and Plummer (2002:789) refers to the inability to use computers, word processors, e-mail and website as new illiteracy. For any one to live effectively and efficiently in this 21st century, the person must be computer literate.

**DAYCARE SECTION**

Daycare centre are places where children between the ages of six months and three years are taken care during the days when parents are away from home. But in W.C.C.E Daycare centre, the “students” are not expected to stay at home up to six months after delivery. They are told to resume after delivery as soon as they are strong enough. In compliance with the child-friendly policy of total breast-feeding for six months, the mothers are opportune to come to school with their babies and hand them over to the nannies at the Daycare centre. The advantage is that they can breast-feed their babies as at when due and can also attend to them during the two break periods. Moreover, husbands that would have discouraged their wives on the ground that no one to take care of the babies since maybe the older siblings had gone to school and maybe no kith and the kin to take care of the babies have no excuse to render. Another reason why the Daycare centre is necessary is to avoid the disturbance of crying babies in the class.

**SOCIO–ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN BY W.C.C.E.**

According to the words of Azikiwe (1997), empowerment for women simply means raising the awareness and consciousness of women towards acts and laws that are detrimental to their progress and survival. It also implies increasing the participation and productivity of women in the social, economic and political activities of the society. It also means giving women the authority and legal power to participate without any hindrance in every decision and plan that directly affect their lives. The empowerment became necessary because the women have been lowly placed in the society, not on empirical evidence or facts but rather on patriarchal ideologies.
The school was upgraded to the W.A.E.C. status and so the first set that sat for West African Examination Council (W.A.E.C.) was in May/June 1990 and 2000 the National Examination Council (N.E.C.O.) also accredited the school. In effect the school has been producing students each academic session.

To date, many of the graduates of this centre have secured admission into tertiary institutions within and around the state e.g. Colleges of Education, Schools of Nursing and Midwifery, Polytechnics and Universities.

Economically, some of these women have been employed as civil servants e.g. teachers, nurses, secretaries, newscasters, etc. under the Sokoto State Civil Service board and some have secured employment with the Federal civil service commission.

Similarly majority of those that passed through the vocational section have been equipped, empowered to stand on their own financially without depending wholly on their husbands, parents or relations, as the case may be, for their personal needs by establishing one petty business or the other. In effect these women are now combining their duties as wives and mothers together with generating income for their families. Ekejiuba (1990:9) sums up this new societal role and status thus.

_A woman who successfully combine reproduction with production enjoyed a much higher status than one who merely reproduced but was too lazy to contribute her productive labour to ensure the survival of the family and lineage. The woman who contributed, and thus ensured the survival and reliance of others on her, were more respected than the lazy/ or barren wife._

Socially, some of these women together are members of many clubs, N.G.Os. that has indeed raised their social status (Nwosu 2006) which has ordinarily been disadvantageous to them. The International Labour Organization (I.L.O) cited in Smyke (1991) observed that

_“Although woman constitute half of the worlds population, they receive one-tenth of world’s income, account for two-thirds of the world’s working hours, and own only one-hundredth of world’s property”_

Politically, since all the inhibiting factors e.g absence of political consciousness, lack of self confidence, inferiority complex, illiteracy, lack of self expression, financial handicap has been removed, these women can now come out to
demand for their political rights by vying for one political post or the other; or even become women leaders in one political party or the other; treasurers, public relation officers, secretaries in their different communities.

Beyond all these pecuniary gains and financial empowerment given to these women through the school, it is a thing of great joy seeing illiterates who can neither read nor write coming out as brand new persons that can read, write, express themselves and communicate with people anytime, anywhere. Indeed, the joy derived cannot be quantified in the heart of the state government, students, teachers, parents, husbands and all stakeholders concerned. For the veil of ignorance which Akuguo (1990), identified as a major impediment to achieving national development has been removed from their eyes. Indeed, the benefits of educating the girl-child and the women can never be quantified. For it reflects on the family, the children education, the financial position of the family and the society at large.

PROBLEMS

- Financial handicaps. Some women that are non-indigenes that would have benefited from this school are incapacitated because their husband cannot pay their school fees.
- Some of those that have also graduated from the vocational section are yet to establish one business or the other because of financial constraints.
- Despite all the benefits of this school, some men are still finding it difficult to release their wives to enroll.
- Transportation is also a handicap. Some of the men that would not like their wives to climb ‘Kabu-Kabu’ motorcycle used for public transport, are making lives difficult for the woman either by telling them to trek long distances or even stopping them out-rightly.
- Despite the knowledge acquired, the skill learnt, some husbands also find it difficult to allow their wives to work due to erroneous misinterpretation of religion, hidden fear of their wives and daughters flirting, or even being exposed to temptations.
- Some of these women like to “jump” classes. Even if they fail or even can claim the classes where they have not reached. The long run effect of this is that some of them end up being half-baked graduates.

SUGGESTIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

Having seen that the products of the school are not just acquiring certificate for the mere acquisition of it, but are rather delving into different fields, occupations and professions, the following suggestions and recommendations are therefore proffered for the upliftment of the standard of the school, to further
equip the students to fit in well into the rapidly changing and demanding society.

1. The skills in the vocational class should be expanded to include such skills as bead-making, hat-making, tye and dye, embroidery, etc.

2. The primary school section should be made up of Adults, classes 3, 4, 5 and 6. This is to enable their foundation to be solid and so that they can defend their certificates anytime anywhere.

3. The issue of demotion should be taken seriously. Those that fail a particular class should be made to repeat. There should be no jumping of classes. This is to ensure that half-baked and parboiled workforce are not being infused into the system. Not only that the syllabus has been planned in such a way that the knowledge is imparted from the simple to the complex and the knowledge jumped can never be regained.

4. The curriculum of the school should be enlarged to include subjects like Civics, French, Computer Studies and Literature in English at the Junior Secondary School section. At the Senior Secondary School, Computer Studies, Physics and Chemistry should be included. The exclusion of these subjects is a hidden means of limiting the career life chance of these women. Haralambos and Holborn (2004: 699) cautioned that it is not the content of lessons and the examinations that pupils take which are important, but the form that teaching and learning take and the way that schools are organized. The exclusion of these subjects invariably means that none of these women can venture into such courses as Medicine, Engineering, Information Technology, Pharmacy, Computer Science etc (Nwosu 2004) to enable them become Doctors, Engineers, Pharmacists and Computer Analysts. It is not as if these women are not intellectually fit to pursue these courses and professions rather they have been limited directly or indirectly, knowingly or unknowingly in order to keep them where ‘they’ actually want them to be through sieving and censoring the curriculum. Thereby leading them to courses and professions that tend to Nursing, Motherhood, Home-keeping and Home-management (Nwosu 2005).

5. Similarly, the science laboratories should be equipped to enable them carry out practical

6. Efforts should be made to post female science teachers so as to act as effective role models to the students and also to demystify the erroneous
assumption that these subjects are difficult and not meant for women/girls.

7. Along side this, subjects such as French, Literature In English, C.R.S should also be introduced to cater for different needs, aspirations, capabilities and interests.

8. Government should provide buses to convey these women from designated spots to the school and from the school back.

9. Both long-term and short term interest free loans should be given to these women to enable them establish one business or the other. This could be done by religious organizations, philanthropists, NGO’s, banks and government

10. The school should be free to all students to enable the non- indigenes to benefit from it.

11. Early marriage should not be a hindrance to the education of women. And so, there is a recommendation of establishment of continuing education centers in all the 774 L.G.A’s in Nigeria and in all developing countries of the world. The essence of this is that it does not require the women to travel long distances away from their homes for education. Husbands may be more willingly to support and encourage their wives participation in the literacy programmes if such centres are taken to their doorsteps.

12. Men (fathers, brothers and husbands) should disabuse their minds from the erroneous assumption that all educated and enlightened women are flirts and prostitutes. A woman that wants to live an amorous life even if put under lock and key will also be morally bankrupt. It is also worthy to note that some of the women flirting do so due to lack and want of the basic necessities of life. If they are empowered, equipped and fortified to stand on their own and carter for themselves they will be in a better position to resist these temptations.

13. More importantly, there is a clarion call from the writer to all fathers, brothers and husbands to release their daughters, sisters and wives that missed the opportunity of passing through the conventional primary and secondary school at their tender age to do so now. The establishment of this school has indeed proved the adage which says that “opportunity once lost can never be regained” wrong. But has proved the saying “Delay is not Denial” right, for it is better to be late than never. A school of this nature will brighten the hopes of women who have abandoned
school due to reasons of domestic pressure e.g poverty, early marriage child-bearing, teenage and unwanted pregnancy, etc.

14. Each well educated individual in the society must be involved in reducing the ranks of the veritable army of academically able but financially challenged women/girls child through the award of scholarships, payment of school fees, purchasing of textbook, etc. for it is only through education that poverty, ignorance and diseases can be stamped out within the world. Note that education brings light, freedom, hope, and independence of spirit.

CONCLUSION

The success story of Women Centre for Continuing Education (W.C.C.E) in Sokoto State, North Western Nigeria is an indicator that education for all women by year 2015 is an achievable goal. Establishment of continuing education centre modelled after this and taking cognizance of the identified short comings will be the required rescue operative to fill the continued disparity between men and women education.
REFERENCES


