

Promoting Girl-Child Education in Nigeria : A Path-Way to Sustainable National Development

C. O. Daramola and Margaret O. Ayodele

Abstract

This paper therefore examines who the girl-child is, and the concept of the girl-child education. It also examines the rights of the girl-child, and discusses the importance of educating the girl-child for sustainable development. It further explains factors responsible for discriminating against the girl-child and concluded by recommending solutions to the problem.

Keywords: Girl-Child Education, Gender In-Equality, Sustainable National Development, Nigeria

Introduction

Education is a form of learning in which knowledge, skills and habit of a group of people are transferred from one generation to the next generation. It is a process of receiving or giving systematic instruction especially at a school. It is known as the theory and practise of teaching which is supposed to present learners with equal opportunities for men and women, boys and girls during the teaching/learning process. Education is believed to be the wealth of knowledge acquired by an individual after studying a particular subject matter or experiencing life lessons which provide an understanding of something. It requires instruction of some sort from an individual. Fafunwa (2004) cited that education for good life has been one of the most persistent concern for men throughout history. This is to say that education is universally acknowledged to benefit individuals and promote national development, therefore educating males and females increase their earnings and expand their future opportunities and choices. Education plays a key role by presenting learners with equal opportunities.

Kabul (2007) referred to social relations between men and women, girls and boys are defined by values, mores and norms. He reiterated that the relations between women and men, girls and boys vary in different culture and are more empowering than others. Gender equality connotes fairness and justice in the distribution of benefits and responsibilities between women and men. It is pertinent to note that equal status is an essential condition for achieving sustainable development especially when gender equality issues are applied in all development.

Sustainable development is not possible without the full participation of men and women, and development policies that incorporate gender as a

factor reflects a growing understanding of the necessity for women and men's full participation in all areas of social life. Gender development therefore means that male and female are given equal opportunities to survive and contribute to and benefit from all areas of human endeavor. The importance of training a girl-child cannot be overemphasized, as the girl-child is a biological female offspring, who becomes a female adult, entitled to enjoy equal fundamental human rights as the male counterparts. Karim (2015) stressed that despite the tremendous efforts by the Nigeria government over the past three decades to increase educational opportunities for males and females, gender challenges still lie ahead of the goal of education for all.

Therefore, promoting girl-child education is a task that must be achieved for any sustainable development to be recorded in any nation.

Who is a girl-child

A girl-child is a female child under age 18, or a young girl of 1 to 15 years of age. The girl-child is a biological female offspring from birth to eighteen (18) years of age. It is the age before a girl becomes an adult, which covers crèche, nursery, or early childhood (0-5 years), primary (6-12 years), and secondary school (12-18 years).

Concept of girl child Education

Educating the girl-child refers to every aspect of education that aims at developing the skill and knowledge of girls and women. Poojalates (2017) opined that girl-child education include general education, technical and vocational education, health education, etc. The report reiterated that education of women encompasses both non-

literacy and literary education which has the ability of bringing socio- economic changes.

Importance of Educating the Girl- Child for Sustainable Development

The importance of educating a girl- child cannot be under-estimated as educating a girl- child is educating a nation because the girl- child is a mother of the nation. When the girl- child is educated, it gives her better opportunities to improve herself and the household, and be successful in all areas of life, thereby contributing her quota to economic development. The benefits to be derived from training a girl -child can be viewed from the following points:

Future educated generations, economic development, improved life- style, dignity and respect, improved health condition, eradication of poverty, economic empowerment, improved standard of living, prevention of early marriage, respect for humanity, increased opportunity for high income to take up responsibility like their male counterpart, improved family care and health advantage, low mortality rate, community development is enhanced, it helps to foster unity and integration, home management, agent of socialisation, family education, war against child trafficking, reduced women fertility rate, protection against sexual harassment and infection, knowledge for capacity building, reduced population explosion, increased involvement of women in politics, improved socio- economic growth and lots of benefits are to be derived by the girl- child, the family, society and Nigeria at large.

Okorie (2016) argued that girl- child education is important for the following reasons:

Increased Literacy Offering all children education will prop up literacy rates, and increased development.

Human Trafficking Women are most vulnerable to trafficking when they are uneducated and poor. Educating girls will reduce this menace as skills and knowledge gained will liberate them from ignorance.

Political Representation Women are under-represented when it comes to politics. Good education will empower them to ease this gap.

Thriving Babies Good education for girls will help them take care of their children, and this will reduce

infant mortality.

Safe Sex A girl who is trained is likely to avoid being contacted with sexually transmitted diseases because of the knowledge gained in school on these infectious diseases.

Later Marriage An educated girl will not be married before age 20. A situation where a girl is trained for seven or eight years of education, wedding date will be delayed.

Income Potential Education empowers a girl's purse through boosting her earning capabilities. Financial empowerment will boost her spending.

Poverty Reduction When a girl is provided with good education, she will enjoy equal rights and privileges to participate in business and economic activity. Increased earning power and income will enhance good living standard.

Smaller Families Increased participation in school reduces education fertility rates over time. Women with good education have few children, while girls without education may have many children.

Thriving GDP Gross domestic product will increase as both boys and girls are offered educational opportunities. When they are both employed, they both contribute to the income of the nation.

Factors militating against girl- child education

Girl- child education as a global concern has been seen as a difficult task that may not be easily achieved for some reasons. Okorie (2017) opined that girl- child education is not easily achievable as usually proclaimed due to many impediments which stands in the way of the girl- child. The following reasons are major constraints to effective girl- child education in Nigeria.

Poverty This is the cancer worms that have eaten deep into the fabrics of the Nigeria society. Socio-economic background of most family is a major determinant factor why most parents feel it is a waste of money to send girls to school. Omoladun (2015) stressed that most girl- child from poor background are out of school because their parents feel it is a waste of money to train a girl- child, who will end her career in a man's house. Some parents also see the girl- child as a means by which the family can get additional money through early marriage to support the family income.

Marrying girls out early is therefore seen as an alternative to many low income families in Nigeria because it gives them money through the bride price that the husband and the family must pay.

Socio-Cultural Factors This deals with the culture of the people who do not believe in the education of the girl – child. This is commonly practice among some poor people who hide under religion to keep their daughters at home in the name of religion. These set of people are religious fanatics, who send their daughters to men's house at early age (child marriage). Also, educating men in some culture is vital and seen as investment to raise leaders who will take responsible roles and keep the name of the family from dying. Some girls have been discouraged from schooling as a result of inadequate resources from parents or guardians. Some of the schools may be too distant from their villages, and walking long distances may be another barrier.

Ignorance Some people do not believe in training their daughters because they do not know the usefulness of education to a girl- child. Olarewaju and Ajibade (2015) stressed that ignorance and illiteracy of parents contribute immensely to the negligence of the girl- child education. Ignorance and illiteracy have also prevented them from knowing the value of educating the girl- child. Also, some girls may not want to go to school because of fear of punishment or being beaten by their teachers.

Religion Various religion reasons halt girls' education in Nigeria. Religion is the belief system of the individuals. Islam religion provides its education in the Quran and Islamiyya schools, which does not conform to the western education brought by Christian missionaries. Some parents keep their daughters out of school because of a misinterpretation of the Islamic text, the Quran. Some parents also believe that educating their daughters will bring about immorality. Islamic injunction restrains the mingling of women with men, which have negative effects on the education of the girl- child.

Early Marriage Some culture permits early marriage and this encourage some parents to give their daughters to men at tender age. This practice is mostly practiced amongst the illiterate parents in the Northern and some other parts of the country, where girls are given out in marriage at a tender age.

Safety Reasons Nigerian parents and guardians are

afraid of educating a girl- child for security reasons, especially in the Northern parts of Nigeria. The frequent kidnapping of girls from school in some part of the country may discourage the formal training of female children, especially in the affected areas in the country. The Boko Haram kidnappings of Chibok girls in 2014 has created unnecessary fear in the minds of most parents in the affected areas. Some schools in the rural areas that are located very far to the area place of residence may discourage parents from allowing their daughters to walking such Ways distance for security reasons.

Ways to Improve Girl-Child Education for Sustainable Development in Nigeria

To ensure effective education for the girl- child, the following points must be given adequate consideration according to Ajayi (2015)

- Raising continuous awareness among the public especially about the importance of, and equal opportunity for girl education
- Deferment of early marriage to a later period until the girl- child reaches the age adolescent
- Provision of gender awareness and sex education to enable girls develop self-knowledge and what awaits them
- Provision of incentives to outstanding girls in schools so that they can be more encouraged for further education
- Assisting poverty stricken girls and those who performed less in order to enable them to continue their schooling, by implementing different mechanism
- Establishing exclusive study centres (consisting ample text books and other supplementary reading materials) for girls, to be guided and managed by trained and academically better peers who can serve as tutors
- Establishing girls' hostels in remote areas where they can be insured to continue their education in schools
- Setting female roles models if possible at home and even in society upon professional training or orientation
- Holding periodical discussions and meetings among peers to discuss problems that occur frequently and affect their academic life

negatively

- Government should ensure that society and family/ parents accord proper value to the education of girls
- Government should ensure that girls are not disadvantaged on the basis of caste, ethnicity, religion or disability
- Government should ensure that girls have access to a safe school environment
- Government should empower women
- Government should make girls education affordable
- Government should make adequate provision for education officials and teachers who have knowledge, understanding and status to ensure that girls have access to quality education
- Government should involve parents in education policy, planning and budgeting process
- Government should improve life opportunities for girls by ensuring that national plans include provision of right levels of basic and post- basic education
- Government should take appropriate measures to tackle abuse and violence towards girls
- Government should eliminate gender disparities in primary and secondary education
- NGOs, religious and other voluntary organisations should support the government in the provision of necessary materials and monitoring of girl- child education.

Conclusion

The importance of educating the girl- child cannot be over- emphasized as this has been an important human right issue that has been lingering on for some time in most developing countries, which includes Nigeria. Education is needed in all spheres of life, especially the home, where some people think women belong to. Education liberates women from ignorance, thereby giving adequate attention to every issue of importance in the home, like helping the children for effective socialisation,

preparing them adequately for the larger society, and most importantly ensuring adequate training skills needed in areas of good feeding habit and health care and diet system in preparation for motherhood. Also, the current trend of gender sensitivity both at national and international levels has given credence to improve girl- child education so that the girl- child can contribute positively to the economic growth and development.

Finally, there is a clarion call for all and sundry to ensure awareness creation of the girl- child, especially in the rural areas where parents think it is a waste of resources to educate female children.

Recommendations

The consequences of the neglect of training the girl- child are so enormous that can hardly be exhausted. This is because training the girl- child is training a nation. Therefore, all stakeholders should ensure that the education of the girl- child be given adequate priority to ensure a healthy nation.

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