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**Variability in the Quality of Life of Literate and  
Non-Literate Rural Women: A Nigerian Account**

By

**BENEDICTA OZOEMENEM EGBO**

A Thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements  
for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy  
Graduate Department of Education  
University of Toronto

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*To all women who succeed against all odds*

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## **Abstract**

### **Variability in the Quality of Life of Literate and Non-Literate Rural Women: A Nigerian Account**

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Discourses related to world trends in illiteracy are replete with accounts of the ameliorative potential of literacy vis-à-vis the subordinate condition of women in Sub-Saharan Africa. But, despite the extensive coverage of the problem in academic literature, there is a paucity of field-based research showing how illiteracy affects the quality of women's lives in the region. This study was designed to explore the quality of life of literate and non-literate rural women in Nigeria.

The study progressed on the assumption that the fundamental cause of women's peripheral condition is rooted in their collective status as the subordinate gender within Nigerian society. Women's limited access to literacy/education is as much a question of economics as one of legitimacy, uneven distribution of power and access to social rewards. Theoretically, the study examined the link between women, literacy and power, emphasizing the structural

nature of women's subordination often through hegemony.

The question of women's access to literacy touches virtually all spheres of women's private and social life within organised society, including issues of power, politics, economics, demographics, health and child welfare as well as women's psychological well-being. To varying extents, this work touches on all of these. Additionally, the study addresses the broader implications for society as a whole when literacy levels among women are low.

Guided by the philosophical underpinnings of critical realism, the data were collected through the use of qualitative methods that relied substantially on individual and focus-group interviews as well observations by the researcher within the lived milieu of the women themselves.

The findings suggest that while the literate participants have not become the leaders of their respective rural communities, they do enjoy a comparatively enhanced quality of life, have increased life options as well as some social influence. But the evidence also indicates that non-literate rural women are ambivalent about literacy programmes because their abject economic conditions make participation in such programmes an unattractive option. Finally, the results strongly suggest that empowering rural women in Nigeria requires the adoption of praxis-oriented intervention policies that are geared towards critical social reconstruction, linking educational empowerment with economic independence.

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# Chapter 1

## Introduction

### *1.1 Background to the Problem*

The advent of colonial domination in Sub-Saharan Africa during the 1800s, marked the beginning of Western-style social ideologies within the region and substantially changed the socio-economic orientations of the once agrarian societies. The impact of this change was most pronounced in the area of education. The colonialists considered their type of education an essential tool in achieving their agenda that is, sustaining the colonial regime. Unfortunately, the educational systems introduced by the colonialists tended to accentuate various forms of gender-related discrimination and were modelled on the male only institutes of higher learning that had developed in medieval Europe. The systems were at once racist to Africans in general and sexist to females. In consequence, African males were almost exclusively the sole beneficiaries of Western-style literacy. Because education was purely functional and utilitarian, priority was given to boys who would eventually serve as support and clerical staff to the colonial administrators. However, the education the boys received did not include vocational or technical training. In 1921, for instance, Lord Lugard, the first governor of Nigeria, described the early colonial philosophy of education as follows:

The chief function of Government primary and secondary schools ... is to train the more promising *boys* [emphasis mine] from the village schools as teachers for those schools, as clerks for the local native courts and as interpreters (Nduka 1964 p.21).

The same trend existed in other countries of the region. Smock (1981) reports a similar attitude among the colonialists in Kenya in East Africa:

Economic and educational opportunities ... to the extent that they were offered at all to the African population ... were accorded to men. Women were left to subsistence cultivation in reserves... (p.22).

In addition to the functional nature of education during the colonial period, the Western culture which came along with it also carried rigid gender ideologies which aided and supported exclusionary practices against women (Amadiume, 1987). Far from redeeming women from gender-related oppression, colonial rule actually curtailed some of the traditional rights and statuses that were hitherto conferred on them. The colonial administrators failed to recognize that in some parts of Africa, certainly Nigeria, women were active participants in both commerce and the public spheres. Not that gender discrimination did not exist in pre-colonial era; indeed, any such assumptions would be tantamount to illusory romanticization. Nigerian society is not by any means a sexually egalitarian society now nor was it even in pre-colonial times. Social stratification (which does not necessarily imply oppression) on the basis of gender is therefore nothing new. The difference, as Amadiume argues, is that before colonial rule women wielded considerable socio-political influence and power within their respective communities and therefore had more options to minimize the control of men. Other studies by Mba (1982) and Okonjo (1976) substantiate this claim. In a study of the political activities of women in Southern Nigeria between 1900 and 1965, Nina Mba concluded that "women... wielded more political

authority, power and influence in the pre-colonial period than at any other time" (p.302). She maintains that at that time, women had officially recognized representation even at the highest level of government. Similarly, Kamene Okonjo points to a dual-sex political system among the Igbos of Southwestern Nigeria in which women played a parallel but complementary role to men. Other writers, Iweriebor (1988), Afonja (1990), Smock (1981) and Van Allen (1976) also support this view. In reference to the infusion of ethnocentric ideologies into African society and the subsequent devaluation of women and their statuses by colonial administrators within the entire Sub-Saharan region, Smock (1981) notes that:

The development of Western education within the framework of a Victorian mentality and a dependent economy, consistently led to the exclusion of women from the educational system ... The European conception of females ... of a helpless homebound creature, inclined administrations to favour the admission of boys to the limited number of places available (p.254).

This phenomenon among the colonialists was, however, not unique to the African context. Corson (1993), cites similar instances of the dis-empowering consequences of colonial rule among Aboriginal Australian women. Similarly, in Canada and the United States, the subordinate condition of the once independent and self-sustaining Native peoples, is directly attributable to the erosion of their power base as a result of colonial domination. That Sub-Saharan Africa in general remains considerably behind in Western-style literacy should therefore come as no surprise. Even less surprising is the fact that women, as a result of the exclusionary practices of imperialist administrations, juxtaposed with some culture related biases, have fared the worst (Smock, 1981; King and Hill, 1993; Chlebowska, 1990.

1992). The deprivileging of traditional African education and the privileging of formal Western education, for the most part, affected women adversely. Further, the simultaneous introduction of Western-style capitalist economy, which shifted the emphasis from the family as the primary unit of production to wage labour outside the home, compounded the problem. Thus excluded from wage employment and from educational opportunities, women in Sub-Saharan Africa have been left unprepared to live in a post-agrarian and increasingly modernizing society.

The UN declaration of the women's decade at the World Conference of the International Women's Year, held in Mexico City in 1975, brought the issue of the subordinate condition of women in the region to the attention of the world community. This awareness in turn resulted in a deliberate focus on the status and welfare of women by the UN and its affiliated agencies. Both UNESCO and the World Bank, for instance, embarked on numerous development-related projects aimed at improving the conditions of girls and women in the region. Considered an indispensable prerequisite to development (Psacharopoulos and Woodhall, 1985; United Nations, 1991; Herz et al., 1991; King and Hill, 1993), education was seen as a potential tool for alleviating women's marginalized condition. Encouraged by the UN initiatives and still reeling from the euphoria of newly acquired independence, many national governments in the region began to restructure and expand their systems of education (Dupont, 1981; Bhola, 1990; UNESCO, 1991). These reforms typically included the implementation of Universal Primary Education (UPE) which aimed at providing basic education for all, accelerating development and redressing previous

educational imbalances. But, despite numerous literacy campaigns, women remain substantially less educated than men in the region. In its 1991 World Education Report, UNESCO observed that while significant gains were made in male education in developing nations, women continued to trail behind in school enrollments at all levels.

In the case of Nigeria, the national policy on education, in addition to introducing a new system of formal education, also included a policy statement on the government's commitment to eliminating "mass illiteracy within the shortest possible time" in the country (revised National Policy on Education, 1981). Only about 30% of the Nigerian population is considered literate (Akinde, 1985; Iweriebor, 1988; Braimoh, 1993) and over 60% of the non-literates are women (Akinpelu et al., 1994; Women in Nigeria Document-WIN henceforth, 1985). Because a majority of the population lives in rural areas, the bulk of non-literate women also live in rural areas. However, not all rural women are illiterates. There is a minority of literate women who also live and work within these areas. Their living conditions and that of a group of their non-literate counterparts constitute the topic and respondents of this inquiry.

## ***1.2 The Purpose of the Study***

The study is an exploration of the living conditions and life chances of literate and non-literate women in a rural area of Nigeria as seen from their own perspectives. The study was designed to explore any significant difference which may exist in the living conditions and quality of life of both groups and how many of these differences the women

themselves attribute to literacy or lack of it. In addition, the study explored which particular aspects of their lives the women believe have been most affected by their literate and non-literate conditions respectively. From this evidence, I propose praxis-oriented policies that are geared towards empowering rural women and bridging the gender gap in literacy/education. The position adopted in this inquiry is, for the most part, that policies related to empowering rural women both by the Nigerian government and by international and donor agencies working in the area of developing and sustaining literacies, have been based primarily on the conceptions of policy makers themselves. As is often argued in related literature, literacy should indeed empower women in such a way as to significantly alter their marginalized condition (Chlebowska, 1990, 1992; Bee, 1993; Stromquist, 1990, 1992a; Ramdas, 1990). Finding out what it is like to be literate/non-literate within a rural African setting, from those who live and experience it, is the main concern of this study. Specifically, the study addressed the following issues:

- The impact of illiteracy on the daily existence of the research participants, as revealed in their own reports.
- Any significant difference that may exist between the quality of life of both groups of participants, from their personal accounts.

- The extent to which rural Nigerian women believe that literacy or lack of it contributes to or limits their ability to contribute to the sustenance of their families, the socio-economic development of their communities and subsequently to the Nigerian society in general.
- What enabled some women within the same rural setting to become literate and what factors impeded others from becoming so.
- The kind of link (if any) that exists between access to literacy and the empowerment of women on the one hand, and education and quality of life on the other hand, particularly within a rural context. Additionally, in what ways has literacy or lack of it affected women's access to critical resources.
- The ways (if any) in which the acquisition of literacy has helped rural women to renegotiate power relations within both their households and communities: thus bringing them closer to the centre from the margins.
- The kinds of link (if any) non-literate women, from their own perspectives, see between the acquisition of literacy and the improvement of their present living conditions.

- The degree of priority non-literate women assign to the acquisition of literacy in policies related to their empowerment.
- The kind of literacy policies<sup>1</sup> that would empower Nigerian rural women. Adult education policies in Nigeria may not be relevant to the needs of rural women and therefore problematic: a possibility that suggests the need for alternative solutions.

### *1.3 The Significance of the Study*

One common theme that seems to emerge in the disparate literature on the subordinate condition of women in developing nations in general and Sub-Saharan Africa in particular, is the redeeming potential of education (see Smock, 1981; Chlebowska, 1990, 1992; King and Hill, 1993; Herz, 1989; Ramdas, 1990; Kelly, 1987; Akande, 1987; Stromquist, 1990; UNESCO, 1975, 1987; United Nations, 1991; Blumberg et al., 1995). However, if literacy is inextricably linked to empowerment, as literature discussed later suggests, there is a paucity of empirical research that supports this claim. Similarly, there is little evidence that show whether or not being literate has contributed to the renegotiation of power relations between men and women, and the enhancement of political and socio-economic status of women particularly within the African context. As Heath (1986) asserts:

---

<sup>1</sup> Although the Igbo language from which the local dialect of the study area is derived is orthographed, the latter (the local dialect) is not and so the development of literacies in the area is discussed within the context of the English language which is the national lingua franca and in which most educational instruction is given.

Much must be known about the psychological and social consequences of both illiteracy and nonschooled literacy before pushing ahead with such goals as UNESCO'S mission to eradicate illiteracy in the world before the year 2000 (p. 19).

While the ameliorative potential of literacy is an assumption that few would query (de Castell, Luke, and MacLennan 1986; Wagner, 1992; Arnove and Graff, 1987; Goody, 1977; Olson, 1977; Kozol, 1980, 1985), Heath's injunction has, however, significant research implications and this study provides some of that empirical evidence. Further, the few studies that have been conducted in this area within the Nigerian context are based on urban-rural and not rural-rural comparisons. Indeed, a critical scrutiny of the literature suggests that for the most part, the voices of rural women have been ignored in the search for workable solutions to their condition. Yet as Freire (1970) argues:

No pedagogy which is truly liberating can remain distant from the oppressed by treating them as unfortunates and by presenting for their emulation models from among the oppressors. The oppressed must be their own example in the struggle for their redemption (p.39).

Adopting a similar stance, Kassam and Healey (1984) stress that:

[Adult education] must be judged by whether or not it has helped to foster people's participation in the development process, to reduce social inequities and to help in shifting power into the hands of the down-trodden majority of the people (p.245).

This study also examined the ways in which education enhances the lives of rural women in Nigeria. One potential value of the study is the fact that it gives a voice to Nigerian and

indeed, African rural women in general by using their views as prime data. Across Nigeria, as elsewhere in Africa, women continue to contribute significantly to the development process, yet most lack the education to improve their condition or to reduce the social barriers and economic burden they must endure, quite often, out of necessity. Understanding the effects of illiteracy from the perspective of those who actually live with it should, to some extent, provide a critical subjective "lens" for viewing the problem among rural women within Nigeria and perhaps rural Sub-Sahara Africa. The study also attempts to document the lives of some women as they struggle to survive and improve their lives and those of their families, without the benefit of a taken-for-granted phenomenon-literacy.

The subjugation of women in Africa has become an international *cause célèbre*, particularly among researchers within the social sciences. But, as Amadiume (1987) observes, a lot of the literature on African women is written from the perspective of non-continental Africans whose limited knowledge of African culture and systems of thought, and whose psychological and physical detachment from the situation, may inadvertently taint the accuracy of their accounts. Further, as Brydon and Chant (1989) point out, most of the theoretical foundations upon which women's studies and gender relations studies are based, emanate from studies of women in Western societies. In contrast, this research offers the perspective of a "situated" critical observer conducted from an Afrocentric stance. In the persistent search for workable interventions in the development crises of Nigeria and other African nations (Okeem. 1990), it is essential that all related issues, including the development and sustenance of literacies, be reconceptualized to suit local complexities.

Beyond that, the issue of "women in development" (WID), a dominant framework for analyzing women's role in sustainable development, has gained currency among feminist researchers but related studies have hardly focused on the issue of women's literacy (Stromquist, 1992a) or its function in the empowerment of women and their participation in development. The emphasis of WID programmes is often on issues related to the broader development needs of society. The assumption is that "modernization" would automatically ameliorate the condition of women. Criticizing this approach, Etta (1994) points out that a major flaw in the WID concept is that:

Scant attention is given ... to the multidimensional and complex ways in which education affects economic development.... WID and WIE (women in development and women in environment), two of the most favoured conceptual platforms for addressing gender issues are insufficient to reach the desired result of gender equity (p.58).

Indeed, a 1975 UN resolution on empowering women, clearly makes a connection between women's lack of education and their inferior status in many countries. It, therefore, suggests that "... only if a woman is given equality of educational opportunity can she make and exercise a free choice as to what her role in society will be."

While Sub-Saharan Africa is by no means a homogenous entity, similarities in culture and systems of thought among many communities (Dei, 1994a; Bhola, 1990; Karp, 1986), suggest that the findings of this study could have significant implications for policy formulation not only in Nigeria but also within the region.

Finally, issues related to women are generally glossed over by policy makers in Nigeria. In addition to contributing to the much needed literature/research on African women, it seems likely that any discourse that questions and exposes their condition will in some way contribute to the enhancement of their status.

### *1.4 Il/literacy: A Critical Analysis*

The literature on literacy not only covers a wide range of disciplines (Barton, 1994), it is also replete with contradictory and competing views (Wagner, 1992; Ouane, 1992; Lankshear and McLaren, 1993; Stromquist, 1992b; Levine, 1986; de Castell, Luke and Egan 1986; Giroux, 1993; Heath, 1986; Ramdas, 1990; Graff, 1979). However, within this mesh of academic and professional discourse, it is possible to identify several distinct (although not mutually exclusive) themes. These include the nature of and types of literacy and its consequences for beneficiaries.

#### *1.4.1 The Nature of Literacy*

Defining literacy is a daunting task since there seems to be no consensus among researchers. While most acknowledge the fact that literacy involves, to varying extents, the ability to read and write, debates remain rife as to what constitutes "real" literacy and what the acquisition of such competencies should do for beneficiaries. Levine's (1986) succinct description of the persistent discord within discourses related to literacy, clarifies the point. He warns that in attempting to define il/literacy, it is essential not to:

start with unrealistic expectations about...achieving a simple formulation acceptable to all interested parties. On the contrary, what might appear to be an endless series of disagreements will be encountered which reflect the fact that we are dealing with a complex amalgam of psychological, linguistic, and social processes layered one on top of another like a rich and indigestible gateau. Different varieties of academic specialists cut slices out of this cake with the conceptual equipment their disciplinary training has taught them to favour (p.22).

Bhola (1989). agrees with this state of conceptual chaos particularly among academics.

According to him:

Scholars and practitioners have talked about cultural literacy, public literacy, critical literacy, dominant literacy, liberatory literacy, emergent literacy, differentiated literacy and a host of other literacies (p.441).

Underscoring its contextual nature, and attempting to untangle the mesh, Lankshear and McLaren (1993) offer a potential solution to the contested territory which literacy discourse has become -- talking about "literacies" rather than literacy. While this view almost condemns the concept to orthographic relativism, it does serve two crucial purposes. First, it offers the possibility of accommodation between the claims espoused by competing "models" and second, it attests to the fact that literacy is a cultural phenomenon. This view of literacy also has considerable empirical support. Heath's (1983) significant ethnographic study of literacy patterns in three American communities, for instance, demonstrates quite clearly that the acquisition of and use of literacy varies from one setting to another. Elsewhere, Heath (1986) concludes that literacy has:

different meanings for members of different groups, with a corresponding variety of acquisition modes, functions, and uses... (p.25).

Other writers are less conciliatory. Graff (1986) for instance, takes a definite stance and argues that literacy is a " set of techniques for communications and for decoding and reproducing written or printed materials [and] ... cannot be taken as any more or any less." Similarly, Okenimpke (1992), favours a more universal definition of literacy which takes cognizance of the fact that:

People are either able to write their names, pick them out from a list of other names, read non-technical material within a range of vocabulary or they are not able to do these things (p. 34).

He goes on to argue for the repudiation of any relationship between the acquisition of literacy skills and what society subsequently offers to literate citizens. Clearly, this argument negates a causal relationship, even in the most indirect manner, between illiteracy and social disempowerment or empowerment as the case may be.

In spite of the battery of definitions, one seems to stand out in international discussions of literacy -- UNESCO's definition.

#### ***1.4.2 UNESCO's Conception of Literacy***

Appropriated from the very functional and relative (Wagner, 1992) definition of Gray (1956), UNESCO'S definition of literacy as it currently stands, states that to be functionally literate, a person must be able to:

Engage in all those activities in which literacy is required for effective functioning in his group or community and also for enabling him to continue to use reading, writing and calculation for his own community's development (UNESCO, 1990: 8).

Many practitioners and theorists, however, reject this view. Giroux (1993), for instance, urges for a definition that sees literacy:

as a form of cultural citizenship and politics that provides the conditions for subordinate groups to learn the knowledge and skills necessary for empowerment. ... to live in a society in which they have the opportunity to govern and shape history rather than be consigned to its margins (p. 367).

Giroux's definition has particular appeal when considering the objectives of this study. While it is naive to completely discount the functional definition of literacy since the acquisition of literacy is essential for a meaningful and complete life in contemporary societies (Kozol, 1980; Corson, 1993), the position of this study is that such a narrow view of literacy is not adequate to provoke the kind of social change that can empower marginalized groups such as women in Sub-Saharan Africa.

Closely related to the definitional problem (albeit indirectly), is the question of the dichotomy that is often drawn between literates and non-literates<sup>2</sup>. This dichotomy is often

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<sup>2</sup> My interest here, however, is less with the conceptual separation of both groups than with semantics and the negative implications of such distinctions where the term "illiterate" conveys the image of "handicapped" social stereotypes.

problematic. Many writers have criticised<sup>3</sup> the pejorative connotations of the term "illiterate" and point out that being an "illiterate" is not synonymous with reduced mental capabilities or the ability to conceptualize abstractly (Horsman, 1990; Stromquist, 1992b; Ogunniyi, 1987; Scribner and Cole, 1981; Ramdas, 1990; Street, 1991). While it is simple common sense that for conceptual convenience, both groups should be categorized as separate entities, it serves no theoretical purpose to stigmatize non-literates. As Ramdas (1990) sees it, " ... it is we the so-called 'literate' who tend in our arrogance, to equate illiteracy with ignorance, or worse with stupidity." In a similar vein, Street (1991), suggests that:

illiterates are presumed ... to be able to think less abstractedly, to be more embedded, less critical, less able to reflect upon, for instance, the nature of the language they use or the sources of their political oppression (p.165).

On the contrary, a commonly cited study (discussed further in Chapter Four), of the Vai people of Liberia (Scribner and Cole, 1981), suggests that non-literates do not think less logically nor less abstractly. Similarly, a study conducted to determine the nature of scientific thinking among a group of non-literate-Yoruba-speaking adult Nigerians (Ogunniyi, 1987), had similar results. The researcher found that the perceptions of the participants vis-à-vis natural phenomena occurring around them were influenced not only by traditional but also

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<sup>3</sup> This study endorses such a critique and will therefore avoid the use of the word "illiterate(s)" except where it is unavoidable (such as in quotations), or where its usage adds a special emphasis to a line of thought. Rather, I shall use the word "non-literate" which simply refers to the state of not being able to decode and encode written material.

scientific thinking. As a result of this finding the study concluded that:

Rather than base literacy programme on the faulty assumption that we are dealing with ignorant and superstitious illiterates, we would do well to first ... determine their level of perception and to proceed therefrom. Otherwise, we would only be touching on the surface but not...reaching their inner being (Ogunniyi, 1987 p.93).

### ***1.4.3. Forms of Literacy***

Two types of literacy are relevant to this discussion: functional and critical literacy. While this study considers functional literacy "inadequate", the latter is congruent with the literacy theory within which the study is grounded.

#### ***Functional Literacy***

Often associated with UNESCO, the term came into official use after the Tehran World Conference of Ministers of Education on the Eradication of Illiteracy, organized by UNESCO in 1965; a conference that marked the beginning of the now famous ten year (1965 - 75) Experimental World Literacy Program (EWLP). Although it has undergone several revisions through the years, particularly due to UNESCO's tinkering (Levine, 1986; Okenimkpe, 1992), it is generally linked to national development, modernization and social transformation. Its emphasis is on reading and writing, numeracy, acceleration of economic development, civic and occupational skills. Quite simply, functional literacy is literacy for everyday use with the added incentive of socio-economic rewards since beneficiaries (particularly the masses), are presumed to be more employable. The objectives that

undergird functional literacy therefore, seem to suggest a simple causal relationship between lack of literacy skills and socio-economic underdevelopment. Juxtaposed with its seeming apolitical nature, it is not surprising that this model of literacy has been most influential in the formulation of adult education policies in many developing nations (Ouane, 1992). Although this conception of literacy as a "functional" tool persists in popularity (Levine, 1986), particularly among international development donor agencies such as UNESCO and UNDP, it has been subjected to intense scrutiny and subsequently dismissed by practitioners and academics alike as inadequate, relativistic and oblivious of other mediating factors, such as politics, oppressive social structures, and economics, all of which impinge on an individual's ability to acquire and use literacy skills (de Castell et al., 1986; Wagner, 1992; Lankshear and McLaren, 1993; Freire, 1970, 1985; Giroux, 1993). Such was indeed the message of the 1975 International Symposium on Literacy in Persepolis, Iran. Other international symposia -- Guanajuato 1987 and Windhoek 1990 (see Stromquist, 1992b), have also been critical of the type of literacy that is not associated with empowerment.

### *Critical Literacy*<sup>4</sup>

Influenced by the ideological views of Paulo Freire, which assert that only the kind of literacy that renders people active questioners of their reality is worth acquiring, advocates of this type of literacy reject the notion of functional literacy in their effort to

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<sup>4</sup> In this study, critical literacy is used as an umbrella term to cover the wide range of theoretical views that espouse emancipatory/empowering literacy including the theories of radical libertarians and those of the moderate left.

shift literacy discourse from a neutral to a more political domain. In addition, they link the acquisition of literacy to agents' ability to effect radical social change -- "conscientization and liberation." As two of its most persistent advocates -- Lankshear and McLaren (1993) put it, critical literacy is concerned with:

the extent to which, and the ways in which, actual and possible social practices and conception of reading and writing enable human subjects to understand and engage the politics of daily life in the quest for a more truly democratic social order (preface).

Thus, in their account, an empowering literacy must transcend the benign conventional approaches to literacy and related policies that further domesticate marginalized groups. Beyond this, they also reject the notion that literacy is a neutral activity. For critical theorists, literacy is either an instrument of liberation or domestication (Freire, 1970). Such an argument has significant implications for this study in that it parallels how women in Nigeria, and indeed, Sub-Saharan Africa and most of the developing world, have been marginalized on two levels. First by being denied equal access to educational opportunities and second by being offered domesticating pedagogies that further condemn them to the sidelines, when formal education is offered at all (Iweriebor, 1988; WIN, 1985; Ramdas 1990; Stromquist, 1992a). Commenting on the limited value of the type of literacy programs that are offered to women in less industrialized societies, Stromquist (1992a) observes that:

Literacy programs have offered limited attention both to the deep causes of women's subordination, and to the immediate constraints they face in participating in literacy programs. As a result, these programs tend to solidify the existing social order (p. 61).

In contrast, critical literacy may offer women the possibility of questioning both the "existing social order" and the colonizing effects of conventional literacy practices. Further, it may provide a dialectical notion of literacy in which women, as marginalized social actors, are seen as agents capable in their own right, of critical thought and of putting up counter-hegemonic struggle (Giroux, 1983). The following comments by Bee (1992) capture the essence of the relationship between critical literacy and the empowerment of women. She writes:

Unlike conventional approaches to literacy, critical literacy offers an approach by which to help women understand the root causes of their subordination and subservience and to enable them to turn individual powerlessness into collective struggle with the capacity to transform their lives and, ultimately the wider social order... (p. 105).

Thus, it is logical to expect that any society that views seriously the role of women, must of necessity address the question of gender disparity in the formulation of social policies such as national policies of education.

### ***1.5 Nigeria's National Policy on Formal, Adult and Non-Formal Education***

Nigeria's National Policy on Education (henceforth NPE), the blueprint of current educational practices, which was adopted in 1977 and Revised in 1981 clearly links education to national development. The document asserts, that "education is the instrument par excellence for effecting national development" (National Policy on Education

1981, revised). It advocates equal educational opportunities for all citizens at all levels. Implicit in its essentially gender-neutral approach is the assumption of an illusory national policy of equity and social justice. While its philosophy is based on attaining a free, democratic and egalitarian society and emphasizes development through education, its ultimate goal is to achieve national unity through education. It has been argued by some writers that the document is an attempt to use education to achieve political control and national unity in a country that is ethnically and linguistically diverse (Ajayi, 1994). Most educational policies in Nigeria today are still based on this document. The core of the NPE is a new formal education structure - the 6.3.3.4 system which advocates that formal education be split into six years of primary education, three years in a junior secondary school and three years of senior secondary schooling, all culminating in four years of university education. The system also mandates the inclusion of technical/vocational subjects within schools' curricula to give secondary school graduates practical marketable skills for immediate employment, especially within the industrial sector. This is a major departure from the colonial system of education which was based on liberal arts and de-emphasised technical and vocational training.

Also entrenched in section 7 of this document is the government's mandate on adult, non-formal education and the eradication of mass illiteracy. In it, the government pledges that:

In order to eliminate mass illiteracy within the shortest possible time, an intensive nation-wide mass literacy campaign will be launched as a matter of priority and as a new all out effort on adult literacy programmes throughout

the country. The mass literacy campaign will be planned with a limited duration of ten years during which available resources will be mobilized towards the achievement of total eradication of illiteracy (National Policy on Education 1977:21).

Although the document makes brief reference to the education of women, it is done only cursorily because the government's focus is on education for all regardless of gender, social, ethnic or religious background. To achieve this mandate, the government's priority is more on correcting regional imbalances than on gender inequities.

Since the adoption of the NPE, several attempts have been made by successive Nigerian governments to organize mass literacy campaigns, the most recent being the establishment of a Commission for Adult and Non-formal Education in 1990. This was in response to the International Literacy Year (ILY) held in Jomtien Thailand and jointly organized by the World Bank, UNESCO, UNDP and UNICEF although the first mass literacy campaign in Nigeria was in 1946<sup>5</sup> while still under colonial rule. Subsequent campaigns were initiated in 1982 and 1987 without much success. Some of the reasons cited for the failure of previous campaigns include: political instability and partisanship, lack of national commitment, poor funding, and faulty implementation strategies (Akinpelu et al. 1994; Ahmed, 1992).

The effects of the most recent campaign launched in 1992 are yet to be assessed. But,

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<sup>5</sup> The interest in mass literacy in Nigeria by successive governments actually dates to 1927, with the Phelps-Stokes (an American foundation) Report On Education in Africa. Among the commission's findings was the neglect of the British colonial government to educate the masses.

in order to carry out its mandate of eradicating illiteracy by the year 2000, the commission in charge has adopted a policy of "Each-One-Teach-One" (EOTO) or "Fund the Teaching of One (FTO)". Supporters of this approach argue that it is commensurate with the African communal style of learning as well as being the most plausible option given the failure of past attempts (Oduaran, 1993).

Regardless of any potential it may have, it is quite likely that the current campaign like the preceding ones will fail for several reasons. First the EOTO is essentially a volunteer approach to teaching literacy and depends on the benevolence of the literate population. This approach to combatting illiteracy is of course not new. The original founder of the concept itself, Frank Laubach, helped spread literacy in many developing nations including Africa, through the technique. Jonathan Kozol (1980) in his book Prisoners of Silence calls for the use of volunteers in the fight against illiteracy in America. Unfortunately, Nigeria does not have a tradition of voluntarism. Second, in the current period of national and individual economic malaise, it is unlikely that people struggling to subsist would offer such services without some type of financial compensation. Third, thirty-six years after independence, Nigeria is still trying to validate itself as a nation state. The current government, like its predecessors, is so preoccupied with the process of legitimizing its regime that it is unlikely to mobilize the resources and manpower needed to ensure effective and efficient co-ordination of such a novel concept within the educational system. Fourth, and perhaps most significant, the question of the high level of illiteracy among rural women has not been given any particular attention in the current attempt to eradicate

illiteracy. Meanwhile, Nigeria remains one of the ten most illiterate countries in the world (Ajayi, 1994) with an estimated illiteracy rate of 49.27%. Of this figure, over 60% are women. (Akinpelu et al., 1994). Clearly, reducing the illiteracy rate among Nigerian women amounts to a national emergency.

Not that other non-literate sub-groups do not deserve attention. Far from that, the point I am making here is that because women in general and rural women in particular constitute the bulk of illiterates in the country, improving their condition requires special effort and attention from policy makers.

### ***1.5.1 The Government and Women's Education***

Although the NEP does not distinguish between the educational needs of men and women, there has been a growing concern in the country that despite commendable educational expansion since independence gender disparity still exists. This concern and a belated recognition by the government, of UNESCO's (1960) Convention Against Discrimination (Federal Ministry of Education 1988, Newsletter), resulted in the organization of a national workshop designed specifically to make policy recommendations vis-à-vis women's education. In 1986, a spate of activities took place within the Federal Ministry of Education aimed at improving women's access to education. One of the most significant outcomes of these activities was the creation of Women's Education units at both the national and state levels. The units were charged with promoting public awareness of the need to educate women, facilitating opportunities for both formal and non-formal

education for women, and generally promoting the participation of women in the socio-economic development of the nation. One other important achievement of the 1986 initiative was the launching of the Nigeria Association of Women in Science, Technology and Mathematics (NAWSTEMS), and the organization of related workshops. The resulting document from these initiatives, referred to as the "Blueprint on Women's Education in Nigeria," is the closest thing to a philosophy of women's education in the nation. It makes, at least in principle, some recommendations vis-à-vis facilitating access to educational opportunities for girls/women, including those with "special needs" such as rural women at all levels of the formal and non-formal education network. Besides rural women, the document also addresses the question of access to literacy by nomadic women -- nomadic women who work as cattle ranchers; women in purdah -- married women who live in seclusion as a result of Islamic laws; and women who drop out of school for an assortment of reasons. Other policy recommendations include the promotion of science, technology and mathematics for girls/women in schools, and the promotion of moral education and health education.

While it is difficult at this stage to assess the national impact of these initiatives particularly due to the current economic crises and political instability, there was some evidence of an increase in female enrollment in schools within the first few years of the adoption of the blueprint. Akujuo (1989) reports that while primary school enrollments in two educationally disadvantaged states stood at 29% and 35% in 1984 before the establishment of the women's education units, they increased to 45% to 50% respectively

in 1988. In addition to an increase in enrollments, it is noteworthy that there is now legislation allowing women with children to attend school and which forbids parents from early withdrawal of female children from secondary schools (Iweriebor, 1988). This attention to women's education is part of an overall attempt on the part of the government to promulgate more progressive social policies in keeping with global trends.

### *1.6 The Government, Social Policies and Gender*

Social policies in Nigeria since independence have traditionally been informed by international trends and resolutions particularly with regards to women. Although the various governments have as a rule pursued a policy of gender neutrality in the development process, they have succumbed to international pressures, advocacy and resolutions with regards to women's issues.

Several international conferences which have impacted on the formulation of social policies aimed at ameliorating the condition of women in Nigeria deserve mention. The first was UNESCO's 1960 convention against discrimination in education. The second and perhaps most significant was the declaration of the decade for women at the UN conference on the status of women held in Mexico in 1975. Next came the 1980 conference in Denmark which was designed to evaluate the implementation of the 1975 resolutions. In 1985, there was the Nairobi conference on the UN decade for women designed to assess the progress made by member nations towards improving the life chances of women. In 1989, Nigeria itself played host to the UNECA (United Nations Economic Commission for Africa) -

sponsored fourth regional conference on the implementation of the Arusha Strategies for the Advancement of African Women. All of these international conferences (perhaps including the 1995 Beijing conference), have had a profound impact on the enactment of gender-specific strategies geared towards improving the lives of women. The two most recent of these government intervention policies deserve fuller attention.

### ***1.6.1 The Better Life Programme***

The Better Life Programme (BLP) was introduced in 1987 as part of the activities related to the world wide phenomenon - Women in Development and to mobilize and encourage rural women to participate in the development process. The programme addressed four broad areas:

- The enhancement of the quality of life and status of rural women: to serve as an impetus for change and self reliance among rural women through the acquisition marketable skills;
- The achievement of economic self sufficiency by rural women through income-generating activities such as the establishment of small-scale businesses.
- Sensitizing the general population to the plight of women and to sensitize women to their rights.

- To teach women moral education.

Perhaps the most progressive social intervention programme for women in Nigeria so far. the BLP made some significant progress during its first few years. Examples include the enactment of laws in some states, prohibiting the withdrawal of girls from school. Some states adopted a free education policy for girls and women. The activities of the BLP eventually led to the establishment of the National Commission for Women although it was later disbanded. A new one was created in 1992.

### *Problems of the BLP*

Although the BLP increased both government and public awareness of women's issues, it has since been replaced by another intervention programme - the Family Support Programme (FSP) - as a result of political transition.

Even if it had survived, it is doubtful whether the BLP would have achieved its set objectives for the following reasons. First, because the programme was not specifically an educational intervention, the issue of improving women's access to literacy (an important aspect of empowering Nigerian women), was not given adequate attention within the set objectives. Second, the programme emphasized the traditional role of women focusing on skills related to the production of arts and crafts, food production and processing and generally how to make women better wives and mothers. In effect, the programme failed to critically address the root causes of rural women's poor condition - gender-based oppression. Third, although the programme did yield some economic dividends (see

Federal Government of Nigeria 1990), there is no evidence that any feasibility study was conducted before the programme was implemented. On the contrary, the scant literature on the programme suggests that it may have been designed (like many programmes in Nigeria), to promote the political popularity of the initiators. Fourth, there is also no evidence that the government committed enough resources towards sustaining the programme. Fifth, the issue of time constraints on female students was not adequately addressed by planners of the programme. Indeed, during my research, time constraint was overwhelming cited by my non-literate participants as the reason why they would not be able to take advantage of literacy classes where such exist.

### *1.6.2. The Family Support Programme*

Government documents show that the creation of the Family Support Programme (FSP) which replaced the BLP in 1994, was influenced by the UN declaration of 1994 as the International Year of the Family. The government contends that the FSP is intended as an improvement and expansion of the BLP, which it claims was fundamentally limited by its focus on rural women. "It aims at improving on previous experiences of Women in Development by broadening its coverage and sharpening its focus" (Federal Government of Nigeria 1994, Blueprint on FSP). Like its predecessor, one of the objectives of the programme is the improvement of women's access to education. But, as was the case with the BLP, the issue of literacy for women has once again been added onto another social programme. Unfortunately, making women's literacy a small part of a broader social

programme. diminishes its chances of having real impact.

### *1.7. Definition of Key Concepts*

#### *Quality of Life (QOL)*

It is difficult to give a universal definition of the term because even though it represents objective conditions it is also both historically and culturally determined (Dube, 1988). Indices of what constitutes a satisfying life, standard of living or well-being may vary according to the norms of a given society. Thus even though they may seem primitive to us, preindustrial societies must also have had a sense of what constituted a good life for them. According to Unesco, QOL includes all aspects of living including material satisfaction of essential needs as well as the more transcendental aspects of life, such as personal development and self-actualization. Dube (1988) argues that QOL should include the interaction between individuals, in the context of their physical and social environment:

any satisfactory definition of the quality of life must include three sets of criteria in their dynamic interaction: Culturally-determined particularistic criteria, scientifically-determined universalistic criteria and criteria considering both environmental over-exploitation and degradation on the one hand and improvement on the other hand (p.58).

Although many writers have different indices for measuring QOL or well-being there seems to be a consensus that socio-demographic variables (Andrews, 1986), including literacy/education are some of its most important indicators (see Dasgupta, 1993; Mukherjee, 1989; Dube, 1988; Andrews, 1986). Further, a close scrutiny of related literature

seems to indicate that the closer one is to the top level of Maslow's hierarchy of human needs, the closer one is to achieving a good quality of life. However, as Mukherjee (1988) points out, this is potentially problematic since the "elites'" conception of needs may not be congruent with the "masses'" concept of wants.

### ***Gender***

While people are born biologically male or female, gender is a socially-constructed attribute which is learned from birth through a process of socialization. Thus, while the biological categories of femaleness or maleness are universal and arbitrary, the conception of what constitutes appropriate gender roles may vary across cultures and may be time specific. In other words, gendered roles are usually in a state of flux and may change in a given society over time. In many societies, gender distinctions, both on state and individual levels, often form the basis of public policies and social relations. As is often erroneously used, gender is not synonymous with sex-- a biological given, nor is it synonymous with women.

### ***Rural Women***

In this study, the term rural refers to an area in which people depend primarily on agricultural activities for survival. Within the Nigerian context, most basic amenities (with few exceptions such as electricity and pipe-borne water) are usually lacking in these areas. Rural women are therefore women who live predominantly in these areas.

### ***Culture***

The term culture has different associations, depending on the context. In its broadest

sense, it has to do with the way of life of a social group as manifested in learned patterns of behaviour. It is sometimes associated with aesthetic interests such as theatre, art and music or sometimes with life-styles of sub-groups within a given society. Bullivant (1989) distinguishes between two possible ways of looking at culture: the heritage and traditions of a social group; and culture as a group's strategy for adapting to and surviving in its environment. Giroux (1983), drawing on the work of Williams (1977), describes culture as:

a complex of traditions, institutions and formations situated within a social sphere of contestation and struggle, a sphere rooted in a complex of power relations that influence and condition lived experiences... (P.164).

While all the above conceptions of culture are useful the latter is particularly relevant to this study. Twentieth-century Nigerian society has been a contested cultural terrain: first within the colonial regime and now within a framework of male domination. As a result, women, like other marginalized groups, have had to struggle to have access to social rewards such as literacy.

### *Patriarchy*

In its broadest sense, Patriarchy refers to the manifestation and institutionalization of male dominance over women and children both within family situations and within greater society (Lerner, 1986). Through material and ideological domination of women (Glenn, 1987) men wield significant power in patriarchal societies while women are more often than not denied such powers. Feminist accounts of gender inequality often implicate patriarchy in the subordination of women.

### ***1.8. Limitations of the Study***

Four main factors constitute the limitations of this study. First, the study is exploratory in nature and relied on the accounts of a limited number of participants, based on their subjective interpretations of their individual situations. As a result, the findings may not be generalizable. However, because of the cultural similarities of most rural settings in Nigeria and indeed Sub-Saharan Africa, the findings may serve as the basis for future research.

Second, data were collected in three different languages: English, Igbo and Nigerian Pidgin English. The use of the last language became necessary as a result of a few participants whose families had migrated to one of the communities - Ebu, from neighbouring rural towns where a language other than Igbo is spoken. The inherent difficulties in using three communication media in one study are quite apparent. There is, for instance, the possibility of the misinterpretation of research questions from English to Igbo as well as the responses from Igbo to English. However, because of my fluency in all three languages, I am satisfied that language did not constitute a communication barrier during interviews and discussions with the women.

A third possible limitation relates to the fact that the researcher may be considered a situated "insider" to the extent that my roots are in these communities although for all intents and purposes, most members of the communities would consider me an outsider. Even so, my cultural and kinship affiliation to the participants do raise questions of possible

bias and difficulties in maintaining detached objectivity. While the notion of absolute subjectivity by researchers has been questioned in some quarters because our paradigms or world views ultimately insinuate themselves in the research choices we make (Kuhn, 1970; Hughes, 1990; Popkewitz, 1984), most writers agree that researchers generally find strategies to minimize the role of subjectivity. In my own case, remaining relatively neutral was less difficult because in many ways. I am also an outsider in these communities having lived elsewhere for most of my life. Further, outside of the researcher/interviewee relationship, I had no prior acquaintance with most of the participants.

While this study focuses on non-literate rural women who are for the most part economically disempowered, it should be noted that there is a group of female entrepreneurs or market women as they are popularly referred to, who have little or no education but may be considered affluent in their own right (see Petsalis 1990). However, most of these women live in very urban centres and are, therefore, not represented in this work. In any case, because most Nigerian women (as indeed other Nigerians) live in rural settings, such women constitute a minority.

Finally, one of the greatest challenges researchers in Nigeria face is the difficulty in accessing statistical data. Even when available, the figures are quite often disparate and conflicting. For instance, the census data on Nigeria are so disparate that to remedy the problem it was necessary to do comparative scrutiny of various sources.

### ***1.9. Organization of the Thesis***

The thesis is divided into eight chapters. Chapter 1 (this section) introduces the research problem, outlines the purpose and the significance of the study. In order to bring the salient issues of the study to the forefront, the chapter also discussed some academic and theoretical literature on illiteracy. Particular attention is given to the definitional problem, in addition to some gendered social intervention programmes by the government. The Nigerian National Policy On Education is also examined in the chapter. Finally, for conceptual clarity, some key terms in the study are defined.

Beginning with a brief examination of some demographic trends, Chapter 2 shifts the focus entirely to Nigeria - the setting of the study. Trends in education, beginning from just prior to colonialism to the present are discussed. A major emphasis is given to colonial educational policies and their enduring negative-socio-economic implications for women.

Chapter 3 discusses the methodology employed in the study while Chapter 4 focuses on the conceptual framework. The first part begins by establishing why women may be considered a subordinate group, then examines the relationship between literacy and power, relating it to women in Nigeria (and Sub-Saharan Africa) as a disempowered group. Part two of the chapter takes up the specific issue of what literacy can do for women in Nigeria.

A profile of the study participants is presented in the next chapter. Chapter 6 discusses the findings of the study as reported by the participants themselves while Chapter 7 examines the results of the study in relation to views drawn from academic literature and other research. The eighth and final chapter draws some conclusions and makes some recommendations that are geared towards critical policy action.

## **Chapter 2**

### **Research Setting - Nigeria:**

### **Historical and Social Context of Education.**

#### *2.1. Introduction*

Nigeria is the most populous country in Africa. It has a total land mass of about 930,000 square kilometres and an estimated 1987 population of 101,407,626 people,<sup>6</sup> 49% of whom are male while 51% are female. It is located along the southern coast of West Africa and is bordered to the north by the Republic of Niger, to the east by the Republic of Cameroon, to the west by the Republic of Benin and the Gulf of Guinea to the south. Seventy percent of the population live in rural areas.

Although Nigeria has three major ethnic groups Igbo, Yoruba and Hausa, who speak corresponding languages, there are over 250<sup>7</sup> other ethnic groups each with their own customs, traditions and languages. While most of these languages are mutually unintelligible, others are regional variations (dialects) of the three major language groups.

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<sup>6</sup> Federal Government of Nigeria (1988). Nigeria's population remains problematic. The last official census was in 1963 but there have since been several attempts and estimates.

<sup>7</sup> It is not really clear how many languages exist in Nigeria. Estimates put the number at 250 ethnic groups and as many as 400 indigenous languages, three exogenous languages-English, Arabic and French, and a relatively neutral language-Pidgin English (Akinnaso, 1993). Of these foreign languages French is the least commonly used.

For all intents and purposes, Nigeria is a multicultural and multilingual society and as such is a prototype of intra-race diversity.

A former colony of Great Britain, it gained its independence in 1960 and became a republic in 1963. With only two brief periods of civilian rule it has since been governed by military regimes. At the moment, Nigeria is divided into thirty administrative units referred to as states. The new national capital - Abuja, is located in the Federal Capital Territory (FCT). Occupying a more central location, Abuja was developed in the 1980s as an alternative to the former capital - Lagos. However, for all intents and purposes, Lagos remains the national commercial centre. As a major oil producer, and a member of OPEC, Nigeria's economy is strongly linked to oil production which accounts for 95% of its foreign exports. The socio-political landscape of Nigeria past and present, is inextricably linked to its colonial past.

## *2.2. The Study Area*

Two communities were used in the study: Onitcha-Ugbo and Ebu, both in Aniocha local government area of Delta state, Nigeria.<sup>8</sup> Both communities are located a few kilometres from Asaba which is the capital of the state and about seven hundred (700)

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<sup>8</sup> Up until 1992, Delta State was part of what was then Bendel State of Nigeria which was split into two states, the other being Edo. At the time of this research, the state was still undergoing a major transition. Some of the policies relating to women's education were still those of the old Bendel State.

kilometres from Lagos, the commercial centre of the country. With an estimated population of 8 - 10,000 each, both towns belong to the West-Niger Igbo speaking group. Relatively culturally homogenous, members of these communities are popularly referred to within Nigeria as-"Ndi-enuani" in relation to the predominant Igbo dialect spoken in the area. The communities were chosen for various reasons. First, as a native speaker, my knowledge of the predominant language of the area, Igbo, was invaluable in a research study that required interviewing non-literate informants. Second, as a native of the area, albeit one in diaspora, access to the field would be considerably less difficult. Third, and perhaps most important, both communities belong to one of the most educationally advanced states in Nigeria where a good majority of the people participate in a culture of literacy and therefore have the advantages associated with it. This meant that the non-literate informants would be able to conceptualize and therefore articulate their feelings about their lack of literacy. Indeed, as I found out, most of them are able to express themselves orally in pidgin English. In less literate communities in Nigeria, speaking even a corrupt version of the English language would have been impossible.

In both communities, descent is patrilineal and men generally inherit the property of their fathers. Women may inherit the properties of their mothers but for the most part women have little more than movable property. In the event of divorce, the children often remain with the father's family although women who wish to, may return eventually when their male children have grown up and have been able to build their own houses or have at least inherited those of their fathers. Although women are accorded certain traditional

titles, such as the case of the "Omu" (the queen mother of the town) in Onitcha-Ugbo, they are not allowed to sit in council with the traditional rulers or elders of the town such as the Obi (king), all of whom are men. The women of the area, as elsewhere in Sub-Saharan Africa, have limited political powers. In relation to men, they have comparatively inferior status. Within the communities, both public and familial roles are delineated along gender lines although these are often complementary.

Both communities have only the most basic public amenities. While Onitcha-Ugbo has pipe-borne water and electricity, arrangements were underway at Ebu to bring electricity to the town at the time of my field work. The major occupation for both men and women in the area is farming although men tend to focus more on cash crops. Women do not generally own land. For the purposes of agricultural activities, they are allocated portions of land in their husbands' farms where they may cultivate crops for household consumption. Only surplus produce is sold in local markets. Indeed, as I later found out, this is the only way many of the non-literate informants are able to generate some cash. In both communities, women participate actively in most agricultural tasks including tilling the soil, planting, weeding and the harvesting of crops.

Onitcha-Ugbo has several primary and two secondary schools. It is thought that formal Western-style education came to the area through Christian missionaries during the last decade of the nineteenth century. In the case of Onitcha - Ugbo, formal education began around 1904 (Okwechime, 1994). The first secondary school - St. Pius Xth Grammar School, an all male institution, was established in 1960. It was not until 1980 that the first

girls' secondary school - Onitcha-Ugbo Girls Grammar School - was established through community effort and government assistance. Both schools also cater to students from neighbouring towns and villages that do not have secondary schools.

Ebu also has several primary schools and one co-ed secondary school- St. Paul Grammar school. Like Onitcha-Ugbo, all of Ebu's educational institutions serve neighbouring communities.

### ***2.3. Historical and Social Context of Education***

Although Nigeria's current educational system was designed after independence, to put the study in context, some understanding of trends in educational development, past and present seems appropriate. Three phases are subsequently examined.

#### ***2.3.1. Learning Systems Prior to Colonialism***

The pre-colonial period includes the period up to the mid 1800s before the advent of colonialism. During this period, two learning systems existed simultaneously (albeit in different geographical locations) within the country: traditional/indigenous education and Islamic education. Both types of education were based on the principles of functionalism. They sustained the spiritual, intellectual and social needs of the communities within which they were practised.

### ***Traditional Education***

This type of education was prevalent in the southern part of the country and was an integral part of the socialization of a child. It was largely based on oracy. It was very functional and was regarded as a means to an end and not as an end in itself. According to Fafunwa (1974), emphasis was on physical training, character moulding, respect for elders and peers, intellectual and vocational training, training in agricultural productions, community participation and cultural heritage, spiritual and moral values. Similarly, Onabamiro (1983) distinguishes between two types of education that existed in pre-colonial Nigeria. The first he refers to as social education while the second he refers to as vocational education. Both categories were generally aimed at immediate induction into society and preparation for adulthood. Children learned by doing, participating in ceremonies, and by imitation. Education was role and gender specific. Each child was socialized in stages in such a way as to correspond with the role they were likely to play in society. The end of each stage was marked by an experience-oriented test. For vocational education, youths were often apprenticed to a specialist in the kind of trade or craft with which they were to earn their living. The only difference was that boys were often apprenticed to "masters" while girls were apprenticed to "mistresses." Within this framework, everybody received appropriate education. Available literature suggests that although education was gender-specific, this was for practical rather than exclusionary reasons (Okonjo, 1976). Because participation was fundamental and mandatory **girls were not excluded from learning** and women wielded considerable political and economic powers (Iweriebor, 1988). More

importantly, even though pre-colonial education was largely informal, its design was appropriate for the needs of the then Nigerian society, as was indeed the case in agrarian societies and pre-industrial cultures elsewhere.

### ***Islamic Education***

Literacy in the form of Islamic education came to Nigeria through its northern parts around the eleventh century by migrant Islamic scholars and missionaries. To effectively spread the teachings of Islam, it was necessary that converts became literate. The result was the establishment of Islamic or Koranic schools where formal educational instruction was given to converts in Arabic. By the time the Christian missionaries/colonialists came to Nigeria in the 1800s, Islamic schools in the north, had produced a good number of eminent scholars who were well versed in Islamic theology, philosophy and jurisprudence (Fafunwa, 1974).

Thus, even prior to colonial conquest, oral and written literacy already flourished in various forms in Nigeria and in many parts of Sub-Saharan Africa. In his work The Domestication of The Savage Mind, Goody (1977) renders a detailed account of the degree of intellectual and literary activity that existed in some parts of Africa (including Nigeria) and some other parts of world before the advent of colonial conquests. He suggests that "at the time of colonial conquest, many societies in Africa and Eurasia were influenced by the advent of literacy which even in a restricted form produced its own scholarly tradition" (1977:33). Thus, rather than introducing literacy to their African colonies, the Europeans may simply have replaced local literacies with the more global Western version. Through

this imposition, they not only permanently changed the course of history but also African destiny.

### ***2.3.2. Colonial Education***

Colonial educational policies were essentially exploitative and discriminatory. Although Western education was introduced in Nigeria as elsewhere in tropical Africa by missionaries as a medium for propagating Christianity, it soon became an essential tool in achieving the British political and economic mandate within the region. It was geared towards the training of a submissive male support staff, primarily low and mid-level civil servants, for sustaining the colonial administration. Implicit in the colonial educational policy was the assumption that only a few essential Nigerians would be trained to assist the colonists with conduct of their business which, at the time, included a flourishing export (to the home country) and import business. Education and access to it was used as means of maintaining the status-quo.

Because the focus was on training male Nigerians, the first girls' school was opened in 1869, ten years after the first boys' school was established. Even then the purpose of girls' education according to Lugard a colonial administrator and one-time British governor of Nigeria, was to ameliorate the quality of private life for both husbands and children (Callaway, 1987). As he saw it:

The immense value to the educated youth of Africa, of having wives who can share their thoughts and sympathies in and understand their work, is only less important than the influence which the mother should exert in forming the

character of her children. Improvement in the standard of private life is fully as important as in that of public life (Callaway 1987, p.111).

This was of course in keeping with the prevailing ethnocentric and paternalistic attitude that existed in the home country. Indeed as Kristin Mann (1985) reports in Marrying Well , a poignant account of the emergence of the educated elite in colonial Lagos, while women from such families had early access to education:

the ideal was for elite women to be "housewives" rather than to work outside the home. By the 1880's many such women achieved this ideal. Those who did work taught school or took in sewing. Teaching offered an exception to the ideal that educated women should not work outside the home (pp.25-26).

However, as Mann also points out, this trend did not continue. In time, some educated elite women began to de-emphasize their newly acquired Victorian ideals and sought personal economic independence outside their marital unions.

Although colonial education was essentially limited to the liberal arts, its emphasis on the training of boys systematically reduced the role of women within the society. As the nation's economy began to shift from its agrarian base to a "modernizing" one, women found themselves even more devalued. Western capitalist economic ideology with the attendant individual pursuit and accumulation of material wealth - values that were incompatible with traditional African culture - became national goals. Already educated by the colonialists, men usurped the limited opportunities available to Nigerians while women who were still predominantly illiterate (with the exception of some from "elite" families), were edged out of the entire process of development and state formation.

The latter part of colonial rule and the period immediately after independence was marked by some noteworthy educational expansion. This period for instance, witnessed tentative attempts at mass education. It was also during this period that the concept of Universal Primary Education (UPE) was introduced first in 1955 in the then Western Region and later in modified versions by many of the southern states including the area that is now Delta state from where the participants of the study are drawn. However, by the time Nigeria gained its independence in 1960, women constituted less than 5% of the literate population.

### *2.3.3. Post-Colonial Education*

When Britain finally bowed to pressure from Nigerian nationalists and relinquished control of the country in 1960, Nigeria as elsewhere in Africa, was confronted by a myriad of problems including lack of national identity, economic underdevelopment and political instability. Education was seen not only as the solution to all these problems but also as an enabling factor in the march towards industrialization and popular participation in national development. So, eager to legitimize their positions and demonstrate their nation-building abilities the new leaders embarked on major educational reforms. Access to educational opportunities was declared a basic human right and the only way to redress previous imbalances. Other reforms included adjusting the lengths of education cycles, altering terms of access to educational opportunities, changing curriculum contents and linking the provision of education and training more closely to perceived requirements for socio-

economic development. The expansion of education and literacy after independence is best categorized into three periods: 1960-1970; 1970-1980; 1980 -present; corresponding to the periods of exploration, growth and crises respectively.

### ***The Period of Exploration***

The years immediately following independence up to 1970 were marked by tentative efforts at self-determination within the sphere of education as well as other areas of socio-economic development. Areas of concern such as the irrelevance of the inherited curriculum, regional educational imbalances, expansion of facilities and enrollments were major preoccupations of the new government. The ongoing civil war (1967-1970) which threatened the stability of the nation at the time, did not deter the politicians from their attempts at restructuring the system of education. Such preoccupation ultimately led to the landmark National Curriculum Conference in 1969 which brought together a cross-section of the society including educators, other professionals, businessmen, farmers, youth leaders, theologians and military officers in a public discussion of educational reforms. The result of the conference was the development in 1977 of the first indigenous National Policy on Education (see Chapter 1).

### ***The Period of Growth***

The years between 1970 and 1980 were marked by massive educational expansion both in facilities and enrollments. This period also coincided with Nigeria's most promising

period of financial buoyancy created by the favourable oil prices of the 1970s. One of the most noteworthy achievements of the period was the introduction of the UPE<sup>9</sup> which was to make education "universal and compulsory." It was geared towards equalizing educational opportunities for all Nigerian children irrespective of gender or geographical location. But, a major concern of the UPE, was the elimination of the socio-political problems in the country which arose from the imbalance of educational development between the northern and the southern parts, as a result of erstwhile colonial policies (Csapo, 1981).

The project was implemented in 1976 but soon ran into trouble. Vast regional disparities, improper planning and insufficient fiscal reserves soon forced the federal government to abandon the project. The idea of compulsory primary education was quietly dropped and replaced with the concept of UPE "where possible."

Another significant development of the decade was the introduction of a two-tier system of secondary education (based on the NPE) - Junior Secondary School (JSS) and Senior Secondary School (SSS). Following the operationalizing of the system in 1982, secondary school education is now operated in two stages: the first stage, the JSS, is a three-year programme which is both pre-vocational and academic. Students who get to this stage have the option of either terminating their studies at that point or moving on to the second stage - the SSS. This is also a three-year course, designed for those who are able to

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<sup>9</sup> In a conference of African Ministers of Education in Addis Ababa in 1961, a resolution was adopted by UNESCO urging all African states to aim at achieving Universal Primary Education within a maximum period of 20 years. 1980 was chosen as the target year.

complete a six-year secondary education and who have the intention of moving on to a tertiary level of education.

Emphasis was also given to tertiary education during the 1970's-80's. Several universities and colleges were founded with special priority given to the training of technical manpower and teachers.

Unfortunately, as in the previous decade, the issue of illiteracy among women received hardly any attention. Special consideration was given to the reformation and expansion of formal education in order to redress geographical imbalances. However, the issue of literacy in general received a significant boost with the creation of The Nigerian National Council for Adult Education (NNCAE), in 1971. The body was created to facilitate the development of adult literacy policies within the country. One of the council's most significant achievements of the decade was its role in the establishment of an adult education section within the Federal Ministry of Education in 1974. The launching of the ten-year mass literacy campaign in 1982 was also the result of the council's recommendations.

In general, the objective of expanding enrollments at all levels of education was quite successful. There was massive growth in enrollments especially in primary schools. Statistics show that between 1976 and 1982 for instance, enrollments at the primary level increased from 6.2 million to 14.7 million while university enrollments swelled from 21,000 to 98,000 during the same period (Hinchliffe, 1989).

### *The Period of Crises*

The state of education in Nigeria today can best be described as dismal and chaotic. It is marked by gross underfunding, mismanagement, inadequate infrastructural facilities, strikes, sporadic closures and general deterioration. Despite many well-intentioned educational policies promulgated by the federal government, education in Nigeria has fallen victim to chronic political and social instability. Juxtaposed with the current economic crises and a national decline in the standard of living, the situation is indeed critical. Since the early 1980s, there has been significant fluctuations in enrollments and quality of scholarship at most levels of the educational system. Available data show for instance, that the number of students enrolled in primary schools in the country during the academic year 1981-82 was 14, 311, 608; the enrollment for 1985-86 was 12,914, 870 while that of 1987 was 11, 540, 178 (Federal Government of Nigeria, 1990). At the same time, government funding for education decreased from 930 million Naira in 1980-81 to 875 million Naira in 1987. In addition, only 5.1% of the government's total expenditure was committed to education between 1986-1990 and 4.1% from 1990 onwards. Ajayi (1994), sums up the situation thus:

[one] cannot deny that the gap between promise and achievement in our education is now so wide that the system should be regarded as fraudulent since it no longer delivers ... anything like what it promised (p. 10).

Paradoxically it is during this period that the question of mass literacy within the country in general and among women in particular has received most attention as a result of global trends (see Chapter 1). Even so, women's participation in literacy programmes remain very

low. Available statistics show that women's enrollment in adult literacy programmes between 1985 and 1990 was 37%. These figures do not indicate the number of women who *actually* remained in literacy classes. The figures will most likely be significantly lower when that is taken into account because of high drop-out rates among women (Osinulu et al., 1994). Similar trends prevail at other levels of the national educational system.

#### ***2.4 Constraints to Women's Access to Literacy in Nigeria***

It is necessary in a study such as this, to examine the structures and processes that lead to the distribution of social rewards along gender lines. Since literacy is one of the processes through which social actors can negotiate power relations (Freire, 1970; Lankshear et al., 1993), it is vital to examine the factors that prevent women's access to it.

The constraints to women's access to literacy/education in Nigeria, although varied and multifaceted, attributable to gender biases within the society. Such biases invariably impact on the enactment of macro- and micro-level social policies even though Nigeria has never had an official policy of discrimination against women. The corpus of literature on the subject suggests that four major factors impinge on women's access to education. These are: socio-cultural bias; bias in type and quality of education for girls/women; patriarchy and the socialization of women; international/domestic economic factors and government's fiscal policies. However, the social policies of the colonial administration are, as always, also implicated.

### ***2.4.1 The Colonial State, Social Policies and Gender***

Colonial rule not only altered Nigeria as a nation state, it also left permanent legacies with respect to gender relations and the erosion of women's power base within the society as Chapter 1 shows. The colonialists therefore set the stage for some of the prejudice which women were to suffer in contemporary Nigeria.

The colonial administrators had brought with them preset conceptions of the appropriate social role of women - essentially that of a good wife and mother. In her book *Gender, Culture and Empire: European Women in Colonial Nigeria*, Callaway (1987), describes how the colonists considered colonial service the bonafide domain of men and excluded even British women from active participation particularly during the early years of their occupation:

Nigeria represented for British colonial officers in Africa an example, perhaps the prime example, of a man's country. This concept had meanings at different levels, the most obvious being the man's job to be done. At the turn of the century, the conquering soldiers and-empire-builders of these vast, roadless not yet fully mapped territories had to be men... certainly not women (p.4).

To get the job done, therefore, a "select" group of Nigerian men were coopted as "partners" in progress. Education further brought the introduction of mechanised forms of farming and the agricultural sector which formed the economic base of pre-colonial economy shifted exclusively to men who now controlled the intermediate economic sector. Clerical work with its concomitant financial gains flourished. Educational achievement replaced agricultural prowess as status symbol. The more parents saw the monetary gains of education the more

they strived to educate their children particularly with the introduction of grammar (secondary) school education. Onabamiro (1983) paints a portrait of the clamour for education at the time:

Youngsters who had a smattering of grammar school education got better posts than the primary school leavers. As a clerk earned in one month a salary bigger than the income that the farmer made on three months the clerk soon acquired an enviable status in the local community. Parents did everything they could to give their children such education as would gain them a clerical appointment (pp.291-292).

What is missing in this account is the fact that with very few exceptions, most of the beneficiaries of grammar school education (as well as primary education), were boys who as "future heads" of their families were sent to school to the detriment of girls. The situation was compounded by rural-urban migration of men in search of a more lucrative economic base. Women were thus left to survive on subsistence farming within the rural areas. Faced with rife and blatant discrimination both in the educational and the development process, women struggled to regain their lost status in several regions of the country through collective action and advocacy.

### ***Women and Advocacy Under Colonial Rule***

The consequences of British gender-biased policies manifested through the denial of access to literacy had far reaching consequences. The British policy of indirect rule in Nigeria meant the co-optation of locals who because they now possessed an essential power conferring tool - education - turned out to be men. As colonial rule flourished so did the

"powers" and arrogance of indigenous men who were administrators of the native authorities. Colonial rule had in effect created a public arena that was dominated by men. Feeling threatened and marginalized, women attempted to challenge the status quo through organised group actions. One commonly cited example (discussed below) of women's resistance to their emerging status as an underclass under colonial domination, elaborates the point.

### *The Women's War of 1929*

Although accounts of the exact causes of the war suggest an accumulation of grievances against the new social system, the immediate cause was the perception of women, based on rumours, of impending taxation of married women who were already burdened with helping to pay their husbands' taxes. Nina Mba (1982), offers a compelling analysis of the causes and objectives of the war from the standpoint of the protesters. She also points out one important factor that has implications for this study and seems to have been neglected in other accounts: the unobtrusive but leadership role played by literate women an example of whom is one Mrs *Janet Okala*, in organizing the group action. While no reference is made to her role in official inquiry reports, Mba suggests the following explanation: "it is quite possible that the administrative officers, knowing so little about the women and not expecting them to be *literate* [my emphasis] simply did not know of her" (p.85).

The Igbo women's war was by no means an isolated incident in Nigeria. Throughout the colonial period, there were intermittent uprisings organized by women. The political

exploits of Mrs Ransome-Kuti for instance, who led the Egba women's protest against colonialism and its discriminatory taxation system is very well documented. Also well documented is the role played by some wealthy and powerful market women in mobilizing their peers against perceived threat to their means of livelihood by the colonial government (see Mba, 1982; Petsalis, 1990).

One thing stands out in any analysis of the women's war: the misconceptions of the colonial administrators about the power and status of Nigerian women within the traditional political network. Such authority enabled the women to mobilize and oppose, within a group framework, the economic policies of the colonists which threatened to undermine their (the women's) sovereignty. Such daring political action by women who refused to see themselves as simply victims even in the face of colonial repression and reprisals, shows the extent to which women had hitherto been independent and outspoken and part of the decision-making process within their respective communities. Indeed, as Petsalis (1990) describes them:

These ...[were] the women who before colonialism had a significant role in traditional political life . ...took part in village meetings and voiced their opinions, ... used strikes and boycotts and force to bring about results. These ... [were] the women who would decide to 'sit-on' or make war on a man against whom a grievance had been voiced. These women were a force to be reckoned with.

Unfortunately, despite women's efforts, colonial exclusionary practices- perhaps the genesis of the disempowerment of contemporary Nigerian women, prevailed. The Victorian assumptions made about the role and place of women within a "modernizing" society by the

colonial administrators were invariably inherited by their Nigerian successors. The situation remains so, thirty-six years later.

#### ***2.4.2. Socio-Cultural Bias***

In Nigeria, socio-cultural variables place obstacles to the educational attainment of women. This is because women face gender-related difficulties, rooted in traditions and taboos that are sometimes codified into law-institutionalized subordination if you will. Because of the cultural premium placed on the male child, boys' education is often given a priority while girls' education is almost always an expendable option. Perhaps a case in point would help. During the Nigerian - Biafran War (1967-1970), many urban middle class families were forced back to their villages almost as "refugees," in an attempt to escape the war. Even though parents were out of work, makeshift primary and secondary schools were organized in many communities to enable children to continue their education. Unfortunately for girls, most families gave priority to boys because of scarce resources. While many of the girls were eventually able to resume their education, for some, the prospects of getting an education ended permanently with the war.

In some communities, girls' education is considered a wasteful undertaking for parents since they often believe that the "benefits" of such an investment would be reaped by someone else after marriage. UNESCO (1991) identifies social customs as one of the primary reasons for gender disparities in education in developing nations. These include parental attitudes which negate the importance of educating women since it is believed that

they would eventually settle down to raising children rather than participating in the formal wage sector where educational qualifications are required. Even when parents decide to send female children to school, the retention rates drop significantly with the onset of puberty. In strictly religious communities, where premarital relationships are unacceptable, parents keep their daughters from co-educational schools, as soon as they reach puberty. This type of attitude has been cited as one of the reasons for the low enrollment of female students in the northern part of the country (Csapo, 1981).

The lack of a set legal age for marriage in Nigeria means that girls are often forced into early marriages by parents especially among the poor. Early marriages, and the interruption of education, inevitably trap these "child brides" prematurely within a web of poverty, illiteracy, powerlessness, dependence and subordination. Another set of problems that affects a girl's access to education is time constraints and opportunity costs of female education. A common trend in Nigeria is the use of girls as providers of paid domestic labour. Further, female children are often expected to contribute significantly to the daily functioning of households. In some situations where women's out of the home activities are limited such as women in Purdah (WIN, 1985), daughters are expected to fill the void. Ultimately, such expectations considerably limit a girl's opportunity to acquire education/literacy.

#### ***2.4.3. Bias in Type and Quality of Education***

Not only do fewer girls receive education but those who do receive a different type

of education from their male counterparts. This however, is a worldwide phenomenon as gender-related studies have stressed. Literature relating to women's issues in North America for instance, commonly cite sex-role stereotyping, differential patterns of socialization, treatment of females in schools, and gender differences in formal curriculum as some of the factors which mitigate against women in their schooling experiences (see Shakeshaft, 1986; Sadker and Sadker, 1986; Corson, 1993; Bee, 1993 and Luke, 1993, 1994). Not only is the formal curriculum implicated but also schools' language and communication media. Corson (1993) for instance, indicts language practices, classroom discourses and textbooks for their gendered overtone. He argues that "... [the] practices and policies found in the objective discursive structures of schooling itself, help to create and reinforce disadvantages for girls and women" (p.139). In a similar vein, Luke (1994) with special reference to Australia, adopts a deconstructionist stance and calls for the de-gendering of literacy activities such as reading, because the sexual division of literacy "plays into the patriarchal reproduction of knowledge, competence and, ultimately, economic structure" (p.363).

The situation for girls and women is however, worse in Sub-Saharan Africa including Nigeria, where gender-related discrimination in schools and educational practices is juxtaposed with rigid traditional norms. Such traditional norms, which often result in differential socialization of boys and girls, means that both groups come to school with different attributes or "cultural capital" (Bourdieu, 1977). This is almost akin to the situation of racial and ethnic minorities in schools in Western societies (Chapter 4 discusses

this in detail).

In Nigeria, the educational system itself conveys very different images of the significance of educating boys and girls and of the appropriate type of education for each gender (WIN Document, 1985). Girls are generally encouraged to follow a stereotyped "feminine" curriculum. Women are encouraged to pursue subject areas that would enhance their home-making abilities or those that relegate them to careers that have less social recognition and prestige. Such career lines invariably confine them to low wages in the labour market. This in turn reduces the aspirations of parents to send their daughters to school.

#### ***2.4.4 Patriarchy and the Socialization of Women***

In Nigeria, family relations are based on a hierarchical kinship system in which the man, perched on the uppermost echelon of the hierarchy rules and dominates. Power and authority is wielded predominantly by him. From a very early age, boys are socialized to embrace the ideology of male supremacy and are encouraged to learn attitudes that would preserve the status quo (Etta, 1994). Girls on the other hand are generally socialized into upholding rigid sex-role norms which demand that they be seen and not heard. Discriminatory practices are unquestioningly accepted and internalized and are in fact, reinforced and perpetuated by women themselves. Because of psychological indoctrination, women for the most part accept their roles as appendages to men. In a series of interviews with Nigerian women, Petsalis (1990) found that both elite and rural women alike

acknowledge and accept male dominance within their households. Indeed, my discussions with the participants of this study confirmed how common such an attitude is among Nigerian women. A good number of my participants seem to believe that the authority wielded by men within their families is very appropriate. Indeed, as Sen (1987) argues:

Deprived groups may be habituated to inequality, may be unaware of possibilities of social change, may be hopeless about upliftment of objective circumstances of misery, may be resigned to ones fate, may be willing to accept the legitimacy of established order (in Elson, 1991. p.9).

This observation is consistent with Freire's (1970) argument that marginalized groups legitimize negative differential treatment by maintaining a "culture of silence." By adopting this culture of silence, women continue to be excluded from active participation in policies that have significant impact on their lives.

#### ***2.4.5. Economic Factors: Government and International Fiscal Policies***

During the colonial era, education was a selective and expensive venture as a result of user fee policies at all levels. These tuition-based systems of education, combined with large family sizes, and high levels of poverty, worked to the disadvantage of girls. However, immediately following independence, Nigeria began to restructure and expand its system of education. With the introduction of the UPE (discussed above), significant progress was made as school enrollments swelled to include girls. Regrettably, the fiscal crises which have persistently plagued the nation, along with the oil glut of the last decade and the

remedial Structural Adjustment Policies (SAPs)<sup>10</sup> adopted in the 1980s by Nigeria (and about thirty other African nations) have abruptly slowed down the educational progress of the preceding decades within the region and created a crisis situation (Hinchliffe, 1989; Fuller, 1989; Reimers and Tiburcio, 1993). As a result, educational budgets have been slashed. A 1989 UNESCO report claims that government expenditure on education in Sub-Saharan Africa per person, fell from US \$33 to US \$15 from 1980 to 1986. The problem is due in part to the fact that even in the post-colonial period, international financial communities (with the support of the modern African states themselves), have continued to shape the fiscal policies of the region. Unquestionably, the transition from colonial rule to statehood has been very turbulent for many of the countries. As Dei (1994b) points out, Africans are indeed not in control of their own destinies.

A recent UNESCO report (Reimers and Tiburcio, 1993), reiterates the dysfunctionality of some of these externally-generated fiscal policies for many developing nations, a majority of which are in Sub-Saharan Africa. The report confirms that SAPs has had a negative effect in the education sector of participating countries resulting in overall decline in expenditure and enrollments.

In the case of Nigeria, SAPs has had tremendously negative impact on the economy

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<sup>10</sup> Structural adjustment policy. A remedial economic revitalization program, which over thirty African countries, indebted to the International Monetary Fund (IMF)/World Bank, have been coerced to adopt in order to make them viable members of the international economy. Among the many conditions imposed by the IMF was the rationalization of social programs, the liberalization of trade and currency devaluation all of which have impacted negatively on the populace in general (Riddell, 1992) and women in particular (Elabor-Idemudia, 1993; Owoh, 1995).

resulting in the decline of the overall-well-being of the citizenry, especially the poor for whom the consequences of run-away inflation and currency devaluation have been most devastating. The direct costs of schooling, including school fees, books, uniforms etc., have once again been shifted to parents who are themselves facing uncertain economic futures. This dramatic fall in economic growth has affected women adversely especially since the education of girls has traditionally never been a top priority among families. Pre-existing inequalities are once again re-emerging.

In Nigeria, government policies and political agendas are major determinants of educational planning and policies. Unfortunately, national development plans (a five-year framework upon which social policies are formulated), do not generally consider women's problems serious enough to allocate scarce resources to them (WIN document, 1985).

### *2.5. Summary*

To put the study in context, this chapter has examined some relevant issues relating to Nigeria. Beginning with a demographic portrait of the country including the specific locale of the study, the chapter examined some educational trends within a historical framework. In addition, the chapter also examined some of the factors that have been inimical to women's progress particularly those affecting access to literacy and educational opportunities. A key argument presented in the chapter and indeed throughout this work is that while discriminatory practices against women also existed in the pre-capitalist era, they were however augmented and sharpened by the collision of Victorian ideologies

(transplanted by the colonialists) with those of traditional Africa. This phenomenon significantly curtailed and indeed almost obliterated the participation of women within the public sphere. Colonial policies particularly in relation to education, therefore, institutionalized women's subjugation.

Having placed the study in context, the next chapter examines the methods through which the data were collected, in addition to a discussion of its philosophical framework.

# Chapter 3

## Methodology

### 3.1. Introduction

This study falls under the qualitative<sup>11</sup> research paradigm but is embedded within a framework of critical realism since the accounts of the participants are used as prime data. Further, although the research is designed to study a social phenomenon from the interpretive stance of the participants, based on their lived experiences, its objectives go beyond meaning making. It rests on the assumption that the accounts of research participants are valid social scientific data and can lead to consequential social transformation. This is an essential tenet of critical realism, a philosophy of the human sciences recently advanced by British philosopher Roy Bhaskar. Critical realism is itself a combination of two of his previously advanced theoretical views - transcendental realism and critical naturalism, one for the sciences and one for the social sciences respectively.

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<sup>11</sup> In this work, qualitative research is used as an all-encompassing terminology that includes various forms of social inquiry that are based on a phenomenological approach. These include critical ethnography, participant observation, discourse analysis and participatory research for instance. Thus it is possible to conduct qualitative research but within a framework of critical ethnography. However, unlike some of the above, critical realism is more of a *guiding* philosophy than a prescriptive methodology. In this work therefore, the method is qualitative but the philosophy that informs that methodology is critical realism.

### 3.2. *Bhaskar, Critical Realism and Emancipatory Research*

Critical realism sets a relevant course for the methodology used in this work because of the priority it gives to agency. Bhaskar presents a perspective of the philosophy of social sciences that focuses on the dialectical relationship between social structures and individuals (or perhaps more appropriately, the powerless) on the one hand and the importance of the accounts of those individuals in interpreting their world. Beyond that and more importantly, he attributes *a priori* reality to the accounts and reasons people use in explaining their existence. In other words those reports constitute valid social scientific data that are not subordinate to those acquired in the natural sciences. Further, in Bhaskar's theorizing, the interpretation of the reports of agents is not an end in itself but rather a starting point for transformative action. Thus in Bhaskar's "conception of emancipatory discovery" (Corson, 1993), social scientific research should lead to praxis in such a way as to transform prevailing undesirable practices to desirable ones. He argues, for instance, that researchers in the human sciences are morally compelled to use the findings of contextualized social inquiry in transforming the social world in such a way as to bridge the gap between "knowing" and "doing", which should in turn lead to emancipation. This kind of emancipation he asserts:

consists in the *transformation*, in "self-emancipation" by the agent or agents concerned, *from an unwanted to a wanted source of determination ... that ... can only be effected in practice* (emphasis in original) (Bhaskar, 1989 p.90).

While Bhaskar's concern with critical realism in social science research has its origin in the

natural sciences, he does not seem to align himself with any particular philosophical school of thought. However, the importance he assigns to the accounts of human agents and his dialectical notion of agency and social structures makes his paradigm congruent with some post-positivist/postmodern critical theorists<sup>12</sup> whose work also informs this study. As a "democratic" socialist, his philosophy encourages the treatment of social actors as ends in themselves and not as means to an end. If this is so, the accounts people use in explaining their existence are equally important: important enough to merit attention and consideration in social construction. The goal of a researcher under this arrangement therefore is not simply the accumulation of knowledge that may in the end reify the condition of the researched. Rather, an empowering inquiry should contribute, even in the most minimal way, to social transformation. For Bhaskar the relationship between social scientific discovery and agency is crucial. Similar strands of argument are found in the works of other critical writers. Lather (1986), for instance, outlines what praxis-oriented research should accomplish. First, it should reject scientific norms in research in the human sciences (although Bhaskar does not reject these norms). Second, it should generate emancipatory knowledge. Third, and of particular relevance to this study, it should empower the researched thus giving a voice to the voiceless. As Tesch (1990) points out, emancipatory research is successful to the degree in which knowledge accumulated results in the improvement of undesirable practices. This of course implies subjectivity on the part of the

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<sup>12</sup> I am using the term in the broadest sense to refer to theorists who advocate emancipatory social, pedagogical and research practices, regardless of intra-paradigmatic differences (See Guba, 1990).

researcher.

Paradoxically, the same element of subjectivity both on the part of the inquirer and on the part of the inquired, is the major critique against the use of non-positivist approaches in research in the social sciences. Bhaskar recognises this flaw and urges researchers to conduct critical self-reflection. However, Hughes (1990) justifies the possible intrusion of subjectivity by pointing out that social scientists engaged in studying social phenomena are not preoccupied with the "realities" of "thing-like" objects but rather are preoccupied with the realities that are intersubjectively constituted by individuals relating to one another. Commenting further on the "illusory goals" of objectivity and scientific detachment, he argues that:

The social sciences, however they may try to ape the natural sciences, have forever to face the difficulties posed by the fact that their subject-matter also has a voice ... The social scientist, too is a member of a society and a culture ... these similarly are likely to affect the way in which he or she sees the world (p. 136).

On the possibility of misinterpretation of and limited scrutiny of generated information, Bhaskar urges an interactional relationship between the researcher and the researched on the one hand and the need for critical analysis of agents' accounts by the researcher on the other hand. As he sees it:

agents' accounts are more than just evidence; they are an internally related aspect of what they are about. Thus any resolution of ... [the] problem must be two-way: the social investigator must avoid both the extremes of arrogant dismissal of and of fawning assent to first person accounts (1989, p.98).

Part of the appeal of Bhaskar's philosophy lies in this kind of pragmatism. A persistent interpreter of Bhaskar, Corson (1997), provides a succinct summary of the central tenets of critical realism: 1. agents' reasons and accounts constitute fundamental scientific data and by consulting such reports people's world views and the non-human entities that create influential structural forces in their lives, become evident; 2. because of human capacity for reflexive self-monitoring, people's account and reasons also reveal what they believe about those world views; 3. using people's accounts as prime data exposes not only what they value but also things that oppress them; 4. finally, by becoming cognisant of those oppressive structures researchers are morally compelled to use evidence from the data (accounts and reasons), to replace undesirable social practices with desired ones.

### ***3.3 Critical Realism, Qualitative Methodology and Literacy Research***

The decision to conduct a qualitative research study informed by critical realism was further reinforced by the views of researchers in the area of literacy who suggest that issues related to the development and sustenance of literacies cannot be divorced from the actual context (Barton, 1994; Ramdas, 1990; Wagner, 1992; Street et al. 1993; Lankshear et al., 1993; Freire, 1970;, 1985; Bee, 1993). If literacies are socially constructed and structures of power have no existence independent of the activities they control (Bhaskar, 1986, 1989), then the accounts of those whose lives are affected by illiteracy are warrantable knowledge. Put differently, potent literacy research cannot be separated from the environmental and structural factors that undergird its acquisition and uses. In that instant literacy research

becomes not simply a form of benign enlightenment but also a form of praxis-oriented explanatory critique. Critical realism meets this criterion. Because its focus is on how agents make meaning of their environment without distorting their social world, it offers the potential for providing a valid understanding of literacy. As Rose (1989) succinctly puts it:

To understand the nature and development of literacy we need to consider the social context in which it occurs - the political economic and cultural forces that encourage or inhibit it. The canonical orientation discourages deep analysis of the ways these forces may be affecting performance (p. 237).

While Rose's assertions refer specifically to literacy acquisition within conventional schools, they have, however, important implications for research in adult literacy. Thus, in conducting gender-related literacy research within the Sub-Saharan context in general and Nigeria in particular, the importance of contextual factors cannot be overemphasized. A central argument in this work is that the factors that lead to the marginalization of women are inextricably linked to their inferior status which in turn affects their access to literacy and educational opportunities (Iman et al., 1985; Chlebowska, 1990; Stromquist, 1990). If literacy research in Sub-Saharan Africa can lead to praxis, there is a moral obligation to take into account all those factors that impinge on the acquisition of literacy skills. As Lather (1986) points out:

For praxis to be possible, not only must theory illuminate the lived experience of progressive social groups; it must also be illuminated by their struggles. Theory ... must be open-ended, nondogmatic, informing, and grounded in the circumstances of everyday life; and, moreover, it must be premised on a deep respect for the intellectual and political capacities of the dispossessed (p.262).

Because this present work is embedded in critical realism, the emphasis is not only on the accounts of the participants but also their views of the accounts they had rendered. Meaning-making from a critical realist perspective offers a new and more holistic way of conducting literacy research particularly given the paradigm clashes that plague the conceptualization of literacy and literacy research (see chapter 1).

### ***3.4. Data Gathering***

The field work for this study was conducted in Nigeria early in 1995 and lasted approximately three months. The data were collected in two previously selected rural communities- Onitcha-Ugbo and Ebu both in southwestern Nigeria (see Chapter 2). The research relied on a combination of methods: formal interviews, focus-group interviews, observations, informal interviews and interviews with ministry officials. However, formal individual interviews and focus-group discussions provided the primary data.

#### ***3.4.1. Research Questions***

Many of the themes on which the findings of the study are based were generated during the interviews and from the actual analysis of data. After the first few interviews for instance, a theme related to participants' children's after school activities emerged. Probing this theme told me much more about a participant's attitude to her children's education than asking direct questions. Other themes emerged from the actual analysis of data after the interviews had been completed. For example, the theme that deals with the women's

perception of the status of women in their communities (other than themselves), emerged from the analysis of the data.

Even so, a previously selected set of questions provided the guide for the interviews (see appendix A). This guide served as a kind of discursive compass and helped to steer the interviews back on track whenever there appeared to be significant digression. The questions were based on related literature which suggests that literacy for women in developing nations will in some way impinge on those areas. For instance, since education (of which literacy is a critical part), has been theorized as an instrument for influencing many forms of behaviour (see Psacharopoulos and Woodhall, 1985; Psacharopoulos, 1989; Bhola, 1990; Stromquist, 1992a; Levine, 1982) one set of guiding questions was geared in that direction.

Literacy has also been associated with economic growth and social transformation (UNESCO, 1975; World bank, 1988), and political power and exercise of informed choice (Freire, 1970, 1985; Lankshear et al., 1993; Chlebowska, 1990). As a result, some questions were aimed at finding out participants' income-generating activities, including whether or not ill/literacy made a difference in the amount of income each participant is able to generate. Additionally, the questions also tried to find out the kinds of access both groups of respondents have to employment and credit facilities. Other questions tried to find out how much women contribute to the decision-making processes in both their communities and households and how sensitized they are to issues that affect their lives. An important issue often raised in literacy research is how non-literates are able to cope in their everyday life (see Horsman, 1990; Klassen 1987). A set of questions was therefore designed to find

out this information.

Linking the interview guide to related literature therefore, the first set of questions was designed to explore participants' perceptions of the impact of illiteracy on their lives. The second category of questions related to how the participants felt about the education of their children including whether or not there was differential perception of the value of male and female children. The next two sets of questions tried to find out the maternal behaviour of the participants including health care habits and practices such as female circumcision, and the use of birth control methods. Questions in the fifth category tried to find out the income generating activities of the participants. The sixth category determined the degree of participants' participation in important family decisions including the right to income disposal and children's education. The seventh category was designed to give the participants the opportunity to discuss issues that may not have been addressed through direct questioning. The eighth set of questions attempted to explore the coping strategies of the non-literate participants.

#### ***3.4.2. Gaining Access***

The field work began almost immediately after my arrival by first gaining permission from the traditional rulers of the two communities. This was relatively easy since I was familiar with the processes involved in gaining access to regents' or kings' palaces within the area. In the first community, Onitcha-Ugbo, gaining access was quite easy. I approached the regent myself since I am personally acquainted with him. Once I had explained my mission,

the entire process became quite informal. After all this was the community I was born into (Chapter 1 explores this issue). Both my parents grew up in this community and are connected to the regent himself in various ways. First both the regent and my mother belong to the same lineage group which means that I am also indirectly related to him. Second, both he and my father are approximately the same age and so grew up together as he (the regent), often reminded me. Even though my parents now live outside the community, both he and my father are still members of the same local associations. Gaining permission at Onitcha - Ugbo required two visits to the *Obi's Palace* (as it is called), even though I visited the palace a few more times after that. The first meeting lasted over three hours not necessarily because all that time was spent discussing my work, a good part of it was due to constant interruptions as streams of subjects came in to confer briefly with him on pressing community matters. I found out that visiting the palace was an event in itself.

Gaining access at Ebu was a much more formal process. I had no prior acquaintance with the regent and so needed the assistance of a go-between who was very familiar with him, had easy access to the palace, as well as being a respected member of the community. But for one brief meeting, gaining access at Ebu was done primarily through this intermediary. I was not told how or through what processes the decision to permit the study was arrived at by the regents (nor was I expected to ask) but in both cases, permission was granted in the form of a signed letter of authorization. Once this was done I was advised to look for a liaison person who knew each respective community very well and whose task was to take me to the homes of potential participants based on the requirements I had

described during the stage of obtaining permission.

Although relying on a local in choosing participants was potentially problematic because of the possibility of bias on the part of my "guide", it was the only option really. Before leaving for the field, I had hoped to access some kind of list from the traditional rulers of both communities but there was none available. This was really not surprising in a nation where both federal and state governments are generally indifferent to the need for even macro demographic statistics. Besides, I was expected to use a guide. While my roots are in these communities, I have never really (but for one brief period), lived there and was, therefore, more like an "outsider" to most of the people (particularly in Ebu) and could therefore not wander around town unaccompanied. The other alternative would have been for the regent of each community to organize town meetings (this option was considered) but it would have created a situation of frenzy and conjecturing. I wanted to be as unobtrusive as I possibly could. I did not want participants to "exchange" views prior to individual interviews. Even so, in making the decision to use the assistance of a local in the search for participants, I had to consider certain issues very carefully. How could I determine for instance, that my guide would be impartial in her choice of homes to be visited? What impact if any would that subsequently have on my choice of participants? What influence would her personal perception of my expectations have on my prospective informants? Could potentially valuable informants be eliminated if certain individuals were perhaps not on the best of terms with my "guide"? These are relatively small and close-knit communities in which interpersonal relations play a major role in the social network.

Finally, I did not want a situation where prospective participants would be "persuaded" or cajoled by a peer to participate. Indeed, a hint of reluctance, once observed, became one of my criteria for rejecting participants.

Several strategies were adopted to address some of these concerns. First, I decided to use two "guides" rather than one in each community. This way, I would minimize the influence (if any) of one individual in the selection of participants. Second, with the help of my "guides", I made up a list of potential participants. Third, I decided to accompany each "guide" on the introductory visit to enable me explain the purpose of the visit myself. In effect, although I was accompanied by a local on each initial visit, I was able to retain control of the arrangements myself without using a spokesperson. In addition, I was able to size up each potential participant without relying on second-hand information from my guides.

### ***3.4.3. Selecting the Sample***

The nature of the study seemed to favour purposive sampling. The problem became how to ensure a relatively fair representation of both communities' women. There seemed only one plausible solution. Since each town is divided into smaller units known as "villages" by virtue of ancestral kinship, I made the decision to spread out my search in such a way as to ensure that participants were drawn from each. The search for participants was difficult. Because there is no public transportation system in these rural areas, it involved long hours of walking along rugged rural roads. From time to time, we (my guides and I),

would get rides from locals who had cars. All contacts and arrangements had to be made in person since there were no other means of communication. Up to seventy-five potential participants were contacted. In the end, thirty-six women aged between 23 -52 (see table 3-1) were interviewed individually: eighteen literates and eighteen non-literates.

While some of the potential informants were not interviewed because they did not want to participate in the study, I rejected some myself for the following reasons: the subject did not meet the major research criterion i.e., having lived in a rural community for most of her adult life; apparent reluctance on the part of the potential participant or her husband; more than one cancellation of scheduled face-to-face interview. In instances where the potential informant turned down my request for participation, I was able to determine what factors contributed to the refusal and to which research group such women belonged to. This observation turned up very valuable information: virtually all the women who turned down the request for interview were non-literates.

Indeed, of the seventy-five potential participants approached, fifty-five (about 73%) were non-literates. Obviously the reason for this discrepancy between the number of non-literates and literates contacted is not because of a shortage of the former. Like most rural communities in Nigeria, both towns have about 30-35% literacy rate. However, many of the potential non-literate participants seemed rather apprehensive and therefore reluctant to participate. Reasons given included being too busy or not wanting to participate because their husbands would not approve.

Perhaps the following experience with a prospective non-literate participant will elaborate the point. Following prior arrangements, I arrived at the house of the participant at the appointed time. Rather than being met by the woman I was met by her sixteen-year-old son who told me that his mother had left a message for me to wait. A little over an hour later, she came in but informed me that we could not proceed with the interview until I had been "interviewed" by her older son (she was a widow) who would then give the permission to proceed. Another meeting was scheduled for the next day when that son would be available. Next day, armed with my tape recorder, I returned to the house. This time the son was available but his mother was not. When I asked where she was, I was told that she was not up to "talking" on that day but that if *I still felt like it*, I could reschedule for another day. In the nuances involved in Igbo language, that was a subtle way of bowing out. I too did.

All but two of the literate women I approached were interviewed. Both were quite willing (one was a clerk (teller) at a local community bank while the other was a local hairdresser) but somehow we could not arrive at mutually convenient times for the formal individual interviews.

**TABLE 3-1: Age Distribution of Participants.**

Age Category	20-25	26-30	31-35	36-40	41-45	46-50	50+	Totals
Literate Women	-	3	5	5	3	1	1	18
Non-Literate Women	1	-	4	5	2	4	2	18
Totals	1 (2.8%)	3 (8.3%)	9 (25%)	10 (27.8%)	5 (13.9%)	5 (13.9%)	3 (8.3%)	36 (100%)

Source: Research data

#### 3.4.4. *The Interviews*

The study was based primarily on two types of interviews: individual and focus-group discussions. Both types of interviews were semi-structured to allow flexibility. The interviews were conducted in three languages all of which I am quite fluent in: English, Igbo (of which I am a native speaker) and pidgin English.<sup>13</sup> The use of Nigerian Pidgin English became necessary because of some participants who had migrated to one of the communities- Ebu, from neighbouring rural towns where another language other than Igbo is spoken. Ebu itself

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<sup>13</sup> While standard English, a legacy of British rule, remains the official language in Nigeria, pidgin - a non-standard mixture of English and local languages, serves as an auxiliary mode of communication in non-formal settings such as local markets and hospitals, where extreme linguistic diversity prohibits the use of one particular indigenous language. Although it is generally shunned by the educated elite, it remains the only means through which literates and non-literates who speak different Nigerian languages can communicate with each other.

is a bilingual community with most members being able speak Igarra, the second language of the community.

### ***Individual Interviews***

All interviews were arranged at mutually convenient times although I usually had to make compromises whenever it was necessary to do so. While all the literate participants agreed to have their interviews tape recorded, only eleven of the non-literate participants agreed to have their interviews recorded. This attitudinal difference between the two groups was perhaps due to some kind of apprehension on the part of the non-literate women. Each participant was interviewed at least two times. The first session was designed to meet and set up an appointment for a formal interview. In many cases such introductory sessions lasted over an hour. Each became a forum for establishing a rapport and beginning a dialogue with the participant. This helped to put her more at ease during the formal interview. For me, it was often an opportunity to enter the "world" of the participant observing their environment and noting their interactions with others. Such observations revealed, for instance, that the children of literate and non-literate participants appeared to engage in different kinds of after-school activities. While those of the former appeared to engage more in school-related activities, those of the latter appeared to engage more in domestic activities often including going to the farm on a daily basis. Although this observation is obviously not generalizable and may indeed be mere coincidence it however excited my interest enough to build related questions into my interview guide.

By prior agreement, I arrived for most of the formal interviews at least two hours before the scheduled time. This gave me another opportunity to "hang around" and continue observing my participant. Prior to beginning each interview, the participant was advised of her right to terminate the session at any given time. Most of the formal interviews were conducted either in the homes of the participants or their places of "work". I preferred this arrangement because it allowed me into their world. Many of the literate informants, for instance, were teachers (see Table 3-2) so some of the interviews were conducted within school premises with the permission of the headmaster or headmistress as the case may be. In such instances, I spent a good deal of time with the teacher in her class having previously spent some time in her home during our first meeting. Other interviews were held in less orthodox locations. Three were conducted in a poultry (chicken farm) where three of the non-literate women worked<sup>14</sup>. With the permission of the farm owner, I spent a substantial amount of time there mingling with my participants. A few interviews were conducted in open courtyards sometimes amidst the clucking of chickens. One interview was conducted on a farm where I spent the better part of a day. These are just a few examples of some interesting situations I had to work in. Whatever the location, I made sure that the interview process was not compromised. Although the minimum number of interviews for each individual was two- one informal and the other formal, some of the women were interviewed more than twice. Over time, I began to interact with some of them on a regular basis. While

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<sup>14</sup> These three women were the only non-literate participants that were engaged in the wage sector. All three were employed as menial labourers.

many of such interactions were usually chance meetings either at a local store or at the home of another local, they served as forums for continuing our dialogue.

Cultural dogma demanded caution during each interview particularly with non-literate women. Although I had gone into the field with an interview guide the use of specific questions was guided by the direction that each interview took. In many instances it was necessary to devise some on-the-spot questions to further probe an issue that had been raised by the interviewee. In some cases, observing the demeanour of the subject would result in an impromptu rewording of a question. It is indeed difficult to express in words the mental strain that this cultural and semantic sensitivity involved. While it was possible to ask some of the interviewees certain questions directly, the answers to such questions had to be elicited indirectly from others. It was sometimes difficult for instance, to ask a participant directly if she was the only wife of her husband or whether or not she had circumcised her female children. Another example: while it was easy to ask my literate participants whether or not they had ever used birth control methods (in relation to health related practices), I could not do this directly with the other group. Rather, I had to skirt around the issue beginning with such questions as "have you ever heard of birth control methods?" The next question would then be "What do you think of them?" etc. before I would finally ask the question directly. Sometimes that was not even necessary since I got the participant's response from the "preparatory" discussion.

Quite often, particularly with the non-literate group, it was necessary to clarify questions without compromising their purpose. Occasionally, a participant would request

to make some statements with the tape recorder turned off.

At the end of each interview, the tape was played back to the interviewee to determine whether she wanted to make additional statements and to determine if she had answered questions the way she had intended to. I also went through the same process with the non tape-recorded interviews to find out whether or not I had written down and subsequently interpreted responses accurately.

**Table 3-2: Occupational Distribution of Participants.**

Category	Teacher	Farmer	Nursing Assistant	Petty Trader	Seamstress	Manual Labourer	Entrepreneur	Other	Total
Literate Women	11	-	2	1	1	-	3	-	18
Non-Literate Women	-	10	-	4	-	3	-	1	18
Totals	11 (30.5%)	10 (27.8%)	2 (5.6%)	5 (13.9%)	1 (2.8%)	3 (8.3%)	3 (8.3%)	1 (2.8%)	36 (100%)

**Source: Research Data**

### ***Focus-Group Discussions***

The structural arrangement of the focus-group interviews was determined by first conducting three pilot-tests with women who were not part of my actual research group. The

question as to how best to organize the group discussions was problematic in view of the fact that there were two different categories of participants. What would be the best grouping for the discussions? Researchers suggest that grouping people with some similarities was likely to be more result oriented (Anderson, 1990). To sort this out it was necessary to have the pilot-tests.

### *Pilot-tests*

There were three pilot-tests, each made up of three participants. In the first two tests, each category of participants (literate and non-literate), was grouped separately with the hope that homogeneity would facilitate participation and subsequently generate more lively discussions. The group was mixed in the third test.

### *Result of the Pilot Tests*

While same-group pattern did not seem to have any significant effect on the literate group, the non-literate group appeared withdrawn at first but opened up once they had overcome their initial inhibitions. In the third test made up of one literate and two non-literates the latter group started slowly but participated reasonably. In the end, practical logistic considerations seemed to favour a mixed grouping for the formal focus-group discussions.

Prior to setting out for the field, I had hoped to hold the focus-group sessions after all individual interviews had been completed. The reality of field conditions did not permit this. Because of the difficulty in reaching people and making fresh arrangements, specifically for the group discussions, (once private interviews had been completed), I decided the best

option was to schedule a focus group session after each set of nine interviews or so. The pilot tests had indicated that group composition would have little or no impact on the outcome of the discussions. Consequently, during individual interviews each participant was invited and given a date and time for the next focus-group meeting. One advantage of this arrangement was that participation in each focus-group session was random depending on who participated in each set of nine interviews. It also seemed logical to have a focus group discussion as close to individual interviews as possible while issues were still fresh in the minds of the participants.

All but five of the thirty-six women who participated in the study attended the focus-group sessions. In all there were four formal-focus group sessions. During each meeting, my role was that of a moderator and facilitator. The group discussions were held at very interesting locations. One of the formal sessions for instance, was held outdoors under a tree, two others in classrooms in a local primary school and the fourth in the living room of the house I was staying in one of the communities. The sessions were quite lively, with most of the participants, literate and non-literate alike, participating to the best of their abilities. During both individual and focus-group interviews, I was surprised at the extent to which some of my non-literate interviewees were aware of some salient social issues.

All participants in the focus-group discussions had to have been interviewed individually first. There were several reasons for this. First, each focus-group session served as a forum for "confirming" what a participant had told me in our private session. Second, a potential participant was likely to be "tainted" by the views of others if she attended a

group session before a private interview. Third, the focus-group discussions were intended to serve as further exploration of some of the themes that had emerged at individual interviews.

### *Interviews with Ministry Officials*

In order to substantiate the policy position of the federal government of Nigeria vis-à-vis adult literacy and the improvement of the quality of life of women, it was necessary to interview some officials of the Delta State Commission for Mass Literacy, Adult and Non Formal Education<sup>15</sup> as well as the State Commission for Women. These interviews turned out to be informal information sessions in which the officials simply reiterated the government's efforts at empowering women. The prevailing political climate did not favour any criticism of the government by its employees so I had to make do with the information sessions although with my persistence, they told me some of the problems, mainly related to funding, that they were encountering in the implementation of literacy programmes. The visits to those offices did yield some secondary data.

### *3.5. Corroboration of Data (Triangulation)*

One of the biggest dilemmas I faced before and while in the field was how to verify the accuracy of the information provided by my participants as suggested by researchers (Anderson, 1990; Merriam, 1988). The problem was that I could not go back to the

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<sup>15</sup> Established in 1991 as an offshoot of the World Conference on Education For All (EFA) in Jomtien Thailand in 1990, it is the latest agency (after the failure of many), charged with the "eradication" of illiteracy in Nigeria.

participants with the transcribed interviews once I had returned to Canada. I decided to take certain measures while I was still in the field.

First, at the end of each formal interview, I played back the tape to the interviewee to find out if the participant wanted to change some of the information. Second and perhaps most important, the focus group sessions were used as media for confirming what some participants had told me during individual interviews. This was indeed one of the reasons for including the focus group sessions as one of the sources of data. During the group discussions for instance, I deliberately asked some important questions that were discussed during individual interviews to see if some of the participants would change their original responses and positions on certain issues. Third, I compared interview notes to information from tape-recorded interviews. Finally, I transcribed a few randomly selected interviews and discussed them with the respective participants. For the most part, all these measures confirmed the information given in the formal interviews.

### ***3.6. Analysis of Data***

The data were analyzed in two phases. The first was carried out while still in the field; the second and major analysis was done after the collection of data had been completed.

#### ***3.6.1. Analysis in the Field***

Once the interviews began I had to evaluate the direction of the research on an

ongoing basis to determine if and where changes were required as related literature suggests (Bogdan and Biklen, 1992; Merriam, 1988; Tesch, 1990). I also had to make sure that the interviews were not shifting in substance from my purpose for undertaking the study - to 53 determine how literacy or the lack of it had affected the lives of the participants. Several changes were made as a result of this ongoing analysis. After the first three interviews, for instance, I realized that taking notes (as most related literature suggests), was distracting to both the participants and me. The solution was to minimize note-taking during the course of an interview and instead, to keep a tape-recorded journal of my observations and impressions at the end of each session or at least at the end of the day where immediate recording was not possible. I was, therefore, able to listen more attentively to my informants. Had this study been funded, I would have preferred to have a "trained" assistant to take the notes. I had no choice but to take notes during unrecorded interviews.

Preliminary analysis in the field also revealed a surprising "finding" that has been neglected or cursorily mentioned in discourses related to literacy. The existence of a third group (besides beneficiaries of formal education and adult literacy) which I have called the "*limbo group*". These are teenage non-literate girls who (now adults in the case of my participants) were too old to attend regular school with other children yet too young to attend adult literacy classes. Some of them had gone to live with wealthier relatives because they had promised to send them to school but had failed to do so. Another group consisted of girls who had gone to live with other families as domestic help. They eventually returned to their rural communities as non-literate teenagers willing to get some education but

unable to fit in anywhere. This discovery challenged my attempts at detached objectivity.

Early analysis in the field also indicated that cultural and traditional norms are implicated, to a certain extent, in the marginalization of the women within my research communities. Interestingly, the considerable economic independence and seemingly enhanced quality of life that the literate informants seem to enjoy appeared to reduce the impact of cultural negatives on them. Thus, by constantly scrutinizing the data as they were being collected, I was able to pay more attention to certain areas I may otherwise have missed had I initiated my analysis after the interviews had been completed.

### ***3.6.2. In-depth Analysis of Data***

This phase was much more challenging and began after the interviews had been transcribed. Although I had gone into the field with guiding questions I had no idea what to expect. Before beginning the in-depth analysis however, as LeCompte, Preissle and Tesch (1993) suggest, I had to relocate the original research question: that is, based on their personal accounts, in what ways has literacy or lack of it affected the quality of life of a group of women who are otherwise similar. Implicit in this question is the assumption that a discussion of the quality of life of these women also includes that of their families, particularly their children. For example, how has being literate or non-literate affected the lives of their children in terms of their education, time spent with parents and general quality of life as revealed in these women's own accounts? Up to this point, my guiding hypothesis/assumption in the study had been that literacy would probably make some

difference, as related literature suggests, but to what extent?

Having reestablished the research questions I began the actual analysis. The first stage was the scanning of the raw data from a hard copy in order to refamiliarize myself with the contents and to initiate the generation of themes. During this process and indeed for the entire duration of the analysis, I constantly asked questions of the data. The questions "what is this piece of information telling me and who is saying it *and* who else is saying it," became important "guides" through the process. After several readings, some themes began to emerge and were coded accordingly. The frequency of a given code determined how important that chunk of information was. That in turn determined the dominant themes. At first there seemed to be too many themes but these gradually reduced as several themes became sub-categories and subsequently main categories. Two new files were then created for each category: one for the literate participants and the other for the non-literate participants. The data in each category was then analyzed for commonalities, contradictions, and uniqueness of content (Tesch, 1990). The findings of this analysis are reported in Chapter 6.

### ***3.7. Summary***

Chapter 3 has focused on the discussion of the methodology used in the study including the description of the processes involved in gaining access to the field, selecting the participants, collecting and analyzing the data.

A total of thirty-six participants, all rural residents for most of their adult lives, were

interviewed both individually and in focus-group situations.

The data gathered from the interviews went through two stages of analysis: first as an ongoing process while still in the field and later through an in-depth scrutiny after the field work had been completed and the taped interviews had been transcribed.

Having looked at the methodology of the study, the next chapter is an examination of its theoretical framework.

# **Chapter 4**

## **Theoretical Framework:**

### **Women, Literacy and Power**

#### *4.1. Introduction*

It is difficult to establish historically when and how the diminutization of the status of women occurred. What is amply documented, however, is that cross-culturally, women are marginalized and have been in varying degrees, for centuries. Such evidence is provided by social theorists such as Marx and Engels who in both their individual writings and joint collaborations, address the subject.

Similarly, the work of Charles Fourier, the renegade eighteenth century French philosopher and social theorist, critiqued extensively society's unjust treatment of women. His views, still relevant to contemporary society, strongly link social progress to the liberation of women. For Fourier, society can truly become "civilized" when women have attained social justice. As he saw it:

**Social Progress and changes of [a] period are brought about by virtue of the progress of women towards liberty and social retrogression occurs as a result of the diminution in the liberty of women...the extension of the privileges of women is the fundamental cause of all social progress (Fourier, 1846 [1808])**

pp.132-133).<sup>16</sup>

Although Fourier may have written under utopian ideals, the recognition that women were, relative to men, second class citizens, made the above quotation the rallying cry of radical feminism in Western Europe and North America in the nineteenth century (Beecher, 1986). Indeed, the fundamental argument in support of the provision of equal access to literacy for women in Sub-Saharan Africa and other developing nations, rests on a similar assumption: *that social progress is significantly retarded by denying them equal access to literacy*. Invariably, the argument continues, lack of literacy limits women's ability to maximize their potential and to participate in national development, thus leaving them at the margins of their respective societies (UNESCO, 1991; Ballara 1992; Etta, 1994; Okojie, 1983; Chlebowska, 1990; Stromquist, 1990; Ramdas 1990). Fourier's rhetorical question "what kind of life do they [women] live today?" and his succinct answer: "[t]heirs is a continual state of privation, even in industry, where man has taken over everything... while women may be seen plugging away at laborious farm work,"<sup>17</sup> may well apply to women in contemporary Africa where gender-based distinctions play a pivotal role in the degree of access to social rewards. In Nigeria for instance, even though women constitute the numerical majority their social distance from legislative and decision-making processes and subsequently from positions of power contributes to their limited access to an important social artifact - literacy. Inevitably,

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<sup>16</sup> Fourier, C. (1808) *Théorie des quatre mouvement et des destinées générales*. In Oeuvres Complètes de Charles Fourier, Tome 1. Editions Anthropos (1966). This edition is a reprint of the 1846 (3rd) edition of this work.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.* p. 150.

this creates a society where gender-based subordination is rife, with one gender group assuming the role of the dominant class, licensing itself to social rewards while the other is relegated to the status of a sub-class unlicensed to receive similar rewards.

#### ***4.2. Gender and Class***

Much of what is known about class today is based on the work of Marx and Engels who argued that the status of women within a capitalist framework is one of subordination and exploitation. Unfortunately, classical Marxist approaches to the "woman question" often locate their marginalization within the framework of the oppression of the working class thus drawing a sharp line between class and gender. Within an orthodox Marxist framework of economic determinism, all social phenomena are underpinned by and reducible to their relationship to the economic base (Poulantzas, 1975). If this is so, then the subordination of women can be understood from the perspective of their marginal location within the system of production under capitalism. But, many feminist scholars reject simple economic reductionism, giving rise to the persistent marxist-feminist/-socialist-feminist debate that has defied consensus. (see Stichter and Parpart, 1988; Chant and Brydon, 1989; Robertson and Berger, 1986; Abbott and Sapsford, 1987). Briefly, some of the dominant strands of the debate include those that relate women's subordination to biology (Firestone 1972); to domestic labour (domestic mode of production), (Delphy,

1984)<sup>18</sup>: to the intersection of social relations and biology (Molyneux, 1977) and to the link between production and men's control of reproduction (Meillassoux, 1981).

Still, others insist that the oppression of women is related to but transcends access to critical resources. According to them, the link between women and class position is also implicated (Abbott and Sapsford 1987). Thus, it is possible to argue that the control and power exercised by men as a dominant group over women as a subordinate group is analogous to the control and exploitation of the lower class or proletariat by the middle class or bourgeoisie, but not subsumed by it.

Undoubtedly, classifying women as a group may in itself be problematic since they do not constitute a monolithic group. Further, as Stichter and Parpart (1988) point out, gender exploitation does not occur between the biological categories of male and female but between the socially construed categories of gender. In reference to men's control of the reproductive processes, Parpart and Stichter argue that:

Class categories of controller/non-controller of the means of reproduction must and can be defined; the question of whether these are identical to the categories male/female is an empirical and historical one (1988, p.11).

While this assertion leaves open the question of whether or not "gender" coincides with biological male and female categories, it points to the dialectical nature of women's oppression and thus the possibility of redemption. Surely, if women's oppression has social

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<sup>18</sup> This volume also includes a reprint of her well known 1977 publication. "The Main Enemy."

origins, then with agency and critical action, a reversal is conceivable.

With regards to African women, Bujra (1986) captures the inherent dilemma in any attempt at "homogenizing" them in the following:

The condition of women in Africa ... has always been culturally diverse .... women cannot be thought of as a single category, even though there are important and occasionally unifying struggles in which they may engage in. At the same time women cannot be simply analyzed 'as men': gender is almost invariably a relevant category .... gender differences find differential expression at different class levels - gender is qualified by the places women occupy in newly emergent classes (p.118).

Indeed, the degree of gender-related oppression may vary depending on further classification of women as "elite" or poor but *middle class women are themselves not immune from oppression*. What links women as a group is therefore their position as a subordinate gender even though the degree of oppression may vary. Any analysis of the sociology of women must therefore take cognisance of the fact that under certain conditions, it is possible to talk of women as a class-like group, relative to men. This is particularly the case within the Nigerian context where such stratifications are often manifest in the division of labour and assignment of roles along culturally defined gender (ideological) lines. It is within this framework, juxtaposed with patriarchal hierarchies and emergent capitalism (as African nations integrate more and more into the global economy), that women are oppressed.

Regardless of how one looks at it, the domination of women in Nigeria both within the public and private spheres is inherently linked to their position as a distinct and inferior

group in society. Simply put, at all levels of organized society, women are discriminated against because they are *not* men. Such discriminations are particularly manifest in two areas: (a) social relations of production within the household and (b) women's access to means of production.

***(a) Social Relations of Production Within the Household***

In many parts of Nigeria, there are gender disparities in social relations of production within the household. In the rural areas household production is tied to agriculture-related activities. Although a common government assumption is that the bulk of farmers are males, studies have shown that in Africa, women play an extensive (perhaps even dominant) role in agricultural production although official representation of women's role in socio-economic production is hardly presented as such (Boserup, 1970; Okojie, 1983). The problem arises from the low valuation of women's work even though they work longer hours than men. This is because the "products" of women's work, including child care, cooking, household maintenance, etc., are less quantifiable. The reverse is however true for men whose labour outside the home, in or out of the fields, yields tangible economic rewards. Further, there is a culturally sanctioned (albeit tacit) assumption that men have control of the fruits of women's labour even outside the home because such "rewards" are possible through the benevolence of husbands to whom the time spent on such labour belong. With reference to Uganda, Obbo (1988), for instance, describes how rewards ensuing from women's labour are controlled by men and how market economic sanctions are applied when they attempt

a withdrawal of their labour.

Within the Nigerian context, the typical rural household includes a man and a wife or wives and a network of relations who make up the extended family unit. This household engages in both production and consumption with every member having his or her own allocated duties. The one unifying link is the woman whose duties traverse everyone's in addition to her reproductive role. Yet long hours of arduous work by women go uncompensated. Iman et al. (1985) offer a practical reason why women receive less for more hours of work in Nigeria-women's labour is divided into three portions. According to them, the first portion relates to the mundane but essential tasks that go into sustaining and reproducing the family such as household chores, childbirth, child care and farm production. Such tasks they assert, go unremunerated. The second portion which is her own private domain, involves income-generating activities for which she gets some financial reward although this may also go back into sustaining the family. The third portion is the work done in aid and support of her husbands' cash-oriented agricultural production for which she receives still no remuneration. In effect, while women work longer hours, men control the bulk of the fruits of labour within the family. Paradoxically, even though it is valued less than that of boys, the opportunity cost of female schooling, including the loss of domestic labour, also mitigates against girls being sent to school.

Even when women are involved in the formal wage economy, they must also work within the home and so are doubly exploited through the sale of their labour power and through domestic labour both of which as some marxist-feminists argue, support the wage

economy (Gardiner, 1977; Robertson and Berger 1986).

***(b) Access to Means of Production***

If women's labour and contributions are marginalized within the household so also is the situation within the larger economy where women are discriminated against in the development process and as a result lack access to means of production. The monetization of productivity within a capitalist framework has had a negative impact on women because for the most part (at least within rural Nigeria), the goods that women produce are usually for consumption. In pre-colonial times, land ownership was a communal venture and women had at least usufructuary right to it. But with the privatization of land ownership in favour of men, women have limited access to land which is a prime resource within rural economies. Additionally, women also have fewer employment opportunities and even when such become available their domestic roles may prevent them from availing themselves of such opportunities.

Even in situations where women's work is more quantifiable either through participation in the wage economy or through private entrepreneurship, it is still devalued because of inequities in wages and lack of access to capital. Women in business face extreme difficulties in the acquisition of capital and credit facilities. Up till recently in Nigeria, women were not allowed to borrow funds from lending institutions without the explicit endorsement of their husbands. What all of this amounts to are gross disparities in the social reward system which in turn devalues the importance of women and leaves

them permanently on the margins of society. Popular perceptions of the marginal role of women reinforce women's exclusion from access to literacy by limiting the amount of resources that parents are willing to invest in the education of girls.

It is noteworthy that although the works of Marx and Engels, and of subsequent mainstream Marxist theorists have been criticised for giving relatively cursory attention to women's issues (by locating their subordination within the broader framework of working class exploitation within the framework of labour production) (Leacock, 1972; Charlton, 1989; Abbott and Sapsford 1987), they nonetheless laid the foundation for the theoretical conceptualization of gender issues (Vogel, 1983) and provide a useful starting point for any analysis of women as an oppressed group, caught between the reality of their role in society and the gendered perceptions of that role which often leave them in the position of an underclass.

#### ***4.2.1. Women as an Underclass***

In his almost doctrinal work, *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*, Engels lays out his reflections on the condition of women. In his theory, the marginal condition of women is intertwined with the emergence of monogamy which transformed the family into a unit of production. Juxtaposed with the subsequent class society controlled by men, women lost their independence as they and their children came under the control of one man. In pre-class or clan societies prevailing social arrangements did not turn women into unpaid domestics because the division of labour was reciprocal and the production of

commodities was for consumption rather than for exchange. Engels argues that with the emergence of the monogamous family, household management became private business only limited to the private sphere of the home. As a result "... the wife became the head servant, excluded from all participation in social production" (Engels, 1972, p.137). Even the introduction of modern industry did not alleviate her status since she is caught up in the dilemma of either fulfilling her role "in the private service of her family" or participating in public industry. Engels goes on to argue that only the restructuring of social arrangements in such a way as to include women within the public economic sphere, in addition to the demise of capitalist society (with its attendant class exploitation) can the redemption of women occur. The liberation of women would therefore be possible when they are fully integrated in production and cease to offer unpaid services. Much earlier, Fourier who was one of the first of the early socialists to address the condition of women transculturally, had made similar assertions equating the condition of women to that of "servitude". For Fourier even the education (in reference to general socialization) of women was suspect and part of their oppression. Accordingly, he called for a new order in which education would sensitize women to and liberate them from their oppressed condition as well as the drudgery of their domestic roles.

Ultimately, the question of women's access to literacy (and related issues) cannot be disconnected from relations of power and subsequent control in society. As Rockhill (1993) succinctly puts it:

The construction of literacy is embedded in the discursive practices and power relationships of every day life: it is socially constructed, materially produced, morally regulated.... Literacy is caught up in the material,... and sexual oppression of women *and* [emphasis in original] it embodies their hope for escape (p.171).

If the intersection of power and gender relations is germane in any analysis of the sociology of women what therefore is power?

### *4.3. Conceptualizing Power*

The wide array of theoretical perspectives that underpin discourses related to power makes it difficult to focus on one particular concept. However, generally speaking, power involves the exertion of some type of influence, either legitimately or coercively, over another. Beyond this, conceptualizing power is subject to paradigmatic confusion that is the trademark of intellectual discourses ranging from classical Marxism to contemporary post modern critical theory. What seems particularly relevant to this work is that power can only exist to the extent that those who are controlled allow it. However, as Nyberg (1981) points out, not all types of power are immoral and dysfunctional. Indeed, the very essence of organizations and society in general depends on the possession of power by some. One kind of power is particularly relevant to this work-hegemony, which is often associated with the Italian Marxist theorist and political activist, Antonio Gramsci.

### *4.3.1. Gramsci and Hegemonic Control*

Best known for work written while a political prisoner in Italy, Antonio Gramsci was centrally preoccupied by the plight of the working class who he felt were oppressed through the imposition of the ideological views of the dominant group who controlled both the state and the means of production. He described this system of maintaining control by dominant groups through state and social institutions as ideological hegemony.<sup>19</sup> In his conception, hegemonic power (like most kinds of power) can only exist through the unconscious acquiescence of those who bequeath that power and who lulled into a false sense of normalcy, accept the world views of the perpetrators. In simple terms, hegemony is unobtrusive power and its potency lies in its apparent "invisibility" and subsequent acceptance.

For Gramsci however, hegemonic power is never *une affaire classée*. He argues that individuals are not passive agents and therefore have the potential of putting up resistance against their ideological colonization in order to change oppressive groups and social structures. Human social interaction is, according to him, characterized by contradictions.

A similar parallel can be drawn between Gramsci's conception of power and the views of Michel Foucault whose work has been very influential in poststructural critical theory, particularly in feminist literature where he has received considerable attention as well as criticism (see Deveaux, 1995). For Foucault power is not static and domination is

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<sup>19</sup> It is at this point that Gramsci departs from classical Marxism. While Marx believed in economic determinism Gramsci saw ideology as the driving force of society.

never total. Like Gramsci's notion of power, Foucault presents a dialectical view of domination which sees the "subject" as capable of putting up resistance. For Foucault:

The individual is an effect of power, and at the same time, or precisely to the extent to which it is that effect, it is the element of its articulation. The individual which power has constituted is at the same time its vehicle (Foucault, 1980, p.98).

Within Western societies, contemporary Neo-Marxists and critical theorists who agree for social justice for various marginalized groups have tended to embrace the views of Gramsci and Foucault because they offer hope for the dispossessed.

But the views of Gramsci are particularly pertinent to the condition of women in several significant ways. First, rather than through coercion, women in Sub-Saharan Africa are controlled through subtle but persistent indoctrination which they themselves subconsciously endorse. Hegemony in a Gramscian conception relates to the kind of power that survives to the extent that the dominated contribute to its sustenance. Second, the priority which Gramsci assigns to human agency is particularly relevant for women since it is within such "powers" that their redemption lies. His dialectical view of power offers hope for women in Nigeria and elsewhere. By withdrawing their consent for the status quo, women can put up counter-hegemonic struggles in order to change unwanted structures with wanted ones (Bhaskar, 1986, 1989). In the end, as Nyberg (1981) asserts, "the withdrawal of consent may be the final power over power" (p.170).

In many societies, certainly in Nigeria, women have always contributed to social development; what they lack is the power to put them in a position to institutionalize and

legitimize that role. A starting point for this withdrawal of consent is the acquisition of literacy. Indeed, in Gramsci's theorizing, the acquisition of education is fundamental in the elevation of the status of oppressed groups.

#### ***4.4. The Power of Literacy***

That literacy as a valued social asset makes some kind of difference in the lives of recipients is not debatable. What is open to contestation, among theorists and practitioners alike, is the nature of that difference. It is within this framework that its power lies. Literacy underpins educational progress which in turn often results in access to powerful social positions. Implicitly, illiteracy is inimical to individual and societal progress. Literacy is quite easily a tool for praxis. Practical common sense suggests that the current state of progress achieved in 'modernized' societies may not have occurred had those societies been less literate. But literacy can also be used to indoctrinate and dominate. As critical pedagogy/literacy scholars have shown (Lankshear et al. 1993; Corson, 1993; Giroux, 1983; Freire, 1970; Street et al. 1993, Freire and Macedo, 1987; Luke, 1994; May, 1994) certain kinds of literacy limit people's potential in society. What, therefore, is the nature of the power of literacy? A good starting point is an examination of related academic literature beginning with the relationship between literacy and cognition.

##### ***4.4.1. Literacy and Cognitive Development***

Perhaps the most contested area of the literacy debate, the literature on the cognitive

consequences of literacy is substantial but more or less presents two disparate schools of thought. Essentially, the controversy involves whether or not literacy results in higher order reasoning or simply redeploys existing mental capabilities (Akinnaso, 1981)<sup>20</sup>. The first school of thought, represented by such works as Vygotsky (1962), Havelock (1963), Goody and Watt (1963), Goody (1977), Ong (1982) and Olson, (1977; 1986), sees a direct correlation between literacy and decontextualization or abstract thinking and logic. Literacy, they contend, bequeaths the individual more than essential skills including decoding and encoding written material. Within this group, the work of Vygotsky seems aimed more at the socio-psychological link between thought and language. Although his work has come under considerable attack, because his studies were conducted when the Soviet Union was undergoing revolutionary transformation (Gee, 1986), Vygotsky's constructivist view of literacy as a culture specific phenomenon continues to be very influential.

Unlike Vygotsky, Goody and Watt (1963) and Havelock (1963) explicitly suggest the existence of a great divide between oral and literate cultures. Following the line of argument of Havelock and Goody, Ong (1982) contends that:

The interaction between orality that all human beings are born into and the technology of writing, which no one is born into, touches the depths of human psyche. Ontogenetically and phylogenetically, it is the oral word that first illuminates consciousness with articulate language.... Writing introduces division and alienation but a higher unity as well. It intensifies the sense of the self and fosters more conscious interaction between persons. Writing is consciousness-raising (pp. 178-179).

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<sup>20</sup> See this work for an excellent synthesis of the debate.

The point Ong is making here is that while orality is prior to literacy, the latter results in higher order reasoning. Some researchers are more cautious. In a recent study, conducted among undergraduate students, Stanovich and Cunningham (1992) concluded that there is strong correlation between print exposure and the acquisition of some kinds of verbal skills but caution that "Much work remains to be done in developing a complete model of the relationships between reading habits [a domain of literacy] and cognitive abilities" (p.64).

The second strand of the debate questions the validity of the view that literacy causes abstract and analytical reasoning. Among this group, the work of Scribner and Cole, (1981) dominate related literature (see for instance, Akinnaso, 1981; Olson, 1994; Gee, 1986; Klassen, 1987; Stromquist 1992b; Stanovich and Cunningham, 1992; Barton, 1994 and Corson, 1995). Based on the findings of their research among the Vai of Liberia in West Africa, Scribner and Cole indict cognitive psychologists for their generalizations about changes in intellectual processes which are supposedly attributable to the acquisition of literacy. Further, they argue that rather than resulting in differential ways of processing information, what literacy actually does is to provide the individual with a different mode of thinking. In their own words academics simply:

*make assumptions about changed modes of thinking in the individual as the mediating mechanism for linguistic and cultural changes which are their objects of enquiry (p.7).*

In spite of their criticism, Scribner and Cole acknowledge that the acquisition of literacy does indeed result in "changed modes of thinking". What seems unclear is to what they

attribute this change. It is quite plausible to argue that the degree of "cognitive" differences (or lack of it) found in the Vai use of each of the three types of literacy studied, may be attributable to the fact that each type had specific use. The Vai syllabic script which represents their language, may not have evolved beyond a rudimentary stage since its use, just like Arabic (the third literacy of the Vai, the other being English), is very limited.

Even later works (Heath, 1983; Cook-Gumperz, 1986; Hamilton et al. 1993; and Street et al. 1993), continue to challenge traditional assumptions about literacy. Street et al. (1993) for instance, show through ethnographic accounts how literacy practices vary from one context to another. For Street, there are two possible models of literacy: the first, "autonomous" literacy he associates with the traditional views of literacy while the second, the "ideological" model he associates with the more progressive and context-specific view of literacy. In response to criticisms of a dichotomization of the technical and cultural aspects of literacy, Street provides the following explanation of the priority he gives to the latter model:

The ideological model ... does not attempt to deny technical skill or cognitive aspects of reading and writing, but rather understands them as they are encapsulated within cultural wholes and within structures of power. In that sense, the 'ideological' model subsumes rather than excludes the work undertaken within the 'autonomous' model (p.9)

Like Scribner and Cole, what Street is arguing for here is an all inclusive way of dealing with the literacy question: in my view, a critical realist account of literacy.

A second important implication of Scribner and Cole's work is their questioning of the assumption that a major psychological divide (Havelock, 1963), exists between literates and non-literates. Third and perhaps most significant, unlike most literacy studies, they address the issue of the acquisition of literacy outside the formal setting of schools and the possibility of becoming literate through immersion in a culture of literacy- a dimension of the literacy debate that is currently getting considerable attention (see Olson and Torrance, 1991; Olson, 1994; Barton, 1994; Goody, 1987; Corson 1995).

#### *4.4.2. Literacy and Language*

If the relationship between literacy and cognition is a contested terrain, the relationship between literacy and language is less tenuous but also replete with contention. Across disciplines, there is a general assumption among scholars working in the area of literacy that there is a discontinuity between oral and literate language (Vygotsky, 1962; Havelock, 1963; Ong, 1982; Olson 1977; 1986); unless of course, oral language (home language) and literate language (school language) coincide (Bernstein, 1977; Bourdieu, 1977). Literacy for instance enhances language<sup>21</sup> and implicitly linguistic competence.

While an in-depth analysis of such assumptions is beyond the scope of this work, one fact is clear: language is the tool through which power relations are negotiated (and renegotiated) among social actors. Of particular importance to this work is the fact that

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<sup>21</sup> My reference to language here does not only include the type of language used in every day discourse but also the type that is used in philo-reflexive analysis of one's condition.

language mediates experiences and literacy is embedded in language. The written word enables individuals to access, reflect upon, critique or act upon other people's ideas (expressed in language), in addition to creating new ones from such scrutiny. Taken a little further, the link between literacy and language is really a simple one: literacy depends on language but literacy in turn, *enhances language*. As Barton (1994) contends:

Literacy is based upon a system of symbols. It is a symbolic system used for communication and as such exists in relation to other systems of information exchange. It is a way of representing the world to others.... Literacy is part of our thinking. It is part of the technology of thought (p.35).

Looking at the above through a critical lens, a likely inference is that those who lack literacy also lack a powerful tool of human existence. The power of language and implicitly literacy becomes even more obvious when discourse practices become associated with life chances. Indeed, many social theorists such as Bourdieu, Bernstein and Foucault equate the possession of high status language (often mainstream) to social power. And inversely, it has been argued that those who have limited repertoire of mainstream language are inevitably socially disadvantaged.

Even in advanced societies the gendered construction of language and literacy is often implicated in the disempowerment of women (Luke, 1994). However, as Corson (1993) points out, "... it is the way that language is traditionally used as an instrument of power, that excludes women from a foothold on power, not language itself" (p.125).

### ***4.4.3. Literacy and Culture***

There are two diametrically opposed views of the influence of literacy on culture. The first is the transformation function (Havelock, 1963; Goody 1977; Olson, 1977; Ong, 1982), while the other is the conservative or ideological function (Bowles and Gintis 1976; Bernstein, 1977; Bourdieu, 1977). In both instances, literacy is assigned differential powers. In the former, literacy is seen as a catalyst to transformations of cultural systems and patterns of behaviour in society (Akinnsaso, 1981), including the technologizing of the world, while in the latter, literacy is assigned some malevolent properties. Indeed, so powerful is the supposed influence of literacy on culture that whole societies have been classified either as "primitive" or "civilized" depending on degrees of literacy (Gee, 1986).

#### ***4.4.3.1. Literacy and Cultural Transformation***

Anthropologists argue that the introduction of the written word universally transformed society's way of handling information in terms of storage, retrieval and reuse (Akinnsaso, 1981). Havelock (1963) points out that a major cultural transformation occurred in the Greek society with the introduction of written language. Alphabetic literacy resulted in changes in communicative practices by enabling the concretization of human thought.

Even in more contemporary settings, literacy has often been used as a catalyst for socio-cultural transformation. Laqueur (1976), chronicles how literacy in eighteenth and nineteenth century Europe, Britain and America became an important part of daily life and the subsequent effects on the proliferation of popular culture. Modern history is also replete

with accounts of national revolutionaries who changed their societies by manipulating school systems to suit desired ideological goals. Clearly, contemporary Western societies changed significantly with the introduction of mass literacy. It is indeed difficult to imagine how these societies would have achieved similar levels of technological advancement without the introduction of universal education.

Within the African context (as Chapters 1 and 2 show), literacy has always been a catalyst for significant socio-cultural transformation. First, the importation of Western style culture via literacy and Christianity permanently changed the African traditional way of life including the culture of orality and religious practices. As literacy researchers have pointed out. (Goody, 1977: Akinnaso, 1981: Street, 1993), a profound cultural change occurred with the introduction of both Christianity and Islam into West Africa. Chinua Achebe's classic work *Things Fall Apart*, chronicles from a fictional but anthropological stance, the profound cultural clashes that ensued in a Nigerian society with the advent of British rule. One such clash included the resistance of the main character to Christianity and literacy believing that accepting both would mean embracing European values and by implication the destruction of his own. His resistance did not prevail.

Later, as more Africans became educated, access to literacy accelerated their demand for independence from the colonialists. History has it that most of the African nationalists who championed the cause of independence were those who had been sent to the colonists' home countries (Britain, France or Belgium as the case was) for education. Indeed, much as the British transference of Western education has been criticized and while one might

argue that without colonization there would not have been the need to fight for liberation in the first place, it is probable but unlikely that the African nationalists who fought for independence would have had the wherewithal to do so. The process of state formation and survival in Africa and other developing nations has often been associated with literacy and education. Judith Marshall (1988) for instance, reports how literacy was used in a work-related setting to advance the cause of freedom - "people's power", from the Apartheid system in Mozambique. Similarly, Julius Nyerere used the concept of Education for Self-reliance in advancing socialist ideologies in Tanzania (Datta, 1984). In Nigeria, successive governments have used the promise of mass literacy as a tool for legitimizing their regimes.

Other examples of nations where literacy has been used for political restructuring of the state include Brazil, Cuba, Nicaragua, and Chile (James 1990). The potential power of literacy in struggles for political liberation is succinctly described by Okedara (1985) in the following view of literacy:

Literacy is a political action which,... accompanies a process of rupturing colonial domination, recovering democratic life or revolutionary triumph. When there are persisting conditions of social, political or economic oppression, literacy faces serious difficulties and ... becomes an instrument of struggle against the oppressing power.<sup>22</sup>

#### ***4.4.3.2. Literacy and Cultural Reproduction***

For advocates of critical pedagogy, schools are exemplars of the state ideological apparatus where the values, culture and world view of the dominant group is perpetuated

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<sup>22</sup> In James 1990 p. 19.

and reproduced, often insidiously, through differential dissemination of literacy (see Giroux, 1983; Corson, 1993). This "tailoring" function of literacy (which ties in with Gramsci's notion of hegemonic power) refers to how literacy is used to preserve the dominant culture in society. To show how socially transmitted knowledge (literacy) and hegemony can intersect to reproduce the status-quo, several theories of reproduction are briefly discussed below.

In their work Schooling in Capitalist America, two well-known reproduction theorists argue that educational systems are designed to reproduce the status quo. Briefly, using what they refer to as the correspondence principle, Bowles and Gintis (1976), suggest that the essential function of schools in capitalist societies is the reproduction of the labour force (needed to sustain capital accumulation), along the lines of class and gender. In other words, the structural class inequalities and hierarchies that exist in society, particularly within the labour force, are traceable to practices perpetuated by educational systems. They argue that children from certain social classes are "trained" to occupy leadership positions within the capitalist economy while others (lower class children) are prepared to occupy subordinate positions. While this theory is flawed by its determinist position and passive view of humans (Cole, 1988), its implicit message of futility in any attempt at transforming existing social order (Giroux, 1983), and does not address sociocultural variables at work outside school systems (Corson, 1995), it nevertheless offers an example of how hegemony works if uninterrupted.

Unlike Bowles and Gintis, Bernstein and Bourdieu offer a more plausible account of the link between public knowledge and control of power in society. Bernstein, for

instance, proposes that schools "embody an educational code" which prescribes how power and authority are to be mediated. For Bernstein the organization and control of knowledge (including literacy) in society is inextricably linked to the control of power. Further, Bernstein suggests that working class groups develop "restricted" or "particularistic" linguistic codes which are incongruent with the language of the school and that working class children are therefore more susceptible to academic failure. The middle class on the other hand, impart to their children "elaborated" or "universalistic" codes which are more compatible with that of the school. Since language embodies culture, values and beliefs that undergird people's day-to-day existence, the possession of privileged language implies possession of mainstream culture and vice versa.

What Bernstein is describing (although with particular reference to formal school literacy), is how literacy is related to power distribution in society through the control of knowledge or what counts as one. As he sees it:

How a society selects, classifies, *distributes* [my emphasis], transmits and evaluates the educational knowledge it considers to be public, reflects both the distribution of power and the principles of social control... Educational knowledge is a major regulator of the structure of experience (1971: 47).

Arguing from Bernstein's point, if educational knowledge does indeed impinge on our experiences, then denying women access to educational opportunities is akin to social oppression.

Similarly, using the concept of cultural capital (linguistic and cultural abilities transmitted through the family) and cultural habitus (internalized class based skills and

patterns of behaviour), Bourdieu and Passeron (1977) argue that minority and oppressed groups are disadvantaged academically because they have different forms of cultural capital which are not as valued as those of the dominant group, in schools. In much the same way as Gramsci's concept of hegemonic power, Bourdieu uses the notion of reproduction to describe how power and privilege are reproduced in greater society via the educational system while feigning neutrality. Elsewhere (Bourdieu 1977), he explains:

among all solutions put forward throughout history to the problem of the transmission of power and privileges, there surely does not exist one that is better concealed ... than that solution which the educational system provides by contributing to the reproduction of the structure of class relations and by concealing, by an actual neutral attitude, the fact that it fills this function (pp.487-8).

Although these examples are deterministic to varying extents, deal essentially with schooled literacy, refer specifically to literacy practices in the West, and do not account for the considerable academic success of students from non-western cultures within Western systems of education (see Gibson, 1987),<sup>23</sup> they do have significant implications for women in Sub-Saharan Africa. First, the gendering of education, including access, values and what counts as appropriate knowledge in Nigeria, is the consequence of the reproduction of the status

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<sup>23</sup> Ogbu (1987), however, provides a compelling explanation. The motivation of such students derives from their position as "voluntary minorities" who therefore have a basis for comparing their current schooling situation to a likely more negative one in their home country. As a result, they are more likely to embrace the dominant cultural values of their new country. The reverse is true for "involuntary minorities" like African Americans and indigenous Australians and New Zealanders for instance, who do not have the luxury of such a comparative framework.

quo within the educational system, formal or informal. Second, the gendered discourse practices and repressed attitudes which girls (who have access to schooled literacy) bring to school as a result of home socialization (WIN Document 1985; Etta, 1994), limit their academic success which further reduces parental motivation to send female children to school. Third, by denying women access to education the dominant group is licensing itself to decide who should receive certain societal rewards and who should not. By limiting girls to certain types of curriculum, the dominant group is giving them the type of education which it feels corresponds with their designated role in society even though that perception may not be congruent with contemporary global realities. What ties all of this together is that over time, the value of women's education reduces as in Nigeria and a vicious cycle develops resulting in high incidence of female illiteracy.

Finally the theoretical advances of Bourdieu and Bernstein, in the end, come down to a question of the relationship between knowledge and power on the one hand and the politicization of educational knowledge on the other, to the disadvantage of oppressed groups such as women. In addition, they also raise important questions about power relations between social classes. As a result, although both theorists ostensibly address schooled literacy, they take the issue of access to public knowledge beyond the classroom by tying together micro and macro forces that impinge on the acquisition of education including control, type, quality, purpose and access. As this work maintains, the lack of access to literacy by women in Nigeria is, among other things, fundamentally a question of control and power often, in Bourdieu's terms, through *symbolic power*.

#### ***4.4.3.3. Women Literacy and Hegemonic Control***

A central argument of theories of reproduction is that publicly controlled knowledge is not always as negotiable as it would seem to be. If literacy can be used as a tool for empowerment, like language, it is also a potential tool for disempowerment. Lalita Ramdas (1990) warns that advocates of literacy for women must avoid embarking on the type of programmes that would result in domestication rather than empowerment. Using India as a backdrop, she argues that viable literacy programmes for women transcend a simple matter of achieving national objectives and must address women's quest for social justice and their struggle against patriarchy "which affects the very existence and survival of woman in society under all economic systems, spanning both time and geographical boundaries" (p.36).

Other writers share Ramdas' views. Graff (1979) for instance, suggests that literacy may not always lead to improved status for marginalized groups. Citing nineteenth century Ontario as an example, he notes that the universalizing of literacy did not change the status quo. In fact he contends that some oppressed groups became even more so with the acquisition of literacy. Both Ramdas and Graff's point address one of the central concerns of advocates of critical pedagogy/literacy practices (Freire, 1970, 1985, 1995; Giroux, 1983; Lankshear et al. 1993; Corson 1993; Luke 1994; May, 1994). As Chapter 1 points out, part of the literacy debate involves what kind of literacy constitutes critical or empowering pedagogy. Thus, if literacy has the potential of empowering and enabling African women, who are historically marginalized, to perceive, understand, and better interpret their social

reality, it is also possible to maintain hegemonic control over them through the kind of literacy/education offered to them. Literacy/education, then, becomes a social artifact which reifies existing inequities. But the dialectical nature of literacy also offers agents (women in this case), the possibility of engaging and demystifying their world - an empowering view of literacy often advocated by Paulo Freire.

#### *4.5. Freire, Literacy and Agency*

Years after he first came to the limelight as a persistent advocate of empowering the oppressed through liberatory literacy (Freire 1970), Freire's views remain very influential. Though his views are devoted less to the cause of women as a group than to the dispossessed in general, they remain relevant to any discussion of the double-edged power of literacy, particularly as it relates to the rural poor. Freire's thoughts on literacy are significant because among dominant proponents of critical pedagogy he has the unique distinction of being at once a theorist and a practitioner. He therefore falls into the philosophical perspective that informs this work-critical realism. Freire has consistently pointed out how literacy can either emancipate the oppressed or become a powerful tool of oppression by denying certain groups access to it or using it as a tool for further domination. In a recent interview (Freire and Macedo 1995) he reiterates his dialectical view of literacy:

what constitutes an imposition is to engage with the oppressed educationally without providing them with the critical tools to understand their world, the tools that they were denied by not giving them access to education, to literacy,

so they can read the word as well as the world.... [T]o not create pedagogical structures where the educator can make it feasible for the oppressed to retake what has been denied them, including the ability to think critically and the option to act on their world ... constitutes a veiled imposition of the oppressive conditions that have been responsible for their subordinated status to begin with (pp. 388-9).

For Freire therefore, meaningful literacy and human agency are inextricably linked because it is precisely structural disparities in society and its institutions that sustain illiteracy. It is no coincidence that the poorest and most disempowered people in the world are non-literates and vice-versa. For Freire, becoming literate transcends the simple act of encoding and decoding written words. The process must also include the ability to transform unwanted social realities through critical reflections and actions.

Other literacy researchers/writers share Freire's views about literacy (Lankshear et al.1993, Kozol. 1985; Ramdas, 1990). Influenced by the pedagogical teachings of Freire, Bee (1993), creates a link between critical literacy and the politics of gender. Drawing on her own literacy work, she argues that while economic independence is key to women's emancipation, the achievement of such emancipation requires that women understand the structural arrangements that sustain their exclusion and keep them at the periphery of social hierarchies. As she sees it:

Merely enabling women to read and write without reference to their social and political inequality and its origins contributes materially to maintaining their oppression.... Teaching women to read and write through critical analysis... will enable ...[them] to travel with a different consciousness of their world, their place within it, and their personal and collective power to transform what is inhumane and unjust.... Any lesser view of the aims and

purposes of literacy for women effectively promotes and prolongs their *domestication* - in Freire's sense of the word...[emphasis in original] (pp. 106, 107).

Thus in Bee's account, women's independence, economic emancipation and full social participation depend on their becoming literate; but literacy programmes must also enable women to critically assess their world. Clearly Bee (like other critical literacy advocates) is here raising questions related to conscientization, a term popularized by Paulo Freire.

#### ***4.6. Conscientization***

Besides providing women with reading, writing and numeracy, in addition to specific occupational skills, literacy must also sensitize them to the realities of their world, their role in it and how they can transform the prevailing social order in which their voices are essentially unheard. The term conscientization (Freire, 1970), refers to the ability of the oppressed to uncover the processes that lead to and reify their condition. Parajuli and Enslin (1990), provide a good example of how literacy can lead to "conscientization". They describe how a group of women in rural Nepal were able to assess their socio-cultural condition through participation in a critical literacy programme. Although the women's initial objective was more spiritual than causing social transformation, in their pursuit of learning:

they discovered a shared sense of oppression with other women ...[and] ... moved beyond the pursuit of learning to demand legitimate spaces in which they could evolve programs for social reform.... While pedagogy began with a struggle for education, it evolved in sociocultural struggle (p. 45).

This ability to critically assess their world and attempt to change it should indeed be a valuable aspect of literacy acquisition in Sub-Saharan Africa. As Chapter 2 shows, the struggles put up against unfair and gender biased policies of the colonialists and their Nigerian male cohorts was to a significant extent encouraged by literate women. Unfortunately women continue to be excluded from contributing their full potential towards achieving sustainable development in their respective communities.

#### ***4.7. Literacy and Socio-Economic Development***

Quite often, differential levels of educational achievement have been used by relevant agencies in explaining the variation in levels of socio-economic development among countries (UNESCO, 1975; World Bank, 1988). As a result, limited levels of literacy have been associated with Africa's inability to achieve sustainable development.

In his book An Inquiry into Well-Being and Destitution, Dasgupta (1993) cites illiteracy as one of the indices of poverty. This view is of course not new. As mentioned in Chapter one, policies aimed at the eradication of illiteracy (by the UN and other donor agencies) are based on the premise that universal literacy can accelerate national development thereby ending developing nations' dependency on the West. For donor agencies therefore the power of literacy lies in achieving quantifiable socio-economic progress.

In its most common usage, "development" refers to changes associated with growth (increase in productive capacities), adaptation and progress within a given society. It implies

the mobilization of both natural and human resources. Logically, gender disparities in the acquisition of literacy and the resultant exclusionary effect means that women as valuable human resources are being under-utilized. The United Nations (1991) argues that in Sub-Saharan Africa gender inequity in education

comes at a high cost [since] evidence shows that the mother's education is perhaps the single most important determinant of a family's health, nutrition ... (p.79).

Furthermore, one of the cost benefits of education is increased chances of employment. While there are competing views among researchers on the subject (Smock, 1981; Simmons, 1980), Psacharopoulos and Woodhall (1985), argue that the relationship between the level of education and participation in the workforce cannot be dismissed. Schultz (1960) and Denison (1962)<sup>24</sup> effectively demonstrated through research in the United States that education contributes significantly to growth in national income by improving the skills and productive capabilities of the labour force. For women, access to literacy has the potential of increasing their participation in the economic sectors of their communities. As Chlebowska (1992) argues:

it is no longer possible to disregard the possibilities that literacy can afford them [women] of escaping from the traditional cloistered roles as wives and mothers, and of contributing as equal partners to social and economic development efforts (p. 27).

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<sup>24</sup> Cited in Psacharopoulos and Woodhall, (1985). Education for Development: An Analysis of Investment Choices.

Besides direct economic growth, there is also evidence that literacy may influence various forms of behaviour which will in turn indirectly contribute to social development. Such behavioural changes may include maternal behaviour which may affect fertility rates, infant and child mortality rates, and general familial well-being.

#### ***4.8. Literacy and Maternal Behaviour***

Although domestic arrangements may vary from one household to another, in general women are the primary care-givers of children particularly during the first few years of life (LeVine, 1982). This is certainly the case in Nigeria and other countries in Sub-Saharan Africa. If this is so, then denying women access to literacy means preventing them from access to pertinent written information that could enhance the quality of care and ultimately the quality of life of their families. This does not in any way imply that traditional methods of childcare are less productive or that non-literate women have not been good mothers. However, as LeVine (1982) points out, women with formal schooling are more likely to better prepare their children for participation in the new socio-economic order that is emerging in developing countries. Although studies linking education and maternal behaviour are relatively few, one important link that has been recognized by researchers is the one between education/literacy and fertility. While some analysts contend that findings of related studies are inconclusive and highly speculative (see Simmons, 1981; Psacharopoulos and Woodhall, 1985; Lankshear et al. 1995), the fact remains that contemporary demographic studies are based on the assumption that exposure to literacy

is inversely related to fertility and a woman's desire to have many children. Part of the argument stems from the nature of that influence; i.e., whether or not the influence is direct or indirect, economic, culture-related, causal or associational (Smock, 1981). Despite the debates, reports in related literature often point to a positive link between literacy and maternal behaviour. Such reports emphasize the power of literacy and the need to grant women equal access.

Ironically, the greatest testimony to the power of literacy comes from the reader of this work. How else could it have been accessed? Consider the vast array of linguistic possibilities available to an individual through simple semantic and syntactic "gymnastics": words that seem the same suddenly take on new meanings and simple inflections in spoken language can transform benign words into powerful ones. All this and much more are possible only because those few tentative steps towards scholastic prowess began with the process of becoming literate-something that is often taken for granted. Arguably, not everyone will become an intellectual nor are the literacy needs of non-literate rural women in a developing economy even remotely close to that of achieving academic distinction but it is a point worth emphasizing in any discussion related to the power of literacy.

Although inter- and intra-paradigmatic wrangling may persist, until many issues are resolved, the power of literacy will remain immutable. Denying one segment of society (in this case women) its benefits, particularly given contemporary global realities, results in social oppression and a reduction of life options.

#### ***4.9. Rural Women, Literacy and Life Chances***

Up to this point, this chapter has focused on the more theoretical and general aspects of the power of literacy. What follows is an examination of the practical benefits of literacy for rural women in Nigeria. Women, who are at once burdened by a multiplicity of roles and constrained by lack of access to means of production are economic, social, political and physical prototypes of the exploited and disempowered. Their overall well-being (as elsewhere in Sub-Saharan Africa), is persistently threatened by lack of access to social rewards compounded by lack of literacy. Okojie (1983), draws the following portrait of Nigerian rural women:

Physically, rural women are overburdened by the numerous tasks they perform. Economically, they have limited access to personal income; often, they are unpaid family workers. Socially, women (with few exceptions) have little access to power: their prestige derives from the number of children they bear... (p.131)

In Nigeria, the largest group of the rural poor is made up of women who, despite their conditions, remain a viable force in national development efforts. But, women's efforts are also impeded by low levels of literacy among them. A key component of the concept of "development from within" (Taylor 1992) as a potential solution to Africa's economic crises, is the idea of grassroots participation at the level of local communities. Women comprise a significant number of Nigeria's local communities. Although the literacy needs of rural women may vary slightly, depending on regional demographics, for the most part, access to literacy will have significant impact on the following areas.

### ***Economic Well-Being***

In Nigeria, women have little or no access to the means of production and as such lack economic power in terms of disposable income. Women's incomes are at least one-third less than that of men for comparable activities (UNICEF 1993). There are three specific areas in which literacy can contribute to the enhancement of women's economic well-being.

### ***Agricultural Production***

Virtually all economic activities in rural Nigeria are tied to the agricultural sector and rural Nigerian women contribute between 50% - 70% percent of the production of the nation's food requirements. Women are involved in brushing of the bush, planting, weeding and harvesting of the crops (Okojie, 1983; WIN, 1985).

The persistent wave of male migration from the rural areas in search of jobs in large urban centres has further increased women's role in agricultural production (Federal Government of Nigeria, 1989). Yet most agricultural work is done through the use of outdated and traditional tools which reduce productivity and increase back-breaking drudgery. In addition, these women must also contend with domestic workload related to their reproductive roles (including biological, household maintenance and family sustenance). Findings of several studies conducted by the World Bank and United Nations confirm that literacy plays a pivotal role in increasing agricultural production.

The economic consequences of this situation are far reaching. First, in the current search for food security, not having access to and knowledge of the use of more modern

agricultural technology is a waste of valuable human resources. What rural women therefore need is proper training. This is however impossible since agricultural training requires the ability to read and write. An often cited reason for excluding women from access to credit facilities such as agricultural development financial schemes, co-operatives, and bank loans, all of which could significantly increase the nation's food supply, is that women lack literacy skills (Federal Government of Nigeria, 1989); the same reason is often cited for their exclusion from other formal economic sectors such as wage labour.

### *Participation in the Formal Labour Sector*

A 1989 government policy paper lists the following as the characteristics of female participation in the formal labour sector: low participation particularly in the mid-cadre, managerial and executive positions; very limited participation as technical and scientific manpower both in government and industries; a disproportionately high number of women in the paramedical and catering fields; very limited number of women as agricultural extension workers and large number of women as factory floor workers. All in all, even in urban centres where industrial jobs are more readily available, the bulk of women in the formal work force dominate the service sector or dead-end jobs where wages are considerably lower (Dennis, 1987). The situation is even more dismal in the rural areas where there are fewer jobs and where most of the available jobs (outside of teaching) go to literate rural men. In a study conducted among women in Nigeria, Okojie (1990) found that while non-literate women have no access to the formal labour market, education was

a major determinant of women's access to the formal labour sector.

### ***Micro-Entrepreneurship***

In Nigeria, women engage extensively in what can be described as micro entrepreneurship. These include economic activities found predominantly in the informal labour sector such as petty trading and food processing. Most of the women in this sector are non-literates who lack basic knowledge in book-keeping, banking, and management. However, as Sen and Grown (1987) point out, the disproportionate number of women in these sectors in developing countries, is itself an indication of women's lack of access to the formal labour sector. Even so, it is conceivable that literacy will increase the level of productivity of women who are engaged in this sector. As the United Nations (1991) points out, a literate person is more likely to gain access to production-boosting resources such as credit from financial institutions, better book-keeping abilities, in addition to feeling more empowered to participate in government business-loan schemes (as is sometimes the case in Nigeria) where such is available.

### ***Physical Well-Being***

In general, maternal health is poor in Nigeria. A combination of poor nutrition, arduous and unending tasks, combined with inadequate health services often jeopardize (as elsewhere in Sub-Saharan Africa) the health of women. In addition to their agricultural activities, rural women must also attend to their daily household chores of cooking, fetching

water and cooking fuel (firewood), cleaning the house, looking after the children, processing and marketing produce for petty cash, etc.

But perhaps the biggest health hazard Nigerian women in general and rural women in particular face is the incidence of repeated pregnancies. Culturally, a woman's stature in her community depends on the number of children she bears (Okojie, 1983). A 1982 government fertility survey put the maternal mortality rate at 15 per 1000 births. Besides the health risks involved, there are also considerable economic consequences for individual families and the nation as a whole. First, frequent pregnancies often limit a woman's ability to participate in the labour sector which in turn translates into a loss of needed resources for families. Second, rapid population growth is a potential threat to the stability of a nation, like most African countries, in the throes of economic stagnation. This was precisely the theme of the UN sponsored World Population Conference held in Cairo in 1994. Only educated women appear to take advantage of available family planning facilities. More often than not, non-literate rural women are either unaware of these facilities or fail to take advantage of them because, as some of my informants told me, they do not understand how to use birth control methods or are afraid to do so because of perceived threat to their health. Available statistics show that although significant gains have been made in recent years, Nigeria still has a relatively high infant mortality rate. Okojie (1992) for instance, reports that the findings of a 1991 government health survey put the infant mortality rate for the five preceding years at 87 per 1000 live births and under five rates at 192 deaths per 1000 live births.

### *Socio-Cultural Well-Being*

The single most inclusive factor that reduces the value of women in most African countries is rooted in culture (Etta, 1994; Okojie, 1983). While cultural and traditional norms affect most aspects of the lives of Nigerian women, a few examples are worth discussing here.

### *Early Marriages*

The social stigma attached to women who remain unmarried beyond their early twenties means that women in general tend to get married very early. Indeed, evidence from related literature suggests a positive correlation between education and increase in age at first marriage (Smock, 1981).

Although the situation is improving (Nwabara, 1989), forced marriages for women are still commonly practised in Nigeria. This situation is causally (although indirectly) a consequence of illiteracy. Young girls who have not gone to school often enter into early marriages because they are considered economic liabilities for their families. A common reason cited by all my non-literate informants for getting married very early (which they did) was lack of education. In contrast, none of the literate participants in my research married as early as the non-literate participants. Indeed, two of them were already over thirty, yet as they told me, they prefer to remain unmarried rather than rush into a situation they may later regret.

In Nigeria, the differential value placed on male and female children also affects their life chances. As discussed in Chapter 1, boys' education is always given priority

because they are considered the future heads of their families and an enabling factor in the continuation of the line of patrilineal descent along which Nigerian kinship system is predominantly based. Girls, on the other hand, are more likely to give up their family names through marriage. Ironically, this perception of the limited role of women continuing the family lineage is not only held by men but also by women themselves. A broader knowledge base such as literacy offers may help reduce this type of attitude.

Other significant factors that impinge on Nigerian women's access to literacy include opportunity costs of formal education and fear of excessive emancipation: a commonly held belief that educated women are more aware of their rights and therefore less "manageable" (Alele-Williams, 1986).

### ***Health-Related Practices***

Education has also been theorized as an instrument for influencing many forms of behaviour. This view is of particular significance for women in Nigeria whose lives are governed to a large extent by traditional expectations and prescriptions regardless of their desirability. A typical example is the persistence of female genital mutilation which women themselves are socialized to perpetuate, despite global attention and the politicization of the issue<sup>25</sup> (see WIN document, 1985; Brydon and Chant 1989). Literature on the issue often

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<sup>25</sup> This issue is likely to become more politicized as feminists from developing nations and feminists from developed nations continue to disagree on the subject. However the dissension is not so much that feminists from developing nations support the practice, rather as Chant and Brydon (1989) point out it has become a symbol of "...more general resistance on the part of Third World women to the hegemony/ imperialism of First World feminists" (p.243).

highlights the adverse health implications of such practices yet it persists worldwide. Nigeria is no exception. The practice is still very prevalent among certain cultural groups (WIN, 1985). Other examples of undesirable health-related practices in Nigeria include the traditional practice of taking scalding hot water baths by post natal women among certain tribes (Alti-Muazu, 1985) and child delivery in unnatural positions (Owoh, 1995).

### *Widowhood*

Although specific practices may vary from one ethnic group to another, typically in Nigeria, a widow goes through some traditional rituals that include seclusion for extended periods of time: a kind of "sitting-in" which usually involves sitting on cold hard floors, extensive wailing at prescribed intervals in addition to maintaining a generally dishevelled demeanour. When carried out accordingly, all of these are supposedly indicative of the woman's grief at the death of her husband. In addition to loss of productivity, this kind of practice threatens both the physical and psychological well-being of a woman. This issue came up during all my focus-group discussions. Virtually all the participants showed concern over this practice. They felt however, that the severity of the rituals have reduced considerably because many educated women have spoken out against some of the practices and have in fact been known to refuse to fulfil these obligations or to "renegotiate" the terms.

### ***Legal Rights***

Legally, the Nigerian constitution guarantees equal rights and privileges to all citizens. At the global level, Nigeria is one of the few African countries that has consistently ratified all international and regional conventions for the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women. Ostensibly therefore, women have equal status to men but within the complex interplay of statutory (English), customary and Islamic laws (all of which form the formal judicial system) women have had to contend with legal inconsistencies. In many parts of Africa for instance, in legal tussles involving a woman's right to a deceased husband's property (see Stamp, 1991 for an example) or even in cases of divorce, unfair customary laws often prevail to the detriment of the woman. Unfortunately, lack of literacy compounds the problem as women first do not know their rights and second even when they do cannot fight for them.

### ***4.10 Summary***

This chapter began with an analysis of the condition of women within a framework of their position as a distinct class-like group in society. Certainly, in Nigeria, that an obvious dichotomy exists between the social status of women and men is a given, although not an immutable one. The very essence of this work lies in this assumption: that social actors are capable of counter-hegemonic struggle; that people have the capacity to withdraw their consent to the forces and structures that keep them at the margins. In effect, while social structures may repress, exploit, and subjugate, such structures are constantly in tension and

hold the key to empowerment and emancipation. Thus if literacy as an artifact of social structures has been used to dominate women by giving them limited access to it, it also holds the key to their redemption. To illustrate this point and to show the link between literacy and power, various theoretical views were examined.

Finally, the chapter looked at some specific areas in which lack of literacy affects the quality of life of Nigerian women in general and rural women in particular. The profiles of some of these women, the participants of the study specifically, are presented in the next chapter.

# **Chapter 5**

## **Profile of Research Participants**

### ***5.1. Introduction***

The last chapter examined the theoretical underpinnings that inform this work. This chapter will focus on the participants whose accounts provide the data. All my informants share one thing in common: they are women who live in a rural area of Nigeria. Beyond this, there is considerable diversity among them, particularly between the literates and non-literates. To show how each participant connects to the study vis-à-vis their occupation, life-style, what they value and how they see themselves, what follows is a description of each participant. Each has been given a pseudonym in compliance with my promise to protect their identity. Because some of the respondents have African names while others have Christian names most of the pseudonyms have been chosen to reflect this. Still others are a combination of syllables from the first and last names of some of the participants. For structural convenience, I shall begin with my literate interviewees.

### ***5.2. The Participants***

#### ***Malobi***

I had at least three formal interviews with Malobi. Once on an individual basis and twice in focus-group situations. A teacher and a strong community leader, she mobilizes

other women in the community to take charge of their lives. She became an important "ally" during my stay in her community. She is so active in her community that at the time of my field work, she was among those being considered for state government sponsorship to the 1995 Women's conference in Beijing. She is very forceful and outspoken, and a strong critic of many traditional practices such as female circumcision and rites of "passage" into widowhood, which she feels are ways of subjugating women. Although as a woman, she is not directly involved in the official traditional administration of the town, her activism exemplifies the difference education can make in the life of a rural woman. I often asked myself why she commanded so much respect from members of the community. She was, after all, in many ways like any other woman around. The one difference I could immediately see was her education and community work. She seemed to have a comfortable but busy life, including holding a teaching job and often travelling to the state capital to represent her community in various state-organised activities.

### *Victoria*

Victoria is a nursing assistant in a local hospital. She seemed to be highly regarded by the locals. When I visited her at work, I noticed that some of the patients and their relatives referred to her and other nursing assistants as "doctors." Even though she is in her twenties, she is still unmarried. She said she would limit the number of children she would have whenever she was ready to do so in order to increase their life chances. She had made the decision based on her experiences in the hospital. She explains:

Every day I see women who have had more than enough babies coming here to have more babies. Sometimes they cannot even afford to pay for their stay. I wonder how they can afford to take care of the children. We [the nursing assistants] try to explain to them but I don't know how much effect that has.

She had had a rough childhood, having had to take over a good deal of the responsibility of running the household after the early death of her mother when she was only seven. She explained that schooling had been difficult for her but she had managed with the help of relatives. In a community where many women are uneducated, she is very happy to be one of the educated ones.

### *Kolu*

A very forceful and well-known community activist, Kolu had grown up in the rural community, married, and moved to another town with her husband for a while but is now back where she grew up. She had just returned from a UN sponsored women's conference in a neighbouring west African country at the time of my fieldwork . She is the co-ordinator of the local chapter of a national organization devoted to the economic advancement of rural women. She had once been a teacher and was now a successful local entrepreneur. She told me that being educated has made a difference in her business successes. She is very active in the local church. She expressed dismay at the plight of non-literate women who, according to her, live with little or no income but still manage to do the best they can for their families. She believes that women should band together to solve the problems they face. She attributes a lot of these problems to their relationship with men. She told me that

the literate members of the community have a moral responsibility to help empower their non-literate counterparts. Her major preoccupation at the time of the field work was trying to fulfil that role. She explained that an organization she represents advances small capital to local women which they use to fund some income-generating activity. According to her, the women have been very consistent in paying back the loan. During the course of my stay in her community she was often described by others as a role model for women.

### *Ofunne*

The individual interview with Ofunne took place under very interesting circumstances. We began the interview inside the house but had to move outdoors after her children returned from school. An isolated corner of her compound was the only area we felt we could have some quiet. Some quiet it turned out to be. The chickens in the court yard made their presence felt.

The wife of the vice-principal of a local secondary school, Ofunne was the only literate interviewee who was unemployed. During the first informal meeting and also during the formal interview, I sensed a kind of melancholic aura about her. Perhaps that might be connected to the fact that she had completed a teacher training programme and had no job. She was, however, quite forthcoming and seemed particularly sympathetic to the non-literate women in her community. She was definitely aware of the problems facing women, and expressed concern about the interruption of education when girls married young. She cited several examples of girls who had quit school in order to get married. From my personal

observations, she seemed to be living quite well by community standards. She had one child attending a privately-operated secondary school which she believes provides a better education than the local public school. On the day of the formal interview, I noticed that the children started doing some type of school work as soon as they had had something to eat after school.

### *Emene*

A prominent member of her community, Emene appeared to be very self-assured and articulate during my interviews. Her husband, a teacher, lives in another town and sees the family once in a while. However, as a primary school teacher, Emene is able to take care of most of her family's financial needs. Aged thirty-four, she was expecting her second child at the time of the interviews. She told me that she wants only three children because she felt that the fewer the number of children, the better their life chances. This kind of thinking can only be the result of careful social analysis in a place where having as many children as possible appears to increase the value of a woman. As she put, "...it is better to have fewer children, because you will be able to give them good education and handle them better."

She is of the opinion that the literate members of her rural community enjoy higher status and a better sense of well-being. She is convinced that female circumcision has adverse health effects and so would not circumcise her baby if it turned out to be a girl. Her first was a boy.

*Alice*

I have noticed that my single participants were all literate women and had not married even at an age that most people would consider late by Nigerian standards. Aged thirty-three, Alice falls into this category. Like many of the literate women she seemed self-assured and independent. She told me that she did not want to get married for the sake of it. In fact she had been close to doing so once but realized in time that she would have been making a big mistake. She told me that she earns just enough money as a teacher to take care of her needs. She gets a lot of personal satisfaction from performing certain services such as reading and writing letters for non-literate members of the community.

*Nkechi*

Nkechi was interviewed three times. First to arrange for a formal interview although it turned into an informal interview session as most of the preliminary interviews became. The second was the formal interview while the third was as a participant in a focus-group interview. She is married with three children. She seemed aware of the salient problems facing women in Nigerian society. Her one regret was not having remained in school long enough to get some kind of skills-related training. She had quit school early in her secondary school career for family-related reasons. Although she did not specify the reasons, I noticed during the focus-group discussion that she was one of the women in her group who condemned the practice of making girls quit school in order to get married. She was so emphatic about it that I suspected that may have been her reason for dropping out of school.

*Teresa*

Teresa belongs to the group of rural women who may be considered successful micro-entrepreneurs. She runs one of the most prestigious restaurants in her community. Although now a widow, she had earlier left her rural community to marry a businessman in another town. After his death, she returned home to set up her restaurant with some financial help from her relatives. She seems to have done quite well. Apart from her restaurant business she is a major supplier of fresh meat (mostly beef and goat) to the community. I had two individual interviews with her: one informal and the other formal. I did, however, run into her on a number of occasions and each time our conversation always drifted to the purpose of my visit and the issues my discussions with her had raised. Although only forty years old (quite young by community standards) she is a well-respected member of the community and an active member of the local PTA.

*Neleh*

Neleh is one of the more tradition-minded of the literate women I interviewed. She had grown up in a very traditional home in which her father had several wives. So much had she internalized that way of thinking that she even encouraged her husband to marry a second wife. However, she regretted this when the other woman began to control things around the house. She told me that at that point, she began to question why she would allow such a situation just because she had been brought up in a polygamous household. She told me that she knew her options and her rights and decided to take charge of the situation. The

following is Neleh's description of the situation:

My father has three wives and as a child I liked the way they were co-operating. So, I thought that would apply to me, but later, the opposite was the case. I thought about it and decided that I would not like my husband to marry another wife. If he does I will not be part of it.

I asked how much the fact that she is educated had to do with her decision to break with a tradition she had grown up in. Neleh's candid reply was that she wasn't sure but she knew enough to know that women often help perpetuate their marginal condition.

Neleh is a teacher. She told me that all her siblings had been sent to school, although her father often ordered the girls to get married after they had attained a certain level while the male siblings continued their education. In fact, my major individual interview with her was conducted in her school with the permission of the headmaster. She has her own bank account although at the time of the interview she claimed that she was not using it. She has four children, three of whom are girls. Her husband is also educated. She was very forthcoming both in the personal interviews and focus-group discussion. She seemed to have a lot of status within the community. In addition, she has taken a few traditional titles and suggests that she does have some influence over the traditional administrative council which is controlled exclusively by men. She claims that gender would not be a factor in determining which of her children would receive education in the event of financial hardship. She said that she had been a victim of that kind of thinking and would not allow the same to happen to her daughters.

*Okwunwe*

Okwunwe falls into the category of literate women who remain single at an age (thirty) when their non-literate counterparts would have had four to five children. She was very forth-coming during the individual/focus-group interviews. She would not circumcise a female child if she had one. She told me that she did not see the medical reasons for it. On the contrary, she felt that it was an unnecessary "operation". She was a very willing participant. Gender will not be a factor in deciding which child should continue education in the event of financial hardship. Her biggest ambition is to continue her education and feels that adult education classes should be a priority for women. Like many of her literate counterparts, she is a teacher.

*Eliza*

Eliza came across as very calm and self-assured during my discussions with her. She had moved to her present community from another rural one and was a nursing assistant at the local community health centre. She told me that her parents believed in the importance of education and had therefore sent all their to school. She was planning to go on to nursing school to complete a full nursing program, as soon as she had the money. Aged twenty-seven, she was single at the time of the fieldwork.

***Kandime***

Kandime is very dynamic, hardworking and practically everywhere at once in the community. She is a community leader and is one of the participants I observed on a regular basis. She is a well-respected activist, teacher and business woman. She has lived in this rural community all her life, and has managed to carve out a comfortable living for her and her family. She lives in very comfortable surroundings. Throughout my stay, I maintained an ongoing dialogue with Kandime and talked with her at home many times. She seemed to know a lot about the community and was a good source of information. She is one of the participants I - "shadowed" -- visiting her at work, at home and at the restaurant which she runs in addition to teaching. She is one of the organizers of a prestigious ladies social club. She told me that most of the members are literate, although that was incidental rather than deliberate. She appears very aware of women's rights and laments the injustices that women endure both within and outside their homes. She told me of the difficulty women, especially those who are non-literate, encounter in trying to secure credit from banks and local thrift associations. But, according to Kandime, even literate women are also subject to blatant gender-based discrimination. She recalled a recent personal experience:

Just last month, I went to the bank manager in our community to ask for a loan. The lady said that she didn't have the authority to give more than 2000 Naira and even before they could give me the 2000, I had to bring my husband to the bank.

She had walked out in annoyance and sought credit somewhere else where she was considered on her own merit. She is convinced that such a demand would not have been

made of her husband had he been the one seeking the loan. She believes that educating women can significantly decrease the level of their marginalization. It is interesting that the bank manager was a woman although she was probably following bank policies.

### *Nlianji*

Like many of my literate participants, Nlianji is a primary school teacher. She has two children and is married to a fellow teacher. She is particularly sympathetic to the plight of non-literate rural women because of the hardship they face on a daily basis.

She used the mundane example of taking a bath in the mornings, to draw a parallel between the lifestyles of each group of women.<sup>26</sup> According to her, while she is able to take a bath in the morning before going to her job, her non-literate peers head for the farm without having a bath (which supposedly, results in discomfort under the hot sun), and would probably not do so till the end of the day.

Nlianji is very visible in her community because she conducts private teaching lessons at her home after school hours for those children whose parents can afford the extra fees. Asked what type of clientele she had, she told me that most were the children of fellow teachers and other literate members of the community.

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<sup>26</sup> This analogy came up many times during my interviews with the literate participants. Usually within the study area, people who have to go to the farm in the mornings do not take their baths, the rationale being that farm work is a dirty job. Curiously, the symbolism here is quite elitist and ties in with this idea of "urban" rural dwellers versus "villagized" rural dwellers (see the profile of Patricia).

*Augusta*

Augusta struck me as a simple woman. She showed little or no emotion during my private discussions with her. She is pleased by the fact that she has gone to school and has a job as a teacher. One striking thing about her was how clean her children looked. Indeed both she and her children could have passed for middle class urban dwellers. Relatively speaking, there was a significant difference both in appearance and demeanour between her children and other children I met particularly those of my non-literate participants who were more often than not engaged in some kind of chore. Augusta claims that she teaches her children every evening and insists that they do homework daily. Both she and her family appear to have a decent life. Her husband lives in a different rural town and only visits his family from time to time but because she has regular income, she is able to provide the financial needs of her family. Gender would not be a factor in deciding which child to send to school in the event of financial hardship. Like some of the other literate participants, she owns and operates a bank account.

*Agnes*

I found Agnes, a mother of six, very quiet but self-assured. I interviewed her both at work and at home. Both her surroundings and her children (although I met only some of them) appeared very clean. She reported that, being a teacher, she always gives her children extra lessons. She was doing just that when I dropped by one evening. She also pays for her children to get extra tutoring elsewhere. She considers herself a community activist.

According to her, many non-literate women often come to her for advice on personal matters, a service she says she feels quite happy to render.

### *Nwaka*

Nwaka is one of the literate informants who is truly an entrepreneur. Aged forty-one, she had received up to two years of secondary education but she dropped out to train as a seamstress. After several years of apprenticeship with another local seamstress, she had opened her own sewing business with financial help from her family. She seems to be doing quite well: success she attributes to hard work and education. She makes extensive use of fashion catalogues in addition to clipping fashion styles from newspapers. This she insists gives her an advantage over some of the other seamstresses in the community. At the time of my field work her husband was between jobs but she seemed to be managing quite well financially. She has a bank account, although she admits that she has practically no savings. Her four children appeared quite well taken care of. For her, the education of her children is a major priority and she intends to see that some of them get some type of tertiary education.

### *Obi*

Obi can also be called a local entrepreneur. She runs a local provision (convenience) store with her husband, although he is hardly ever there because he does part-time clerical work in a nearby town. Her shop is always busy. During my interviews with her she expressed

how happy she was at being able to read and write. According to her, being literate allowed her to keep records of her creditors (and there were many, judging from the records she showed me) and therefore better able to keep track of her sales. She is thirty years old and has three young children, one of them just under a year old at the time of my research.

### *Beatrice*

A mother of three, Beatrice was one of the literate participants I shadowed. Although she is separated from her husband, she continues to maintain a comfortable life within her rural community. She is a very well-known teacher in the community. In fact is she often referred to by her nickname - Onyenkwuzi- meaning "teacher". I talked with her many times at home and at work. She was a great source of information about her community and had many ideas about the disempowerment of women. She sees herself as a confident, self-assured and independent woman. Like some of the other literate respondents, she has experienced some urban living as a result of attending teachers' college. Her children are among those who not only get tutoring at home but whose parents are willing to pay to send them to tutoring sessions elsewhere; a phenomenon I found quite amazing in a rural setting.

Beatrice decided to use birth control after having her third child. Asked why she had taken such a decision, she replied that having too many children had economic consequences that can affect a family adversely.

***Ewele***

When I first met Ewele, she was just returning from the farm where she had spent a better part of the day. The second time I met her, she was coming back from a neighbouring village where she had bought several baskets of fresh tomatoes for resale. She reported that she makes a living farming and trading in farm produce purchased from nearby towns and villages. Although her husband (who is literate) is employed in one of the local health departments, she told me that she hardly receives any financial support from him. She laments the fact that she had not had the opportunity to go to school and as a result, had married quite young. She had her first child at the age of fifteen. Ewele explains:

I feel it greatly that I didn't go to school, because if one didn't go to school, it is not good. I am suffering greatly as a result of not going to school. If I see something that I would have been interested in, I ignore it because I won't be able to read. If I had gone to school, the moment I see the thing I would pick it up to read. I also feel that if I had gone to school, I would have a regular job somewhere no matter how small the pay. But because of not going to school, we are suffering, farming and frying garri. As you can see, I am just coming from a market. Tomorrow evening after returning from farm, I shall be at our local market in order to sell the tomatoes. Without doing all these, we won't eat....

She also lamented the fact that not being literate has substantially limited her ability to participate in the social sphere of her community. Non-literates, she told me, are often hushed down in general meetings because it is assumed that they are not very knowledgable. She had not gone to school because after being widowed Ewele's mother decided that she could only afford to educate her male children. None of her sisters attended school. Her

one objective in life is to see that all her seven children get as much education as possible. She was the only non-literate participant who reported not allowing her children to do farm work after school on weekdays. Rather, she told me, she encourages them to study. She is a very busy woman - somewhat of a local entrepreneur, shuttling between the farm and area local markets.

### *Chima*

Chima was one of the interviewees I observed regularly while I was in her community because she lived very close to the house I stayed in. In many ways, she is a typical non-literate rural woman in Nigeria and indeed elsewhere in Sub-Saharan Africa: uneducated, married very young, over-worked, with many children (ten in her case) and little or no opportunity of improving her condition. Chima herself told me that she has nothing to look forward to but a life of hardship. Each morning she would leave home at 6:00 a.m. with one of her daughters and go to a farm many kilometres away. Her two youngest children, ages one and three respectively, are often left in the care of their six year-old brother who, thus occupied, could not attend school.

Each evening Chima would return home with some farm produce with which she prepared her family's supper. Once this was done, she would spend a good part of the night preparing the remaining farm produce for sale which one daughter would take to the local market on the appropriate day. On a number of occasions, I asked her why she had to go off so early and come back so late leaving three young children practically unattended. She

replied that she had no choice since that was the only way she could eke out a living. Her husband, who is also a farmer, also leaves the house quite early. Although both of them had moved from another area to the town, she has lived in rural areas all her life. While I was there, Chima went to bed very late every night and left for the farm very early the next day. On those odd days when she did not go to the farm I hung around her, whenever possible, observing her daily routine. Everything she did was tedious. The food processing she engaged in was very labour intensive and required the help of her children, resulting in sporadic school attendance on their part.

### *Emeke*

Emeke had been sent to live with a relative as domestic help at a very young age. She had returned to her home in the village at the age of thirteen, too old to begin regular schooling and too young to take advantage of any adult education classes. She is a classic example of what I refer to as the *limbo* group. At the age of forty-seven, she now makes a living selling cooked food to an occasional local clientele in front of her home. She is bitter about not having attended school. She was one of the participants I interacted with quite frequently. Some of my discussions with her took place in the bamboo kiosk which is her place of business. She runs a small eating place - a *buka*,<sup>27</sup> as such restaurants are often referred

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<sup>27</sup> This is a small eating place, usually one room, which serves as both the kitchen and eating room. *Bukas* are quite common in urban shanty towns especially among low-income workers who are either too busy to cook or find cooking an inconvenience in the hustle and bustle of urban living.

to in Nigeria. She complained of having been controlled by her husband but had ensured that her children obtained as much education as family finances would allow. Her oldest daughter, like some of her other siblings, had received some post-secondary education and was doing quite well in Lagos.

### *Nwabuno*

Nwabuno struck me as a very intelligent woman. She is relatively young; at the age of thirty-four, she already has nine children. She had married at a very young age. As a child, she was sent to live with a relative after the untimely death of her mother. Rather than sending her to school, her guardian had used her as house help. She is particularly bitter about it. She believes that the quality of her life would have been better had she had some education. She equates her situation metaphorically to blindness. Like the other non-literate informants, she lives a very hectic life, doing farm work, preparing farm produce for sale, etc. She goes to bed very late and rises very early. Her husband is literate and has a successful business as a photographer. Both individual interviews I had with her were at her house. During my first meeting with her she was busy peeling cassava which she was hoping to process both for family consumption and for sale. She is determined to give her daughters a good education so that they can be independent; but she also added that in case of financial hardship, she would give priority to the education of boys.

***Christiana***

Christiana agreed to an interview on the condition that her husband permitted it. She was adamant on this point. Indeed, she was one of the women for whom I had to explain the purpose of my study to their husbands. Once permission had been granted, however, she was very cooperative and forthcoming. Sitting in her meticulously clean mud hut (her private quarters since her husband has two wives) one afternoon after she had just come back from the farm, it hit me that if I could get out her story my research would have been worth it. She looked tired and fed up with life. She has six children.

She had married at the age of sixteen because the guardian who raised her had refused to send all the girls within his household to school opting rather to educate boys. Although she told me how much she wanted her children to be well-educated, I noticed that the children spent much of their time either at the farm or processing farm produce. Here is how she describes her children's after-school activities:

They have their lunch, after lunch whoever is not tired will accompany me to the farm to collect the food materials for the evening and the next morning if I have not already gone in the morning. But if I have, they will come and meet me at the farm. Those who cannot go will begin making preparations for the supper. When we have all eaten and rested, I light the hurricane lamp. If we brought back some cassava to process we embark on it. If not I advise them to try and do their school work.

***Rita***

Rita was one of the three non-literate participants who had wage employment, albeit, menial ones within their community. She worked from 7:00 a.m. to about 6:00 p.m. feeding

chickens, collecting eggs, cleaning the poultry, etc. I interviewed Rita several times during my visits to her work site and at a focus-group meeting. She has seven children. Rita is also the only non-literate participant who had attended school very briefly as a child (she had had two years of primary schooling). After Rita's mother died, her father took her out of school to look after her siblings. Her brothers (including those younger than her) however, continued their education. She seemed very dissatisfied with life although she counts herself lucky to be employed.

### *Megwai*

The mother of six children, Megwai had never attended school. Her father, who considered the education of a woman an unnecessary, had sent her to live with another family to work as a maid. Now aged thirty-four, she still harbours some resentment against her father. Megwai feels that everyone should be able to do mundane things like signing their names. She believes that education empowers people by giving them wider options in life. Her husband is literate. She considers herself intelligent and said that one of her literate relatives (a teacher), had advised her father to send her (Megwai) to school but he had refused to listen. She feels stigmatized because she is not educated. She told me that it is not unusual to be referred to as "iti" (meaning stupid in the local Igbo dialect) by her educated peers during certain social gatherings.

Like many of her non-literate counterparts, she generates money from the sale of surplus farm produce which like many women in the community, she works very hard at

cultivating. She told me that she is a born-again Christian and would have loved to be able to read the Bible.

### *Mebele*

Aged fifty and widowed, Mebele is one of the three non-literates employed in the local wage sector as a menial worker in the local chicken farm. She had never attended school. As a child, she had been made to stay home because her father did not see the benefit of educating girls. She took it upon herself to educate her children but unfortunately, the early death of her husband meant that most of the children (she has seven) had to quit school. She continues to strive to educate those she can although she had prioritized the education of her sons. However, her younger children (still in secondary school) now live with their older siblings who have moved to the city in search of a better life. She told me that she did not immunize her children because her husband had refused at the time citing some possible harmful-side-effects although she claims that she knows better now.

### *Maria*

Maria told me that she had married very young. She has five children, three of whom completed their secondary education but could not afford to go beyond that. Her father had ordered her (in accordance with local custom) to separate from her husband and look after her father's household because he did not have a son. She earned some income by selling dumplings made from processed cornmeal (a very labour intensive process). Like

others in this group, she is disturbed by her lack of education but feels that going to adult education classes would be pointless. She told me that her priority was finding some capital to put into her dumpling-making business in order to spend less time doing farm work.

***Patricia***

Patricia is a mother of six who told me that her lack of education affects her self-perception. She deliberately avoids social events that involve the active participation of literate women because they tend to dominate such events. She explains:

It [lack of literacy] makes me to withdraw because there are things your mates will say and if you don't respond very sensibly, they will say that if you had gone to school, you wouldn't have responded the way you did. They do not say it directly to you. They just whisper among themselves. That is very embarrassing. The only illiterate women who they listen to are the old women. I think they respect the age of the women.

She believes that being literate increases one's prestige in the community. She is convinced that people who can read and write, and particularly those who are wage-earners, are considered "urbanized" while the non-literate ones are often referred to as "villagers". I found her analogy and the dichotomy implied very interesting.

In other words, in Patricia's view, the community associates literacy with urbanization and thus implicitly "modernization."

*Ekwuda*

Ekwuda is rather articulate. She frequently referred to her lack of education as synonymous with blindness. She is also one of the three non-literates engaged in formal wage labour working in a chicken farm. Aged fifty-two, she has ten children and says that she has never used contraception. She states that while most of the men in her extended family are educated only one woman received an education. She attributes the marginalization of women in her family to their lack of education. Her one wish is to have at least one of her daughters educated to university level if possible. She demonstrated an awareness of and interest in various important social issues that affect people's daily life in her community. Rather, I found her very knowledgeable. Besides her job at the poultry, she also farms for subsistence although only on weekends. She complained that she is ill and she did look rather tired each time I saw her. She came across as a very sincere person. She would have liked to take some literacy classes but her work and family commitments prevented this.

*Tasida*

Tasida is one of the rare non-literate participants who had had the opportunity but refused to attend school (out of stubbornness she said) as a child. She is also the only one of the participants attending adult literacy class although I gathered from discussions with her literacy class teacher that her attendance was very irregular because of her food-selling business and her family commitments. Indeed, two of my meetings with her was at her *Buka*. At the age of thirty-nine, she wants to become literate in order to be able to do

things like reading road signs (she frequents neighbouring towns looking for food and produce bargains for her restaurant) and instructions on medicine labels. She has six children and occasionally uses traditional medicine to treat her family's ailments as well as medication purchased from the chemist (pharmacy). She has never had a bank account. Like several of her non-literate peers, she equates her lack of education to blindness.

### *Celina*

Celina struck me as a woman resigned to her situation. She is married to a man who is quite literate and she has six children. She lives a very busy life which revolves around farm work and taking care of her family. Sitting in the living-room of the modest house, she explained in a monotonous but matter-of-fact tone why she had not gone to school. Her parents made her stay home to help take care of her younger siblings. She refers to her lack of education as a state of ignorance and feels that the quality of her life would have been significantly better had she been literate. She believes in circumcising female children and scoffs at the new idea that it is an unnecessary procedure. She is, however, convinced that young girls should have equal access to educational opportunities. She has no intention of attending adult education classes because she feels that her lack of finances is a more pressing problem.

### *Felicia*

The first time I met Felicia, she was "reading" the Bible. A little girl was sitting beside her.

My first reaction was that my guide had brought me to the wrong house since we were supposed to be meeting a non-literate. We had not made a mistake. It turned out that she was simply "staring" at the various pages of the Bible. With some help, she can identify a few books of the Bible although she could not read and had never received formal education. She explained that the little girl who was sitting beside her was her niece who sometimes reads the Bible for her since none of her children lived with her. I asked her how she could identify certain books of the Bible "Years of attending church and hearing the pastors refer to them and seeing people around me open them." she replied. She told me that she is a born-again Christian and spent a lot of time in church. She said that she hated her illiteracy all the more after she became involved in the church because she wished she could read the Bible.

Even as a young girl Felicia had wanted to be educated and for that reason, at fourteen, she married a man almost three times her age because he had promised to send her to school. Her husband reneged on the promise. Now a widow, she remains bitter about this. Her six adult children live in cities. In her perception, she has lived a hard life. Although she could not explain how, Felicia is quite convinced that if she had been educated she may have had a different life. Her one priority had been to educate her children. Although she admitted that she had given priority to her boys' education but may not do so now if she had to do it all over again. She would be equally concerned about the education of her daughters.

*Vero*

I spent the better half of a day with Vero on her farm. She had grown up in a neighbouring rural town with an aunt. Rather than being sent to school, she had remained at home to look after her aunt's children. When she was not looking after the children, she was at the local market selling processed farm produce. At first she had been upset by the injustice she believed she was receiving but resigned herself to her fate, particularly since she had lost her father at an early age and her mother could not afford to send most of her seven children to school. As is typical, only the boys could be sent to school. While Vero is not particularly upset about her own lack of education, she is determined that each of her five children receive as much education as possible. Now thirty-one, she spends a lot of time preparing cassava for "garri" which she sells to get some cash in the local market. She was quite talkative about her perceptions of her condition and those of other women in the community. Her biggest problem has been getting the capital she needs to start up a small petty trading business. She had sought credit facilities unsuccessfully.

*Nne-Ego*

Nne-Ego began our interview by describing a typical day in her life. Up at about 4:00 A.M. she usually puts a finishing touch to whatever farm produce she had been working on the previous night. Once this had been completed and ready for market later in the day, she would begin the morning routine of cleaning the house and preparing the family's breakfast. She headed to the farm after five children had left for school. According to her, the next

six to eight hours would be spent on the farm. Once home, she would go to the market (particularly on big market days) to sell some produce. The proceeds of the sale are usually used to provide the basic needs of her family.

Nne-Ego, looked much older than her thirty-five years. She attributes this to long strenuous hours on the farm and lack of rest. I found her attitude to her children's education was rather nonchalant and unusual. While most of the non-literate informants seemed very concerned about their children's education she told me that the priority of both she and her husband, was providing the basic necessities for survival for the family. Indeed, she had all her children very involved in her farming activities. Their-after-school hours are usually spent on the farm.

### *Ndidi*

Ndidi is the youngest of all my informants. At twenty-three, she already has four children and is likely to have more because, as she told me, she was too young to stop having children according to local customs. She was not looking forward to it. Asked how her husband, a successful farmer by community standards, felt about the issue, she told me that they had not discussed it. She wished that she had gone to school since that would have meant that she would have some kind of job and maybe devote less time to farm work and having children. To support her views she cited some of her literate friends who were predominantly teachers and had fewer children. She feels that the literate women within her community are respected more by their husbands because they are financially

independent. When I pointed out to her that many women her age do have some kind of education, she explained that the early separation of her parents had prevented this. Her mother (who was uneducated herself) had difficulty taking care of Ndididi and her sisters. Her brothers had remained with her father and had gone to school.

### *Ogugua*

The first time I met Ogugua, she and some other women were working at a construction site delivering sand by way of pans that are sometimes carried on the head. She told me that she did this kind of casual work from time to time to generate some quick cash. She is thirty-six and has a small business weaving and selling baskets to women in the area. She hardly has time for leisure but had managed to turn the basket-weaving into a kind of hobby. She had learnt the trade from her mother. She wished she could spend more time weaving baskets but she had no one else to help look after her portion of land in her husband's farm where she grows subsistence crops. Unlike most of my non-literate informants she has only three children and was not planning to have any more. She told me that both she and her husband had decided to wait because she had a difficult delivery the last time around.

### *5.3. Summary*

The decision to devote this chapter to the participants in this study is based on my belief that the factors that affect and often marginalize women are found within the myriad

of influential variables in their personal history and their accounts are therefore as real as the social structures that also affect them. To concretize their accounts therefore, it was necessary to offer some glimpses (albeit very brief ones) into their lives. Many of my literate participants (a majority of whom are teachers) are employed in the formal wage sector while with the exception of three, the reverse is the case with the non-literate informants as will be seen from the next chapter which is devoted to an in-depth reporting of the women's accounts.

## **Chapter 6**

# **Findings: Perceiving Il/literacy: Impact, Constraints and Possibilities**

### ***6.1. Introduction***

A major goal of this study was to find out how women whose lives are affected by il/literacy feel about their specific situations. This chapter is therefore devoted entirely to the findings of the study as reported by the participants themselves. The analysis of data (described in Chapter 3) produced several thematic categories which emerged from the accounts of the women. Intra- and intergroup consensus on certain issues was quite considerable. Both groups agreed, for instance, that, in general, non-literate women in their communities live under more arduous conditions, have less disposable income, and have less social standing as well as less power within their households. But the groups' views diverge on some points, e.g., the extent to which women should have power within their households, on some health-related practices and most importantly, the best means of empowering rural women (especially the non-literate ones).

Because the entire framework of this thesis hinges on how the participants see their individual situations in relation to literacy, I began each interview by trying to find out their perceptions of the impact of being literate or non-literate.

## ***6.2. Perceived Impact of Il/literacy***

All the participants in both categories reported that literacy or the lack of it had had a significant impact on virtually all spheres of their lives. It was possible through the analysis of data to narrow most of what the women said in this regard to three areas: personal impact, impact on family and impact on the community.

### ***Personal Level***

On the personal level, il/literacy seems to have had an impact on feelings of self-worth among both groups of women. A good number of the literate respondents reported feeling quite positive about themselves particularly because of their relative financial independence and the 'elite' status they seem to enjoy within their communities. Beatrice, a very visible member of her community, is typical in her explanation of the positive socio-psychological impact of literacy:

Being literate has made me independent. I have a job and I am able to express myself quite well. ... I also know what I want out of life and how to request it from whomsoever is concerned.

The non-literate group however, often referred to lack of literacy as a state of "blindness" which they felt limited their potential. Emeke explains:

Well, an educated person and an uneducated person are never the same. I see the difference in my friends. I know that I would have lived a happier and better life if I had gone to school. It is possible that I would not have been involved in petty trading as a way of making a living. Even if I would have

been involved in trading, it would have been at a much larger scale, travelling from one town to another. But, as it is, I am stuck here. An uneducated person cannot really go from one place to another doing business successfully. So if I had gone to school, I would have proved my worth a lot more.

She added that she often feels "unfulfilled" even though she realizes that she works very hard to make life as comfortable as possible for herself and the family she started at a very young age.

### *Early Marriages*

A common personal impact, according to the non-literate participants, was having to get married much earlier than they wanted. However, most of them had been too young to appreciate the implications at the time. What seemed obvious then, according to their accounts, was that they had no career to look forward to and there was therefore no reason to delay what was inevitably, their only option. In their view, had they had access to literacy, the number of years needed to complete their schooling would have meant getting married later than they did. Ewele's comments below are typical, although in her own case, she, rather than her parents, decided that she should marry young:

I married at the age of fifteen because I did not go to school. Different suitors were coming; at first I rejected them. After a while I said to myself, 'why are you doing that [referring to the rejection of suitors] when you have nothing else tangible to do?' So I compelled myself to get married. I was not forced to do so. I did so because I was angry that my parents were not prepared to do anything for me... .

The result, she explained, was that at the age of sixteen, she already had her first child (one

of many), and had embarked on a life of hardship.

Megwai, another non-literate participant who seemed particularly upset about not having gone to school echoed similar sentiments and captures the feelings of many of her peers in the following:

If someone came in now and asked me to sign something, even my name. I can't because I do not know how to... that is very bad. Such a simple thing.

### *Community-Level Impact*

According to the women, the consequences of illiteracy affect their ability to participate fully in their communities. Indeed, I found that most of the prominent women in both communities were literate women who contribute considerably towards the advancement of their peers. Many of them believe that their contributions to the socio-economic development of their communities is only possible because they had gone to school. They maintain that literacy has given them licence to lead their peers, make demands from and be heard by male community leaders. As Malobi, the teacher, adult literacy instructor and community activist puts it:

Being literate makes one powerful in the community... it has also helped me to earn my living. It gives me some status within the community and enables me to participate in the development of my community. It helps me to mobilise the women in so many areas. Without being literate, I wouldn't be able to do so....

Kolu, who is the coordinator of an externally-funded association that grants small business loans to women in her community, shares Malobi's views. She explained that the

marginalized and dependent condition of the non-literate women in her community prompted her organization to focus its attention on this group. She explains her interest in non-literate women as follows:

Here in the village, women live mostly on the produce from their husbands' farms. A man gives a portion of land to his wife and it is the proceeds from the produce from this portion of land that she will use to feed the family ... and raise the money to take care of her personal needs... . My interest is in illiterate women because I want to see that they have something they can rely on for their living. They are the ones that depend mostly on men... . Many of my educated friends have either jobs or their own small businesses like me.

She further explained that although women are subordinated in general, non-literate women are particularly dependent and this leads to tremendous discord and hardship within their households. This in turn, leads to further oppression of the women.

Other participants share Malobi and Kolu's views. Even the non-literate participants cited their literate peers as their role models because they are considered more knowledgeable. Many of the literate women confirmed this assertion. One reported for instance, that many non-literate women in her community often seek advice and help from her on personal matters as well as for scribal purposes such as reading and writing personal letters to members of their families who live outside the community. She explains:

Many of my peers who are not educated feel that we [the literates], can give them better advice. I am not saying that they cannot solve their problems themselves. What I have just said is the reason they themselves give me. I just do whatever I can to help.

### ***Perceived Impact on the Family***

One topic which emerged constantly in my conversations with the women was the impact of illiteracy on their families. For the literate women, being literate has meant being able to contribute significantly to the financial needs of their families thus enhancing their overall well-being. The non-literate group reported almost the opposite. From their accounts, the impact of their illiteracy on their families is far reaching. First, they reported that despite labour-intensive agricultural work they cannot make enough contribution to the financial needs of their families. Because most do not receive food allowances from their husbands (once certain basic food items like yams have been provided), they work twice as hard to meet their families' other subsistence needs as well as their children's educational needs. Even so, many reported that their children still have to do without such basic necessities such as school supplies and uniforms.

### ***6.3. Reasons for Being Literate/Non-literate***

There were considerable intra-group similarities in the reasons for each group's educational status. Many of the non-literate participants reported that they had been denied access to schooling opportunities either because of lack of financial resources or because their parents had not seen the need to educate female children. The following excerpt from Ekwuda illustrates the point:

I lost my mother when I was very young and my father had a lot of difficulty coping. When it came to educating us he decided that the boys should go to

school because boys' education was more important. He believed that women did not need education to fulfil their roles. As a result, all the girls in my family did not go to school.

According to Ekwuda, her father himself had not gone to school and had very conservative views about the role of women in society. A good number of the non-literate women made similar assertions. Some reported finding themselves in similar situations even in homes where they had been sent to live in order to have access to educational opportunities. In such instances, the "guardians" did not believe in educating women particularly other peoples' daughters.

However, this was not always the case according to Ofunne, one of the literate participants. The same lack of literacy sometimes serves as motivation for parents to send children to school because of their perception of education as the route to increased life chances. She explains:

My father was illiterate, but he tried to give us education. Even when I went to live with someone else, he made sure I continued my education... . As for my brothers and sisters who continued to live at home, after their primary education, my father sent them to commercial school before they moved away. He made sure that we are all educated because he was not.

Another literate participant, Neleh, provides some reasons why some non-literate Nigerian parents send their children to school:

Many of our parents see the importance of education, although they themselves did not get any. Most want their children to be educated for the following reasons: 1) to be wealthy; 2) to be like other educated people

they know and 3) just for the pride - to be able to say 'this is my daughter and this is my son, having a white collar job'.

However, in her case, she had had to stop schooling to enable her brothers continue, when her father faced financial difficulties. She had been advised to get married. According to Neleh, her father's priority was to educate his male children to tertiary levels. Fortunately for her, she was able to attend teachers' college even after marriage. Besides providing her the opportunity to continue schooling, the marriage had even brought some additional financial resources into the family through contributions from her husband. Such contributions had enabled her younger siblings to continue their education.

Some non-literate participants reported being sent to live with other people as domestic servants in exchange for schooling opportunities. Unfortunately for them, their "guardians" had failed to keep their own end of the arrangement as Nwabuno, who lost her mother at an early age, attests:

My mother died when I was very young and so it was someone else who raised me. At the time, we had to pay some fees to go to school and those who didn't pay could not attend... . My guardian felt that I was not his child and could therefore not spend the money to send me to school although he sent all his own children to school.

Like many others, she had, in effect, been exploited since she did provide the services but did not receive the promised education in return. These women (young girls at the time), eventually returned to their parents'/family homes too old to begin schooling.

A few reported that they were asked to stay home to look after their younger siblings instead of going to school. Celina explains:

I did not go to school because at that time my parents told me to stay home to look after [babysit] the other children while they were away, mostly at the farm. So I stayed home and looked after my younger siblings while every one was away. Now it is too late....

She further added that she is determined to see that her children acquire as much education as possible so that they would not live a life of deprivation as she says she has, trying to eke out a living from the proceeds of her farming activities (her primary source of income).

#### **6.4. *Income-Generating Activities***

Virtually all the literate respondents reported a significantly higher monthly income than the non-literate participants. The average income was 2500 Naira<sup>28</sup> while the average income for the non-literate group was 700 Naira. This difference is attributable to the fact that virtually all the literate participants were engaged in the formal labour sector. A good portion of their monthly income comes from their formal jobs while the rest come from supplementary income generating activities. Some of the literate participants also reported having access to credit facilities because their monthly salaries were accepted as collateral or ability to repay. Such credit was in turn invested into small side-businesses which

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<sup>28</sup> By the early eighties, the Nigerian monetary unit, the Naira which replaced the British pound after independence, was worth approximately one U.S. dollar. However with its devaluation by the IMF in the mid-80s, the current market value of the Naira is about 80 to one U.S. dollar.

provided further disposable income. Additionally, a majority of the literate participants had bank accounts. In Nigeria, a major requirement for opening a bank account is formal employment. Indeed, having a bank account is sometimes in itself a status symbol, particularly in rural communities. None of the non-literate group reported having a bank account.

The non-literate group were predominantly engaged in labour-intensive subsistence farming on portions of land allocated to them on their husbands' farms. Those who were widowed or separated had portions of farm land allocated to them on the farms of male relatives or on communal lands. In the latter instance, the women had usufruct access to the land. Because of lack of other marketable skills, the women depend extensively on farming activities and the marketing of surplus farm produce for their income. Patricia explains:

I generate money mainly through farming. For example, when I need money, I go to the farm and harvest some cassava. I either process them to get garri [cassava flour] or sell them in tubers. Sometimes, if it is cocoyam season, I harvest some as well. Sometimes, I harvest other farm produce like pepper, okra, and tomatoes which I also sell.

Although most of the non-literate informants generate funds primarily through farming activities, a few are involved in petty trading or selling cooked food to a very limited clientele. Quite often, such business endeavours offer more in terms of the psychological satisfaction of being involved in "entrepreneurial" activities than in actual profits as Emeke's comments below show:

My main source of income is [petty] trading. But I also run this *buka* where we are sitting now. With respect to the trading part of my business, I buy certain goods for resale purposes. Sometimes I make profit sometimes I do not. At times like that, I find myself in huge debt since the goods are sometimes bought on credit. However, I have never allowed selling at a loss to stop me. One has to continue struggling no matter what... .

Another participant, Christiana, reported supplementing the money she earns from the sale of surplus farm produce by processing palm nuts for oil. The process involves long arduous hours, work she would have been happy to do without. Although she acknowledged that people have extracted oil for ages that way, she maintains that the complexities of contemporary living make the work seem even more tedious.

Asked to explain other sources of income, many of the women mentioned contributions to *susu*. This is usually a type of financial cooperative in which members are given the total monthly or biweekly contributions on a rotational basis. After everyone has had a turn, the cycle begins again. Members of the literate group also participate in *susu* but as Kandime reports, the amounts they contribute are minimal when such co-operatives include non-salaried women (the majority of whom are non-literates) as members. At such times, contributions may be as small as 20 Naira. However, when membership of the co-operative is limited to only literate women<sup>29</sup> who earn regular salaries, contributions are considerably higher. Kandime elaborates on this point:

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<sup>29</sup> The women Kandime is referring to in this instance, are her colleagues and fellow teachers who for the most part, receive similar salaries.

We also organize *susu* at work but this time because we are salaried, we contribute much more. Each member contributes 1000 Naira per month. If for example there are nine members, it means that each member collects 9000 Naira when it is her turn to do so.

She explained that such bulk money (a very impressive amount by community standards), comes in handy in meeting family needs, investing in supplementary businesses, and generally enabling better living conditions for them and their families. Many of the literate women are by these means able to provide for their families more variety of foods some of which are considered luxuries by most rural folks. I also noticed that most of the patrons of the poultry where three of the non-literate participants worked, were literate women. This was particularly the case at the end of the month after the women had received their salaries.

While studying the nutritional level of household diets was beyond the scope of this work, such observations provided significant insights into the lifestyle and living conditions of the women. Further, a clear picture of the living conditions of the non-literate women in these communities also begins to emerge when one compares the amount of money described by Kandime in her statement, to the equivalent of 180.00 Naira for nine people when the amount contributed by each member is only 20 Naira, as is often the limit for non-salaried women. Comparatively, 9000 Naira would have a much more significant impact on family budgets and quality of life than N180.

One other source of income reported by some of the non-literate participants, is the occasional monetary gifts sent to them by either their grown-up children (for those who

have some) or relatives working in urban centres. One of them explained that she hated having to solicit such help but often found it necessary to do so because of her adverse financial situation.

Only three of the non-literate participants (discussed further later), were engaged in the formal wage sector as non-skilled labourers.

Besides the difference in income-generating activities, there were also significant differences in the number of hours both groups of women work each day. According to the data, the non-literate participants work is approximately eighteen hours a day. A typical day usually begins between 4: a.m. and 5: a.m. and ends at about 11: p.m. Most of these hours are spent on arduous tasks such as labour-intensive work at the farm, domestic work and the processing and conservation of food. Many reported that these daily activities often leave them exhausted, with little or no time for leisure. There are however, some exceptions. Most of the women reported belonging to various social groups such as dance troupes, financial co-operatives (*susu*) and various "wives" associations. According to the women, adjustments are made in their daily routines on such days to accommodate attendance.

The literate group reported working from twelve to thirteen hours a day although some of those hours were spent on leisure-related activities such as socializing with friends and family members, giving their children extra lessons, and, like their-non-literate peers, attending to associational commitments or meetings as they are often referred to.

Because most of the non-literate participants spend so much time doing farm work, I wanted to know if they at least used time-saving farming equipment. The women reported

that they (as well as most men) continue to use traditional farming tools which do not in any way reduce the amount of labour involved in their work. Personal observations also confirmed these claims. I however, observed that women now use wooden pushcarts, or "trucks" as they are popularly called, for transporting firewood and farm produce from the farm rather than carrying heavy loads on the head as is traditionally done. As the women themselves pointed out, this may be the only innovative "technology" that has been introduced to alleviate some of the labour involved in their farming activities.

#### ***6.5. Health-Related Practices***

The study focused on three particular areas of health-related practices which existing literature suggests that literacy may impact on. The women were questioned about their knowledge and use of contraception, their attitude towards the immunization of children as well as female circumcision, a traditional practice that may have some health implications for women.

#### ***The Use of Contraception***

While 67% of the literate group reported either using or having used birth control methods, only 11% of the non-literate participants said they had used such methods. All participants, however, appeared to have adequate knowledge of the need for contraception including the fact that related devices were quite readily available at nearby family planning centres. When asked why they did not use such methods, many of the non-literate

participants (89%) cited not having adequate knowledge of how to use them and fear of possible adverse health consequences. Some added that they had enough faith in their traditional ways of preventing unwanted pregnancies, as one of them explains in the following statement:

I do not use them because I do not know how it will affect my health. [Besides], we have our traditional ways of controlling birth which our people have relied on for ages.

An offshoot of this line of inquiry is perhaps one of the most significant findings of the study. The average number of children for the non-literate participants is 6.28 (a total of 113 children in this group) and 3.1 (56 children in total) for the literate group. However, three of the literate women reported having no children since they were still single at the time of the field work. Because that could have skewed the figures, the three highest numbers for the non-literates were removed to balance the equation. Even then, the average for the non-literate group was 4.7 (85 children), still considerably higher than that of the literate group.

A majority of the literate women reported that they opted for fewer children because of the adverse economic implications of having a large family as Beatrice explains: "I didn't want too many children because I want to bring them up properly-educate them and not make them liabilities to others." This was in reference to a common parental practice of educating one child, usually the oldest, and making them responsible for paying for the education of their younger siblings once they are able to find work.

There were some exceptions that should be noted here. Although the non-literate group had more children in general, two of the literate women had eight children each. I was curious to find out the reason for this exception<sup>30</sup>. They explained that they had had good childcare help and had not seen any reason not to have as many children as was traditionally expected of women.

### *Female Circumcision*

Female circumcision is still quite prevalent in certain parts of Nigeria including the study area. This fact is obvious from the findings. While 78% of the non-literate group reported circumcising their daughters, 22% reported not having done so. Only 39% of the literate group reported having circumcised their daughters while 61% said that they had not. However, most of the literate group who circumcised their daughters said they would not do so in future since further reading on the subject had sensitized them to the potential health hazards involved in the practice. Only 11% of the literate participants insisted that they would continue the practice if they had daughters in future. For both groups, the main reason for circumcising their daughters was adherence to cultural practice. The reasons cited for not circumcising female children included religious grounds, influence of government eradication campaigns, the print media (literate group only) and family tradition. Most of

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<sup>30</sup> The quest for male children was obviously not the reason since the two women had boys as their oldest children. In Nigeria, because male children are considered prized possessions, it is not uncommon for a woman who has only female children to keep giving birth until she has a boy.

the participants, including the non-literate group, were aware of the controversy surrounding the practice.

### ***Immunization of Children***

All but 22% of the participants (all non-literates) reported having immunized their children. Most cited government campaigns and advice from nurses at post-natal clinics as the reasons for doing so. Of the participants who reported not immunizing their children, one did not do so on religious grounds, two others cited opposition from their husbands while another thought that the process was a waste of time, adding that her children had never had serious health problems. The participants who reported opposition from their husbands, explained that their husbands were concerned about possible health problems resulting from the vaccines. These two men are among the few husbands of the non-literate participants who had not gone to school.

### ***6.6. II/Literacy and Attitude to Children's Education***

Both groups of women had very positive attitudes towards the education of their children. Among the non-literate participants, the need to provide basic educational supplies for their children often motivates them to intensify their already back-breaking income generating-activities. Some reported that they sometimes appeal to wealthier relatives who live in urban centres for financial aid. Sometimes such help is arranged in exchange for the domestic services the children would provide. Most stated that while there are no

guarantees of their children being provided an education by such relatives, they were willing to take the chance. Those who could not get help did the best they could on their own. This response from Patricia, typifies the feelings of most of the non-literate participants on the subject:

I am determined that all my children will be educated. What I am presently going through is because I am not educated. I do not want my children to suffer the same fate. ... the suffering of an illiterate person knows no limits. For example, if I don't go to the farm to harvest some produce, we usually have nothing to eat. I have to do this almost every day. I feel that if I had gone to school, I may be working and will not have to live this way.

Another participant provides some implications of being literate vis-à-vis the acquisition of knowledge:

When it became clear that no one was willing to help me with their education, I had to struggle very hard to make sure that they at least get some. Take my last child for example, if he opens any book he is likely to know what is being discussed. That is something I can never experience in my lifetime. Even at his age, he is more knowledgeable than me.

Another participant is convinced that even if a person does not find paid employment on the completion of schooling and chooses to remain a farmer, that person is likely to be more productive:

I feel that it is important to educate children because it will increase their potential in whatever they choose to do. Even if they complete their education and decide to become farmers because they cannot find other work, they will know how to manage the farm better.

Clearly, all the participants have good intentions with regards to their children's education and future well-being. However, when participants were asked to describe their children's after-school activities, a different pattern emerged between the daily routines of the children of both groups of women as the following responses show:

When they return from school, they either go to the stream to fetch water, or to the farm to get firewood. Sometimes they also do some work on the farm. At the end of the day, if they are not too tired, they do their school work otherwise they go to bed.

Well, when they come back from school, they usually find something to eat. After that, if we are still at the farm, they will join their father and me, to help carry home some things like firewood. Usually, one of the girls stays home to begin supper. Once we have eaten, we attend to any work [produce to be processed] that we may have brought back from the farm. When there is no such work to attend to, those who feel like studying do so while the younger ones who are not yet in school, go out to play.

Such statements from two of the non-literate informants, contrast quite sharply with the description of the after-school activities of the children of the literate group as these examples show:

When they return from school, they usually have their lunch. After that, those who want to have their siesta do so, while those who do not want to and have homework to submit the next day, begin to do the work. After that we prepare our evening meal....

After school hours, they take their lunch, then rest, then go to lesson. After lesson, they have their dinner and then do their prep [homework]. They often wash the plates and spoons [dishes] and help to prepare meals.

These two women, like most of their literate peers, reported that they do some farm work but only on a limited basis and on weekends. The result is that their children do farm work but also, only on weekends, giving them enough time to focus on their school work as well as extra-curricular activities.

I also tried to find out if access to education or lack of it would have an impact on the women's perception of the value of male and female education. This was particularly important since a good deal of the oppression women experience and the subsequent denial of access to literacy for them, stem from differential societal perceptions of the value of both sexes. To explore this issue, the women were asked to hypothetically state what criteria they would use to determine which of their children would continue their education if they faced financial difficulties.

There was a discernible pattern of bias among the non-literate group although not as much as one would have expected. While 39% said that gender would be a factor, 61% stated that academic ability would be the deciding factor. Overall, for the literate group, the majority (83%) reported that academic ability rather than gender would be the deciding factor. Nwabuno, a non-literate respondent, provides a common reason why some of the participants would prioritize the education of boys:

I would prefer to educate a boy because a boy will remain in his father's family and continue to bear the family name. Girls move away after they get married. Look at me now, I do not bear my father's name but my brothers still bear our family name. I want to educate my daughters... I am just saying that if I have to choose, it would be the education of the boys.

### ***6.7. Decision-Making in the Family***

Finding out whether or not there was some correlation between education and increased participation in family decision-making was particularly important in a society where a woman's value is inextricably linked to her role within her household. Further, although structural and institutional forces contribute to the oppression of women in Nigeria, most cultural, religio-social and attitudinal factors that subjugate them particularly in traditionally more conservative rural settings, originate within the private domestic sphere.

However, because this is an exploratory study, the women were questioned in the most general terms in this regard. The focus was not particularly on the nature and type of decisions but rather on their perceptions of the degree of participation.

While 67% of the literate group reported joint decision-making in their households (a pattern that is not traditionally the norm), only 22% of the non-literate group reported the same. Most participants in the latter group informed me that early socialization had taught them that important family decisions were supposed to be made by their husbands as heads of the household. This includes decisions about family finances and expenditures regardless of who earned the money. Chima (one of the non-literate women) reported that she turned over most of the money she generated from farm-related work to her husband for family use. In her opinion:

Even if a woman sold goods worth N1,000 (Naira), she has to give it to her husband for family needs. She is not supposed to keep it for personal use

because she generated the money from the sale of pepper or other farm produce... . One must give that N1,000 to the husband. He should be the one to keep the money. If there is a pressing need, he will solve it with part of the money....

In contrast, many of the literate participants reported having control over their earnings but conceded that most were invariably spent on family needs.

Along with her peers, Ndidi, a non-literate respondent, believes that they have less respect from their husbands because the work they do is less valued. The non-literate women said they wished they for regular paying jobs like some of their literate peers because their farm-related activities, even though they bring in much-needed family income, are not appreciated as financial contributions. The frustration the women feel about this is quite evident in this slightly sarcastic remark from Ndidi:

These [literate] women are learned; they earn big salaries and whatever they want they buy; they are always looking clean; how can their husbands not respect them?

Having said that, she then suggested that mutual spousal respect enhances the quality of family life because of reduced strife within the household. There was some consensus on this issue, as I found out from focus-group discussions. Most of the participants believe that the more financially independent a woman is, the more likely she would be to have better status in her home and subsequently more input into important matters.

Some of the literate women, however, argued that it is not a matter of a simple cause and effect situation. Both Malobi and Neleh argued quite compellingly that even in "literate"

homes women are still oppressed, but to a lesser extent than in homes where the women are not literate. Like many of their peers, they argued that the literate woman's regular income gives her a bargaining chip to negotiate more power within her home which would otherwise not be the case. Additionally, many of the women, literate and non-literate alike, argued that that bargaining power further translated into shared decision-making in the household, including having joint bank accounts (an uncommon phenomenon in rural Nigeria).

Malobi also explained in a focus-group session that certain cultural practices that marginalize women tend to be less prevalent in homes where the women are educated. She cited as an example the issue of women and men sharing common bathrooms as in her own case (a practice that is also uncommon in rural households in the study area as a result of cultural taboos). She also pointed out that the practice of husbands and wives sleeping separately was beginning to disappear in literate households like hers. All the participants believe that one way of guaranteeing that women in Nigeria attain financial independence and thus enhanced status, both within and outside the home, is through access to education.

One interesting corroborating piece of evidence about decision-making within participants' households: with very few exceptions, the non-literate informants had to have their husbands' permission before they would participate in the study. In some instances, I had to first explain the purpose of the study to the husbands. Curiously, once permission had been obtained, the husbands seemed happy, frankly almost proud that their wives were part of such a project. On the other hand, I do not recall any of the literate women

requiring their husbands' permission to participate in the study. In instances where I had pre-interview discussions with husbands, they were encouraging and generally interested in the study per se rather than the potential implications of their wives' participation as was probably the concern of the husbands of the non-literate group. My conclusion, then, was that the husbands of the literate women seemed to believe in their wives' ability to make such judgments for themselves.

#### **6.8. *Perceptions of the Status of Women***

Quite often, particularly in academic literature, there are stereotyped conceptions of the living conditions of rural women in Sub-Saharan Africa. These perceptions may, however, not coincide with the women's own perceptions of their conditions. To explore how rural women assess their own conditions, one strategy adopted in this study was to find out from each group of women their perceptions of the living conditions of women in general in their communities. This not only revealed additional information about participants' perceptions of their own individual situations but also their views on the quality of life and living conditions of the other group.

Most of the women stated that in general women are the subordinate gender in their communities but that some fared better than others. Asked to elaborate, many of the women reported that the literate group had higher status because they constituted a visible "elite" group within the communities while the non-literate group was less visible and more prone to being discriminated against in important community gatherings. Here is what

Emene, a literate participant had to say about the general condition of her non-literate peers:

These women do not have regular salaries so they work on the farms from dawn till dusk. When they return, they have to fry garri [cassava flour] which they sell in the market on market days. Whenever they [non-literate women] attend our Delta Women's Association meetings, they never seem to have money....

The focus-group sessions provided the fora for passionate discussions on the subject of the status of women in both communities; so passionate, in fact, that during one of the sessions one participant, pointing to the notes I was taking, commanded:

Write everything we are saying verbatim, for it will be of help to us and we will [then] be happy.

The women argued that in general women are a marginalized group and are often treated as subordinates to men. One participant argued that many women are marginalized in the communities because they lack two fundamental things: education and financial independence. The women also pointed out that certain cultural practices reduce the status of women and are therefore also implicated in women's subordinate condition. All singled out the rites of widowhood as an excellent example of a cultural practice that oppresses women. One literate participant offers an account of the women's views on this issue:

There is one particular custom that is very bothersome and many of us find unacceptable: what a woman goes through when she loses her husband. She

is made to sit on bare cold floor, without even a mat. She goes through a lot of suffering at this time as she goes through all the required rituals. The constant wailing, the lack of sleep, etc.... I must say that now, because of Christianity and education, such things are beginning to disappear although not as fast as we would like....

Other participants were less hopeful. Kolu, a literate participant and leading community activist, suggested that women themselves are part of the problem and help to uphold community expectations that reduce the status of women. She reported that while some educated women were leading the move to "do away" with such customs, other women, mostly among non-literate elders, were thwarting such efforts. She explains:

We have been trying to stop it, but the women have not agreed. There was a time we held a meeting in this community. We were all invited and the question was raised as to what should be done by us (women) to remove us from this bondage. Some women said they would fight to abolish it, but some refused, saying that it was handed down to them by their mothers and that since their mothers had observed such rituals, they too are bound to do the same. They queried why any one would want to change an age-old custom handed down by their fore-parents.... I believe, well, you understand the point I am driving at? Such women only want to show or make people believe that they are the only ones that value their husbands.

She also added that women who opposed abolishing undesirable cultural practices, were perhaps afraid of possible community censure-certain checks and balances that are designed to curtail women's "excesses." Non-literate women, she asserted, are more susceptible to such a line of thinking, tend to stick to traditional beliefs and do not really want to understand the need for change. However, she insisted that she and her peers are not willing to relent on their stand on the abolition of the rites of widowhood and several other

customs. They had in fact written a petition against certain practices to the ruling body in her community but had not received an official response at the time of my fieldwork.

In one private session, Malobi, another leading figure in the empowerment of women in her community, had this to say about the status of women:

In this community, most of the women are illiterate. They all depend on farming. They are not "enlightened" and do not know their rights. They depend solely on their husbands, most of whom with few exceptions, are also farmers and believe strongly in tradition. You find that these husbands are very authoritative... . I find that they [the women] always regret not being educated or having a job. I try to get them to attend literacy classes but they don't.

She added that most of the women do not participate in the programme because they claim that they do not have the time. She cited Tasida, the only participant enrolled in the literacy programme in her community (see chapter 5), as a typical example. According to Malobi, Tasida spends so much time running her food-selling business, attending to her farm and domestic duties, that her attendance was very irregular. Malobi that like many others, Tasida would eventually drop out of the programme.

Some rural women attribute their problems to governmental neglect. They assert that even programmes such as the BLP and the FSP (see Chapter 1) which are ostensibly designed to improve their quality of life, including the provision of more access to literacy and income-generating opportunities, often overlook them. The following comments from one literate participant elaborates the point:

You know, this community is under a local government, but the impact of the programmes that are supposed to help women is only felt at Asaba, the headquarters of the local government. One day when I was travelling [to another town] I heard some people making announcements about the Family Support Programme. I was dumbfounded. I had not heard anything about it. When I asked what it was all about, I was told that it had just been launched at Asaba. The funniest thing about all these programmes is that they are actually being enjoyed by the wealthy and powerful people in the society instead of taking them to the grassroots!... . All they [government officials] do is to launch them for themselves then come here to make noise, claiming that the programmes have been well established in every nook and corner, whereas it is all lies.

According to her, such attitudes on the part of the government only worsens the conditions for women within their communities.

### *6.9. Perceived Solutions to the Problems*

Opinions were split on this issue. While a good majority of the literate informants felt that the solution to the problems confronting women in general and non-literate ones in particular would be access to literacy and economic empowerment, most of the non-literate women cited immediate economic relief as most crucial. Interestingly, there was a further split even within this group. The younger members of this group, were less ambivalent about the potential impact of literacy programmes on their living conditions. To show the variety of opinions, below are some excerpts from the interviews. Emeke, one of the older members of the non-literate group, had the following to say:

I feel that they [the government] should create jobs; lots of jobs to allow non-natives to come. If this is done the trading that we women do will flourish. As at this point in time, frankly I do not understand the kind of trading we do

here. There are no customers. Take for example this boiled rice I am selling. Since you came in [I was in her buka for quite a while on that day], how many customers have you seen? An influx of non-natives would improve the lot of the women who do most of the petty trading. This is the solution for us advanced women for whom it is too late to go to school.

She added that she had visited a nearby community which used to suffer the same economic malaise as her community but which had now become economically "vibrant" because the government had set up some offices in the area. She explained that the creation of such jobs had brought in non-locals who did not own land and therefore depended on the locals for their food supplies. This, she said, created a demand for the kind of petty trading women engage in. According to her account, access to literacy was not the potential solution to her problems. Like many of her non-literate peers, she argued that while she feels bad about not having attended school, such a move would not likely ameliorate her economic condition now.

Mebele, another non-literate participant, would want to learn as well as be economically empowered. According to her:

I will be very happy if I can learn how to read and write my name even at my age.... Whenever I receive letters, I give them to schoolchildren in our quarters to read. I will be happy to do so myself. But it will also be good if the government can give us financial help such as loans that we can trade with. That will help us a lot.

The literate group, on the other hand, saw things slightly differently:

I feel that the women should be able to identify and write their own names. I am not talking about them becoming teachers or reading to very high levels,

but they should be able to identify some basic things around them, know how to read signs and so on.

Another felt that women need literacy in order to develop their self-esteem and some degree of awareness in relation to their conditions, especially at home. As she saw it:

Most of us do not seem to know our rights. Even some literate women do not. I think its time for us women to really become independent. These women [non-literates] need some education in order to increase their self-image. Some of these women want to make others happy even when they themselves are not. I feel that with "civilization" and the knowledge we acquire from education, we should be able to identify those things that will make us happy and then fight for them.

She added that women who are not educated are the most vulnerable because of their greater dependence on others.

### *6.10. Coping With Illiteracy*

One purpose of this study was to tell the story of the non-literate women as well as to find out how they cope without literacy when the need for such arises. Because this subsection can constitute a separate study, I limited my inquiry to certain areas where the literacy needs of rural women are more apparent.

A common activity rural women perform is dispensing medication to their children when they are sick. The common community practice is to purchase self-prescribed medication (particulary in cases of minor ailments such as common colds, headaches and

minor diarrhea), from local chemists. I therefore tried to find out how the women are able to figure out the correct dosages.

#### ***6.10.1. Dispensing Medication***

Many of the women reported that they had no problem with dispensing medication for themselves and for their children. Most said that they simply purchase medication from the chemist although they sometimes seek advice from workers in the chemist shop who read them the dispensing instructions. The chemist owners and their assistants are not usually pharmacists although they often play the role of "doctors" within both communities and indeed in most rural settings in Nigeria. The fact that the women rely more on drugstore medications emphasizes not only the changing nature of rural life in Nigeria but also the need to educate rural women whose health-related practices often affect the entire family. In the past, both minor and major ailments were often treated with alternative traditional healing methods that neither required the reading of dosages nor a knowledge of English, (the official language and the language in which drug literature is written).

Asked how they are able to remember the instructions given to them at the chemist, the women replied that somehow they manage to. They added that with regular use of certain common medications such as aspirin and cough syrups, they become conversant with the required dosages and no longer need to have the directions translated. Others reported seeking help from their husbands, children or literate neighbours as the case may be. Nwabuno, one of the non-literate participants explains:

When someone is not feeling well in the family I just go and buy medication....At the chemist, they usually tell me the dosage required and how to administer the medicine. I then go home and administer to the sick person as directed. If I forget I get my husband to read it for me again.

The women also use similar coping strategies when they go to the hospital. One told me that there is usually an Igbo-speaking nurse with the doctor during consultations if the doctor himself cannot speak the local language. Nurses also help to interpret doctors' prescriptions as one participant explains:

When they [doctors] prescribe in the hospital, I usually give it to the nurse to read for me. If not, when I get home, I give it to someone else to read.

None of the women admitted ever making mistakes or giving the wrong dosage. They maintained that once dosage instructions have been read to them in their local language, they hardly ever forget.

### ***6.10.2. Reading and Writing Letters***

According to the women, in practical terms this is the one area where the impact of illiteracy is most manifest. It is not unusual for them to go around the village looking for someone to read or write letters for them particularly when they do not want their husbands to see the contents of the letters or because their husbands are unwilling to help. The women consider this loss of privacy a constant reminder of the impact of illiteracy on their personal lives. Emeke explains what happens whenever she has to have a letter read or have one written:

When ever I receive a letter from one of my children, I look for someone to read it for me. Sometimes, I give it to a young child to read. I have to accept whatever the person tells me, because I cannot verify what is written in the letter. The same thing happens when I want to write a letter. I tell the person what I want to say in Igbo and they write it down in English. When the content of the letter is confidential, you have to be careful who you ask to read or write for you.

She added that this was such a mundane way of living that sometimes she does not dwell on it. Frustration however sets in when she asks the writer to read back what had been written in Igbo and finds that her dictation had been wrongly interpreted.

Another area where the women feel (from their accounts) the impact of illiteracy is in reading the Bible. Most of them consider themselves Christians and state that they would love to read the Bible. Some stated that they have become quite familiar with the general location of a few books in the Bible by watching other people open to them regularly in church. However, for them, this is not a substitute for actually being able to read the Bible.

### **6.10.3. Keeping "Business" Records**

Some of the women are involved in micro-entrepreneurial activities although sometimes in the narrowest sense of the word. They often buy and sell their wares, even cooked food on credit. I asked how they are able to keep track of their business transactions such as who owes them and the amount owed. Most said that they always manage to remember but that even when they forget, seeing a certain "patron" would remind them of that person's debt. Those who have school-age children often have them write down the names of debtors, thus enabling them to document such deals.

### ***6.11. The Non-Literate Participants in Wage Labour***

The three non-literate participants who were engaged in the formal labour sector deserve some special attention because they constitute a relatively rare phenomenon in rural Nigeria. Although they did not constitute a recurrent theme among the participants, they themselves constitute a special theme. I did not anticipate finding non-literates formally engaged in wage labour within these communities. Further, they offer a unique opportunity of seeing the kind of jobs non-literate women in rural settings perform.

My first impression of Rita, Ekwuda and Mebele was of a group of unhappy women. But as I got to know them better I found out that nothing could be further from the truth. Throughout my subsequent visits to the poultry farm where they worked they welcomed me warmly. They told me how lucky they were to have found jobs in their community although they worked long hours. As menial labourers their jobs involved hurling chicken feed (often on a pan which is carried on the head) to the various chicken houses. When they were not hurling poultry feed, they were busy collecting and packaging chicken eggs. According to them and from my observation, their work was tedious and dirty. As Ekwuda told me:

I feel lucky to have this job but at the same time, I wish it was a little cleaner. Besides even though I collect some salary, it is so small that sometimes I feel that it might be better to just wake and go to the farm. Some of my friends wish that they can get jobs too. All I do is just laugh. They think that it is the same thing as being a teacher or a secretary in the office. It is not. Just look at me.

The three women preferred not give their exact monthly income opting rather for an estimate of 600-700 Naira. Among their peers they formed a unique "clique" because they

are employed outside of the home and the farm. It is indeed a rare phenomenon.

One afternoon, I sat with them as they were having a break. We drifted into discussions related to the problems women face in the community. Very casually, I asked what they regretted most in life. I was certain that they would not be expecting such a question. There was brief silence; then Mebele gave me a response I equally did not expect. She pointed to me saying "That is what I regret most". She was referring to the fact that I was writing. She later told me that even now at the age of fifty, she still would have liked to attend an adult literacy class but could not find the time to do so.

On the whole, although they did not come across as a group of satisfied women, they seemed to live a slightly better life than the other non-literate women I interviewed in the community. They had some disposable income that they received on a regular basis and as they told me, having a regular income meant that they could sometimes give a definite date of repayment whenever they are indebted to someone.

### ***6.12. Summary***

This chapter has focused on the findings of the study based on the analysis of data. The findings show that illiteracy has had considerable impact on the lives of both groups of women, leaving the literate group with more positive self-perception and the other with diminished perceptions of self-worth.

The findings also show that non-literate women tend to get married at a very young age and generally have more children. According to the perceptions of both groups of

women, literate women seem to be more empowered within both their households and the community.

Contrary to a common assumption in related literature, the findings do not show a positive correlation between illiteracy and low parental aspirations to educate their children. In fact, lack of literacy may serve as an additional source of motivation to educate children, although different living conditions may impinge negatively on the outcomes of such aspirations for the children of non-literate women.

The findings also show that while non-literate women work longer hours daily they have considerably less tangible economic rewards along with less access to regular income and credit facilities. Perhaps this explains their perception that the solution to their marginal status is more a question of economic empowerment than one of access to literacy.

Finally, barring the interventions of other mediating variables, literate rural women have more access to formal employment, an important prerequisite to enhanced quality of life within the Nigerian context.

## **Chapter 7**

# **Discussion of Findings: Literacy and Quality of Life Revisited**

### ***7.1 Introduction***

The previous chapter detailed the findings of the study based on the accounts of the participants as they perceive the link between illiteracy, their individual and collective conditions. Similar issues have been the subject of considerable attention in existing literature (Etta, 1994; Alele-Williams, 1986; Chlebowska, 1990, 1992; Smock, 1981; Okojie, 1983, 1990; Iman et al., 1985; Cochrane 1979; Kasarda et al., 1986) although some of such material falls short of being actual research. Nevertheless, this chapter focuses on the discussion of the findings in relation to views from academic literature and existing research. An important point must be reiterated here: although this work examines the quality of life of two groups of women, the literacy status of all the women was the result of whether or not they had access to education as *girls*. The ensuing discussion, therefore, refers to access to literacy by non-literate/literate adult women as well to the education of girls. I begin with a look at why certain girls may have access to education while others in the same community may not.

## ***7.2 The Determinants of Girls'/Women's Access to Literacy***

From the findings of this study, two fundamental factors appear to impede a woman's access to education in rural Nigeria: financial resources and parental perception of the value of educating a girl which in turn depends on the general perception of the role of women in society.

### ***7.2.1. Financial Resources***

A good number of the non-literate respondents reported that their parents were unable to support their education. Some had actually been sent away to live with more successful relatives with the hope that they would be educated. Unfortunately such promises were not always honoured. In some instances, some had been encouraged to marry quite young to supposedly successful men, because such liaisons brought in additional resources that were used for the education of their younger siblings. In these situations, the women were denied education for what I refer to as incidental reasons. An important assumption here is that they would most likely have been educated had the resources been available.

### ***7.2.2. Differential Valuation of Male and Female Children***

From the evidence, part of the subjugation of women in Nigeria stems from the different value placed on male and female children to the disadvantage of girls. As Etta (1994) and Alele-Williams (1986) argue, male children are considered prized possessions in Nigeria.

From the accounts of the participants of this study, that tendency of attaching more

importance to male offspring affected their own lack of access to schooling opportunities. In some instances where resources were available but limited, the parents of some of the respondents had managed to educate only their sons. These parents apparently did not see the need for educating girls, an attitude that may be due to the limited life options women have in Nigerian society. An example is women's limited opportunities within the labour market. Even when they have access to it, they are quite often confined to low level jobs (Iweriebor, 1988).

When the data were analyzed for husbands' educational status, the evidence showed that 72% of the non-literate women were married to literate men. The only plausible explanation for this discrepancy between the educational status of the women and their husbands (since each couple ostensibly grew up together and in the same community), is gender discrimination in education. All the literate women were married to men of equal or slightly higher educational standing confirming the assertion that an educated woman would in all likelihood seek a literate mate.

Another factor that seems to impede women's access to literacy is the nature of the services they provide at home as young girls. In the case of some of the respondents, such services were more of immediate value to the sustenance of the family unit than school attendance. Additionally, some of the participants were sent away from home as paid domestic servants to other families because the services they rendered provided much-needed financial resources for their families. These findings are corroborated by related literature. The opportunity cost of sending girls to school is often cited as one of reasons

for women's low educational status in Nigeria and elsewhere in Sub-Saharan Africa (Alele-Williams, 1986; Chlebowska, 1990; The United Nations 1991).

Beyond that, participant observations revealed that girls' school attendance is still sometimes sporadic because they often take time off school to help their mothers with either domestic duties or income-generating activities. To illustrate this point, I return to the case of Chima, a non-literate mother of ten. Although she had rated education as her daughters' potential source of the good life, participant observations showed irregular school attendance by her children especially among the girls. At the time of the field work, two of her daughters had already been sent away to work as domestic servants for other people without the possibility of continuing their education. As Chima herself pointed out, the girls are not likely to acquire more education than the few years of schooling that they had already received while living at home. Clearly, the life chances of these girls are already jeopardized.

Csapo (1981), reports similar findings among women in seclusion (purdah) in Northern Nigeria where young girls have to perform outside tasks that would normally be performed by their mothers. In these instances, young girls face double jeopardy: first they must perform family roles expected of them, then they have to fulfil the obligations of adult women.

While lack of financial resources and differential valuation of male and female children may operate independently, a girl's chances of attending school decreases even further when there is an interplay of both factors. Thus, when the problem is only a

question of financial resources as some of the participants reported, parents may seek financial help within the network of the extended family or by offering the domestic services of the girl to other families in exchange for a promise to educate her. But when both factors exist such avenues for assistance may not be exploited. In such instances, a girl's domestic services may even be offered to other families as a way of generating family resources that are sometimes channelled to the education of male siblings.

There is however, some evidence of changing attitudes, from the accounts of the women. When asked to state hypothetically what criteria would be used to determine whose schooling among their children would be dispensable if funds were limited, most participants (83.3% for the literate women and 61.1% for non-literates) reported that academic ability based on previous performance would be the deciding factor rather than gender. But even here also there is a marked difference between both groups, indicating a less dogmatic attitude among the former.

Most of the participants stated that in general the education of girls is more rewarding for parents. Indeed, most, literate and non-literate group alike, emphasised that girls were more likely to take care of their parents at old age and as a result, educating girls is a worthwhile course.

### **7.3. *II/Literacy and Participation in Wage Economy***

The data presented in this study show that literacy provides Nigerian women easier access to one source of power that has been controlled by men: the labour market. Even

in rural settings where availability of wage employment is considerably limited, the results of this study show that the literate women were actively engaged in the formal labour sector, although disproportionately in the teaching field<sup>31</sup>. This finding is congruent with other research literature which suggests a positive relationship between education and a woman's participation in the formal labour market (Okojie, 1983).

The present study found that besides direct access to the labour market, the number of hours literate women put into market work,<sup>32</sup> is considerably less than those of their non-literate peers, leaving them enough time for leisure which is in itself an indicator of enhanced quality of life. The difference may stem from the nature and type of work both groups of women engage in. To show the differences, Tables 7-1 and 7-2 (below) present the daily routine of two participants, one drawn from each group. Their activities, for the most part, typify those of the other members of their respective groups.

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<sup>31</sup> This is however a common phenomenon in rural Nigeria. A study conducted to determine the educational aspirations of urban and rural girls (Akande, 1987) showed that more rural girls aspire to become teachers than urban girls. This may be because the most prevalent jobs in rural areas are in the teaching field. It should also be pointed out that the discussions in this section are limited to formal wage employment since most women in Nigeria participate within the informal labour sector even in the most minimal way.

<sup>32</sup> In this study, the term "market work" (Mueller, 1982), refers to the types of labour that are income generating. Thus the number of hours a teacher puts into her job would be considered as time spent on market work. Unfortunately, the line between the market work of non-literate rural women and their other household duties is often blurred. However for analytical purposes, non-literate women's work on the farm and work put into the processing and marketing of farm produce, will be considered market work because these activities, constitute their major sources of income generation.

**Table 7-1: Example of the daily routine of non-literate rural women**

TIME	DAILY ROUTINE
4-5 a.m.	Rises/continues food processing from previous day/family breakfast
7:30 a.m.	Sends children off to school
8-9 a.m.	Prepares for/walks to the farm
9-3 p.m.	Working on the farm
3-4 p.m.	Back from the farm/prepares for market
5-7 p.m.	At the market
7:30-9 p.m.	Prepares/has dinner
9-11 p.m.	Food processing/household chores
11 p.m.	Bed

**Table 7-2: Example of the daily routine of literate rural women**

TIME	DAILY ROUTINE
6:00 a.m.	Rises/toiletries/prepares family breakfast
7:30 a.m.	Sends children off to school/off to work
8-1:45 p.m.	On the job
2-4 p.m.	Lunch / Siesta
4-6 p.m.	Market or leisure
6-8 p.m.	Prepares / has dinner
8-9 p.m.	Miscellaneous (chores, leisure)
9 p.m.	Bed

It would of course be simplistic to argue that all literate women are engaged in wage labour since there are other mediating variables, such as demographic factors, domestic situation, the type of skills acquired through education and level of literacy, that would affect a woman's entrance into the labour market.

An analysis of data from five developing countries (Smock, 1981), revealed that relationship between education and labour force participation may indeed not always be linear. Similarly, Wagner (1992) argues that according to current global trends, the "purchasing power" of basic literacy may be diminishing as it becomes more available.

Even so, the crucial point remains valid: education is positively associated with participation in the formal labour force (certainly within the Nigerian context) and unless under-utilized, the output of education (knowledge, skills, acquired dispositions etc.) is a durable capital asset (Dasgupta, 1993; World Bank, 1995). *Ceteris paribus*, the possession of such an asset increases the chances of a woman gaining access into a male-dominated sphere: the formal labour market.

### **7.3.1. II/Literacy and Economic Well-Being**

A corollary of labour force participation is the economic well-being resulting from access to regular income. Evidence from the data shows that for the literate participants, access to formal labour translated into higher income earnings (see Table 7-3) and economic independence. One possible reason why literate women appear to have more leisure time is that their earned income enables them to channel some of the household production they would otherwise be engaged in, outside the household. For instance, a

common time-consuming and back-breaking activity rural women engage in is the production and preservation of food predominantly for subsistence but, as the previous chapter pointed out, also for cash. Because most of the literate women have access to earned income, they are able to purchase such food items rather than engage in the-time-consuming production themselves.

A further source of economic empowerment for the literate women is access to credit facilities. This enables many of them to engage in supplementary income generating activities which provide more disposable income. All these economic activities make it possible for many of them to purchase what would ordinarily be considered luxury goods by more financially handicapped rural households. A good number of the literate women also use time-saving cooking devices that are relatively expensive to maintain, such as stoves. What all of these amount to is a significant difference in the lifestyle and living conditions of both groups of women and their families: the one for the better and the other more encumbered resulting in the stereotypical image of the rural Nigerian woman as illiterate, overworked, disempowered and poor (Okojie, 1983; WIN Document, 1985).

**Table 7-3**

<b>Monthly Income of Participants<sup>33</sup></b>		
<b>Amount(Naira)</b>	<b>Literates</b>	<b>Non-literates</b>
0-500	1	5
500-1000	1	11
1000-1500	2	2
1500-2000	6	-
2000-2500	4	-
2500-3000	2	-
over 3000	2	-
Totals	18	18

**Source:** Research data.

#### ***7.4. Literacy, Fertility and Maternal Behaviour***

As was pointed out in the preceding chapter, three areas of health-related practices were singled out for this study. The evidence shows differential patterns of fertility behaviour between both groups of women particularly in relation to family size and the use of contraception.

##### ***7.4.1. II/Literacy and Family Size***

The findings show that literate rural women have a preponderance towards smaller families. The significance of this finding can only be appreciated when one realizes that fertility rates in Nigeria are usually very high in rural settings for two reasons. First,

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<sup>33</sup> All incomes were approximations since some of the participants were not certain of exact amounts, particularly the non-literate women. The incomes reported by the literate women include estimates of supplementary income-generating activities.

generally in Nigeria but particularly in rural settings, men have a strangle-hold on power, as this work has emphasized. Because of the traditional importance attached to children women derive a source of power through procreation. Thus, as Okojie (1983) points out, a woman's status within her household may increase correspondingly with the number of children she bears, particularly if such offspring are male. A second reason why rural women tend to have many children is the availability of childcare help because of the close-knit communal way of living.

According to demographic researchers, there is a simple logic for the positive relationship between a woman's education and reduced family size. Parenting requires a substantial amount of a woman's time and options available to women as a result of education compete with time devoted to child-rearing. The reallocation of time from regular childbearing to participation in the formal economic sector results in fewer numbers of children.

But the relationship between education and reduced family size is more than a matter of simple logic. The bulk of related research studies do indeed show a negative relationship between education and fertility (Kasarda, Billy and West, 1986; United Nations, 1987; LeVine, 1982; Cochrane, 1979; Caldwell, 1979). LeVine (1982), for instance suggests that an educated mother is more likely to make more informed decisions relating to the economic consequences of multiple pregnancies, children's education, health and nutrition. He argues that the reduction in the number of births means that children have more access to family resources including time spent with parents, a better quality of life, and ultimately,

increased life chances. This was precisely the explanation given by most of the literate respondents for having fewer children than is the norm in rural Nigeria. They argued that the negative economic consequences of having large families discouraged them from doing so, opting rather to use birth control methods. Others cited the job-related implications of constantly going on maternity leave.

Kasarda, Billy and West's (1986) analysis of several related studies offer yet more insights as to why education may not only enable women to control their fertility and fate but also ultimately enhance their status. According to them, education affects fertility in several important ways: i) through direct impact by acting as a catalyst to the acquisition of psychological orientations that favour smaller family size; ii) indirectly, by influencing some socio-economic and demographic variables, such as participation in wage labour, age at marriage and the knowledge and use of contraception; and iii), jointly through interaction with other variables such as residency, husband's education and degree of religiosity. They do however point out that:

While the transition from illiteracy to literacy usually depresses fertility, the most substantial reductions often come with increases from elementary schooling... to secondary and above (7+) years of education (p.92).

Similar data from the UN World Fertility Survey (WFS) (1987) corroborates the findings of this study and the assertions of Kasarda et al.. The findings of that survey show a pattern

of steady decline in fertility rates in 9 African countries<sup>34</sup> with increases in educational attainment (see Table 7-4 below).

More recent data continue to point to an inverse relationship between maternal literacy and overall family health. Lankshear et al. (1995) report that the findings of an analysis of trends in infant mortality rate in Nicaragua conducted by the Latin American Center For Demography show an inverse correlation between maternal education and infant mortality over a twenty-year period.

A recent study of female cohorts also in Nicaragua, and reported by Sandiford et al. (1995), also showed a lower risk of mortality and malnutrition among children of women who became literate through adult education than among the children of those who remained illiterate, leading them to conclude that "education plays a crucial role in child health and survival independently of other social and economic advantages" (p.15).

While the findings of this study and other research suggest a positive relationship between literacy and reduced family size, there are, however, some instances, in extremely poor countries, for example, where slight increases in female education may actually contribute to increased family size (see Smock, 1981; Herz et al., 1991). Within the Nigerian context, educated elites who have the financial wherewithal may engage the services of maid servants, thus offsetting the impact of the opportunity costs of the mother's time. Cochrane's analysis of several country studies also suggests that the relationship

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<sup>34</sup> While this same source also includes data for several other developing nations, only the data for Africa was extracted because of its obvious relevancy to the present study.

between education and fertility may not always be linear although "there is tentative evidence that over time, education ultimately will reduce fertility" (1979: 151).

It should be noted that while aggregate numbers show a significant difference between the family sizes of both groups of women, on the individual level, two of the oldest literate women had a considerably higher number of children than the rest of their group who were much younger. This may be an indication of a normative shift in attitude towards having fewer children in Nigeria, particularly because of the deteriorating economic conditions. Even so, it should also be noted that the same stringent economic conditions *did not* influence the non-literate women (who can least afford it) to have fewer children.

Table 7-4

**Total Fertility Rates by Years of schooling<sup>35</sup>**

	<i>zero</i>	<i>1-3</i>	<i>4-6</i>	<i>7+</i>	<i>Difference</i>
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(1-4)
Benin	7.4	8.5	5.5	4.3	3.1
Cameroon	6.4	7.0	6.8	5.2	1.2
Côte d'Ivoire	7.4	8.0	6.4	5.8	1.6
Ghana	6.8	6.7	6.7	5.5	1.3
Kenya	8.3	9.2	8.4	7.3	1.0
Lesotho	6.2	5.6	6.0	4.8	1.4
Morocco	6.4	5.2	4.4	4.2	2.2
Senegal	7.3	9.4	6.3	4.5	2.8
Sudan	6.5	5.6	5.0	4.5	3.4
<i>Totals</i>	7.0	7.2	6.2	5.0	2.0

Source: United Nations (1987), World Fertility Survey (WFS) p.224

Notice small increases in the second category, confirming contentions in academic literature that slight increments in educational attainment may in fact increase fertility rates (Cochrane, 1979; Kasarda et al., 1986; United Nations, 1987; Psacharopoulos and Woodhall, 1985).

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<sup>35</sup> There are twelve countries listed in the source; however, three had missing values in all categories and so were excluded in this excerpt.

#### **7.4.2. *The Use of Contraception***

The present study also shows the prevalence of use of birth control methods among the literate group. Although an exploratory study such as this may not conclusively prove the causal hypothesis, the evidence seems to suggest a positive relationship between education and the use of contraception as other research has shown (Smock 1981; Cochrane 1979; LeVine 1982).

#### **7.5. *Early vs. Delayed Marriage***

A major problem affecting women's school attendance in Nigeria and elsewhere in Sub-Saharan Africa is the practice of teenage marriage. It is not unusual for girls to get married at the age of twelve. However, because of the number of years involved in schooling, the probability of a negative association between female education and early marriage is often reported as quite high. The results of this study are congruent with such assertions. From the accounts of the non-literate participants, most of them were married between the ages of fifteen and seventeen, thus allowing them to begin childbearing at a very early age. In Nigeria, a natural outcome of early marriages is large family size except in cases of low fecundity. Besides family size, early marriage has profound health implications for women in Nigeria. Tahzib (1989) reports that in some parts of the country, girls in their early teenage years (those who married at less than 16 years of age) constitute 5% of the childbearing population, 16% of maternal deaths, and 8% of prenatal deaths. Additionally, while the overall national maternal and prenatal mortality rates are 10 and 90

per 1000, the numbers are significantly higher for teenage brides, at 34 and 125 per 1000 respectively. Clearly, this is the result of early childbearing for girls who are neither psychologically or physically ready for such roles.

While the non-literate group reported early marriages, the literate group reported getting married between the ages of twenty and twenty-five. All cited schooling as the reason for their higher age at marriage. Indeed, at the time of the field work, three of the literate women were well over the age of twenty-five but were still single. They reported being more concerned about furthering their education than about marriage. While such claims could obviously not be verified, the fact remains that because of their relative financial independence they seemed to be seeking their status and self-validation elsewhere, rather than through family roles as wives and mothers. Delay of marriage may also explain why a good majority of the literate respondents have fewer children than their non-literate peers. According to a (1991) United Nations report, women with seven years or more of education tend to marry an average of four years later and have fewer than 2.2 children. Similarly, Smock (1981) concludes from a study of data from several developing countries, that education correlates positively with higher age at marriage.

### ***7.6 II/Literacy and Expanded "World Views"***

A common assumption among advocates of women's education in Sub-Saharan Africa is that educated women are more likely to acquire dispositions that favour more liberal and less dogmatic thinking. This study found that the literate women in the sample

seemed more receptive to new ideas than the non-literate group.

A typical example is the issue of female circumcision. While only two of the literate group maintain that they would continue to circumcise their daughters despite being aware of the potential health consequences, most of the non-literate group insist that they will continue to do so. Female circumcision has of course generated considerable controversy in recent years (see WIN News, 1996; Kouba and Muasher, 1985; Lightfoot-Klein, 1989), and is also cited as a potentially preventable practice with exposure to education. The rationale for such a view, as Kouba and Muasher (1985) point out, is that literate women are less likely to be susceptible to the cultural myths and biological inaccuracies associated with the practice. My own findings support such suppositions. A majority of the literate participants discounted the culture-based benefits and argued against the practice on the grounds that it has negative health consequences. Others dismissed it as one of those practices that are historically embedded in attempts at controlling women. In their opinion, that implication is enough reason to discontinue the practice.

The non-literate group on the other hand, reported<sup>36</sup> that they were bound by culture to continue such a practice even though they admitted being aware of the health implications through government campaigns. The problem, as they told me, is that they do not believe in the validity of the claims made in those campaigns.

Other studies have also looked at the relationship between education and the

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<sup>36</sup> They supported their views with some culture related "reasons" (myths) and anecdotes that emphasize why it is necessary to continue the practice.

practice of female circumcision. A study of the Nandi tribe in Kenya by Oboler (1985) found that educational achievement was a good predictor of whether or not a girl would undergo circumcision. Additionally, she found that the higher a woman's level of education, the less likely she is to undergo female initiation, the ritual aspect of the practice. What is not clear in that study, however, is whether or not such girls would themselves support such a practice being done to their daughters. A logical assumption is that they would not since they themselves had not been subjected to it.

On another tack, I also found that the advocacy to eradicate certain cultural practices that most of the sample agreed constitute gender-based oppression was being led by literate women in the communities. The rites of widowhood, a persistent problem for women in Nigeria, is a case in point. Many of the literate women reported that their efforts at changing the status quo were often thwarted by their non-literate peers who either do not want to change the practice or do not understand the need for change. While their likelihood of success is debatable, what is apparent here is the degree of conscientization: questioning the realities of their existence and challenging structural forces (including cultural practices) that they perceive as oppressive. Even the government itself has recognized the need for change with regards to problems widows in Nigeria face as the following from a government policy paper on the Better Life Programme (see Chapter 1) shows:

Realising the immense problems faced by widows in certain parts of the country, the Better Life Programme has initiated schemes to alleviate their sufferings .... concerted efforts have been made to mount enlightenment campaigns against the

customs and behaviours which promote the dehumanization of this category of women (Federal Government of Nigeria, 1990 p. 24).

Not all studies show a negative correlation between education and adherence to traditional practices. Perdita Houston (1979), for instance, found that even Sudanese women who shared "liberal" theories about the rights of women and condemned the practice of female circumcision were willing to subject their daughters to the process out of cultural necessity.

### ***7.7 Illiteracy and Parental Attitudes Towards Children's Education.***

The corpus of research on this subject often points to a positive relationship between parental education and children's schooling (Kasarda et al., 1986; Ballara, 1992). Although my research focused more on parental aspiration than on the actual outcome of parental schooling, I did not find this to be the case. On the contrary, I found that most of the non-literate participants, like all the literate respondents, had high expectations for their children's education. There was no correlation between the desire to educate children and maternal literacy or lack of it. All the respondents seem to believe that education is a key factor in increasing life chances and that education is the single most important factor in their children's socio-economic advancement and upward mobility. Indeed, I found that most of the non-literate women seemed particularly motivated to educate their children because they felt that they had missed out on life, the consequence of what they referred to as a state of "blindness" - illiteracy. Illiteracy, then, seems to contribute to the desire to send children to school.

The high value placed on education by the study sample is not unique to the study area. Adeyemo (1984) found a similar trend among rural Yoruba women. Although that study examined women's economic activities in relation to development, it found that most non-literate parents had high academic aspirations for their children. The study also found that 98% of rural women paid their daughters' school fees with the hope that they would someday become doctors, lawyers, etc. Even non-literate women, the study found, encourage their children to work towards academic excellence.

Indeed, while it appeared to be taken for granted by the literate informants that all their children would receive some type of education, there was a feeling of urgency, perhaps even desperation, in the desire of the non-literate group to send their children to school. There was, however, a marked difference in the perceptions of the level of education both groups of women believe their children can realistically attain. While the literate group appeared to expect that their children would receive some type of tertiary education, the other would welcome just basic education for their children. Unfortunately basic education is probably not enough to meet the development needs of rural Nigeria.

An important incongruence between parental aspirations and the potential outcomes of such aspirations also became obvious through interview accounts, but especially through observations. During interviews in the homes of participants, I noticed that the children of both groups of women seemed to engage in different kinds of after-school activities. While the children of the literate group seemed to engage more in school-related activities, the children of the other group were, more often than not, preoccupied with activities related

to the sustenance of the family. These included food processing or going to the farm on a daily basis either to do some farm work or to help in carrying home firewood, cassava, yams or other farm produce.

Thus, while the desire to educate their children may be quite high among the non-literate group, tensions do exist between desires for education and the better futures it is thought to bring, and the conditions which constrain women's ability to act on those desires. In effect, the realities of very stringent living conditions may have negative consequences on the quality and level of education their children attain. Juxtaposed with financial difficulties, this may in turn, have a negative impact on their life chances resulting in a vicious cycle of poverty and deprivation.

### ***7.8. Women, Literacy and the Renegotiation of Power Relations***

As the previous chapter emphasized, an important goal of this study was to determine if female literacy influences and changes power relations within the household. The view that women's often peripheral position within the domestic entity is at once the catalyst and reflection of her position in society and vice versa is well established. Glenn (1987) underscores this point when she argues that:

[Any] debate about women's place in the family is actually a debate about *women's place in society* [emphasis mine]. We cannot comprehend women's subordination within the labor market [for instance] without taking into account the organization of household labor.... Nor can we understand the exclusion of women from centers of public political power without referring to their encapsulation within the family (p.348).

An inverse interpretation of such proposition is that the enhancement of women's status within the household would in all likelihood reverse their marginal status in greater society.

Most available data on family decision-making show that education has an impact on the balance of power vis-à-vis familial decision-making. My own findings show a preponderance towards egalitarian decision-making within the households of the literate participants. It is not exactly clear how this happens as views in academic literature are divergent, but one particular variant offers a plausible explanation: the Theory of Resources in relation to marital power (Rodman, 1972). Briefly, Rodman's reconstitution of an original theory by Blood and Wolfe (1960) posits that the more resources a partner brings into a marital union, the more likely that person is to have power within the union. Of particular significance here is the fact that education and income are among the so-called empowering assets as other studies have indeed confirmed.

A recent study of Iraqi rural women's participation in domestic decision making (Al-Nouri, 1993) shows that among other things, increased literacy among women and the expanded economic roles they play, have significantly increased their levels of participation in domestic decision-making. Thus, access to education offers a woman more options in life, including entry into the formal labour market. The resulting income, an important asset, provides her with more independence, leverage and subsequently more power to influence decisions within the household (Rodman, 1972; Kasarda, Billy and West, 1986). This ability to influence decisions tilts the balance of power closer to the centre.

This point was in fact an important issue among the participants of this study. Both

groups of participants claimed that literate rural women have more decision-making power within their households because of the *visible* economic role they play. The non-literate women in the sample argued compellingly that such roles narrow the power gap in the union enabling what approximates collaborative decision making between the partners. Ironically, most of the non-literate women in the study do not specifically depend on their husbands for financial sustenance. The difference between them and their literate peers is that their struggles for the survival of their families are not considered work and nets only minimal income, leaving them with a feeling of dependency.

### ***7.8.1. Women's Autonomy vs. Dependency***

According to my findings, non-literate women tend to see themselves as dependent on their husbands, an attitude that reinforces their powerless positions. For instance, despite the fact that they provide a good part of the essential survival needs of their families, most of them had difficulty admitting this, opting rather to say that they only play "supportive roles". According to them, the suzerain position of men within their households means that women can only play supportive roles. Although some of the literate women did not refute this view, most consider themselves autonomous individuals. They also seemed quite willing to challenge (as many of them reported doing quite often) male authority when they felt there was a need to do so. They had no difficulty reporting that they play equal, and in some instances, greater financial roles than their husbands. This does not suggest that the literate participants of this study have achieved complete social parity with the men in their

communities. What the findings show is that on a continuum, literate women have been able to renegotiate power relations within their households much more than their non-literate peers. They reported feeling empowered enough to control their own destinies within *their own* set limitations, although such limitations may coincide with perceived societal norms. I did not find this attitude among the non-literate women. What I found, for the most part, was a feeling of futility and dependency. Clearly, few would query the inevitability of this dependency given their limited access to means of production and resources. The fact remains, however, that this feeling of dependency keeps them more marginalized and disempowered. In Nigeria, the economic dependence of women strengthens the control men have over their wives' activities. When women are more economically independent as I found among the literate participants, there is a tendency towards greater autonomy and power within their households. Such empowerment within the household is an important prerequisite for the renegotiation of power relations within the larger community. For the non-literate women, education, had they had access to it, may have reduced their dependency and exclusion from economic opportunities.

### ***7.9. II/Literacy and the Status of Rural Women***

A distinct dichotomy exists between attitudes to both groups of women within the community. The general perception is that literate women are much more knowledgeable even in such mundane matters as organising members of the community during certain traditional ceremonies. I witnessed several such incidence where community members who

had migrated to very urban parts of the country returned temporarily to the community for certain ceremonies. Because of long absences from the community most seek assistance from locals. What is relevant here is that (with the exception of those very advanced in years)<sup>37</sup>, non-literate women are excluded from such arrangements because they are seen as closer approximations of rural folk while literate rural women are considered urbanized rural dwellers.

### *7.9.1 Urbanized vs. Villagized Rural Women*

This attitude permeates virtually all social interactions within the communities, even among the literate women who are considered the female elites of their communities. In talking to the women, certain attitudinal biases did emerge from the kinds of language which each group used to qualify the other. While my purpose here is not to conduct a formal discourse analysis, the usage of certain words, particularly by the literate women, did imply a subtle psychological and social distance between both groups of women. This is perhaps the result of differential social location within their communities. The phrase "these women" was often used by the literate women in reference to their non-literate peers. It was quite clear during the interviews that non-literate women are often considered "backward". From their accounts, the non-literate women are quite aware of this attitude and feel stigmatized. The overall effect is a further erosion of their self-esteem as they

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<sup>37</sup> Among the Igbos west of the Niger, age is highly revered and old age is a "status" conferring attainment, regardless of gender.

consider themselves inadequate even among other women. Non-literate rural women approximate the notion of an underclass, discussed in Chapter 4. They are far removed from productive resources even though they work very hard.

In general, the literate women by virtue of the leadership role they play in the community (such as in church organizations, women's advocacy, etc.) are very visible in their communities. However, even though some play advisory roles, they remain relatively speaking, excluded from the official administration of their communities. This remains, as always, the sole domain of the men, as dictated by tradition.

#### ***7.10. Non-Literate Women's Attitude to Participation in Literacy Programmes***

One unexpected finding of this study is the attitude of the non-literate women towards possible participation in literacy programmes. While most did not reject the notion outright, they did suggest that participation in such programmes was not an immediate priority. Rather, the concern was for their immediate economic survival. The degree of ambivalence was much more pronounced among the older women, who felt that they were already too advanced in age to begin schooling. The younger non-literate respondents, however, reported that while they aspired to be able to read and write, they were convinced that their economic situation would probably not allow it.

Other studies have found similar attitudes among non-literate women elsewhere. Chlebowska (1990) for instance, reports a similar reaction among a group of non-literate women in Niger. Similarly, Ramdas (1990) reports that a group of non-literate people in an

Indian community were ambivalent about the possible outcome of participating in literacy programmes. Their interest was in an empowering kind of literacy, within their own perceptions of empowerment, and not just on the acquisition of literacy per se.

My own analysis shows that the economics of daily survival is at once an impediment and an enabling factor in women's participation in literacy programmes. The resolution of this paradox is potentially the key to integrating women into sustainable literacy programmes and ultimately into the mainstream of their respective societies. Restating this in more precise terms, *the problem as well as the solution is, fundamentally, economics.*

In trying to explicate this issue, I find value in Abraham Maslow's theory of basic needs. Briefly, Maslow categorizes human needs into five hierarchical levels. As lower level needs such as hunger, safety, security and general *survival* are met, people begin to seek higher level needs such as esteem, status, belonging and fulfilment. Although Maslow argues that for most people, lower level needs are usually satisfied, well over half of the non-literate respondents of this study are constantly engaged in pursuing those lower level needs in the bid for survival. Because they have not been able to satisfy the fundamental essentials for sustaining them and their families, literacy becomes a higher level need particularly for the older respondents.

From their personal accounts, the literate participants, on the other hand, appear to have achieved their basic needs and are well on their way to achieving their higher level needs. This different location on Maslow's hierarchy accounts for the fundamental difference in the quality of life of both groups of women. A case in point: when both groups

of women were asked in individual interviews to state their greatest aspiration, most of the non-literate women gave *economic independence* as their first aspiration while the literate women responded that continuing their education was their pressing aspiration. They further added that but for government irregularities in the payment of salaries, they were relatively financially independent and satisfied with their quality of life.

As Chlebowska (1990) points out, it must be emphasized that non-literate women do not reject literacy training *a priori*. Additionally, the women's ambivalence may also originate from a distrust in the ability of such programmes to significantly change their onerous living conditions. Some of the women would welcome a second opportunity to learn, particularly, as they reported, after seeing the living conditions of their literate peers. *The difficulty, however, lies in balancing the quest for survival and the quest for basic knowledge.*

### ***7.11. The Limbo Group***

One important finding of the study is the neglect, with few exceptions (see Ballara, 1992), in discourses related to literacy in Sub-Saharan Africa of a group I shall refer to as *the limbo group* for analytical purposes. They are the group of non-literate teenage girls usually ranging between the ages of thirteen and eighteen. Although that age cohort was not part of this study, several of the non-literate participants reported that as young girls, they were sent away by their parents to live with wealthier relatives who failed to keep their promise of educating them in exchange for domestic services. They eventually returned to

their villages as non-literate teenagers yearning to be educated but too old and "ashamed" to attend regular primary schools and too young to fit into conventional adult literacy programmes.

The cycle of poverty can still be broken for teenage girls in similar situations and thus for their future families. Unfortunately, most intervention programmes by national governments and international donor agencies usually target either young girls aged six to fourteen or older women whose literacy needs may not be very pressing since many of them may have found ways of adapting and surviving without literacy.

### ***7.12. Rural Women's Participation in a Culture of Literacy***

While there is a clear distinction between non-literates and literates particularly in the ability to decode and encode the written word, Wagner (1991) points out that only few adults at this point in history "can still be labelled as 'naive illiterates': those with absolutely no knowledge of the existence and use of written language." Similarly, Levine (1986) makes reference to the ingenious ability of non-literates to adapt and function quite well in their environment by circumventing the any need for reading and writing.

My findings in some respects, reflect these views and more. None of the non-literate sample can justifiably be referred to as "ignorant" or a "simpleton". Many appeared to be quite conversant with salient social issues that affect their daily lives. A possible explanation is that the women are, to a certain extent, immersed in a culture of literacy. First, most of them (72%), are married to literate men who engage quite frequently in literacy-related

activities such as reading newspapers and listening to radio broadcasts in English, the official language.<sup>38</sup> Even informal gatherings among men often result in the use of English or a mixture of Igbo and the former. While the women do not often participate in these discussions, they are usually witnesses to such "literacy events" and may subconsciously retain snippets of such discussions. Indeed, some of the women unexpectedly had some knowledge of Nigerian Pidgin English, an important informal communication medium in the country. Although to a lesser extent, this may be the kind of thing Goody (1987), in a shift from previous position on the cognitive consequences of literacy (see Goody and Watt 1963), is referring to when he assigns an important priority to participation in a culture of literacy, in the acquisition of vocabulary.

A second reason may be related to the fact that most of the women have or have had school-aged children and attend church services in which English is used along with Igbo. Many of them also belong to various organizations where they have to interact with literate women. In my judgement, the line of reasoning of some of the non-literate women was quite analytical as Ogunniyi (1987) found in a study of the nature of scientific thinking among a group of non-literate adults (see Chapter 1). The argument provided by one of the participants in relation to potential solutions to women's problems within her community (see Chapter 6) is a case in point. She argued convincingly that job creation was a possible solution. Her reasoning was that if the government created jobs, non-locals would migrate

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<sup>38</sup> A popular pastime of men in these communities, is listening to as much "world news" as can be accessed, including BBC news through short wave radios, a common household possession.

to her community from urban areas, thereby increasing the demand for the products women trade in. She had in fact given the kind of response that one would expect to hear from an economic analyst proposing solutions to a depressed economy. She had been able to infer that if government upgrading of the status of a neighbouring community managed to change its economic fortunes, then, such a move could also have similar implications for her own community.

### ***7.13. Summary***

The focus of this chapter has been on providing evidence from existing research with similar results as the present one. For the most part, the evidence points to an enhanced quality of life for literate rural women including economic well-being, attitude to health-related practices, status in the home and to a lesser extent, within the community. While both groups of women aspire for their children to become educated, the arduous living conditions of the non-literate women and their children may impinge negatively on such aspirations. Finally, although non-literate women do not reject the notion of a second opportunity to become literate, the acquisition of literacy does not appear to be a major priority for them. This attitude has significant policy implications which are addressed in the next and concluding chapter.

# **Chapter 8**

## **Towards Improving the Life Chances of Rural Women and Bridging the Gender Gap in Literacy/Education: Implications for Policy Action**

### ***8.1. Introduction***

A fundamental assumption that undergirds educational research is the notion that knowledge accumulated will result in social change. Change itself depends on the reformulation of existing policies. Indeed, critical realism, the guiding philosophy of this work, demands that this be so. In Bhaskar's account of emancipatory research, oppressive structures that constrain individuals must be restructured based on the accounts provided by agents. In consequence, this chapter focuses on possible policy interventions for the elimination of gender disparities in education and the improvement of non-literate women's quality of life.

Expanding women's educational opportunities transcends mere rhetoric and tinkering with existing policies. It requires-praxis-oriented interventions. Programmes and policies genuinely aimed at tackling the problem must simultaneously deal with some fundamental social structures and attitudes which perpetuate discriminatory educational

practices and ultimately diminish women's status. These interventions are classifiable under three distinct categories: macro level, sub-systems and micro level interventions. While it is necessary to treat each category as discrete for analytical purposes, in practice, they are not mutually exclusive since each, in the end, impacts on the other two. But first, it is necessary to stress again that the conception of literacy adopted in this study is much broader than (although not excluding) functional literacy (see Chapter 1). Such a conception sees literacy as a critical engagement of one's world (Freire, 1970) as well as a deep immersion in a culture of literacy.

## ***8.2. Macro Level Interventions***

Macro level interventions include those emanating directly from the government. Within the Nigerian context, they are particularly important because virtually all social policies emanate from and are controlled by the federal government. For instance, educational policies originate from the federal government, are then filtered through the other two levels of the three-tier system i.e., the state (provincial) and local governments. There are several ways in which government intervention might redress women's lack of access to educational opportunities in Nigeria:

- First, through the adoption of an economic framework, *femanomics*, designed to deal exclusively with issues related to women's education, in much the way as it adopts its customary five-year development plan.

- Second, through the removal of wage-sector barriers and discriminations that make the education of girls a less attractive proposition for parents than that of boys. (Although data from the present study indicate changing attitudes, there is still enough evidence to show that the education of boys continues to be a priority for parents).
- Third, through the adoption of an all-inclusive philosophy in the formulation of public policies.

### 8.2.1. *Femanomics*<sup>39</sup>

Perhaps the most non-traditional of the intervention measures proposed here, it takes as a starting point the principles of simple economics and relates them to the needs of girls and women. It is a two-pronged intervention model geared towards both girls' education and women's participation in literacy programmes (see Figure 8-1). It argues that the marginalized condition and the degree of female illiteracy can be substantially reduced if such principles are tied to programmes directed towards eradicating female illiteracy. The emphasis is on sustaining the interest of female learners through tangible reward systems. Providing adult female learners with the wherewithal to pursue some kind of income-generating activities while enrolled in literacy programmes would help sustain their participation. As an intervention framework, femanomics is rooted in the notion that the

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<sup>39</sup>**FEMANOMICS** is a concept I developed, referring to enhancing the status of women through positive interventions such as increasing public investments that are aimed at giving them equal access to literacy and educational opportunities.

causes of women's illiteracy are embedded in state and economic structures that deliberately encourage the subordination of women or at least tacitly condone it. As a result, solutions also depend on deliberate state action. Under femanomics, there would be an increase in funding of primary and secondary education for girls including expanding boarding facilities for girls in Nigeria, whose school attendance is often jeopardized by the domestic services they provide at home.

As an economic framework, femanomics assumes that there is an interdependence between education and women's participation in national development. The findings of this study like other studies, confirm a well established view that rural women play pivotal roles in the maintenance of familial well-being. Increasing their chances of education would facilitate such roles and enhance their quality of life. Another fundamental assumption of femanomics is that since other policy interventions have had only limited success (otherwise Nigerian women would have achieved greater educational parity with men), only drastic and non-traditional interventions would make a difference. As Rakowski (1995) argues:

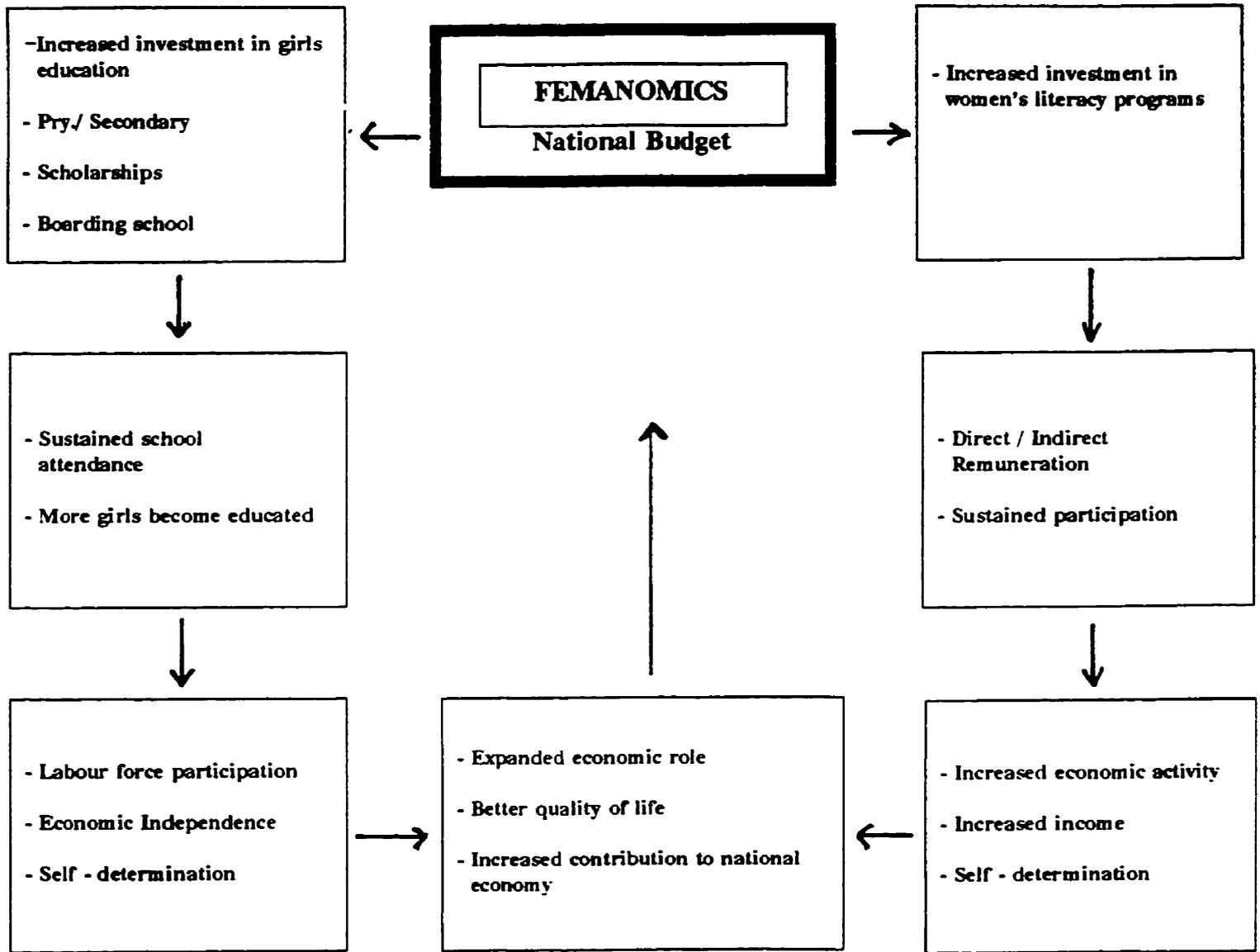
women's potential power-be it economic, political, or personal-familial-[educational] is highest in circumstances where new, nontraditional opportunities arise...than in settings where women are included in or are integrated into traditional forms of production, reproduction, and politics (pp.290-291).

Similarly, Elson (1991) argues that one of the reasons why women continue to remain at the periphery of their respective societies, particularly in developing countries, is that issues

related to them continue to be integrated into existing male-biased development frameworks. As a new intervention paradigm, femanomics then, embraces the following:

- The notion that issues related to women's access to education deserve attention *separate* from but *equal* to that given to other major social policies.
- Direct or indirect remuneration of female adult learners participating in literacy programmes.
- That literate women in general and literate rural women in particular have better access to wage labour, economic independence and individual autonomy.
- The notion that the fundamental way of combatting female illiteracy is to increase investments in girls' education (early intervention), since they eventually become adult illiterates. Such investments should include the expansion of boarding school facilities for girls.
- The notion that investing in women's education can empower and enable them to take control of their own lives and subsequently define for themselves their roles within their respective societies.
- The idea that through education, women can begin to understand the processes that oppress them and how they themselves may contribute to their own subjugation.
- The view that by increasing investment in women's education, they can contribute to the socio-economic development of their societies.

- Because women make up about 51% of the Nigerian population, it simply makes economic sense to invest substantially in their education. Devaluing the tremendous potential of one sector of a society in contributing to national development is an unnecessary waste of human resources.
- The view that instituting economic policies that enhance the earnings of women within the labour force will in turn encourage more parents to send their female children to school



**FEMANOMICS: An Intervention Model**

Adopting the principles of femanomics need not increase educational expenditures.

In many instances, simply increasing internal efficiency in the management of public funds

can result in substantial improvements in education (World Bank, 1995). While the concept may have universal application, it will be particularly useful in poor countries where even the most minimal remuneration will make a significant difference in the lives of adult female learners and their families. Adopting femanomics as an intervention framework will by no means be an easy task. As Stromquist (1990) points out, historically, government policies relating to women's education are "... characterised by substantially more lip service than pertinent allocation of human and financial resources" (p.109).

Ideologically similar but substantively different programmes have been adopted in other countries. Drawing on the results of three programme evaluations, Tietjen and Prather (1991) report a boost in enrollments for girls in a pilot project in Bangladesh in which indigent girls are provided with a monthly stipend to attend secondary schools. Other positive impacts of this project (initiated in 1982) include delayed age of marriage for the girls, reduced fertility and an improved status for girls (and, one can hypothesize women) in the community. While this programme does not include women in non-formal educational programmes, it is an example of how rewards systems can increase adult women's motivation to participate in literacy programmes. Another example of a country where a literacy programme is tied to income generation is Indonesia where the government provides a loan for neo-literates (Ballara, 1992). Femanomics is, however, different to the extent that it advocates remuneration for women while they are *still enrolled* in literacy classes and such monies may not necessarily be considered loans.

### ***8.2.2. Inclusive Public Policy***

In Nigeria, the formulation of public and educational policies remains essentially in the hands of men (Euler-Ajayi, 1989). Women have very little influence in policy-making and program implementation. Without strong female representations within the political milieu, male policy makers fail to address the issue of gender inequities. Profound educational change is inconceivable without the full participation of women in the formulation of policies that affect their lives.

From a critical realist perspective, positive structural reconstruction cannot take place without co-opting women because their views, as important stakeholders, are as important as the structures that require transformation and should therefore be given due consideration.

Additionally, scholars of public policy often underscore the importance of consultations with all possible stakeholders in policy matters to allow for a more global picture of the issues at stake (Dunn, 1981; Pal, 1992).

### ***8.2.3. Removal of Labour Market Barriers***

In general, women in Nigeria are an assetless group, since most physical assets (land, capital etc.) are usurped and controlled by men. However as this study shows, with access to education women are able to convert much more readily the one possession that the assetless owns: potential labour power (Dasgupta, 1993). The reverse is true for the non-literate sample in the study. With little or no employable skills, most remain distant from

the formal wage sector because in Nigeria, distortions within the labour market are particularly prejudicial to the uneducated, the bulk of whom are women. Except in very rare instances such as the case of the three women discussed in Chapter 6, non-literate rural women are excluded from both the formal and informal labour sector. They are excluded from the former because of lack of education and from the latter because of lack of access to capital and other productive resources.

It should be pointed out that although most of the literate women in this study were employed in the formal wage sector, a major structural constraint that affects the education of girls in Nigeria is persistent discrimination within the labour sector. This type of attitude towards women and their education serves to keep them in subservient and dependent positions, and effectively prevents them from participating fully in and benefiting from the development process. This in turn limits parental desire to educate female children because the perceived private returns to such an investment are considered much lower than the returns for boys.

### ***8.3. Sub-systems Interventions***

For the purposes of this work, "sub-systems", refers to structures such as the educational system (formal and informal) that serve as socializing agencies for the state. Thus, critical reconstitution of schools' curricula, existing literacy policies and programmes would be considered as sub-systems interventions.

### ***8.3.1. Meaningful Literacies***

Two important policy implications arise from the ambivalence of the non-literate women towards the potential of literacy in enhancing their living conditions, as seen in the last chapter. The first involves the nature and type of literacy programmes for rural women and the other relates to the question of determining which age cohorts would benefit most from such programmes.

#### ***Rural Women and Meaningful Literacies***

The implication of the attitude of the non-literate women in this study, like those in Ramdas (1990) and Chlebowska (1990), brings this work back to the question of the uses of literacy and what it means to different individuals as they interact with their environment i.e., the social construction of literacy.

Heath's (1983) study of the literacy practices of three culturally different communities (see Chapter 1), Scribner and Cole's study of the Vai of Liberia, Steven May's (May, 1994) account of literacy teaching at Richmond Road, a multiethnic school in New Zealand, and a host of other studies have contributed to a major understanding of the contextual and socio-cultural nature of literacy. Although most of these studies deal with empowering literacies and pedagogical practices among ethnocultural groups, the same principles would also apply to literacy programmes for girls and women in Nigeria.

As the views of the non-literate women in the present work suggest, literacy learning must be relevant to their daily existence and the kinds of activities they engage in. Most of

these women, for instance, engage in agricultural activities. It would make economic sense to provide them with related education in order to achieve greater output through the use of less rudimentary farming tools and techniques as these women continue to. In discussing the potentials of education in development in Sub-Saharan Africa, Browne and Barrett (1991) report different rates of productivity among agricultural cooperatives led by literate women and those led by non-literate women in Gambia, another Sub-Saharan nation.

An empowering literacy for rural women would integrate their needs for survival within their environment and their need to understand and challenge the contradictions in their lives. I found that while non-literate rural women can articulate their survival needs, they seem to have difficulty in articulating the roots of their peripheral condition and are therefore unable to question forces and structures that oppress them. Phrases like "I feel cheated," "I feel inferior" and "I feel as if I am blind" were commonly used in their accounts of their condition. Enabling them to reverse a deep-rooted feeling of negative self-worth must be an essential part of an empowering literacy for these women. As Freire and other critical literacy practitioners and theorists persistently argue, becoming literate means more than the ability to decode and encode written word and textual conventions. Meaningful literacies should result in the acquisition (often unobtrusively), of certain kinds of "consciousness" or conscientization, that are intrinsic in the very process of engaging the written word. Critical literacy would enable rural women, for instance, to recognize and question the sources of their oppression. Any programme that does not address the fundamental causes of women's marginal conditions will only perpetuate further domination

and camouflage the real issues (Ramdas, 1990; Stromquist, 1990, 1992). Stromquist (1990) captures the essence of this argument when she observes that:

A policy to modify one or more of the fragmented determinants of women's educational participation will do little to bring about changes for women. The political nature of women's subordination must be identified and illiteracy seen as an additional expression of uneven power relations (p.109).

Breaking the cycle of poverty and oppression for rural women would depend on an intricate balance between functional literacy (in UNESCO's sense of the word) and critical literacy. The one non-literate participant who was enrolled in a literacy programme reported that her attendance was very irregular because of a lack of fit between her daily life and what she was learning, leading her to conclude that her attendance was a waste of valuable time. This need for relevance is particularly important in Nigerian society where the need for national "unity" encourages standard educational practices although such uniformity does not cut across gender lines. Uniformity in this instance, refers to what is appropriate for the dominant group.

My findings suggest that while access to literacy/education may not completely eliminate deep-rooted patriarchal ideologies or repressive and gendered cultural practices, it does neutralize or at least minimize the impact thus bringing women closer to the centre from the margins.

The literate group in this sample appeared to have more propensity towards analyzing their situation and weighing their options. They condemned, for instance, certain

practices they feel diminish the status of women. Thus, while culture and traditional dogmas may not often permit them to make needed changes as quickly as they would like, they appear to know that choices exist and that if they are so inclined, they can make those choices. In the end, just the knowledge that choices do exist may be the foundation to negotiating new power relations and social order.

### *Age Cohorts and Participation in Literacy Programmes*

A second important policy implication is the determination of which age group would benefit most from literacy programmes in general and from certain kinds of literacy in particular. My findings underscore this often neglected factor perhaps because it may in itself raise questions of what is just.

Before going to the field, my assumption was that literacy programmes were a *sine qua non* for all non-literate women regardless of age. The reverse turned out to be the case. Incorporating women of certain age groups (older women in this case) into literacy programmes may not be feasible and at the very least requires careful consideration. Such women for instance, are least likely to commit the number of years required for tangible results such as participation in formal wage labour. Indeed, current global trends suggest that for literacy to result in significant benefits or higher real incomes, recipients would require more than basic literacy. This, naturally, translates into a substantial number of years of schooling or literacy education.

An alternative policy action is to have different literacy programmes for different age cohorts rather than adopting blanket programmes for all groups. One theme that clearly emerged from the findings of this work is that different groups of women have varying literacy needs. The literacy needs of women aged fifty and above, for instance, would be much more limited and considerably different from those of a much younger age cohort such as the *limbo group* (see Chapter 7), much in the same way as the literacy needs of children in school differ from the literacy needs of non-schooled adults.

Other researchers have offered different but related views on this issue. Using vignettes of non-schooled adults engaged in culturally relevant literacy activities in Morocco, Wagner (1991), distinguishes between two notions of literacy<sup>40</sup>: literacy in the "etic" sense - universal notions of literacy which would include decoding and encoding written words, and literacy in the "emic" sense-literacy that does not include actual engagement with the written word but involves the ability to perform "literacy" activities within a given context. He goes on to argue that in certain contexts, those who are "literate" in the emic sense may not need to become literate in the etic sense to survive in their environments. Rather, he proposes that one literate person can serve the scribal needs (literacy in the etic sense) of others when the need arises. What Wagner is saying is that not everyone needs to be literate in a universally understood way to function in their societies. Wagner's propositions have obvious limitations. For one thing, just being able to repeat regularly practised "literacy"

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<sup>40</sup> As Wagner (1991) points out these notions of literacy were first advanced by Pike (1966) and later modified by Berry and Dansen (1974).

related activities without actually being able to read and write can hardly qualify as being literate, even within the current conception of literacy as *literacies*. Further, besides the importance of learning to read for its own sake, the acquisition of literacy by everyone is becoming more a necessary part of survival, even in the least developed areas of the world. Even so, his proposition like mine, addresses the important questions of appropriateness and relevancy, such as determining for instance which adults would benefit most from literacy programmes. My emphasis, though, is on age cohorts and not on the elimination of whole groups from access to the written word. An overarching policy would be the aggressive pursuance of increased enrollments for girls in both primary and secondary levels, and the reduction of high drop-out rates among girls.

### **8.3.2. Curriculum Reform**

The disempowerment of women in Nigeria is not only legitimized through attitudes, cultural and traditional norms, but also via the school system as a sub-system of the state. Although close scrutiny of Nigerian schools' curricula was beyond the scope of this work, a review of some related secondary data, including some recent results of W.A.E.C. (West African Examinations Council) examinations, shows that girls continue to outnumber boys disproportionately in the so called "feminine" subjects such as home management, food and nutrition, etc. Additionally, the national schools' curricula continue to emerge in related literature as an area where gender-related interventions are critically needed (Etta, 1994; Osinulu et al., 1994). Schools, as powerful agents of socialization, help perpetuate the status

quo and patriarchal ideologies which contribute significantly to the disempowerment of women. If Nigerian girls and women are to become empowered, school structures and practices must also change.

Bourdieu and Bernstein's sociological analysis of the ways through which schools perpetuate and reify differential power relations that play out in the wider society (discussed in Chapter 4) is, in the end, an indictment of schools curricula as complex socializing media. It is therefore not surprising that a universally-shared opinion among proponents of critical pedagogy is that the school curriculum as the source of the problem also holds emancipatory possibilities through critical transformation (see, for instance, Corson, 1993; Lankshear et al., 1993; Giroux, 1983; May, 1994).

Within the Nigerian context, the degendering of schools' curricula is a necessary step in enhancing the status of women. A study of Nigerian primary schools (Biraimah 1987) shows that gender-based stereotyping begins early in the schooling process, although boys and girls come with similar expectations and aspirations and even have similar levels of achievement at first. However, as that study shows, gender differences in aspirations seem to increase with the number of years of schooling (see Tietjen and Prather 1991).

#### ***8.4. Micro-Level Interventions***

Substantive social transformation geared at improving the status of women in rural Nigeria can hardly occur without attitudinal changes within the general society. Another potentially empowering micro-level intervention involves the provision of basic

infrastructure in rural communities to alleviate some of the domestic responsibilities that increase the opportunity costs of educating girls.

#### ***8.4.1 Attitudinal Changes Within Society***

Of all the policy interventions discussed here, this is probably the most difficult to legislate. Most of the attitudinal biases women experience usually occur within the domestic sphere, beyond the scope of public scrutiny. Even including this as a micro-level intervention is problematic, since to a certain extent, this intervention requires legislation on a national scale.

As was pointed out in Chapter 4, women's inferior condition in Nigerian society is as much a function of lack of education as it is the result of the patriarchal ideologies that permeate inter-gender relations and distinguish women as an underclass. The evidence from my own research also points in that direction. Chapter 6 clearly shows that rural women occupy subordinate positions relative to their husbands. Indeed, it would appear that women require a "bargaining chip" such as the one access to literacy and the resulting increase in income earning opportunities provides, in order to contribute significantly to the decision-making process within their households. It is also clear from the women's accounts, that a chasm exists between the social position of men and women in rural communities. While literate rural women argue that they fare much better than their non-literate peers, none suggested that women literate or otherwise have achieved social parity with men. The argument here is that since men obviously constitute much of the problem, they must also

become part of the solution.

Parents in Nigeria need to be sensitized to the importance of educating female children. In this regard, the government will have to mobilize all possible media to propagate a more positive image of women and their vital role in society. The importance of educating women is likely to be more apparent when the traditional portrayal of women as dependent and subordinate appendages to men is reversed. In addition, government intervention is necessary to discourage prejudicial social practices such as early marriages for women and lack of rights to land, which reduce their status and automatically act as constraints to their advancement. Although during pre-colonial days women did not necessarily inherit land, their usufructuary rights were recognized. But with the current commercial ownership of land women have virtually been left out. To ameliorate the general condition of women in Nigeria and rural women in particular, this situation should be reversed.

Clearly, legislating against discrimination of any form is much easier than enforcing enacted rules. However, a persistent public education campaign by the government will contribute significantly to positive attitudinal changes towards women.

#### ***8.4.2. Provision of Infrastructural Facilities***

Most rural communities in Nigeria are neglected in the development process even though the bulk of the population live in these areas. Basic infrastructural facilities such as roads, potable water, mass public transit etc., are virtually non-existent. The result is that

rural women whose productivity sustains these communities do so under unbearable conditions. To alleviate some of the burden, young rural girls are co-opted by their mothers, making it impossible for them to attend school. Although Nigeria has made several attempts at carrying out rural development schemes, most rural communities, like the study area, continue to lack basic amenities. Providing such amenities would considerably reduce the burden of rural women and enable their daughters to attend school on a regular basis.

#### *8.4.3. Women as Agents of Change*

Because Nigerian women are socialized into upholding rigid sex-role norms and submerge their own interests to those of men and children, they themselves contribute significantly to the processes which reinforce disparities in education. Most of the socially undesirable practices which undermine the position of women and emphasize their subordinate role are actually perpetuated by women themselves, indicating the need to sensitize them to their role of complicity in perpetuating hegemony in a Gramscian sense.

The advocacy for increased access to education for women is based on the notion that education would inform and accelerate the need for them to put up resistance and begin the deconstruction of their history. This need for agency on the part of women is an important aspect of their social advancement. As pointed out in Chapter 4, power exists to the extent that those who are controlled allow it to be so. In combatting both structural power and disempowering orthodoxies in Nigeria, women need to form coalitions, which focus on group needs. In challenging some of the cultural practices that oppress them, such

as the rites of widowhood and female circumcision, the literate women in this sample have shown that Nigerian women can interrupt patriarchy. As Alele-Williams (1986) points out in relation to women's literacy in Nigeria, it is the dominant group's knowledge that literate women have the potential of challenging the existing social order, that contributes in some instances, to societal reluctance to educate them. As she puts it:

It is widely believed that educated women do not make 'good' (submissive?) wives; that they are morally corrupt or promiscuous... . However, the real fear was the effects of education on women's attitudes, the newly acquired attitudes are seen as incompatible with their 'proper' roles as wives and mothers (p.33).

Although less prevalent than in the past, this attitude continues to exist especially in rural areas. It is perhaps no coincidence therefore that rural women are the least educated group in Nigeria.

### *8.5. Conclusions*

The findings of this study suggest that literate rural women have a much better quality of life than their non-literate peers. This difference, for the most part, originates from the improved economic conditions resulting from their participation in formal wage labour, which is a consequence of access to education. Even those who are involved in private entrepreneurial activities, do so at a much larger scale than those of their non-literate peers involved in similar economic activities.

It is also clear that non-literate women have relatively less power and see themselves as dependent individuals. But, despite their recognition of the potential of literacy to

improve their quality of life (as seen in Chapter 6), most do not regard the acquisition of literacy as a priority. Nonetheless, they believe that for their daughters, access to literacy is indispensable. For the women themselves, strategies for immediate economic empowerment appear to be their immediate priority. Ironically, literate women's economic independence, the result of access to education, appears to be the most significant and catalytic variable that differentiates the quality of life of both groups of participants. Without economic independence, women cannot begin to renegotiate power relations both within and outside the home. As this study shows, education facilitates that possibility. It not only plays a significant role in enhancing the status of women, it is also the one institutional variable most amenable to policy interventions, in the search for workable options, emancipatory action and normative change.

Even beyond the individual consequences of illiteracy, women's access to literacy in Nigeria has national implications. The participation of women in national development depends on a set of integrated variables, all of which are linked directly or indirectly to the acquisition of education. Nigeria is a developing nation and as such strategies for achieving and maintaining sustainable growth requires the mobilization of all human capital, including women. Since education is intrinsically linked to development, the exclusion of one section of the population is dysfunctional to socio-economic progress. As Fourier (1846) argued social progress is indeed retarded by the subordination of women.

While increased access to educational opportunities is not a panacea for redressing

all the social problems women in Nigeria face (it would be naive to think otherwise)<sup>41</sup>, the central argument in this work has been that it can empower, confer status benefits on and provide them with the foundational tool to take control of their destinies. Increased access to literacy means more women in policy-making positions. Access to literacy and other educational opportunities, therefore, is imperative for social change. Similarly, profound social reconstruction is almost inconceivable without women's equal access to literacy. Moreover, the importance of educational credentials for occupational and social mobility in the country, mandates that all underprivileged groups, especially women, gain access to schooling.

Finally, a colonial policy elaborates the point: by exposing Africans to western literacy, the colonialists had inadvertently, through a system they had designed to exploit, initiated their own exit and at the same time offered Africans the instrument with which to fight for their liberation and independence. *Pari ratiōne*, a similar analogy may well apply to women in Nigeria and indeed Sub-Saharan Africa at some point in history.

### ***8.6. Implications for Further Research***

Although the problem of high illiteracy rates among women in Sub-Saharan Africa has received considerable attention in academic literature, there is, however, a profound void in scholarship vis-à-vis actual research. Few specific studies exist to either support or

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<sup>41</sup> Indeed there is ample evidence that even in very literate societies such as the U.S. Canada, Australia and Great Britain, women continue to be oppressed in various ways despite relative gender parity in educational attainments.

refute claims made in related literature. At the beginning of this project I found out about the paucity of such research material but by the end of the project, I found out that that paucity is critical. In effect there is a desperate need for specific country research in all areas of literacy, particularly those that relate to women in the region. That literacy research is at a stage of infancy in this region of the world is indeed an understatement.

Specifically, this study was designed as an exploratory investigation and so could not possibly cover all facets of the topic. There is therefore a wide range of research possibilities that can be derived from the study. There is the need, for instance, to expand the scope of the study to include a larger sample to allow for generalizability. The area chosen for this study is one of the most educationally progressive areas in the country. The same study could be duplicated in less educationally advanced areas such as the northern parts of the country. There is also the need to duplicate the study with a much younger age cohort. Further, the study looked at literate women who acquired literacy through regular schooling. A similar study could be carried out to examine the quality of life of women who acquired literacy through non-formal channels, and most importantly, to determine the number of years of non-formal literacy instruction required for quantifiable results. In this age of rapid technological advancement and information based economic systems, basic literacy may be only a starting point. Additionally, there is also the need for field-based comparative analysis of the quality of life of urban and rural non-literate women. For instance, would non-literate urban women have the same views about illiteracy as those of their rural counterparts? Together, these studies may provide further insights into the situation of Nigerian women

with regards to access to literacy and educational opportunities.

Because of the complex sociolinguistic landscape of Nigeria, most adult literacy instruction is given in the English language although in principle the government advocates the use of local languages at the initial stage. However, a possible way of allowing some women to participate in literacy programmes, particularly among older women, may be to carry out instructions entirely in local languages. This would of course be difficult since the Igbo dialect of the locality (like many other languages in the country) has no orthography. Nevertheless, there is need to explore the issue through research.

### ***8.7. Cultural Relativism versus Cultural Eclecticism***

Some final thoughts: any discussion of African issues that relies substantively on theoretical underpinnings derived from Western systems of thought, is often problematic. Inevitably, one is faced with the problem of adopting one of two positions: the one being cultural relativism - that no culture and implicitly, related social practices are either inferior or superior, the other being cultural eclecticism, which implies expediency: taking the best of both worlds.

In my opinion, African social issues have been marked by cultural eclecticism as Africans struggle to make the best of the intersection between their traditional systems of thought and Western world views imported through colonial domination. In the process of doing this work, this was surprisingly, a dilemma that confronted me. After all as Olson (1994) in relation to literacy points out, "[a]ll cultures are by definition, successful; if they

were not they would not survive" (preface: p.xv). In examining some of the social practices that oppress women in Nigeria I found myself constantly trying to determine which are embedded in culture, and if so, whether or not such practices are morally defensible. Indeed, as some African female writers have pointed out, Western-derived notions of the status of women may be quite different from African women's perceptions of their own status (Okonjo, 1976; Amadiume, 1987; Teboh, 1994). In the end I found solace in the realization that matters related to taking control of one's destiny transcend territorial boundaries even given cross-cultural differences in social practices. The question of denying access to literacy to women in Sub-Saharan Africa in general and Nigeria in particular, is universally recognizable as unacceptable and involves questions of power and legitimacy. Indeed, within the context of increased globalization and the emergent capitalist society which Nigeria is fast becoming, a good deal of the problems facing women relates to lack of education although culture may also be implicated. The paradox is who is to dictate which culture is right and whose views should prevail: the ethnocentric views of some Western researchers or perhaps the elitist views of some Western-educated African women, both of whom sometimes appear to suggest that for effective development, third world countries may have to abandon their traditions in favour of Western ways. This question remains unanswered. Common sense seems to suggest that while culture may be implicated in the subordination of women in Sub-Saharan Africa, cultural discontinuity is certainly not the solution.

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**Appendix A**

**Interview Guide**

**Personal Information**

Name .....

Age .....

Occupation .....

Number of Children .....

Study Category  
(Literate/non-literate) .....

Marital Status .....

Educational Category  
of Spouse .....

(Literate/non-literate) .....

**Participant's Perception of the Impact of Ill/Literacy**

How do you feel about being literate/non-literate?

What effects do you personally think that this has on your everyday life?

What contributed to your being/not being literate?

Do you think that being /not being literate affects your participation in your community? If so can you explain in what ways?

**Attitude to Children's Education**

Do you have school-aged children?

How do you feel about education in general?

What are your hopes for your children's future?

In what ways do you contribute to your children's education? Do you help with their school work? Who pays their fees and buys of your children's school supplies?

If you were faced with financial difficulties and can educate only some of your children, how would you decide which ones to educate? What criteria would you use in making the decision?

Please describe your children's after school activities i.e. what do they do when they return from school every day?

**Child-rearing Patterns, Personal and Family Health Care**

Are there noticeable differences in your care of male and female children? e.g. Do you circumcise both your male and female children?

Are your children immunized?

What do you usually do when you or someone in your family becomes ill?

How often do you visit your local health clinic?

What would be your reason for visiting the clinic?

Are you familiar with birth control methods?

Have you ever used them? Why/why not?

Can you read doctors' prescriptions? If not who does it for you?

### **Income Generating Activities**

Do you work outside the home? What kind of work do you do?

Do you have other sources of income?

How much money would you say you generate monthly?

Do you own a bank account?

Have you ever sought credit?

Was such credit granted? why do you think you were granted/not granted such credit?

To what extent do you feel you contribute to the financial needs of your family?

Do you engage in agricultural activities?

If so who owns the land you farm on?

### **Household Maintenance**

Please describe your typical day. What time does your day begin and when does it end?

What kinds of activities do you engage in?

In what ways do other members of your family contribute to the daily management of your home?

**Level of Participation in Family and Community Decision-Making**

How are important decisions made in your family?

Who makes the final decisions?

Which community groups (if any) do you belong to?

What part (if any) do you play in local "politics"?

Do you participate in any way in the local administration of your community?

**General Questions**

If you had the opportunity what changes would you make in your life?

What is your perception of the status of women in your community?.

What would you identify as the problems facing women in your community?

**Guide For Non-Literate Participants Only**

Did you receive any type of formal education as a child?

If yes, why did you discontinue?

Have you ever participated in literacy programmes? Why/Why not?

If given the opportunity, would you like to become literate even now?

In what ways (if any) do you think that participating in a literacy programme might affect your life?

If you had to attend literacy class would you require your husband's permission/approval?

Are you aware of any literacy programmes within your community?

If you could go back to school, what would you need literacy for?

### **Coping Strategies**

How do you communicate with members of your family and other relatives who live in other towns?

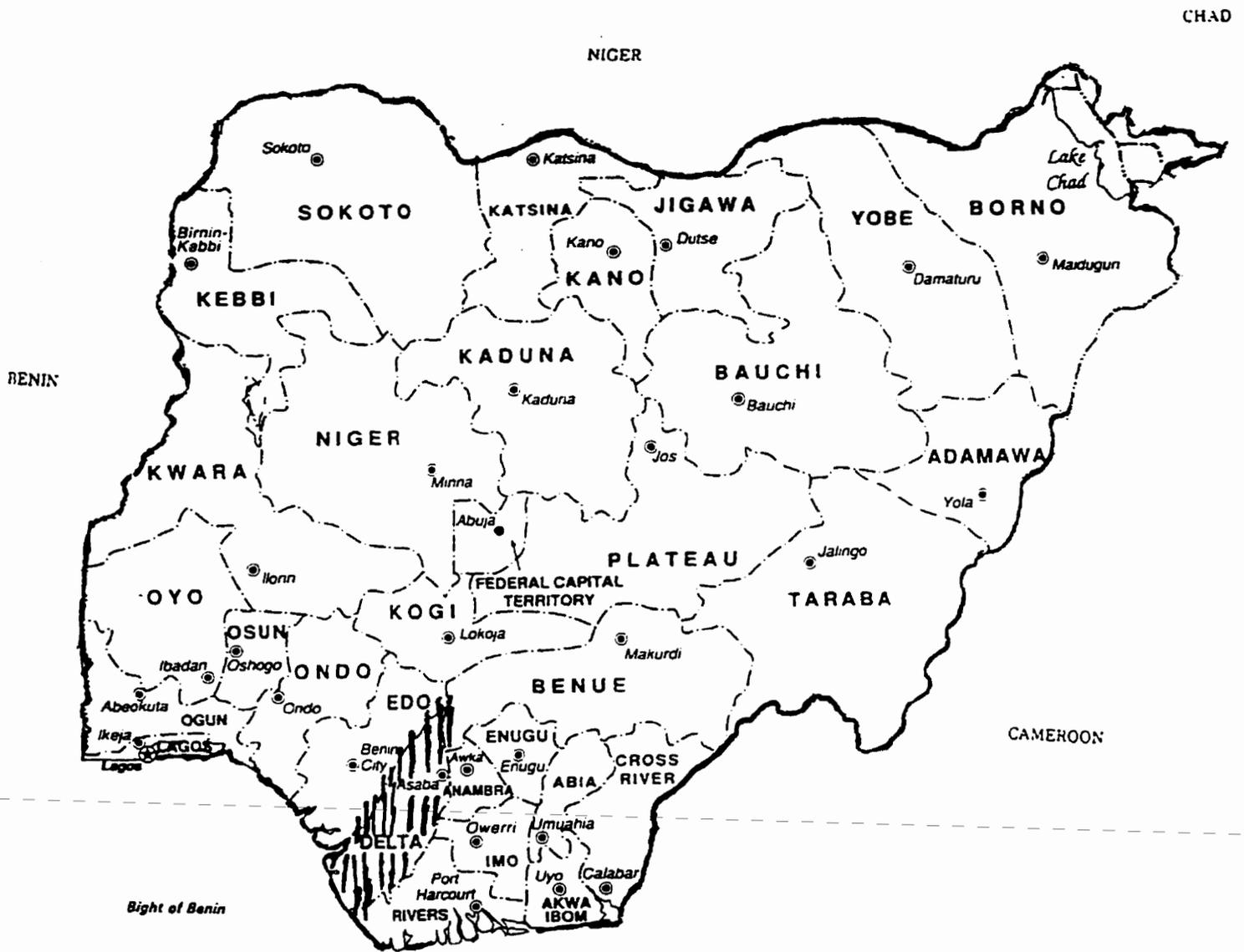
When you receive letters who reads them for you and how do you reply to such letters?

When you go to the chemist and buy medication, how do you know the correct dosage?

Is there any other thing you would like to add to the discussion?

# Map of Nigeria

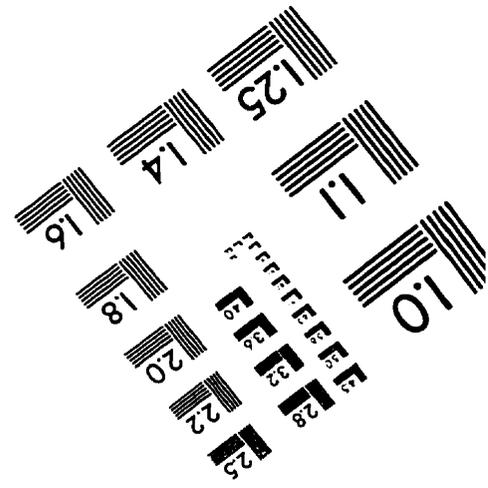
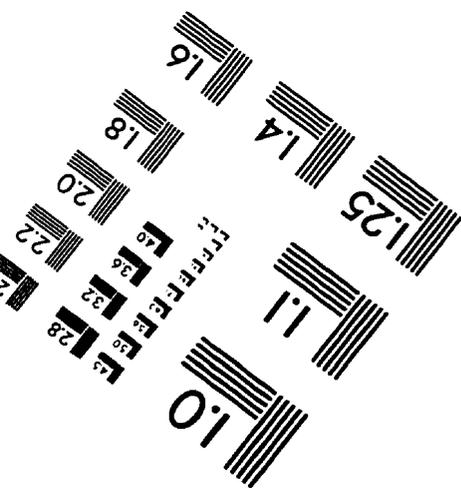
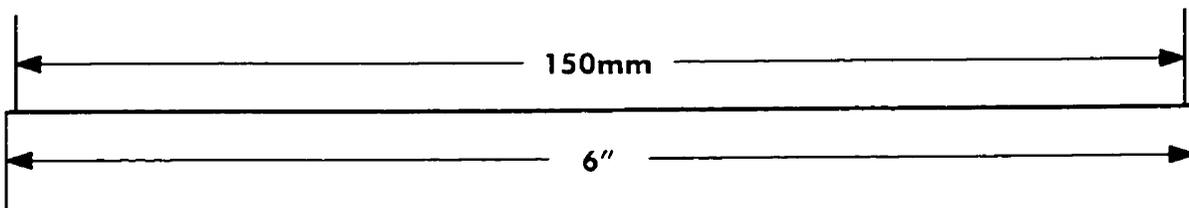
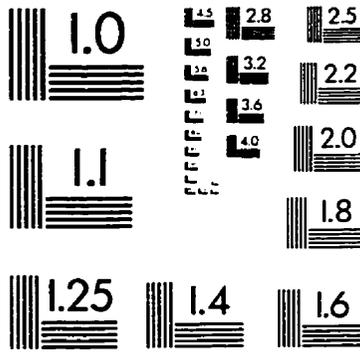
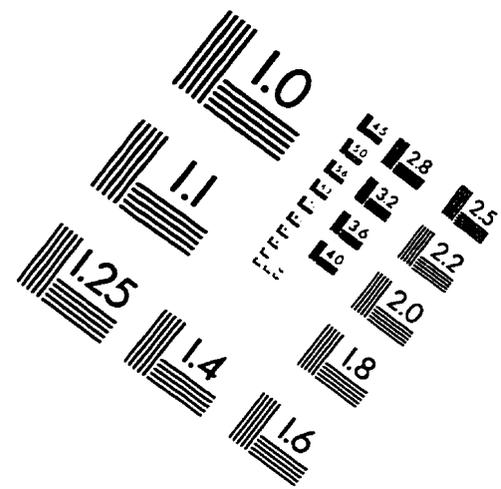
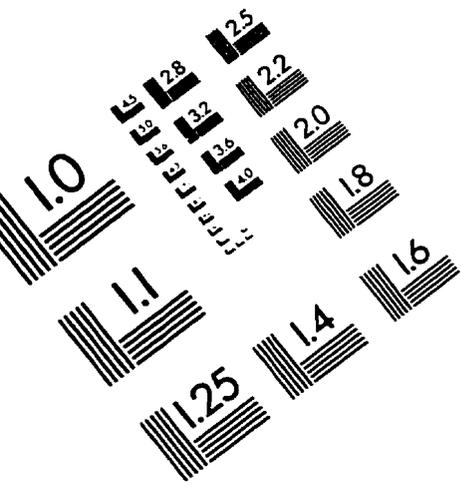
## Appendix B



Study Area



# IMAGE EVALUATION TEST TARGET (QA-3)



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