

# TRANSFORMING THE GIRL-CHILD THROUGH EDUCATION FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA

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## ***Abstract***

*Children are regarded as the greatest asset in every civilized society, are cherished and often protected for all forms of abuse, neglect and mishaps. In the case of a girl-child however, she may not be so lucky to be that protected due to certain traditional and religious beliefs and practices. Girl-child education is very crucial for a sustainable development in Nigeria. Women are at the heart of development, as it is evident that woman is the first teacher, the sustainer, and maintainer of the home. She is a peacemaker, the symbol to deal with real life situations. In these case, knowledge will be very limited and as much as working against sustainable development. This paper examined education as a means of transforming the girl-child for sustainable development. It examined the importance and benefits of the girl-child education, the challenges and strategies for improvement were discussed and conclusion given.*

**Keywords: Education, Transformation, Girl-Child, Sustainable Development, Nigeria.**

For individual and national development, it is crucial that girls and female adults should acquire or have formal education. Unfortunately, a cursory look at the pattern of women's involvement in education in Nigeria reveals abysmal low levels. In spite of all the laudable goals and objectives of education, Nigerian women still suffer a lot of constraints and inhibitions which militate against their personal and national development. In most African countries such as Nigeria, the traditional and social approved roles and rights of women are that of child bearing, housekeeping, and farming. Alibi (1986) reports that men feel that the place of the women is in the home and her office is the kitchen.

Ogbadu (2013) is of the opinion that: The male preserve the family name and perpetuates the ancestral image as against the female child. Based on this view, many families prefer male children to female children. This has led to giving preferential

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treatment to the male child right from birth, giving them greater education, economic and social upliftment opportunities. Consequent upon this, the male child has various advantages over the female child in many aspects of family life.

It is also remarkable and significant to note that the early educational curriculum was designed to train women as teachers, nurses and clerks. They were not in medicine, engineering, law and environmental studies (Achument 2004). This, obviously resulted in shortage of qualified women for top level leadership posts, Even today the story is not quite different. As can be expected, this low level of female education worsens the imbalance of power that has been existing between the sexes. One of the legacies of this is the absence of the female equivalence the male political class.

Educated girls develop essential skills, are better equipped to participate effectively in society and protect themselves from harm. Educated women are better able to care for themselves and their children-Each year of a mother's schooling cuts the risk of infant mortality by 5-10%. Children of educated women are far more likely to go to school, create positive effects on education and poverty reduction for generations to come.

### **Education**

Education has been described as an effective tool in the development of any society in the world (Amah & Ezulike, 2005). It is seen as a major instrument in moving the society forward. Education shapes and broadens the horizon of an individual and society. This is in consonance with the Nigeria's philosophy of education which state that "education fosters the worth and development of an individual for each individual sake and for the general development of the society and for the" and for "the full integration of the individual into the community." (FRN, 2004).

### **The Girl-Child Education**

In discussing the girl-child education, it is important to start by explaining the concept "child." A child is defined at the United Nations' convention on the right of the child (1989) as a person under the age of 18 years. According to the Federal Government of Nigeria (1995), a child is any human being who is not yet an adult and can be strongly or easily influenced by ideas and attitude of a particular time or person. Guyit (1997), highlights that this broad age group includes non-school age children, secondary school and first year Polytechnic, College of education as well as university female students.

The United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO, (1985) spelt out the main objectives of female (girl-child or women) education as follows:

1. To enable women to improve their family's health and diet.
2. To increase women's productive ability thus, raising their family's standard of living.
3. To give women access to appropriate technologies, management of co-operatives.
4. To improve women's social and cultural status
5. To help women fight their own fears and feelings of inadequacy or inferiority.
6. To enable women to discharge their responsibilities more effectively.
7. To educate women on all round development, that is mentally, socially, physically, psychologically, religious and economically.
8. To make women participate fully in all the affairs of their nation and to be at the centre of sustainable development.
9. To enable women to acquire their own basic needs like food, clothes and nurturing.
10. To enhance nation building in terms of economic and human development.

### **Development**

Development means different things to different people. Rogers (196) describes development as a type of social change in which new ideas are introduced within a social what to produce higher per capital incomes and levels of living through more production methods and improved social organizations. Just one person's idea of what development mean is not sufficient.

### **The Concept of Sustainable Development**

The phrase sustainable development as a concept came into being in June 1992 at the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) in Rio De Janeiro, Brazil (Albert 2004 in Kurya (2005): Kurya (2005) opined that sustainable development is concerned with harmonization of the needs of humanity and nature and it is based on two important realizations:

- 1) That human beings are at the centre of development.

- 2) That we are borrower of the earth for our children and must hand it on to them in reasonable useable shape.

In the words of Brundtland in Kurya (2005) “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs.”

According to Aliyu (2009). Sustainable development is therefore a continuous activity in the provision of growth and service for the overall development of people in the society. It is a systematic utilization of goods and services for the overall development of people in the society. It is a systematic utilization of goods and services by the community without compromising the needs of future generations. It is a development which takes into accurate consideration the needs of generation to come.

### **Girl-Child Education and Sustainable Development in Nigeria**

Ogbadu (2013) remarks that girl-child education is a fundamental right. Investing in girl-child education has immediate and long-term benefits. It builds their assertiveness, self confidence and empowers them to take their proper position in the society and actively participating in nation building. For a nation to be properly developed, she should provide in the educational sector a balanced opportunity for both male and female. When the girl-child is not given the right type of education, the girl-child are numerous; they can grow to become a nuisance to the nation e.g. prostitutes are not only dangerous in terms of morality and health; they provide residence to arm robbers, kidnappers and many other evil men. They can be sponsored for evil actions, bearing children who are not properly socialized as a result of single – parents syndrome, who themselves become misfits. The frustration of such children can lead them to drunkenness, drug addition, drug pushing, easy provocation and violence leading to public disturbance. In the presence of these social ills, no meaningful development can take place and if any definite structures have been put in place, such can be destroyed through riotous living.

### **Importance of Girl-Child Education**

Women’s contribution to the economy in principles is not different from men’s. Several studies (for instance. Schultz, 1988; Summers, 1992) reveal that improving the career opportunities and earning power of women through sound education can have far-reaching benefits. These include enhanced family health and welfare, reduced infant and maternal mortality, improved children’s education, productivity and overall improvement in the larger economy.

Some of the advantage of women education, according to Ogunboyede (2000) include:

1. Women education fosters self-confidence in women and enables them contribute meaningful to national development. The educated child today becomes tomorrow's mother, who is able to take better care of the nation's children for tomorrow's social, economic and political dispositions.
2. Through being educated, women, are encouraged to have the ability to contribute their talents and skills in the task of national economic revival and survival.
3. An educated woman is a better and more useful housewife, mother, neighbor and citizen. She is a community mobilize and social worker.
4. Education fully facilities women enfranchisement especially in northern Nigeria, where most women live in Purdah and are secluded from taking part in political changes and progress of the country.
5. Women education prepares girls for their "main secondary roles" in the building of the nation.
6. Women education modernizes some of the customs and traditions, making them fit for the present day society.
7. Women education brings about change in attitude towards obnoxious traditions and makes them live a full life and enables them to understand their heritage and the rapidly changing society of today.
8. Women educations removes the symbol of marginalization, discrimination, denial of equal employment opportunities, unscientific traditional beliefs and taboos about marriage and child bearing.
9. Educating women helps them gain and acquire knowledge, skills, values and attitude to develop uprightness and moral qualities such as honesty, tolerance, compassion, courage and capacity for working hard.
10. Women education facilitates greater ties in accepting family responsibilities and not to eliminate or isolate women from their kindred. (p.74).

### **Challenges facing Women Education in Nigeria**

These are so many challenges facing women education in Nigeria. A few obstacles are highlighted as follows.

**Ignorance:** Some parents consider women's education as waste of funds. Such parents believe that money spent on a girl's education is a waste, since she soon marries into her husbands' family thus leaving only boys in their original families to cater for their parents. Thus when families are faced, with the option of choosing between sons' and daughters' education, the daughters are always dropped.

**Religious Constraint:** A lot of 'dos' and 'don'ts' exist in the numerous cultures and religions in Nigeria that affect the education of women. The practice of purdah in Islam makes it difficult for married Muslim women to fully benefit from the educational system. Similarly, in traditional religion women must always stay in the background.

**Early Marriage:** In some parts of the country, particularly in the North, early marriages are prevalent. Under aged marriages could lead to condition of health hazards such as VVF and other social deprivations mostly associated with educational deprivations which destroy the girl's opportunity and chances of furthering her educational career.

**Poverty:** Poverty is a disease. Many Nigerians are relatively poor with low income levels. Illiteracy is a major contributing factor to high rate of poverty in the less developed countries. Illiteracy promotes ignorance and alienation from modernization. Women who are uneducated as a result of poverty have little or no marketable skills and as such, cannot fit into the labour market or compete with their educated counterparts. This factor can force the girl-child out of school. Female students found to be pregnant are not allowed to continue in the school.

### **Child Labour and Trafficking**

In Nigeria, children are found trading, hawking in commercial buses and at long traffic hold-ups, doing odd jobs as contribution to the family income. These children are vulnerable to kidnappers, children illegal trafficking, adoption, child pornography, and prostitution and sales of human organs. Most of the children involved in child-labour and trafficking are the girls.

### **Conclusions**

Promoting the girl-child education is necessary for a sustainable development in Nigeria. The federal government has realized that education for the girl-child is

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education for the whole nation. This is true because of the impact and the roles and female plays in her family as home- maker and also in her immediate environment. The girl-child education is an assurance of a secured future for the world. It must not be sacrificed at the pleasure of some backward and ignorant few.

Together, we can break down the barriers to girls' education and provide educational and vocational opportunities for all girls, then the future of this generation and the wider communities will be much brighter. Boys will prosper too, girls usually face more obstacles in her quest for education. Collective efforts are required to remove these in the best way to ensure that enrolment increase for all children. It's been shown that these benefits do not stop with a single generation, but are passed down to coming generations ensuring a skilled and educated work force generations to come.

In order to ensure the full participation of girls in their own lives, in the lives of their future families and also in the development of the country, the factors militating against their full participation in education must be removed. If this is done, there will be an increase in the number of girls that will acquire appropriate skills for development.

### **Recommendations**

The following recommendations were drawn from the discourse. They may assist in transforming and positioning the girl-child for sustainable development.

1. There should be more enlightenment programmes on the need for girl-child education.
2. More education opportunities should be provided for female children from primary school to tertiary levels.
3. Incentives such as scholarship awards should be given to female students studying at tertiary levels to encourage them.
4. Early marriage should be discouraged among girls especially those from polygamous homes.
5. The clause in the National Policy on Education (NPE) (year 2008) relating to equal opportunities for all Nigerian should be genuinely executed.

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6. Poverty alleviation programs should be well articulated, vigorously pursued and objectively carried out so that poverty levels of parents will be reduced. This will enable them give equal opportunities to their children,
7. Adult literacy programmes should be encouraged and adequately supervised.
8. Various steps should be taken to rehabilitate girls or women that have taken to social ills like prostitution, fraud and drugs.

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