

## GIRL-CHILD EDUCATION FOR CHANGING COMMUNITIES

*Dr. R. E. Aghadinazu*

### **Abstract**

*Education is essential and a necessary tool for positive change. It is the bedrock of human resource and capital development in any nation. Education of a girl-child is a great asset to any nation. This is because “the education of a woman generates to the education of a nation, but the education of a man is the education of an individual”. This popular adage, infers that the growth and development of any community and the nation depends greatly on the active participation of women in every sphere of life among which are; education, economic, social, health and politics. Investment made in respect to girl-child education is a guarantee that the future generation, will be educated which is crucial for changing communities and society at large. Irrespective of the fact that history has recorded significant number of notable women’s contribution to communities and national development, a lot still need to be done as it concerns girl-child education in our contemporary society. In view of the above, this paper identified the impediments and benefits of girl-child education in our communities. Counselling implications were highlighted and recommendations made towards the improvement of girl-child education for changing communities.*

Education is an essential and necessary tool for positive change. It is the cornerstone and bedrock of human resource as well as capital development of any nation. Education is the route through which youths are socialized and integrated into the values of the society. According to Bolarin (2005), the level and type of people determine the level of their civilization,

development, status, survival and quality of life. It bestows authority and prestige to those who pursue it with determination and strength.

Investment in girls’ education according to Okeke (2011) is a way of reducing poverty in the society. Onyido (2010) opines that “girl-child education is one of the most important investments that could be used for the future of any country”. Following the popular adage that the education of a man boils down to the education of an individual, while that of a woman generates into the education of a nation, girl-child education is very imperative for proper growth, development and continuity of any community and society at large.

Rufai (2001), Obyanya (2003) and Onyido (2010), opine that investing in girl-child education is a gate way to economic increase and the best investment any society can make. According to the above researchers, girl-child education is linked to Gross National Products (GNP) growth, increased productivity, labour force participation, decreased infant and maternal mortality as well as improved child health.

Also, UNICEF (2004) reports that girl-child education is capable of making enormous difference towards a woman’s chances of gaining well-paid job, raising a healthy children, preventing the spread of killer diseases such as HIV and AIDS among others. In support of the above, Osokoya (2004) opines that girl-child education is imperative for skills,

information and self-confidence needed by a woman to be a better parent, worker and citizen tomorrow. Society benefits more when schools open their doors wider to girl-child education. Thus, for positive changes, growth, development of community and society at large, girl-child education is very imperative and must not be compromised.

### **Impediments to Girl-Child Education**

The Federal government in an attempt to ensure quality education for her citizenry, came up with different policies such as Education Trust Fund (ETF) among others which mandates every corporation and private business to deposit 2% of their profit into education, Petroleum Trust Fund (PTF) which going by 1997 budget speech, allocated 17 million naira to education. All state government allocates funds to education on their yearly budgets. However, irrespective of the above efforts, impediments still exist as it concerns girl-child education. Some of these impediments are discussed as follows:

#### **1. Social and Cultural Factors**

This is one of the factors that pose as impediment to girl-child education in our society. In some cultures, education of a girl-child is believed to be a waste of resources and an abomination. A woman's rightful place is in the kitchen, producing and nursing babies as well as playing her conjugal roles. According to Nwanekezi and Onyido (2010), education of women is regarded as a threat to male chauvinism. Some men hold the belief that educated women are not submissive to their husbands; they are difficult to control, loose, immoral and promiscuous.

A girl-child is forced into marriage to a man old enough to be her grandfather in some cultures rather than educate her. The reasons behind it are:

- That girl tends to engage in premarital sexual relationships if they are not married after puberty.

- That a girl-child can learn to love and respect her husband at an early age; hence, become very close and attached to him as she comes of age.

- That wise and matured girl accepts her father's choice of life partners.

- That a girl-child is likely to be influenced negatively in her choice of a life partner by how the man looks, his physique or wealth, than any other thing. According to Ocholi (1995) in a study of teenage marriage, 70% of the illiterate parent respondents maintain that teenage marriage is a cultural phenomenon and culture must be cherished and adhered to. This implies that a girl-child should be barred from going to school or asked to withdraw so as to marry. The resultant effect is illiterate child-motherhood, high divorce rate, malnutrition, low-birth rate, and infant mortality leading to low national development.

#### **2. Gender Discrimination**

This is the situation where parents prefer male children more than girls and as a result, are ready to sponsor their education. According to Akpama *et al.*, (2007), "gender discrimination which is the preference of the other is a factor of imbalance which inhibits the much desired expected change through education".

One of the objectives enshrined in the National Policy on Education (NDE) is the provision of an increasing number of schools for the purpose of educating the youths irrespective of sex, social, religion, and other ethnic background. Also, the Universal Basic Education Scheme (UBES) introduced in 1990, aims at facilitating effective competition of children in single and co-educational schools, so as to facilitate literate population to promote economic, political and social development. Thus, the policy coincides with the United Nations Convention (UNC) on the right of the child which reiterates that education is the

### *Girl-Child Education for Changing Communities*

fundamental right of the child (Akpama *et al.*, 2007).

In the same vein, the United Nations Millennium Summit (UNMS) in September (2000), at Dakar World Education Forum advocates the elimination of gender discrimination in all levels of education by 2015. Also, UNICEF (2004) Millennium Development Goals encouraged that all children should have access to quality and quantitative education by year 2015. However, gender discrimination still persists in our educational institutions.

#### **3. Socio-Economic Status**

The socio-economic status of the family is one of the impediments to girl-child education. In the context of this work, socio-economic status represents the worth or value of the family in terms of finance. Brown and Alder (1998) see socio-economic status as the position of a person in relation to others in the society with respect to money, power and achievements. Families that find it absolutely very difficult to provide a course meal for the family owing to poverty, may see girl-child education as irrelevant and a venture for the wealthy.

#### **4. Teenage Pregnancy**

Teenage pregnancy which is a major contributing factor to girl-child drop-out from school is on the increase in the society today. The incidence of pregnancy often occurs in our secondary schools where girls who are either naïve or claim to be smart are lured and put in the family way by either fellow students, older men known as the “sugar daddies”, or even indecent teachers. The issue of teenage pregnancy can be blamed on inadequate parenting and supervision, moral decadence, lack of proper sex education in our schools, greed, forcible sexual abuse such as rape among others.

#### **5. Family Size and Composition**

This refers to the number of children the parents have to cater for. Discrimination against girl-children is common in large families more especially if the family is polygamous in nature.

Education for the girl-child in such families is dependent on chance factor. This is because, the larger the number of school age, the higher the number of responsibility in terms of feeding and other provisions. Hence, the lower the chances of girls being enrolled into schools and the resultant dropout rate.

#### **6. Family Climate**

Family climate refers to the general condition of the home with respect to the relationship which exists between its members. Based on observation, girl-child in families where parents are affectionate to each other, show more intimacy and better communication develop interest in school. They set high education goals for themselves and are determined to achieve such and also make their parents happy and proud of them. However, their counterparts in families where the demonstration of love is lacking, affectionate ties between parents are weak as parents see themselves as “cat and dog”, there is a likely problem. As the emotional climate of such home is faulty, the girl-child may not have interest in schooling as there is no motivation from the parents.

#### **7. Labour Market Condition**

The state of our economy as reflected by labour market is another factor which act as impediment towards girl-child education. The uneducated parent who are still ignorant of the values of education believe that, investing in girl-child education is a waste of resource owing to the fact, that they are discriminated against in the labour market. Also, the high rate of unemployment is a noted discouraging factor. Some parents feel that there is no need wasting money to train a girl-child since there is nothing to gain at the end of the journey. Instead of gainful employment, the girl-child becomes a burden and liability to the parents at the end of the day. Thus, rather than spend on educating a girl-child, she is urged to marry and make them grandparents.

According to Akamu (2011), there is a serious joblessness growth problem in Nigeria as many graduates of universities, colleges of education and institutions find it difficult to gain employment and it has been reported that at least six out of ten graduates are jobless.

#### **8. Religious Constraint**

According to Bolarin (2006), any religious group that advocates early marriage indirectly disapproves a girl-child education; hence, discourages parents from sending their female children/wards to school. Religion can be an impediment to girl-child education. This is the current situation in some states in the country with special reference to the Northern state.

#### **9. Truancy**

Truancy is an antisocial behavior which is outside the margins of acceptable behavior. Such behavior are negative and unacceptable in the society and they include; promiscuity, drug abuse, pilfering, abortion, violation of school rules and regulations, disobedience among others. A girl-child, who decides to follow the band wagon of deviants in the school, may be expelled from school which may mark the end of her education.

#### **10. Death of a Family's Breadwinner**

Death of a breadwinner predisposes individuals to single-parenthood hence, posing the problem of coping alone to them. It is a common factor which contributes to family crisis as it mandates individuals, to make a compulsory re-adjustment. It may shatter the lives of the family members which include loss of hope for children's education especially, the girl-child. Depending on the family and circumstances, the girl-child may be giving out in marriage so as to assist the family.

#### **11. Parental Ignorance**

Ignorance is a disease which can hinder ones progress in life especially girl-child education. Parents, who are ignorant of the values of education, may see the education of a girl-child as a waste of time and limited resources at

their disposal. It is a common thing to hear such group of people hypothesize that, education leads to late marriage or difficulty in getting a spouse, highly educated women have issues with child bearing as the long period of education, affects their fertility, education makes a woman pompous and they are not submissive to their husbands if they eventually marry. Thus, saddled with these negative views, some illiterate parents who also lack exposure may not likely send their girl-children to school.

#### **12. Lack of Goal**

Not having a primary goal in life can hinder a girl-child's education. Goal is like a road map which leads an individual to a successful tomorrow. It is a problem if the girl-child does not have a goal which she hopes to achieve in life. This is because; she floats and may be lured into activities which may jeopardize her life. Some people drop out of school at primary or secondary level due to no clear goal in life.

#### **Possible Benefits of Girl-Child Education**

The fact that girl-child education is essential for sustainable development cannot be overemphasized. It is a vital tool in tackling under-development and poverty. According to Fawe (2001), it is now documented that girl-child education is the most vital investment which generates maximum returns for development. "Infant mortality rates decrease, children have a higher probability of getting a good education and most importantly, women become income generators, which increase the economic power-base of the family" (Onyido, 2010).

It is important to note that education is very essential and the only known remedy, cure and treatment of the disease known as 'ignorance'. In a bid to terminate this intimidating disease (ignorance), the federal government launched and re-launched the

scheme known as the Universal Basic Education (UBE) so that every citizen will gain access to education.

Thus, girl-child education cannot be compromised as it serves pivotal roles in community and national development as outlined below:

**1. Economic Development**

The concept of economic development can be seen as the consistent and persistent collaborative effort geared towards the improvement of the economy, general well-being, and quality of life of members of the society. Provision of job opportunities and income generating ventures are among the avenues through which the above goal can be achieved. Education equips a girl-child with the necessary skills, knowledge and power to be productive and contribute her own quota towards the economic development of her nation rather than being relegated to the background as a mere bench warming spectator.

**2. Agricultural Development**

Agriculture is one of the oldest and most essential occupation of mankind through which food, clothing and shelter are made available for man. In our society today, agriculture has become a great industry patronized by all and sundry. This is because modern agriculture involves the application of basic scientific knowledge and equipment for a more rewarding production, processing, as well as marketing of farm products. Hence, for the active participation of the girl-child in agriculture, it is paramount that she acquires education.

**3. Self Development**

This infers the development of one's capabilities or potential to its maximum. Self development enables a girl-child to overcome negative thoughts which hinder positive thinking and belief in oneself; thus, equipping her with the skills of leadership, goal setting, visualization, time management and organization among others. A girl-child, who is self-developed, stands a

better chance of assisting others and contributing her own quota towards the development of her community as well as society at large.

**4. Social Development**

The values, knowledge and skills which make it possible for one to effectively relate with others and make positive impact in the home, family, community and society at large is the goal of social development. Hence, if a girl-child is socially developed through education, she stands the chance of achieving the above ideals.

**5. Health Development**

Better health is central to human happiness and well-being. Also, it makes a vital contribution to economic progress, as healthy populations live longer, are more productive and save more (WHO). Through education, a girl-child is exposed to health and related issues. Health is wealth and a healthy mother gives birth to healthy children. As good health is one of the live wires of any society, education empowers a girl-child with the essential knowledge required to reduce mortality rate. This she achieves through the improved nutrition, health care and child rearing practices and prevent killer diseases and its related effects.

**6. National Reconstruction**

This is a step towards promoting good governance, economic recovery and prosperity of the nation at large. Education is a good venture towards continued growth, development and economic recovery. Notable women like Dora Akunyili, Ngozi Okonjo Iweala, Obiageli Ezekwesili, Oluwafunmilayo Ransome-Kuti *et cetera*, played a great role towards national reconstruction. Perhaps, if girl-child education is promoted and more women are allowed as well as encouraged to participate in political affairs in our communities, more positive result would be achieved in our nation and world over.

### **Counselling Implications**

In view of the above discussions, counselors have a pivotal role to play towards encouraging and promoting girl-child education by virtue of their profession. The way forward is outlined below:

- ❖ Active involvement in awareness campaign and information service tailored to address the negative views held by some people and cultures as it concerns girl-child education; gender discrimination, early marriage or child bride. Parents, community members and policy makers should be adequately sensitized on these issues and the negative implications involved.
- ❖ Counselors are to sensitize parents, guardians and care givers on the implications of conducive family climate and family size on the education of their wards.
- ❖ Outcomes of conferences, seminars and workshops on the challenges of girl-child education in Nigeria and the negative implications should be propagated to different communities.
- ❖ Skill acquisition programmes which boarder on assertiveness training and sex education should be organized in schools. The aim is to motivate young girls to develop self esteem, be assertive and empower them with the appropriate values which they need to stand firm and desire to be achievers as well as get to the zenith of academics.
- ❖ Re-education and training of young counsellors through symposiums, seminars and workshops to be adequately equipped with current information as it concerns gender issues and appropriate steps geared towards achieving positive result.
- ❖ Government should encourage girl-child education by subsidizing female education through award of scholarships to those from poor socio-economic backgrounds in different states of the federation.

- ❖ Counselors should collaborate with social media, Non Governmental Organizations (NGOs), and community programmes to disseminate information or create awareness on the implications and consequences of girl-child education and women in general.
- ❖ Counseling profession should be promoted and properly acknowledged in Nigeria. Government can assist by helping institutions to establish standard and well equipped counseling centers for students to practice.
- ❖ Government to make a strict policy on child bride to parents and communities from forcing their children into early marriages to men old enough to be their fathers and grand fathers. There should be a strict law on education for all girls with sanctions on any offender especially in the northern states where child marriage is norm, young girls become mothers before they reach their full potentials.

### **Counseling Techniques Attitude Modification**

This can be defined as what somebody thinks or feels about something. It can also be seen as the manner, feeling or disposition of mind which is reflected in the way one behaves. According to Kelly (2011) a clinical psychologist and educator, each individual views the world through his/her own unique set of preconceived notions about it (i.e. constructs). These constructs change and adapt as the individual is exposed to new and different situations. He believes that individual can seek new experiences, practice and adapt new behaviors in order to change their attitudes towards the world. Thus, the approach can be used to counsel parents and significant others to reshape or develop positive attitudes as it concerns girl-child education. This may help to bridge the gap in girl-child education.

### ***Girl-Child Education for Changing Communities***

---

Persuasion and negotiating counseling skills are strategies which can be used to change negative attitudes of parents towards girl-child education. Persuasion involves being able to convince parents on the need to educate the girl-child or take appropriate action towards their education.

#### **Assertiveness Training**

This is a technique used to promote occurrence of or improve assertive responses. It is necessary when a person is not bold enough to initiate an action, express his feelings and stand for his right ( Essuman, Nwaogu and Nwachukwu, 1990). This therapy can be used to empower a girl to be able to stand up for themselves when the need arises. A girl-child who is assertive cannot be toiled with, pushed about or forced to marry against her wish.

#### **Conclusion**

Every girl-child despite the circumstances surrounding her birth and paternity deserves the right to education in order to achieve self development and contribute towards the development of her family, community and society at large. Since the discussions above infer that impediments to girl-child education can still be evaded, it is pertinent for government to hold girl-child education at a high esteem. This should be reflected in her effort to implement policies and partner with Non Governmental Organizations (NGOs) to create bright future for the girl-child to develop her potentials to be who she is destined to be without limitations or barriers on her path.

The effort should not be one sided; thus, individuals, parents, communities should also do their own bits for the achievement of positive and worthwhile result as girl-child education is a vital tool towards community and national development.

#### **Recommendations**

In view of the above discussions, the following recommendations are proffered;

- ❖ Professional and vibrant counselors to be recruited and deployed to different states to sensitize communities on the need to abolish child marriage, gender discrimination and inequalities.
- ❖ Policies on girl-child education should be formulated by stakeholders and policy makers to give strong attention to it.
- ❖ Government should support the campaign of girl-child education for community development by deploying professional counselors who are zealous and determined to touch the grass root for sensitization against all odds.
- ❖ State governments should tackle the issue of child abuse and gender disparity with determined effort by establishing the child right act which should be strengthened, implemented and sustained.
- ❖ Counselors are to protect the rights and health of the girl-child through comprehensive sexuality education, reproductive health counseling and youth participating platforms.
- ❖ Gender inequality which impedes the rights of the girl-child and forced marriages should be abolished in the society.
- ❖ Government should as a matter of urgency, establish counselling centers in all Local Government Headquarters' in Nigeria for community counseling.

**References**

- Akamu, O. (2011). Graduate employment and employability challenges in Nigeria. A paper presented at the British Conference for Higher Education. Hong Kong 21<sup>st</sup> march, 2011.
- Bolarin, T. A. (2005). Women participation in Higher Education in Nigeria: Values education. *Academy of Education Congress Publication*. Pp 144 – 162.
- Enaibe, P. U. & Imonivwerha, P. A. (2007). Meeting the educational needs of people in special target groups. Ughelli: Eregha Publishers
- Esumann, J. K., Nworgu, P. O. & Nwachukwu, V. C. (1990). *Principles and techniques of behaviour modification*. International Universities Press Ltd Owerri.
- Kelly, G. (2001). *The psychology of personal constructs*. New York: Norton. Pp 1955
- Ocholi, E. F. (1995). Parents perception on teenage marriage: A case study of Abuja. *The counsellor*, 12(1).
- Okeke, E. A. E. (2001). *Women Education in Nigeria*. Lagos NERDC.
- Onyido, J. A. (2010) cited in Stephen O. S., Onwuka, E. C. & Ajaegbo, D. I. (2011). *Issues and challenges in Nigerian education in the 21<sup>st</sup> century* Vol 11. West and Solomon Publishing Ltd, Lagos.
- Osokoya, I. O. (2005). Female and girl-child education and development challenge in the former British West African States. <http://www.osokoyaA/org.doc> printing and publishing. retrieved 20/04/2011.
- UNICEF (2004). The state of the world's children 2004. [www.unicef.org](http://www.unicef.org).

**Dr. R. E. Aghadinazu**  
Department of Psychology and Counselling  
Michael Okpara University of Agriculture,  
Umudike, Abia State.