

*Full Length Research Paper*

# **Sensitizing the female in university admission in South-south geopolitical zone for assurance of sustainable development in Nigeria**

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**There has been a growing belief that the rate of admission of candidates into universities in Nigeria through the Joint Admissions and Matriculation Board (JAMB) has been tilted in favour of the males. This apparent anomaly has resulted in the production of fewer female graduates especially in universities in Nigeria. As a result, the needed female manpower is not sufficiently available in almost all production industries that could provide the needed change in the political and economic spheres for a sustainable development in Nigeria. This is the thrust of this paper which examined the admission rates of females from the South-south zone into universities in Nigeria. Data gathered were analyzed using descriptive statistics. It was found that the rate of female admission into universities from the south-south has been increasing but has remained comparatively low. Strategies were proffered to deliberately favour comparative increase in the rate of admission of females into universities in Nigeria to ensure adequate representation of female graduates in the professions and the production sector.**

**Key words:** Gender access, gender equity, university admission, university education, sustainable development.

## **INTRODUCTION**

Access to university education in Nigeria has been on the increase with the introduction of full decentralization of higher education at the entrance of the 21st century. The Federal Government of Nigeria brought in private investors into higher education, resulting in the establishment of more private universities in Nigeria which has made the total number of universities in Nigeria to be over 90. Globally, higher education is being aligned with the wider demands of economic development, sustainable development and increased modernization. Widening participation in higher education has become a policy thrust and a priority of recent governments (civilian) in Nigeria and other parts of the world. Unfortunately, there seems not to be comparative increase in enrolment rate of females as for the males over the years. This invariably could account for the dearth of high level female manpower in the professions and the production sector of the economy of Nigeria. Research reports such as that of Eribo (1996) had shown a more policy attention to inclusivity and wider

participation initiatives, that have led to a more state interventionist approach to education at all levels in Nigeria.

According to World Bank (2002) estimates, by 2015 there will be 97 million students enrolled in higher education and half of these will be in the developing countries. It is suspected that, this will bring more inclusive policies and practices to bring under-represented groups into the academy. The introduction of universal basic education (UBE) has helped to engender nearly maximum female participation of education at the primary and junior secondary school levels. The quota system policy operated in tertiary education through the joint admissions and matriculation board (JAMB) has equally helped to introduce ethnic balancing and equity in university education in Nigeria and in job placement at the public sector. Governments have also established policy measures even in the National Policy on Education on quota allocation in university admission between the arts and sciences (Federal Ministry of Education- FME,

2004).

However, no corresponding policies or enactments or even pronouncements from governments have been made and consciously pursued with regard to female involvement in university education in Nigeria. According to Adeyemi and Akpotu (2004), the National Policy on Education (NPE) does not have provisions for priority focus of female education in Nigeria universities. This inattention has resulted in low production of female graduates that are needed in the productive and service sectors of the economy in Nigeria. It has been suspected that sustainable development has become a mirage in Nigeria because of the apparent neglect of this important area in the education sector. The South-south geopolitical zone in Nigeria has become very volatile in recent time. The crises that has engulfed the region have given rise to speculations, as to whether the university education provided in this zone and in Nigeria in general, has provided this consciousness and whether a greater percentage of female admission and graduation from universities may not change or reduce the seemingly highly volatile zone, that is believed to produce the major economic resource (crude oil) that is sustaining the whole of Nigeria.

It is possible to ask what efforts have therefore been made, to ensure that females have equitable access to university education, given the fact that, women have always been more than men in Nigeria's population censuses since independence. How can gender sensitization be assured to ensure that females have comparative advantage in university admission in Nigeria? To achieve this purpose in this study, it was necessary to find out the extent females from the south-south geopolitical zone are admitted into universities in Nigeria and thus, the following two research questions were asked and answered.

### Research questions

- i. What is the level of university admission in the south-south geopolitical zone?
- ii. What is the level of admission of females from the south-south geopolitical zone into universities in Nigeria?

### Review of literature

The development of equity in access to university education worldwide has been in focus especially in developing countries such as Nigeria. This concern has arisen because there is a complex process that takes place in education, with regard to its gender dynamic. The gender parity index (GPI) has been emphasized to indicate the extent to which males and females are equally present at different levels in the education system. The American association of university women

(AAUW) (1998) while reporting on the existence of gender gaps in American schools emphasized the need to shift focus on girls' education from issues bordering on quality to equity. The association believes that, equitable education appropriately addresses the needs of males and females rather than assuming that those needs are identical.

Regardless of the specific causes of gender gaps, schools have a commission to ensure that, all students can fully participate in and experience educational success. Morley (2005) had reported that, there is gender disparity in university education in African countries and there is reluctance especially in Nigeria and Tanzania, to remedy the under-representation of women in higher education through quota programmes. It also reported that South-Africa is tackling the problem through the development of gender empowerment measure (GEM).

The difficulty in ensuring gender equity in education has been traced to a number of discriminatory practices such as excluding women from career development opportunities, prejudice against women-particularly mothers, gender insensitive pedagogical processes, sexual harassment and gender violence, prejudice about women's academic abilities and widespread male domination of knowledge. Adeyemi and Apkotu (2004) had found the highest proportion of female enrolment (42.13%) to come from the faculty of education followed by the faculty of arts (36.2%) while the lowest percentages were obtained in the faculties of engineering, technology and environmental design in universities in Nigeria. It concludes that barriers to women's entry into non-traditional subject areas include poor career advice, lack of role models, negative attitudes from families, fear of mathematics and fear of being in a minority.

Women's access to schooling in general and higher education in particular is far from equal to men. The AAUW (1997) has affirmed that, official statistics for enrolment tend to under-estimate the dimension of this problem. Many benefits are believed to accrue to investment in female education. From the social dimension, these include lower fertility rates, improved children and women's health, greater life expectancy for women and men and higher schooling attainment by new generations (UNESCO, 1998). With regard to individual improvements, they include older age of marriage, reduced teen pregnancy, greater participation and productivity into the labour force and greater sense of independence in economic and political decisions.

### METHODOLOGY

This study is descriptive and uses the "ex-post-facto" because of the reliance on the admissions already carried out by the Joint Admissions and Matriculation Board (JAMB). The data were collected from JAMB publications and were not subjected to any form of manipulation. The focus of this study was the university admissions carried out by JAMB between 2000 and 2004. Data

**Table 1.** University male and female admission rates in South-South Geo-political zone 2000 to 2004.

States		2000			2001			2002			2003			2004		
		M	F	T	M	F	T	M	F	T	M	F	T	M	F	T
Akwa-Ibom	N %	808 55.9	636 44.1	1444	1623 61.2	1031 38.8	2654	1964 49.8	1987 50.2	3951	21654 52.4	1964 47.6	4128	4324 53.8	3812 46.2	8136
Bayelsa	N %	418 62.3	253 37.7	671	1587 64.7	862 35.3	2445	667 67.8	347 34.2	1014	2491 62.7	1481 37.2	3972	2560 61.1	1631 38.9	4191
Cross-River	N %	343 61.1	218 38.9	561	734 66.3	373 33.7	1107	813 60.4	533 39.6	1346	1173 60.1	779 39.9	1952	1411 58.5	1001 41.9	2412
Delta	N %	2494 58.2	1763 41.8	4217	3859 58.5	2742 41.5	6601	2289 58.9	1598 41.1	3887	3930 58.5	2787 41.5	6717	5214 54.8	4300 45.2	9514
Edo	N %	2118 60.3	1397 39.7	3515	2149 61.5	1344 38.5	3493	1861 62.1	1135 37.9	2996	3941 59.1	2724 40.9	6665	3824 57.7	2806 42.3	6630
Rivers	N %	1105 57.3	822 42.7	1927	3412 56.5	2590 43.2	6002	1079 57	813 43	1892	3884 55.2	3148 44.8	7032	2719 55.4	2186 44.6	4905
Total	N %	7846 58.7	5089 41.3	12335 100	13364 61.5	8938 38.5	22302 100	8673 57.5	6413 42.5	15086 100	17583 100	12883 42.3	30466 100	18782 54.4	15736 45.6	34518 100

Key: N = Number of admission; % = percentage; M = male; F = female and T = total.

from a five year range was seen to be adequate and were the most recent data approved and made public by JAMB. The data collected from JAMB records were analyzed with the use of descriptive statistics especially percentages. The results are presented in Tables 1 and 2.

Table 1 clearly shows that, there has been a steady increase in admissions into universities from the south-south geopolitical zone of Nigeria between 2000 and 2004. From 12,335 in 2000, it rose to 34,518 in 2004. A variation in the trend was noticed in 2001 when 22,302 candidates were admitted. The males continued to dominate in admission from 2001 to 2004. The dominance was prominent in all the six states with the only exception in the

2002 admission for Akwa-Ibom with 50.2% for females as against 49.8% for males. Of all the states in the zone, only Delta and Rivers consistently had female enrolment rate of slightly above 40% for the five year period under study (2000 to 2004); but in the last year under study (2004), all the states with the exception of Bayelsa, had above 40% female admission. Edo State had slightly above 40% enrolment in 2003. The zone had above 40% female admission in 2000, 2002, 2003 and 2004.

Table 2 shows the national admission into all universities and the admission from the six states in the zone combined. All the years had a range of between 24.6 and 29.7% of the total university admission for the period under

study. While it was lowest in 2001 (24.6), it rose to the highest of 29.7 in 2002, while it was 28.2% in 2004. It is interesting to note that, the south-south zone that makes up about 16% of the states in Nigeria controls more than one-quarter of the admissions into universities in Nigeria through JAMB.

## DISCUSSION

The findings have revealed the consistently lower rate of admission of females in South-south

**Table 2.** Percentage admission rate of South-south Zone in Nigeria 2000 to 2004.

		2000			2001			2002			2003			2004		
		M	F	T	M	F	T	M	F	T	M	F	T	M	F	T
South-south zone	N %	7246 27.2	5089 26.6	12335 26.9	13364 24.3	8938 21.7	22302 24.6	8673 27.2	6413 32.2	15086 29.7	17583 29.6	12883 28.6	30466 29.1	18782 26.9	15736 29.5	34518 28.2
National	N %	26665	19101	45766 100	54972	35797	90769 100	31942	19903	51845 100	59742	45415	105157 100	69715	52777	122492 100

Key: N = Number of admission; % = percentage; M = Male; F = Female; T = Total.

geopolitical zone of the country. This is in line with the earlier findings of Adeyemi and Akpotu (2004) that even though there has been increase in the level of admission of females in higher education, there has also been a corresponding lower enrolment than males in universities. It also agrees with the observation of Morley (1997) that, there is need to strategize and create equality in higher education between males and females.

The perpetual disadvantaged position of females in the south-south, in admission into universities in Nigeria; do reflect the situation persisting in the whole country on issues relating to the education of women in higher education. UNESCO (1998) had expressed a great concern over the absence of gender dimension in higher education in general and in higher education curriculum in particular. There seems to be no strong alignment between policy discourses and organizational practices. This gap in policy implementation is not exclusive of higher education in Nigeria because she has consistently been party to policy decisions at global conferences in general sensitization in higher education in particular and all levels of the education system in general. The findings also show that, the much expected 50-50 enrolment

between males and females is far from being achieved. The existing gender inequality may seem to be a function of factors beyond the universities in Nigeria, irrespective of the phenomenal increase in the number of universities. This may be a result of high levels of female dropout and poor attendance at the secondary school level of education. It can also be attributed to the several factors that affect girls' education, at the lower levels of the education system such as cultural issues, early marriages, poverty, parents' negative attitude to girls' education, absence of role models, among others.

### Conclusion

Female access and equality in university education has not been given enough sensitization for meaningful contribution to sustainable development in Nigeria. Admission into higher education has continued to be tilted in favour of males, as the females have always had comparatively less opportunities for admission into universities in the south-south geopolitical zone in particular and Nigeria in general. Sustainable development is not assured in the

absence of proper articulation and implementation of guidelines for female education.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

Career guidance and sensitization should start at lower levels of education. This could be built up right from primary school. Any career guidance after secondary education may not be of much benefit, as students would already have selected subjects and made up their minds to not pursue higher education. The introduction of special scholarship for females should be a matter of policy, both at the federal and state levels. This should be well publicized for the bright female students from poor background to be aware of such opportunity. There should be a policy shift from the present admission criteria being operated in Nigeria. The introduction of quota should be extended to gender. If it is working for the educationally disadvantaged states and local governments, it will also be effective in redressing the imbalance in male and female ratio in university admission.

The federal government should immediately embark on reviewing the National Policy on

Education, to create a section on gender education, to spell out the modalities of expanding access and equity for female education in higher education, especially at the university level.

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