

## IMPLICATION OF GIRL CHILD EDUCATION ON THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT OF NIGERIA.

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BY

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### *ABSTRACT*

*The quantity and quality of education available to Nigerian girls/women will invariably determine the developmental pace of Nigerian families and Nigeria nation at large. It should be noted that what Nigerian girls /women are today and what they will be tomorrow depends on what plans Nigeria as a country has for the girl child. Nigeria is craving for patriotic citizens to develop their potentials politically, economically, socially and technologically. The actualization of these wonderful goals is dependent on the provision of functional education to the citizenry especially the girls who are future mothers, future teachers of children. Unfortunately, the right of a girl-child to access quality education has been denied and there are consequences. Though some of the challenges are deeply rooted in our traditional background, they have affected the society at large. This paper hereby seeks to determine the implication of the girl-child education on the socio-economic development of Nigeria.*

**KEY WORDS:** Gender, Human Resource, Girl Child Education, Nation Building.

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### **Introduction**

The Universal Declaration on Human Rights which was adopted in 1948 provides for access to education as a fundamental human right. Over the years, literacy level which is being influenced by access to quality basic education became an elemental metric in rating countries on human development performance. Historically and globally, boys have had lesser bottlenecks than girls in accessing formal education. Following this, several researches started highlighting the correlation between the enrolment of girls in school and increase in life expectancy and literacy levels; gross domestic product; as well as reductions in maternal and child mortality rates in countries. This has inspired debates on the enrolment of girls in schools as a large component of human capital investment in any country.

Nigeria as a country has been rated as one of the countries with poor statistics in ensuring the education of the girl-child. This has been despite several strategies that the country has employed to reverse such trend and counter gender disparity in education. These strategies encompass the 1998 establishment of the National Commission for Mass Literacy and Non-formal Education, 1999 Family Support Basic Education Programme, 2001 Universal Basic Education Policy, 2004 Strategy for the Acceleration of Girls Education in Nigeria and the 2007 Universal

**Basic Education Act**, amongst others. **Most** of these policies were created in order to achieve the **Education For-all** goals as well as the **Millennium Development Goals**. However, these policies were not able to achieve all their targeted results. **Nigerian** girls still have a considerable number of challenges in obtaining equitable access to education. The northeastern part of the country, especially the conflict-affected states has some of the poorest rankings regarding girls' enrolment. Apart from the headlining effect of conflict caused by the insurgency that became more adverse in 2010, northeastern states have been one of the lowest ranking states with regard to key education. Statistics such as enrolment, completion, attendance and literacy rates for girls due to the religious, cultural/ internal dynamics, economic and geographical inequalities, poverty, crisis in the implementation of national and state policies on education, as well as terrorism precipitated insecurity in recent times have proved this.

Girl-child education has a considerable influence on society, resulting in healthier and more empowered children. This chapter examines some of the challenges of Girl-child education to the attainment of the **Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)** in **Nigeria** and its implication on socio-economic development. This is aimed at providing valuable insight into the complexity of gender, human resource development and the overall socio-economic development of the nation. This chapter therefore aligns itself to other crusade aimed at dismantling all forms of institutional and man-made impediments to girl-child education in the state.

### **Gender and Human Resource**

Education is believed to be an instrument of state and national development which could be employed to achieve political, economic and social developments. Education is the key to ending poverty. The **UNESCO MMC** report shows that two thirds of all those who have no access to education are girls and women. Sixty five million girls and women never even started school, and an estimated 100 million do not complete primary education, often because the quality is poor and their opportunities are far from equal to those of boys. More than 170 million women are illiterates, many as a result of inadequate or incomplete schooling. In an age of enormously expended effort to increase access to all levels of education, of high aspirations for political participation, and huge growth of knowledge, nearly three quarters of a billion girls and women are being denied education (**UNESCO, 2000**). **UNICEF (2003)** reported that in **Sub-Saharan Africa**, the number of girls out of school each year has risen from 10 million in 2000 to 14 million in 2001. **Offorma (2000)** confirmed that disparity in educational attainment is more in the **Northern** part of the country in favor of the boy-child than in the southern part. **Bashir (2000)** observed that the level of female illiteracy in **Taraba State** (about 61 percent) is probably the highest in **Nigeria**. Since 2000, **UNESCO** and the global community have been striving to attain the **Dakar Education for All (EFA) Goals**.

Considering the fact that education for girls and women is an urgent priority, the **Dakar Framework for Action** contained a time-bound goal devoted specifically to gender parity and equality in education. Moreover, special attention has been paid to women and girls in other goals: for example, **Goal 2** stipulates that we must "ensure that by 2015 all children, particularly girls, children in difficult circumstances and those belonging to ethnic minorities have access to a complete free and compulsory primary education of good quality" (**EFA, 2000**) development and the overall socio-economic Education is an important foundation to improve the status of women and has also been recognized as a fundamental strategy for development. **No** sustainable development is possible if women remain un-educated, discriminated against and disenfranchised. Improving and widening access to education, especially basic education, is not only an objective in itself but also accelerates social and economic advancement. The evidence is out: nations that invest in girl's education enhances economic productivity and growth. In fact, the **World Bank** has stated that there is no investment more effective for achieving development goals than educating girls.

The second **Millennium Development Goal** challenges the international community's commitment to ensure universal primary school completion and to

eliminate gender disparities in primary and secondary education by 2015. This goal is grounded in the recognition that access to basic education is a human right, and a vital part of individuals capacity to lead lives that they value. In addition, education is a powerful instrument that enables women to access a variety of opportunities, while rendering them less vulnerable to HIV/AIDS, abuse, and exploitation. Improving basic education, especially female education, has a powerful influence on both mortality and fertility. Indeed, the close relationship between education and demographic changes has clearly emerged in a number of recent empirical studies. A wide range of theoretical analyses from different disciplines confirms that education improves health and reduces fertility. For example, women with formal education are much more likely to use reliable family planning methods, delay marriage and childbearing, and have fewer (and healthier) babies than women with no formal education. The effect is particularly pronounced for secondary school. Women with a secondary school education tend to have better knowledge about health care practices, are less likely to become pregnant at a very young age, tend to have fewer, better-spaced pregnancies, and are more likely to seek antenatal care, postnatal care, and skilled attendance at delivery. The effect is profound: for each additional year of schooling provided to young women, fertility declines by 10%. In fact, it has been estimated that one additional year of school for 1,000 women would avert two maternal deaths.

### Concept of Girl Child Education

The importance of girl-child education cannot be over emphasized. The girl child is seen as a young female person who would eventually grow into a woman and marry. Within the context of education, many scholars have defined girl-child education in various ways. The National Child Welfare Policy (1990) as cited by Ada (2000) defines girl-child as a person below 14 years of age. Oforima (2000) defines girl-child as a biological female offspring from birth to eighteen (18) years of age. This period is made up of infancy, childhood, early and late adolescence stage of development. The girl-child is seen as a young female person, who would eventually grow into women and marry. She is conditional to look after the young ones, the home and the kitchen. Girl-child education is a catch-all term for a complexity of issues and debates surrounding education (primary education, secondary education, tertiary education and health education for females. Girl-child education also includes areas of gender equality, access to education and its connection to the alleviation of poverty, good governance, which are major ingredients in averting crime against women. Today's girl-child education is for her tomorrow's living.

Afebeugne in Ugwu (2001) defines women education as the education that would make a woman become aware of herself and her capacity to exploit her environment, and involves training in literacy and vocational skills to enable her become functional in the society. When maternal care is adequately provided for the girl-child the aims and objectives of education will be achieved. However, current efforts including national and global programmes have been to target the increase in the enrolment of the girl-child into the different levels of education in Nigeria. The federal government introduced the Universal Basic Education Programme to provide cheap and affordable education to all and sundry. Most states in Nigeria have also introduced free and compulsory primary and secondary schools for both male and female children in various states. Again, most state governments have also passed the child rights and protection acts that will eliminate (or at least reduce) the withdrawal of the girl-child from school and to prevent parents or guardians from using their school age children to hawk or do endless labour activities. This is so important because it promotes girl-child education, which chances nation building. Girl-Child Education and Nation Building Education is one of the most critical areas of empowerment for Women. Education is central to development and improvement of the nation's welfare. It is a powerful 'equalizer', opening doors to all to lift themselves out of poverty.

### Wrong Notions of Girl -Child Education

In Africa, women are considered as men's properties or pleasure objects. They are also considered as a 'machine' meant for producing children. These situations have resulted in unfair treatment of women especially with regards to education of the male-child than the female child. In the traditional Nigerian society, there exist a belief that women are second-class citizen (Enejere, 1991). The author further avers that gender inequality in Nigeria is promoted by religious and communal customs. Young girls particularly in Northern Nigeria are denied the benefit of education. This has given consequences for both the individual and the society at large. Obinaju (2004) sees education as inalienable right of all irrespective of the person's circumstance. Education in its general sense is a form of learning in which knowledge, skills, values, benefits and habits of a group of people are transferred from one generation to the next through storytelling, discussion, teaching, training or research. Education has been described as the most important aspect of human development, a key to a successful living.

#### **Implications of Girl Child Education to Nation Building:**

Afendeugne in Ugwu (2001) defines women education as the education that would make a woman become aware of herself and her capacity to exploit her environment, and involves training in literacy and vocational skills to enable her become functional in the society. When maternal care is adequately provided for the girl-child, the aims and objectives of education will be achieved. However, current efforts including national and global programmes have been to target the increase in the enrollment of the girl-child into different levels of education in Nigeria. Such implications include the following:

- **Poverty Reducing Effects:** Girl-child education can vitally contribute to the attainment of the Millennium Development Goals. While two of the goals pertain directly to education, education also helps to reduce poverty, promote gender equality, lower child mortality rate, protect against HIV/AIDS, reduce fertility rates and enhance environmental awareness (Mordi, 2000).
- **Improve Health and Nutrition:** According to Kiki (2010), education greatly benefits personal health particularly for girl-child, it profoundly affects reproductive health immunization rates. Education may be the single most effective preventive weapon against HIV/AIDS. If the issue of HIV/AIDS is rampant in a particular country, the force and economic growth will be affected. Again through the awareness of girl-child education, the rate of HIV/AIDS will be reduced to the barest minimum and this will have positive impact on Nation Building.
- **Reduces Inequality:** Education reduces illiteracy that is one of the strongest predictors of poverty. Primary education plays catalytic roles for those most likely to be poor, including girls, ethnic minorities, orphans, disabled people and rural families. By enabling larger members to share in the growth process, education can be the powerful tide that lifts all boats (Okeke, Nzewi and Njoku, 2000).
- **Reduces Women's Fertility Rates:** Women with formal education are much more likely to use reliable family planning methods, and have fewer and healthier babies than women with no formal education. This development enhances Nation Building.
- **Lower Infant and Child Mortality Rates:** According to Ocho (2000), women with some formal education are more likely to seek medical care, ensure their children are immunized, be better informed about their children's nutritional requirements, and adopt improved sanitation practices. As a result, their infants and children have higher survival rates and tend to be healthier and better nourished. If children survive through adequate medical facilities provided by a country, that aspect greatly enhances Nation building.
- **Increase Women's Labour Force Participation Rates and Earnings:** Girl-child education has been proven to increase income for wage earners and increase productivity for employers, yielding benefits for the community and society.

Despite these contributions to Nation building, women education has always been marginalized due to cultural practices and political decision. The effect of this situation has led to certain deprivations that have hindered women and girl-child in particular from maximizing their capacities in the development process of their communities. In Nigeria, as in other African countries, women are not held in high-esteem, consequently female education is seen as a wasteful venture as people think that the role of women is for procreation and confinement to the kitchen. This is the challenge of girl-child education today.

### Hindrances to Girl-Child Education

The following are some of the hindrances which negates the effectiveness of Girl - Child Education

- a) **Economic Factors:** Nigeria as an independent entity is undoubtedly characterized by very harsh economic conditions. This has resulted into scarce resources. As a result of this, choice has to be made between whom to send to school. Most often, it is the girl-child that remains at home. Also, distance to the nearest school is a major hindrance. The girls get withdrawn from schools so as to help to supplement family income through hawking, trading or even working on the farm so as to support the family. In some cases, the girls are given out as house helps or even sent into early marriage because of a huge bride price (UNICEF, 1100C).
- b) **Sexual Violence and Abuse:** This also hampers the girls from going to school due to this fear of sexual violence: most parents deny their girl-children access to school.
- c) **Political Factors:** Despite the fact that Nigeria is signatory to various international conventions on the right of children, so far very little has been achieved in respecting children rights. The situation remains pathetic and serious. For instance, at the formation of the United Nations which is almost six (L) decades old, the precarious situation of the children worldwide became so obvious that it became necessary to establish UNICEF with special focus on the needs of the children around the world.
- d) **The School Environmental factors:** Often, most parents are scared of sending their female children to school in distance places and would rather keep them at home. According to Obinaju (1101V), curricular, textbooks and other materials are usually gender-biased. She opines that right from childhood, girls are channeled into stereotyped traditional carrier in form of textbooks illustrations and stories consequently leading to the development of poor self image at a tender age. Also sexual harassment during educational pursuit creates serious emotional and psychological strain on the girl-child.
- e) **Socio-Cultural and Religious Factors:** In most African societies, especially in Nigeria, the role of the girl as a wife and mother is conceived as the utmost priority not only by her parents, but also by the girl child herself. However, in the Nigeria context, gender discrepancy in education is sustained by cultural factors. The wrong notion that her place is in the kitchen, to be seen and not to be heard have had very serious implications on the girl-child's ability at self-actualization. Obinaju (1101V) notes that out of the 1110 million children in LCDs without access to education, 01 million are girls. Also, certain cultural and traditional practices like female circumcision, early marriages etc are to say the least unprogressive because they lead not only to absenteeism distraction, but also to eventual dropout of girls. More so, the ethnic and values of some religions do not help matters, as they are often perceived with tremendous suspicions. Cultural biasness is another factor whereby a girl is deprived of formal education but rather sent to Qur'anic schools.

### Conclusion

The importance of education to a child and also for overall development of a nation cannot be over emphasized particularly the girl-child. Therefore, education is the right of every girl-child, a key to transforming her life and making her a responsible member of society. Without education, girls are denied the opportunity to develop their full potentials and play productive role in Nation Building. Although some

efforts have been made to improve girl-child education in **Nigeria**, much still needs to be done if women must realize their potential and fully contribute to the political, socio-economic and technological transformation of the country.

### **Recommendations**

In order to overcome the challenges of girl-child education in **Nigeria**, the following recommendations are put forward: **Government** at all levels should give more attention to girl-child education. This is because if they are well educated, they will have chances of contributing to nation building. **Well to do individuals** can contribute to girl-child education by giving them scholarship to study in higher institutions, provision of school facilities and equipment that can ease their learning effectively as it contributes to nation building. The need to create more awareness for parent on sexual violence and abuse is imperative. This can be through radio and newspaper jingles and advertisement; as well as periodical seminars and conferences. **More so**, government should enforce law as regard to sexual violence and abuse in order to deter others from terrorizing the girl-child while in the school as it contribute to nation building. **Nigeria** negative attitude towards girl-child education should be discarded completely. **UNICEF** policies on equal rights to education should be strictly followed by government at all levels in **Nigeria** for the enhancement of **Nation** building. **Government** and non-government agencies should establish more boarding schools for girl-children to discourage parents from the notion of geographical distance, environmental hazards vis-à-vis the vulnerability of the girl-children. **Nigeria** society should not use socio-cultural and religious factors as yardsticks to relegate the girl child to the kitchen. The education of the girl-child should be as important as that of the boy-child if not more important as peoples' opinion assert that when a woman is educated, a nation is educated.

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