Educating the Man: Option for Gender Equality and Women Empowerment

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Abstract

The paper is an attempt to address the problem of gender inequality. It locates the origin of gender inequality in a cultural history in which man had played a domineering role, stressing that any genuine effort at addressing the problem must start from the man. It posits that the education and reorientation of the man would bring about a new turn of mind in man about his self-arrogated roles in view of the existential realities. A new turn of mind by man, it is believed, will usher in equality that hitherto was limited by the law of the land. And so, in an atmosphere of gender equality, freedom and security for all being, women would be encouraged to participate fully in the educational, economic, political, social and other developmental activities of their societies. This of course, would result in the much sought for equality of opportunities and empowerment for women.

1. Introduction

One of the issues that have gained much currency in contemporary literature is the question of gender inequality or disparity. This is because the dynamic nature of human society which encourages social change yields itself to intellectual scrutiny. By this social change, man is enabled to create social harmony, and maintain for himself the human dignity which nature bestows on him.

Despite, man's awareness of the obsolescence of age-old nature of gender disparity between the male and female folks in the face of existential realities, attempt at correcting the imbalance have remained illusory. This is so because a realistic approach to addressing the problem of gender disparity has not been adopted. It is our belief that a practical approach to tackling any gender problem must take into cognizance a re-orientation of the man at whose instance the cultural belief of the society is sustained. The common way of addressing gender problems has been from the women perspective; that is by educating and sensitizing the women and forcing them to move at par with their male counterparts. This of course, has not yielded the desired result. Instead, the effort aggravates gender inequality more than heals it. No wonder, Lauer and Lauer (2002;287) quoting Kane says that:

Education as presently structured affect women attitudes more than men and does more to help people recognize gender inequity than support remedies for that inequity.

Gender disparity no doubt is an offshoot of a prevalent human condition in an epoch in which man has played a domineering role, and which result became synthesized into the human culture. We therefore believe that any meaningful attempt at liberating women from gender imbalance must entail re-orientation and re-educating the male folks who are the key players in the gender phenomenon. The dialectics here is that re-educating the man would imply liberating the women folks, which invariably, would entail their empowerment and consequently engendering gender equality.

We shall therefore address this global problem via the historical gate-pass which is to x-ray all experiences past and present of gender disparity drawing heavily from the Nigerian experience and also bring philosophy to bear on our analysis of the way forward.

2. Gender Disparity: The genesis

Discussion on gender disparity which basically imply the idea of male domination over the female folks cannot be complete without a reflective background on which it sprang and thrived. This is necessary because according to Aristotle (1964:445):

He who considers things in their first growth and origin whether a state or anything else will obtain the clearest view of them.

Thus the historical antecedent of gender disparity will be discussed here under economic, religious and socio-psychological influences on the people.

3. Economic Influence

The first human societies were basically agrarian. Agriculture was its main economic base. Ancient man had progressed from gathering of wild fruits and hunting of animals to a settled agricultural life. This economic system in turn necessitated the mode of production appropriate to the era. Man therefore initiated division of labour in the belief that it would enhance his ability to harness the natural resources more effectively. Thus, arose the first form of differences in roles among the sexes. In Africa, for instance, while the man took charge of the daunting masculine task of hunting, clearing of bushes and providing tools, the women folk were left with the task of raising the young, keeping the home and cultivating simple crops. This division of tasks was necessary for the survival of human society, hence Lewis (1981:75) rightly observes when he says that:

Basic to every form of social organization is the method of obtaining the items essential for human survival. In other words how do the people of a particular society produce their food, clothing, tools, and other items that they need in order to live as human beings? Necessary conditions of existence shape the relationship of man to each other. Men carry on a struggle against nature and utilize nature to produce the necessities of life not as separate individuals but in common, in group, in societies. But at different stages of development people make use of different modes of production and therefore lead different kinds of life.

4. Religious Influence

Man is observed to be a religious being. Hence, his actions and passions have continued to be influenced by his religion. Gender roles are embedded in both the teachings and practices of the world famous Religions. Infact all religions assert or simply imply that men are superior and /or that women should be subservient to the men. (Deckard in Lauer and Lauer 2002: 278). For instance while the Christian Holy book, the Bible (Gen 3:11, Tim 2:11, Peter 3:1) declares that Women are help mates to the male folk and therefore should be submissive to his authority, the Islamic religious Pudah system confines women to the homes. Until recently despite the large number of women in the Christian Faith, as against their male counterpart, it was abnormal to see women head churches. Religious influence in African societies cannot be over-flogged as all seem to have given in to the doctrinal belief or rather what we may regard as an epochal interpretation. Male Headship which started from the different religious and family circles soon became a universal social phenomenon.

5. Socio -Psychological Influence

The male domineering human condition which became absorbed into the cultural history of societies played itself into the psyche of the women folk who have come to accept male authority as ideal and a normal way of life; and these women could at best be described as the defender of the "order of male dominance". Hence the tradition.

The Nigerian first lady Dame Patience Jonathan lends credence to this belief when in her 2010 Rivers State launch of the "women for change initiative" she noted that the women have been found to be the major prosecutors of female offenders in the majority of the reported cases of violence against women.

6. Man, Education and Gender Role

Man as used here refers to the male, not its generic sense of all human being. History has shown that man was the

dominant factor in the foundation of gender role and a major agent for social change. Therefore any solution aimed at solving the problem of gender disparity that is outside the man is like a futile attempt to terminate the life of a hydra plant by merely cutting off one of its many tentacles, for it soon assumes normal life with the support of the remaining tentacles. The realistic approach would be to sever the head that bears the tentacles, in like manner; a more holistic approach would be needed to tackle the problem of gender inequality.

Deshi's (2004:75) observation that the increased formation and funding of women related programmes in Nigeria such as "Better life" and "family support programmes" are indications that the women are getting the desired attention. And besides the above initiative the 2010 Nation wide tour of "women for change initiative" of the first Lady, Dame Patience Jonathan, soliciting for 35% positions in political offices for women, raises some questions. (i) Who are the grantors of the desired attention? and (ii) On whose auspices are the "better life", "women for change initiatives" and other women-related programmes sustained? The answers to the representative two questions above no doubt revolve around man. It is the man that is at the centre of it all and who it is that must be willing to give his consent and support. Therefore, it is the man that must be re-educated, re-oriented and re-sensitized to appreciate the existential realities of his time where mental abilities play a more dominant role than the hitherto physical strength and "might is right" that used to be the order of the day. In line with the present contention it would be necessary to examine education in relation to its expected social roles in the transformation of societies. It is in recognition of these roles and the place of education to satisfy them that Braimoh (2000:89) refers to when he describes education as:

A weapon of social change, a bedrock of national socio-economic development, an instrument for changing (for the better) the culture of oppression, ignorance, victimization and perpetual dependence.

Education in this sense is neither a mere acquisition of academic corpus of facts and information nor is it Nyerere's (1967:44) kind of education that would serve to transmit the people's cultural heritage from generation to generation. Such an idea of education might not be responsive to change. The type of education advocated here is the reconstructionist type of education that will generate a new turn of mind in the man. Akinpelu (2005: 58) discussing rational reconstruction of African culture notes that:

It is in part the exhibition of the reasons that logically justify our holding certain beliefs and practices; and in part, the re-organization and systematization of those beliefs and practices, so as to make them coherent with the modern scientific outlook which, for better or for worse, we have irrevocably embraced and hence make them cognitively acceptable to the 20th century technological and rational mind,

Man needs the kind of education that will enable him to re-interpret and transform his societal and national values within the frame-work of the modern day realities. By this, education becomes an instrument for necessary ideological changes that would create an equitable society without boundary and limitations; a society full of equal opportunity and where limitations will be within the confines of the constitution and capabilities rather than on sex differences.

7. Gender Equality and Women Empowerment

Believing that education liberates man from the ideological stereotypes, so that he is at home with the realities of his time, gender inequality will eventually give way for gender equality. By gender equality, we mean a situation in which individuals irrespective of sex differences are accorded the same rights, privileges, opportunities and advantages as rational beings so that they can perform optimally as human beings. Man's acceptance of the equality of all being is a condition that is very necessary for women empowerment. By this we mean that in a society where gender equality is recognized women empowerment becomes inevitable. Bamisaiye (2000:132) quotes fielding as saying that:

... empowerment is about those with power giving those whom they decide are appropriate recipients greater capacity to make decision about the nature of their work or greater involvement in their legitimate sphere of interest.

He goes further to add that:

The word empowerment carried with it a promise of autonomy and the capacity to shape work in the ways which not only reflects but develops the skills, expertise and aspiration of the person who is empowered.

In a similar manner, George and Ekpo (2005:391) quote Okeke as defining "empowerment" to mean "to give power, to give authority, to enable a person or group of persons to gain power". They also quote Azikwe as defining

"empowerment" as "giving or providing the means for self reliance and independence".

These various definitions of "Empowerment" presuppose the fact that by accident of history, the authority to empower is with somebody, and that is the man who through education, would attain a new turn of mind that will pave the way or provide an enabling environment for the women to realize their full abilities and capabilities.

Nigeria in her National Policy on Education (2004:6) states the various ways in which her citizens can be empowered. In a section entitled "five main National goals of Nigeria education", it lists them as (a) a free and democratic society; (b) a just and egalitarian society; (c) a united strong and self-reliant nation; (d) a great and dynamic economy; (e) a land full of bright opportunities for all citizens. These policy statements are further corroborated and given force of the law of the federal republic of Nigeria as contained in chapter iv No. 34 of the constitution that:

Every individual is entitled to respect for the dignity of person, and accordingly:

- (a) No person shall be subjected to torture or to inhuman or degrading treatment.
- (b) No person shall be held in slavery or servitude and.
- (c) No person shall be required to perform forced or compulsory labour.

The above National objectives imply that the idea of equality and empowerment for all Nigerians exist though may not have been practically pursued. Granted now, that the man is an enlightened person having been cured of the ideological ills that have long blurred his understanding and has the will to execute the national goals, the women would find equitable positions in all fields of human endeavour to benefit and to contribute their full quota to human development. Women would be provided with education and relevant manipulative skills for self reliance. All these are possible without whipping of sentiments about marginalization, and demonstration by women or competition between the opposites. Such sentimental statements as what a man can do, a woman can do, even better may not therefore be necessary.

In-fact President Goodluck Jonathan Federal Government led-administration could be said to have demonstrated a very encouraging educative change of attitude towards the promotion and spotlighting of women in Nigeria.

This can be readily appreciated in the number of women that are appointed to such lofty and prestigious positions of responsibility in the present dispensation. Such women among others include: Dr. Ngozi Okonjo Iweala, the Minister of Finance/ Co-ordinating minister; Mrs. Ama Pepple, the Minister of land and Housing; Mrs. Stella Odua, Ogiemwenyi, the Minister of Aviation; Prof. Rugaayat Rufai, the Minister of education; Mrs. Olajumoke Akinjide, minister of state for Federal Capital Territory; Hajjah Zainab Maina, Minister of women affairs; Mrs. Diezani Alison-Madueke, minister of petroleum; Zainab Ibrahim-Kuchi, minister for state Niger Delta affairs; Mrs. Omobola Johnson, minister of communication technology; Mrs. Sarah Reng Ocheke, minister for water resources. These appointments saw their culmination in the elevation of justice (Mrs.) ALooma Mukhtar the first female ever (in Nigeria) to the exalted position of the chief justice of the federal republic of Nigeria.

8. Conclusion

Gender inequality is as old as the human society. It found expression in gender role which were necessitated by the prevailing human conditions and the dire need to subdue the challenging environment for man's greater benefit.

Ever since then man has continued to guard jealously this cultural heritage in which he found himself at a vantage position. A change in the status-quo must entail the education and re-orientation of the man so that he is cured of this oil ideological superiority in the face of new realities of the time. A new turn of mind by the man will user in equality for both men and women with its attendant empowerment.

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