

Chapter 10

Women in Higher Education in Nigeria: Challenges and Responses

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ABSTRACT

This chapter examines issues of female access to higher education in Nigeria and the equity and empowerment interventions available to female staff and students in higher educational institutions (HEIs) in the light of Items 4 and 5 of the Sustainable Development Goals. It focuses on the major challenges, responses, their drivers, and their effectiveness. Statistical and existing qualitative data are used to highlight the persistent sociocultural, economic, political, security, and policy challenges that continue to negatively impact female participation and experiences in higher education. It advocates enactment and implementation of legislation and institutional policies to promote gender equity, gendering of the curriculum, females' equitable and quality participation in leadership positions, and better security from internal and external threats. Advocacy to foster widespread attitudinal change and collaboration on global and regional development initiatives marked by national priorities should facilitate the attainment of these goals. .

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INTRODUCTION

The promulgation of the Sustainable Development Goal 4, namely, ensuring inclusive and equitable education, promoting lifelong learning for all, and Goal 5, achieving gender equality and empowering women and girls by 2030 is based on the premise that social justice is essential to human development and women's empowerment is a powerful means of promoting sustainable development. Nowhere are these two goals more critical than in the low-income countries of the world where traditional beliefs and cultural practices have long been invoked to decide and shape women's place in the society and have become so entrenched that even in higher education institutions which are supposed to be liberatory and equal opportunity places, they still hinder women's advancement. They influence what women get to know, the content, methods and timing through male dominated politics of knowledge production and consumption (Andriansen, 2016). The elimination of gender-based discrimination in education at all levels as well as the eradication of illiteracy among women, improving access to higher education in diverse disciplines, especially in science and technological education and continuing education are all highlighted as important measures on the Platform.

Traditionally, international agencies have presented higher education as a panacea to most of the economic and social inequities in the world and have, consequently interrogated who are the beneficiaries, the content and the quality of the education (UNESCO, 1995; World Bank, 2000). Achieving gender equality is positioned as undergirding other goals of sustainable development, such as good governance, human rights, environmental sustainability, and poverty reduction. Nations which are signatories to these protocols make efforts to ensure that restrictive gender roles do not hinder the opportunities that both genders must develop for realizing their full potentials and making informed choices.

The fact that many of the low-income countries in Africa like Nigeria often fail to attain these goals and must carry forward the unfinished businesses of the preceding protocols makes it essential to examine how the vision of achieving egalitarian education has worked out. This chapter examines the challenges that females face in Nigeria's higher educational institutions, and the institutional, national and international interventions which are being used or could be utilized to eliminate these obstacles.

BACKGROUND

Access to education at all levels refers to the opportunity to attend formal schools to acquire the knowledge, skills and attitudes which facilitate participation in local

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