
GIRL-CHILD EDUCATION AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA: ISSUES AND PERSPECTIVES

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Abstract

This paper discusses the plight of the girl-child education in Nigeria with an examination of the root causes and promotional factors that hinder girl-child's education. The paper also looks into the efforts made by the Federal Government and international bodies in raising female literacy in Nigeria. The paper concludes with an advocacy for female literacy to be free and legislation to protect the girl child in all its ramifications.

Keywords: Girl-Child Education, Development, Culture, Nigeria.

In most traditional African societies women are kept in the periphery. They are the under privileged minority groups in matters of marriage, polygamy, sex restrictions, marital residence, public gathering, offices, decision making and others. Power and privilege are in the hands of men. Traditional cultural rules having to do with power relations within the families are controlled by men. Women are marginalized and subordinated and they accept their statuesque.

In some African societies, women are required by the custom to kneel down while greeting men, with a title sir, even when he has no title. He also noted that power and privilege belong to the position of obeying her husband who is entitled to beat her while she is lying down. He also observed that the household is organized for man's convenience. Meals should be ready at the time when he likes to eat and the women should eat during his absence. She should ask for permission when going to visit, and the husband should fix her a number of days to stay there. Oppression of women has its roots from a culture, which was built over centuries, which also requires patience, and time to reverse it. African cultures restrict the women to the domestic sphere with limited access to resources and participation in societal affairs, men regard women as inferior with low intelligence, and cannot make decision and their reasoning capacity is almost non existence.

The male society in Latin American perceive women as having reduced intellectual capacity, and less admirable personalities, thus a woman is expected to be submissive to the male authority, and seek permission before initiating an activity on her own account. Women in Latin America are restricted to domestic work and caring for the children and husband. They are also expected to be morally upright. In African societies women are somewhat regarded as half citizens, they are regarded as children who should always be instructed. They are beaten, abused, spit on, tortured and despised by men. They are expected to confess to men, when in the wrong or right. They are expected to do a lot of domestic work, while men go for social gathering and politics. They are counted among men's properties, they are men's possessions. Women are not praised for anything apart from producing children and looking after them.

Issues and Concerns

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights proclaimed by the General Assembly of the United Nations on 10th December 1948 states that everyone has a right and equal opportunity to Education. But for sixty years after this declaration, there is still high illiteracy of women and sex disparities in education in Nigeria.

The statistics from the Ministry of Education indicate that 1963 – 1995 despite equal educational opportunity in government policy and the declaration from the United Nations on equality in education, disparities exist regarding the degree of a class and success in education between males and females both in secondary schools and higher institutions of learning. Statistic shows that there is a great social inequality in education for girls in secondary schools and higher education.

Inequalities of access to education for girls are treated as secondary in the African society. This affects the female gender, while the male population is the principal beneficiary of the education system at all levels. From the enrolment statistics, the way in which girls are distributed within levels and the branches of education show the actual discrimination to which they are subjected even more clearly than does the enrolment.

In the early days of the African independence, the conference of African leaders held in Addis Ababa 1961, put forward a project for school enrolment based on equal right to education of all peoples. But the inequality of access to education of different groups remained systematically concealed. When African leaders met again for the Nairobi Conference of 1968, it was noted that the objective of a right to education had not yet been effected.

The 1984 Universal Declaration of Human Rights states that every person has a right to education. In 1990 also, the World Conference on Education For All (EFA) which was held in Jomtien, Thailand, declared among others, that every person shall be able to benefit from educational opportunities designed to meet their basic learning needs. However, much as the two declarations do not have exclusion or exemption, the

girl child, especially in the Third World Countries is to be their least beneficiary. The plight of the girl child has been an invisible one for a long time. In many cultures, the unjust treatment of girl is a perfectly natural part of life. Since the passage of the Child's Rights Act, into law in 2003 by the National Assembly in Nigeria available data reveal that the issue of girl child education is yet to be fully addressed. The Child Rights Law seeks to facilitate the realization and protection of the rights of all children in the country regardless of their tribe, gender and parent's status.

Nigeria as a country also recognizes education as a fundamental human right and is signatory to the major conventions for the protection of the rights of children and women; especially the Convention of the Rights of the Child and the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). But there continued to be a National gender disparity in basic education enrolment, retention and completion against girls. Some families prefer to educate the males to the females thereby giving the males proper and better access to formal education. The reason for the preference of the male gender is found in the general societal belief that continuity of the family lineage is achieved through the male issues. The female issues will be married into other families.

As the Universal Basic Education (UBE) law enacted recently, and which provides for a year free and compulsory basic education to all Nigerian children to fast-track education intervention at the primary and junior secondary levels, is taking off gradual access to formal school by girls still remains a hurdle to cross. statistics available reveal that about 7.3 million children, 60 percent of which are girls, are not in school. The problem of dropout is more pronounced at grade six level where more than 17 percent drop-out of school yearly. Many of these girl-children are seen on streets selling wares, hawking, carrying loads in the markets, begging for alms, stealing and chasing one another. According to UNICEF report on street children (1993), these children are extremely vulnerable to physical and emotional trauma. Among the vulnerable adolescent girls, it may result in sexual exploitation and exposure to a wide variety of highly infectious diseases.

According to an American researcher, Sean Basinski (2009) there are probably 100,000 hawkers in Lagos State alone which may probably be the largest population of hawkers and street traders in the world. Basinski stated further, street trading is not only in Nigeria, but are in other counties like New York and that in New York, there are 10,000 and 20,000 street traders. The difference in street trading in New York and Nigeria is that street trading is legal in New York because street traders do get a license to sell on the street. The question that should be asked is that what are the root causes and promotional factors hindering the education of the girl child?

Foremost among these obstacles are laws and judicial systems, culture, and most especially poverty. Where poverty stalks families, the girl child is most in jeopardy. Adebola (1997) stated that the coping strategies of families in economic crisis are usually gender biased and in many instances families would hang on to possessions

like radio, television but would sell their daughter first off. Udoh (2001) observed that girl child prostitution and exposure to sexual abuse while hawking market wares are consequences of poverty in the family. The girl child is thus encouraged to prostitute her body for money in order to regiment the family financial resources or to obtain some money so as to be independent of her poor parents.

According to United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) (2004), human development indicators observed that countries in West Africa are amongst the poorest in the world where some people earn less than one dollar per day. As a result of poverty and lack of income generating opportunities at home, more and more women especially young ones are migrating to greener pastures in order to provide for their families both within their country and overseas. Former Minister of Education in Nigeria, Mrs. Chinwe Obaji said of this, “many parents are poor that they pull their children out of school for income generating activities, rather than paying for their children’s school fees so as to sustain their families”.

Recently, as a result of poverty, many girls found themselves engaging in human trafficking. Aiyegbusi (2005) stated that the root causes of human trafficking are poverty, greed, ignorance, parental neglect, lack of opportunities, conflicts like ethnic and religious conflicts, high level of illiteracy, unemployment, abuse of the common cultural practice of a place and fostering desperation and lack of legal framework in the past. Human trafficking according to United Nations Protocol (1995) in Igbo (2008) is the recruitment, transportation transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons by means of threat, use of force and other forms of coercion, abduction, fraud, deception, abuse of power or a position of vulnerability or of giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person and having control over another person for the purpose of exploitation. Exploitation here means exploitation for prostitution or other forms of sexual exploitation, slavery, servitude or the removal of body parts for ritual activities.

Also according to law enforcement and Administration Act (2003) in Igbo (2008), trafficking in human beings means all acts and attempts involving the recruitment, transportation within or across Nigeria borders through purchase, sales, transfer, receipt or harboring of persons involving the use of deception, coercion and debt bondage for the purpose of placing or holding the persons’ whether for or not in involuntary servitude (domestic, sexual or reproductive) in forced or bonded labour or in slavery like conditions. The National Agency for the Prohibition of Trafficking in persons and other related matters (NATIP) (2006) stated that the features of trafficking are marked with the use of force, deceit and the other dubious means to capture victims. The victims are usually the poor, weak, powerless, ignorant, desperate and the vulnerable. Adults, women, youths and girl children are victims of crime but women and children are more at risk of being trafficked (Igbo, 2008).

UNICEF (2002) stipulated that stop over locations for trafficking include Cameroon, Ghana, Senegal, Niger, Libya, Mali and Morocco. The common route for victims from

Nigeria include West coast to Mali, Morocco and by boat to Spain, or West Coast to Libya and Saudi Arabia (Igbo, 2008). Aiyegbusi (2005) observed that styles that traffickers use to recruit their victims are enticement through promise of a good job abroad or in the cities, deception and fake adverts, control of victims through the use of Juju rituals, deception, coercion or threat and physical assault.

Efforts by Government and the International Bodies

The Federal Government of Nigeria has not relented on her efforts at taking education to all Nigerian children. There have been a lot of collaborations between Federal Education Project (GEP) and Africa Girls Education Initiative (AGEI) GEP focuses on national awareness on girl child education and increasing political and financial commitment through advocacy and sensitization of policy makers at all levels, parents, school authorities, other leaders and girls themselves. It equally aims at developing technical capacity of schools and teachers' pedagogical skills to create girl-friendly school environment that enhance the participation of girls and improve learning outcomes.

According to Acholonu (2001), four world conferences on women have been held in Mexico City, Central America 1975, Copenhagen, Denmark 1980; Nairobi, Kenya 1985, Beijing, China, 1995. the meetings were on educational issues, ways of helping the girl child have access to education. Other conferences on improving education of the girl child include pan Africa conference on the education of the girl child held in Ouagadougou in Burkina Faso in 1993. Jomtien International conference on education (1990). Various governments have also tried to implement UN declarations by instituting various directives for improving the status of women. In Nigeria wives of heads of state initiated programmes aimed at benefiting women in Nigeria. The programmes are as follows: Better life programme of 1987, initiated by Dr. Mrs. Maryam Babangida for the development of rural women, the family support programme initiated by Mrs. Maryam Sani Abacha, for the support and improvement of families. In order to realize remarkable achievements in the areas of agriculture and small scale industries, the efforts of the Family Support Programme were complemented by the Family Economic Advancement Programme (FEAP), a poverty alleviation programme that boosted sustainable development of local industries. Another one is Women's Right Advancement and Protection Alternative which was formed by Hon. Justice Fati Abubakar in 1992. it was formed for the promotion of social rights for women. It also renders services to women in areas of legal aids and counseling, access to education for the girl child, adult literacy and civic education towards sensitization and mobilization for the upliftment of their fundamental human rights and advocacy for law reforms.

Perspectives

Many of the programmes mentioned above were short lived. This is because each of the programme was dropped whenever a new government came on board. The place of girl-child education remains paramount at all times. And having a balanced educated society would serve as the needed impetus to the realization of Millennium Development Goals (MDGS) targets on eradication of poverty and hunger, diseases and material mortality rate. It is against this background that the various challenges against girl child education must be totally removed. Adebola (2006) suggested some effective strategies of providing education for the street children in a market setting. These include establishing literacy and vocational training centers for street children in market setting. This was imitated by UNICEF in 1997. UNICEF provided literacy and vocational training centers in some markets in Ibadan for children in Especially Difficult circumstances (CEDC). This strategy was effective as there were positive changes in the lives of the children. Majority of the children have been reintegrated into their families. This strategy could also be adopted by the Federal Government of Nigeria in collaborations with international donor agencies like UNICEF, UNDP, ILO to establish such centers in different markets in Nigeria in order to reduce street trading.

Another strategy is the one adopted by Aderinoye, Ojokheta and Olojede (2007). This is a nomadic education programme which has a multifaceted schooling arrangement to suit the diverse transhumant habits of the Fulani. The agencies in support of this programme include the ministry of Education, Schools Management Board, the National Commission for Nomadic Education, the Agency for Mass Literacy and the scholarship board which work together to offer a mobile school system where the schools and the teachers move with the Fulani children (Aderinoye, Ojokheta and Olojede 2007). The mobile school system could also be adopted for the street children, girl child inclusive.

Recommendations and Conclusion

The paper has explored the plight of the girl child in Nigeria. The girl child passes through a lot of difficulties which hinder their education. These difficulties range from poverty, sexual abuse, street trading and human trafficking. The situation of the girl child could be improved by raising female literacy in Nigeria. Street, trading, human trafficking and all other vices should not make a girl child stop or drop out of school. Such a girl can still make it academically if she is not discriminated against in the society. Government can promote the education of girls by making education free for girls. There should be stiff sanctions on any defaulting parent who engages her daughter to street trading and human trafficking. A prison term without an option of fine is strongly advocated.

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