

Original Research Article

## Women Education for Sustainable Development in Rivers State, Nigeria

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**Abstract:** This study investigated women education as a predictor of sustainable development in Rivers State, Nigeria. Two research questions were posed with corresponding hypotheses formulated to guide the study at 0.05 level of significance. Survey research design was adopted in the study. The population of the study comprised all women in Rivers State. A sample of 376 respondents was selected using stratified sampling and purposive sampling techniques. A 15-item structured questionnaire was used for data collection. The instrument was subjected to validity and reliability tests and found feasible for the study. Data collected were analyzed using Mean, Standard Deviation, and Simple Linear Regression respectively. Analysis of data revealed that, sociocultural values and parental attitude, significantly predict sustainable development in Rivers State. Based on the findings of the study, it was recommended that, positive socio-cultural values and parental attitude should be developed towards the education of boys and girls in Rivers State and Nigeria as a whole.

**Keywords:** Women Education, Sustainable Development.

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## INTRODUCTION

Education is a foundation upon which the potentials of society's members are harnessed for self-fulfillment and social growth all over the world. Perhaps, this is why, in the twenty-first century, various countries have tied their political ideology, social investment programs, population, and economic strategies to formal education systems. Education is portrayed as a powerful weapon for socio-cultural, economic, and technical advancement in both the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Education is a vital weapon in the fight against poverty, disease, and ignorance (Nwanna-Nzewunwa, 2010). Education is thought to have a direct impact on economic participation, child mobility, fertility, and individual health (Alam & Nasir, 2016). Education does more than allow people to reach their full intellectual potential. Rather, it aids their emotional, moral, social, psychological, and physical development (Dienye, 2012). The learning of reading and numeracy, as well as the gathering of facts, is not the only goals of education. It equips people with abilities for lifelong learning that go beyond specific knowledge and occupations. It provides individuals of society (men and women, boys and girls) with the skills they need to address current and future local and worldwide social issues. As a

result, according to Okeke (2016), the school provides a platform for children to socialize informally and participate in a variety of social arrangements while being supervised by adults.

According to Ogbondah (2016), education is a process of cultural transmission or socialization that prepares an individual for adult life in society. Education is constantly customized to meet the present and future demands of the people as society continues to change with its complexities. As a result, the National Policy on Education states that, education optimizes an individual's creative potential and abilities for self-fulfillment and the broader growth of society. Education is a critical component of national development and the most effective tool for developing the whole person. In this paper, women are defined as females who are mature enough to handle matters of livelihood, responsible enough to contribute to self-reliance, development, and creativity, and capable of becoming agents of social, economic, and cultural change, thereby contributing to national and sustainable development. Sustainability is a practice that ensures that natural and human resources are utilized wisely, allowing the productivity process to continue perpetually. Sustainable development is described as the process of improving a wide range of possibilities that allow people to achieve their potential goals and

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aspirations while not depleting natural resources for future generations. In the Brundtland Report, as referenced by the International Institute for Sustainable Development (IISD, 2013), sustainable development is defined as development that meets current needs without jeopardizing future generations' ability to satisfy their own needs. The government, businesses, individuals, groups, civil society, and people everywhere all play important roles in sustaining development in a country.

Women are the guardians and pillars of every family and country, but some cultural beliefs deny them the right to go to school. The idea that women's education ends in the kitchen is another important part of women's progress. This has led to problems of discrimination against women and girls. In some societies, the number of women is higher than that of men, but these social and cultural problems have annihilating effect on the opportunities women have. The trend always has negative effect on women's education. Education gives people the skills, knowledge, values, and rules they need to live well, improve their way of life, and contribute to the national and long-term development of their country. Women are born with skills, knowledge, and talents that, when properly developed through education, are a great benefit to society as a whole. Again, these skills make women more entrepreneurial, self-reliant, and helpful to the growth and productivity of their country. The extent to which parental attitudes about girls' education affect women's education is directly related to how society views women and what motivates them to learn well. A person's ability to be self-sufficient is directly related to how much and how well they learn.

### Statement of the Problem

In the 21 Century the notion of marginalization in educational opportunities between boys and girls or men and women has continuously occupied a centre stage in different national and international conventions on social development. It is for this reason that, different educational programmes, policies and laws have been put in place to guarantee equal access to quality education for all Nigerian citizens irrespective of sex, tribe or religion. For example, Section 18 (3)(a) of the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria; Section 15 of the Child Rights Act, 2003; and the Universal Basic Education Act (2004), among others, have been put in place by the Federal Government to provide unfettered access to basic education. In spite of the aforementioned laudable educational laws and policies, the perception and superstitious beliefs that women are inferior to men and that their position in society is limited to the kitchen still prevails in Rivers State. What then could be responsible for all these? Could it be as a result of some socio-cultural factors, or could it be as a result of poor parental attitude towards women education. The problem of this study therefore, is to investigate the

relationships between women education and sustainable development in Rivers State.

### AIM AND OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The aim of this study is to ascertain how women education contributes to sustainable development in Rivers State, Nigeria. In specific terms the objectives of the study are to:

1. Determine the extent to which socio-cultural factors towards women education predicts sustainable development in Rivers State.
2. Ascertain the extent to which poor parental attitude towards women education predicts sustainable development in Rivers State.

### Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

1. To what extent does a socio-cultural factor towards women education affect sustainable development in Rivers State?
2. To what extent does parental attitude towards women education predict sustainable development in Rivers State?

### Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses were formulated to guide the study at 0.05 level of significance:

- H<sub>01</sub>:** The extent to which socio-cultural factors towards women education predicts sustainable development in Rivers State is not significant.
- H<sub>02</sub>:** Poor parental attitude towards women education does not significantly predict sustainable development in Rivers State.

### Scope of the Study

This study is delimited to the effects of women education on sustainable development in Rivers State Nigeria. Variables considered in the content of the study include socio-cultural factors and parental attitude towards women education as predictors of sustainable development.

### Significance of the Study

Women constitute a greater percentage of the population in Nigeria. Their contributions to social development are so numerous and important that they should not be relegated to the background in terms of educational opportunities. The findings of the study therefore, will bring to limelight the socio-cultural factors that prevent women from having equal educational opportunities with men at all levels of the education system. The study will also provide education stakeholders and policy makers with relevant information on how women contribute to the attainment of sustainable development goals in Rivers state in particular and in Nigeria as a nation.

## LITERATURE

### Concept of Women Education

The need to meet the country's manpower requirement led to the intervention of the colonial government in education. Abdullahi cited in Olujuwon (2011), pointed out that the various efforts of missionaries and the colonial government towards the early development of teacher education in Nigeria are noteworthy and are as follows: The Colonial government became more interested in the development of education in general by enacting enabling laws and policies in order to give direction and clear government responsibilities for education. Professional standards and appropriate curricular for training of teachers were set up by both missionaries and the colonial government education officers. Education of youths was no longer limited to the southern part of Nigeria (Olujuwon (2011). In the northern part similar centers for training of teachers were established in order to encourage education of children.

Good as these efforts were, Salami (2002), observed that, there were identifiable shortcomings inherent in the system of education offered by the missionaries then. Commenting on education in colonial times, Salami (2002) asserts that, domestic education as enshrined in the ideology of women as primary home makers which was a social engineering initiative designed to create suitable wives for indigenous colonial employees further disempowered women socially, and economically.

However, since Nigeria got independence in 1960, successive Nigerian government have made several efforts aimed at repositioning Nigerian educational system and given women unfettered access to both formal and informal education. These efforts include the adoption and ratification of international conventions and instruments. These instruments have always emphasized that member nations put in place all the necessary mechanisms needed to eliminate gender discriminations, ensure equality and human dignity to all men and women (Ciroma, 2006). Some of these international conventions operational in Nigeria include:

Convention on the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women (CEDAW), African Protocol on People's Rights and the Rights of Women (APRRW) Convention on the rights of the child (CRC) Millennium development goals (MDGs).

The United Nation (UN) convention on the rights of the child (CRC) adopted by heads of government at the United Nation (UN) world summit for children in 1990 was ratified by Nigeria in 1991 and domesticated in Nigeria through the child's Rights Act of 2003. According to UNICEF (2003), Rights protected by the child's Rights Act include "Right of a child to free, compulsory and universal primary

education." The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) also makes demand for education for all by 2015 and gender equality and women empowerment.

The Nigeria national Gender policy also has targets aimed at improving women education in Nigeria. According to Ciroma (2006), the policy is aligned with relevant regional and international protocols and instruments such as the Beijing platform for Action (B.PF.A). New partnership for Africa's development (NEPA), A.U. solemn declaration for Gender Equality, African Protocol on People's Rights and the Rights of Women (APRRW), the convention on the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women (CEDAW), International Conference on Population Development Plan of Action (ICPD POA), NEEDS/SEEDS, the millennium development goals (MDGs), and Sustainable Development Goals (SDG).

The national gender policy, like the MDGs has objectives and targets relating to women education. For instance, objective 2, target (a), aims to "establish and strengthen appropriate educational, training, institutional and operational frameworks that link the macro-policy environment effectively with the micro level where women, men and communities are experiencing the manifestation of gender equality by 2010". Objective 7, target(a) is to "guarantee equal access of women, men, girls and boys to both formal and informal education and skills development opportunities through special programs and initiatives by 2015". Despite all these provisions, women have not been able to achieve equal status in education in Nigeria due to several barriers (National Gender Policy, 2006).

Women and Girls in developing world are denied opportunities to Education. The situation has now significantly improved due to so many attempts by both the government and non-governmental organizations, such as the 1986 blue print on women education, girl child education program, gender education and other women/girl child education related programs to harness gender potentials for national development (Mulikat & Zuwaira, 2014). Despite all these efforts, more are still needed to be done on this aspect as there are still several issues with regard to girl child education. The Girl child in Nigeria still faces a lot of disadvantages that militate against her development and ability to meet the future challenges of womanhood.

### Barriers to Women Education in Nigeria

In the Colonial era, Western education was solely available to men in Sub. Saharan Africa and Asia (EFA, 2003/2004). Supporting this report, Offor (2006), explains that hostility to western education was greater for girls than boys during the pre-colonial and colonial periods since parents and guardians felt that women's education started and ended in the kitchen. Sadly, the colonial government did not bring a stop to the

opposition. According to Madu (2000), the Nigerian society (pre-medium and contemporary) is studded with strange cultural practices that are detrimental to women's freedom, such as early/forced marriage, wife inheritance, and widowhood rituals. Women are also victims of culture and custom, according to Onyemunwa (1998), Oghiator (2005), and Achunine (2005) in their respective research. According to Bamidele (2011), a number of obstacles continue to impede women's access to education. As demonstrated by the Boko Haram sect in northern Nigeria, some religious sects in Nigeria continue to believe and preach that women should not pursue western education. Parental and guardian illiteracy: In some parts of Nigeria, the majority of parents and guardians are illiterate, and so do not understand the value of education, let alone investing in it. Poverty: Poverty still affects many Nigerian families. According to the Wikipedia online Encyclopedia (2011), 45 percent of Nigeria's population is still poor. This means that, of the 155 million people estimated in 2010. Over 69 million are still unable to meet their basic necessities of food, shelter, and clothes, and cannot afford to pay for education.

However, the findings of Ekejiuba and Okobia (2015) study, revealed that, parents have positive attitude towards Girl-child education. The study further also found out that Christian parents have better disposition towards girl child education than Muslim parents. What must have informed this result is that many young girls especially in Islamic culture are subjected to early marriage by parent before they can acquire or complete formal basic education.

### **Women Education and Sustainable Development**

It is obvious that no form of development in society can be achieved without providing equal access to educational opportunities for men and women. The United Nations Educational and Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) (2017) maintains that sustainable development cannot be achieved by technological solutions, political regulation or financial instruments alone but through creating public awareness to schools and the society. Individuals need to change the way they think and act and this requires quality training and learning for sustainable development at all levels and in all social contexts. It is plausible that if women education is high, stakeholders from varying sectors can challenge governments to implement global development plans such as the defunct millennium development goals and the current sustainable development goals.

Education is important for the self-grooming of the women as it gives her sense of individuality

which boosts her confidence. The importance of education in women's life must not be underestimated and every possible resource must be provided to make sure she gets the required qualification for her wellbeing and the wellbeing of the society. The need to expand access to education is critical because educating women and girls benefits every aspect of the society and fosters the development of all sectors. To this end, Nonso and Alexander (2015) insist that only through literacy, knowledge, access to functional education, and opportunities to gain relevant skills can a woman truly escape living in poverty, fear, humiliation and powerlessness. Similarly, Ibaka (2009)<sup>7</sup> explains that; women education and empowerment is a social process that promotes the participation of women in organizations and communities towards the goals of increased productivity, political efficacy, improved quality of community life and social justice. He concludes that the promotion of women education and gender equality is an alternative mechanism for combating problems like poverty, hunger, disease and stimulating sustainable development.

## **METHODOLOGY**

A descriptive survey research design was adopted for the study. The population comprised all women in Rivers State (18 years and above) who have not attained female education up to the tertiary level. The sample size of 376 respondents was derived from three community markets, three schools and three churches across the 23 Local Areas in Rivers State using the stratified random and purposive sampling techniques. The instrument used for data collection was a researchers-developed structured interview entitled 'Assessing Women Education Questionnaire (AWEQ)'. The instrument contains 15 items on the extent to which women education predicts sustainable development in Rivers State. The questionnaire was designed based on the modified, 4-point Likert Scale of:

1. Very High Extent (VHE) 3.26 -4.00.
2. High Extent (HE) = 2.51 - 3.25.
3. Low Extent (LE) = 1.76 - 2.50.
4. Very Low Extent (VLE) 1.00 - 1.75.

The instrument was face-validated by two research experts in the Faculty of Education, Ignatius Ajuru University of Education, Port Harcourt, Rivers State. The reliability of the instrument was determined using Cronbach Alpha Analysis which produced a reliability index of 0.87, justifying its use for the study. The data obtained were analysed using Simple LinearRegression and the hypotheses formulated were tested at 0.05 level of significance. Mean and Standard Deviation method were used to answer the three research questions.

## RESULTS

**Table 1: Mean and Standard deviation of respondents on the extent to which socio-cultural factors towards women education predict sustainable development in Rivers State**

S/N	Item	Responses						
		VHE	HE	LE	VLE	Mean	Std DEV	Remark
	<b>To what extent do the following socio-cultural factors towards women education affect sustainable development in Rivers State?</b>							
1	Consideration of only males as the heirs of the family	194	104	69	9	3.2	.84	VHE
2	Restriction on interaction among boys and girls	120	185	64	7	3.1	.74	HE
3	Relegation of women to domestic chores	200	103	11	62	3.1	1.09	VLE
4	Excessive protection of women from sexual violence	122	209	18	27	3.1	.80	HE
5	Poor implementation of child’s right act in Rivers State	97	202	12	65	2.8	.98	HE
	<b>Grand mean</b>					<b>3.06</b>	<b>0.89</b>	<b>HE</b>

In Table 1, data analyses reveal that responses to Items 1-5 yielded the mean scores of 3.2, 3.1, 3.1, 3.1, and 2.8 respectively. These Mean scores confirm that consideration of only boys as the heirs of the family and the relegation of women to domestic chores predict sustainable development in Rivers State to a very high extent. Similarly, it is shown that restriction on

interaction among boys and girls, excessive protection of women from sexual violence, and poor implementation of child’s right act predict sustainable development in Rivers State to a high extent. Conclusively the grand mean of 3.06 was gotten. This implies that socio-cultural factors predict sustainable development in Rivers State to a large extent.

**Table 2: Mean and Standard deviation of respondents on the extent to which parental attitude towards women education predict sustainable development in Rivers State**

S/N	Item	Responses						
		VHE	HE	LE	VLE	Mean	Std DEV	Remark
	<b>To what extent do the following attitudes of parents towards women education predict sustainable development in Rivers State?</b>							
6	Restricting girls from attending schools of their choice	183	104	76	13	3.2	.88	VHE
7	Guiding girls and women into vocational subjects	127	194	46	9	3.1	.72	HE
8	Discouraging women from enrolling in higher institutions of learning	204	84	21	67	3.1	1.13	HE
9	Providing only basic learning facilities for the girls	97	221	22	36	3.0	.83	HE
10	Poor supervision of school work	108	208	14	46	3.0	.90	HE
	<b>Grand mean</b>					<b>3.08</b>	<b>0.892</b>	<b>HE</b>

Table 2 confirms that restricting girls from attending schools of their choice predicts sustainable development in Rivers State to a very high extent. However, responses to Items 7-10 culminated in Mean scores of 3.1, 3.1, 3.0, and 3.0. These Mean scores suggest that guiding girls and women into vocational

subjects, discouraging women from enrolling in higher education, providing only basic learning facilities and poor supervision of school work for girls predict sustainable development in Rivers State to a high extent.

**Table 3: Simple linear regression for the extent to which socio-cultural factor towards women education predicts sustainable development in Rivers State**

Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	R <sup>2</sup>	F	Sig.
Regression	1499.896	1	1499.896	0.866	2419.955	.000 <sup>b</sup>
1 Residual	231.806	374	.620			
<b>Total</b>	<b>173 1.702</b>	<b>375</b>				

\*H0 rejected at p > 0.05

Table 3 shows that coefficient of determination R<sup>2</sup> (0.866), is the square value of the correlation coefficient. It indicates that 86.6% variation in the sustainable development is predicted by social-cultural values towards women education. The calculated F

(1,374) = 0.2419.955 and p = 0.001 (p < 0.05) also shows that null hypothesis is rejected indicating that contribution of social—cultural factors towards women education in predicting sustainable development is significant.

**Table 4: Simple linear regression for the extent to which parental attitude towards women education predicts sustainable development in Rivers State**

Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	R <sup>2</sup>	F	Sig.
Regression	303.354	1	303.354	0.175	79.430	.000 <sup>b</sup>
1 Residual	1428.349	374	3.819			
<b>Total</b>	<b>1731.702</b>	<b>375</b>				

\*H0 rejected at p>0.05

Table 4 shows that coefficient of determination R<sup>2</sup> (0.175), is the square value of the correlation coefficient. It indicates that 17.5% variation in the sustainable development is predicted by parental attitude towards women education. The calculated F (1,374) 79.430 and p = 0.001 (p < 0.05) also shows that null hypothesis is rejected indicating that contribution of parental attitude towards women education in predicting sustainable development is significant.

## DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The first hypothesis revealed that socio-cultural factors influencing women’s education greatly influence sustainable development. This means that positive socio-cultural factors promoting women’s education will help to ensure sustainable development. The second hypothesis confirmed that parental attitude towards women education significantly predicts sustainable development in Rivers State. This implies that the earlier female education gains momentum in society as a whole, the greater their prospects for sustainable development. When a woman receives an education, she benefits both herself and her community. These findings are also consistent with Nonso and Alexander’s (2015) and Ibaka’s (2009), assertion that, only through literacy, knowledge, access to functional education, and opportunities to gain relevant skills can a woman truly escape living in poverty, fear, humiliation and powerlessness. That women education and empowerment promotes the participation of women in organizations and communities towards the goals of increased productivity, political efficacy, improved quality of community life and social justice. That women education and gender equality is an alternative mechanism for combating problems like poverty, hunger, disease and stimulating sustainable development.

## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Since the advent of western education in Nigeria, education inequality between men and women has remained a persistent concern. It has remained difficult for men and women to achieve equal status in educational attainment. This is due to a variety of causes, including a flawed educational system as well as cultural and traditional customs that are hostile to women’s education. However, emerging realities reveal that, initiatives in Nigeria to improve women’s education are generating positive results, giving hope that, the asymmetrical education imbalance between men and women may be restored within the next 10 to

15 years if current momentum is maintained. Thus, it is recommended that, open or tacit restriction on women’s education should be eliminated in order to enhance women’s professional career development. Gender disparities in education should be addressed so that men and women have an equal opportunity to make decisions about their career paths and abilities without fear of prejudice.

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