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Out of School Girls in Nigeria: Implications for National Development

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Abstract

Education is a right for all children. Discriminating against either the boys or the girls has serious consequences for future national development. In Nigeria, there are alarming figures showing a large percentage of boys and girls of school age not attending formal education. The focus for this paper therefore is on the girl child bearing in mind the serious implications of not educating them on the society. In 2019, 10.19 million children were found to be out of school and 38% of them were girls. Some of the factors attributed to this ugly situation in Nigeria are early marriage, early pregnancy, violence at schools, funding is targeted at boys, child/domestic labour, dangerous journeys to schools, kidnapping, poor sanitation in schools, dilapidated desks/chairs, few female teachers to encourage them to attend school, religious and traditional practices etc. The implications of not addressing these factors as identified in the paper will lead to slower economic growth and reduced income, gender disparity, child mortality rates in communities will soar, she cannot be a policy maker who influences national decisions and women will be less likely to have access to social protection. Finally, recommendations like adequate funding to the education sector, provision of enabling environment, create more awareness among rural dwellers on the need to enroll, retain and encourage the girl child to complete school, Girls4Girls and SHE4HE programmes of UNICEF be sustained, provision of adequate security for all children in and out of school were proffered.

Keywords: Girls Education, National Development, Out of School

1. Introduction

All the countries of the world espouse education as the only fulcrum of national development. It is apparent that for any nation to make significant progress in every facet of their wellbeing, the people have to be educated in the various relevant fields of knowledge. The government of a country works assiduously to ensure the upliftment of its citizenry via the provision of the desired political, economic, and social equity. Education is directly linked with national development as it causes a change that promotes greater productivity and work efficiency in the individual. It is the singular most important agent in transforming a people; national development cannot take place unless a decorous proportion of its population is disciplined in attitudes and beliefs about work, quality of life and other related values.

For many years now a lot of girls have been out of school in Nigeria. The most current figure is put between 10.5 and 13 million implying that “one in every five of the world’s out-of-school children is in Nigeria” (UNICEF, 2020; Umar, 2020). Girl education is the avenue by which women and girls can contribute maximally to national

development. Section 18 of the Nigerian Constitution, the Universal Basic Education (UBE) Act 2004, the Child Rights Act 2003, and Article 17 of the African Charter all guarantee the right of every Nigerian child (including girls) to education. The UBE Act and the Child Rights Act further made provision for free and compulsory basic education for all children up to junior secondary level. Although these measures have been put in place, the girl-child education accomplishment in Nigeria is still truncated.

A nation does not develop in any way or aspect without women given their right of place in the system that sustains it. Education is an incentive to the development of the nation because it equips its citizens to galvanize the development process. Based on the foregoing, therefore, this paper aims at discussing the importance of educating girls and the implications of leaving them out of school on the development of Nigeria as a nation.

2. The Concept of National Development

A country is developed if it is able to provide qualitative life for her citizenry. Nigeria just celebrated her 61st Independence Anniversary. Unfortunately, however, the nation has been battling with the problems of development in spite of huge human, material, and natural resources at her disposal. Waleola (2015) asserts that development is a desirable phenomenon in national sustenance. It is a product of careful design, effective resource mobilization and collaborative action with the people and their leadership. It entails sacrifice and dedication coupled with careful observation and openness to change.

National development is a multifaceted process involving the restructuring and repositioning of the economic, political, educational, and social infrastructures. The major aim of national development is to meet the needs of the present without jeopardizing the ability of the upcoming generation to meet their own needs (Edidiong & Daniel, 2019). This implies that it is a process of well-being, progress, growth and balance that harnesses the evolutionary succession in stages, where human societies leave a rudimentary model until they arrive at a model which is considered unique and universal.

A nation that is developed frees the population from fear and exploitation. It expands the range of choices available to the people that allows for democratic decisions and enjoyment of human, economic and political liberties (Bhawna, 2020).

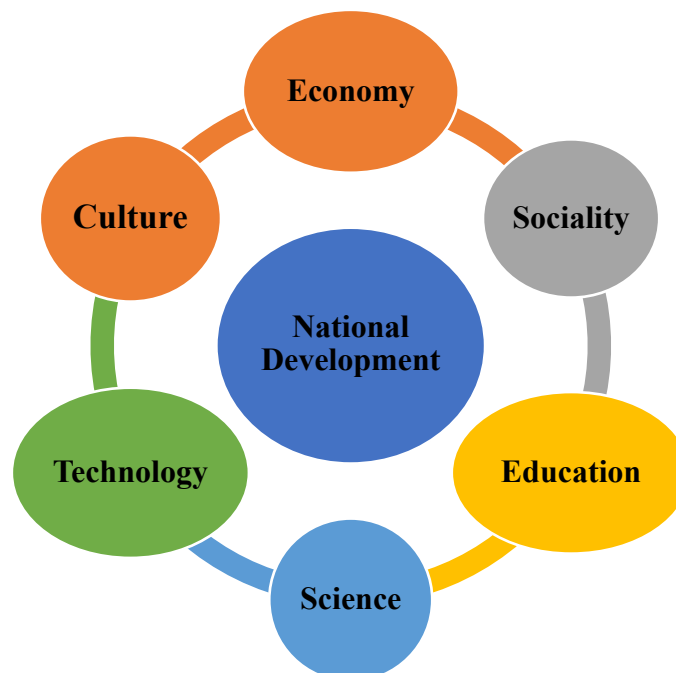


Diagram 1: Components of National Development

Source: Author

The diagram above shows the components of national development. It exhibits the interconnectedness of the components to the effect that the central ideology is realized. A nation is yet on its way to being fully developed where any of these components are essentially nascent.

3. Girls Education in Nigeria

Man has developed the means of passing on his leaning – values, skills, and attitudes – to the next generation. Girls also benefit from this process of education. It is through education, formal or informal, that the girl-child comes to know what her society cherishes. By means of education the young woman is prepared to take part in perpetuation and further development of this knowledge and ideals. Unfortunately, however, Nigeria still falls short of the desired result of giving males and females' equal Opportunities and equal access to opportunities to advance socially, economically, politically and otherwise.

UNICEF (2012) undertook a country study and found out that about 10.5 million Nigerian children who were supposed to be in basic education were not. In other words, one out of every three primary age children is out of school, and roughly one out of four junior secondary age children was out of school. The percentages of out of school children according to geopolitical zones in Nigeria are presented in the chart below:

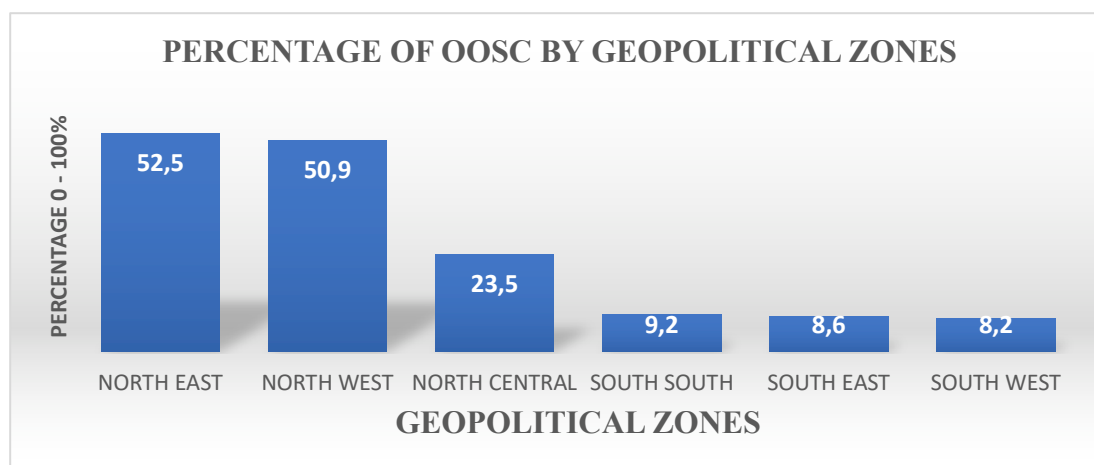


Chart 1: Percentage of out of school girls by geopolitical zones in Nigeria

Source: UNICEF, 2012.

EduCeleb (2020) also carried out a survey and reported that out of 10.19 million children who did not go to school in 2019, 38% of them were girls. The table below contains details according to States with the highest rates and the states with the lowest rates:

Table 1: States with highest and lowest rates of out of school girls in Nigeria

| SN | STATE | NUMBER OF OUT OF SCHOOL GIRLS |
|----|-----------|-------------------------------|
| 1 | Akwa Ibom | 298, 161 |
| 2 | Sokoto | 270, 586 |
| 3 | Katsina | 267, 132 |
| 4 | Niger | 257, 165 |
| 5 | Taraba | 246, 123 |
| 6 | Kaduna | 242, 100 |
| 7 | Kano | 240, 766 |
| 8 | Oyo | 170, 800 |
| 9 | Zamfara | 165, 245 |
| 10 | Kebbi | 144, 000 |
| 11 | Adamawa | 143, 166 |
| 12 | Imo | 32, 457 |

| | | |
|----|-------------|---------|
| 13 | Gombe | 31, 500 |
| 14 | Bayelsa | 28, 735 |
| 15 | Cross River | 26, 279 |
| 16 | Enugu | 20, 378 |
| 17 | Ekiti | 15, 955 |
| 18 | Ebonyi | 15, 454 |
| 19 | Ondo | 8, 700 |
| 20 | FCT | 4, 678 |
| 21 | Delta | 3, 668 |

The records of out of school girls in Nigeria are appalling. The information above indicates the need for government and other agencies which are saddled with the mandate for girl child education to expedite action to bridge the gaps that are apparent. The importance of education to a child and also for overall development of a nation cannot be over emphasized particularly the girl-child.

4. Benefits of and Barriers to Girl-child Education

Education holds many benefits for any nation. It has the capacity to improve the competences of the people who, in turn, bring positive social changes in society (Tabreek, 2017). This is why the United Nations in 1948 decreed the right of everyone to education and made it free, at least in the elementary and fundamental stages, and compulsory too. The International Bill of Human Rights contains provisions on compulsory and free primary education and on nondiscrimination in education. The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (UN General Assembly, 1979) and Convention on the Rights of the Child (UN General Assembly, 1989) contain elaborate set of legally enforceable commitments concerning both rights to education and to gender equality. The Jomtien Declaration (UNESCO, 1990), Dakar Framework for Action (UNESCO, 2000b), and Millennium Development Goals (MDGs; UN, 2000) call for early childhood care and education, learning programmes for all young people, and improvement in the quality of education.

All the international organizations above emphasize the important place of education because it is the means to

1. Reducing poverty and driving sustainable economic growth – Girl-child education has been proven to increase income for wage earners and increase productivity for employers, yielding benefits for the community and society. Women’s productive activities, particularly in industry, empower them economically and enable them to contribute more to overall development. Whether they are involved in small or medium scale production activities, or in the informal or formal sectors, women’s entrepreneurial activities are not only a means for economic survival but also have positive social repercussions for the women themselves and their social environment (UNIDO, 2001).
2. Preventing inequality and injustice – Educated women are more likely to participate in political discussions, meetings, and decision-making, which in turn promote a more representative and effective government.
3. Leading to better health – Educated women (with greater knowledge of health care and fewer pregnancies) are less likely to die during pregnancy, childbirth, or during the postpartum period. Increased education of girls also leads to more female health care providers to assist with prenatal medical care, labour and delivery, delivery complications and emergencies, and follow-up care.
4. Decreasing child marriage – The absurdity giving out under-aged girls into early marriages results at the end of a girl’s schooling. The result is illiterate or barely literate young mothers without adequate tools to build healthy, educated families. Educated girls typically marry later, when they are better able to bear and care for their children.
5. Reducing mother and child mortality rates – Mothers channel much more of their income to expenditures on children than their husbands do is overwhelming. Education also increases the willingness to seek medical care and improves sanitation practices. The children of more educated women are much more likely to grow up healthy.

In spite of the remarkable benefits, the girl-child in Nigeria is yet a far cry from gaining complete and unrestrained access to basic education. The second goal of the Dakar framework for action aimed at granting all children, particularly girls, access to, and complete, free and compulsory education of good quality by 2015. The fourth goal aimed at 50% improvement in levels of literacy especially for women by 2015. The fifth goal aimed at eliminating gender disparities in primary and secondary education by 2005, and achieving gender equality in education by 2015, with a focus on ensuring girls' full and equal access to, and achievement, in basic education. (UNESCO, 2000b, p. 8). All these plausible ambitions are far from being achieved in Nigeria.

There are various factors that have been identified as barriers to the education of the girl-child. These are different depending on the countries and communities where the girls reside. There are some others which are relatively common to all climes.



Diagram 2: Barriers to Girl-child education in Nigeria.

Source: Tabreek (2017)

In addition to the above reasons as contained in the diagramme, this author during UNICEF G4G Reading Hubs activities with some young girls and women in Bauchi State in 2019, got the following responses from them on why girls do not want to go to school, complete their schooling and transit to secondary schools.

1. Early marriage: young girls as
2. Pregnancy: Many do not return after giving birth due to those rules, stigma, fees, lack of childcare and the unavailability of flexible school programmes.
3. Violence at school: Not only is this a violation of their human rights, it is also one of the most common causes for girls to drop out of school. Many are abused on their way to and at school.
4. Lack of funding: Too many girls are being left behind because funding is targeted to boys' education.
5. Child/domestic labour: Many girls spend every day working to help feed themselves and their families.
6. Dangerous journeys: The walk to school can be dangerous or intimidating. During violent conflicts, girls are deliberately targeted by armed groups and government forces. They often suffer sexual violence, abduction, intimidation and harassment. These makes it difficult to send their female children to school. Surprisingly, they gave examples with Chibok and Dapchi schools girls kidnapping.

7. Poor sanitation: That many schools don't have separate toilets and washrooms for girls. Because of this, many girls, particularly adolescents who are menstruating, do not go to school because of a lack of privacy, unavailability of sanitary disposal facilities and water shortages.
8. Dirty classroom spaces, dilapidated desks/chairs
9. Too few female teachers to encourage them to attend school.
10. Because they are girls is often enough to deny them education. They gave examples with religious and traditional practices that discriminate against them to continue with their education.

Despite its contributions to nation development, girl-child education suffers due to any one or more of the factors mentioned in the diagram above. The effect of this situation has led to deprivations that have hindered women from maximizing their capacities in the development process of their communities. In Nigeria, women are generally barely held in high-esteem, consequently girl-child education is seen as a wasteful venture as people think that the role of women is for procreation and home keeping. This is the challenge of girl-child education today. This ought not to be so. All the barriers to girl-child education must be broken through and conducive learning milieu should be provided for the girl-child to ensure a prosperous nation.

5. Implications

This paper posits that girl-child education is one way through which we can disrupt the vicious circle of abuse, poverty, and oppression of women. Education empowers women; it makes them aware of their rights, and enables them to maintain good health and raise healthy children and families. An educated girl has a positive ripple effect on her health, family, community and society as a whole (Bhagavatheswaran et al., 2016). However, the implications of not keeping the girl-child in school are atrocious. These include:

1. An exogenous increase in girls' access to education creates a better environment for economic growth. Nigerian women account for 41% ownership of micro-businesses in Nigeria with 23 million female entrepreneurs operating within this segment. This places Nigeria among the highest entrepreneurship rates globally (Andrew, 2020). Societies that prefer not to invest in girls pay a high price for it in terms of slower economic growth and reduced income.
2. Families that are reluctant to sending their daughters to school because they believe that boys will receive a higher wage in the future but this is a vicious cycle where women cannot compete against male wages, not due to their capabilities respective to their gender but because they are not being offered equal opportunities in their upbringing. A nation that allows this trend will perpetuate gender disparity.
3. If the girl-child is allowed to stay out of school, she is deprived of her right to education and will be doomed to be illiterate. Consequently, she cannot educate her children and look after her family's health properly. Child mortality rates in communities will soar instead of plummeting.
4. A girl-child who is not educated cannot grow up to participate effectively in politics, business, and national leadership. She cannot be a policy maker who influences national decisions.
5. Women will be less likely to have access to social protection. Gender inequalities in employment and job quality result in gender gaps in access to social protection acquired through employment such as pensions, unemployment benefits or maternity protection.

6. Conclusion

Educating the girl-child is beneficial to a nation. When girls are allowed to stay out of school, it undermines the efforts made by the government and other organizations at nation building. Nigeria's slow economic growth is not unconnected to the level of education and participation of women in running the affairs of the country. It is, therefore, imperative to go back to the drawing board and take into cognizance all that need to be done to send and retain the girl-child in school until completion.

7. Recommendations

This paper considered the benefits of education for the girl-child and the consequences of keeping the girl-child out of school. In order to overcome the challenges that have been identified above, the following recommendations are made:

- i. The government at the federal, state, and local tiers should provide adequate funding to the education sector that will ensure that every girl-child in particular and boys in general are catered for through provision of portable water, building safe and inclusive learning environments for girls and boys, hiring and training more female qualified teachers.
- ii. The government at the federal, state, and local tiers should provide the enabling environment where women can participate in entrepreneurial ventures. At the school levels, life skills be encouraged especially for the girl-child.
- iii. Government and relevant non-governmental organizations should create more awareness, among rural dwellers most especially, about the importance of education and the need to allow the girl-child to go to school. Example of such is the Girls4Girls and SHE4HE programmes of UNICEF.
- iv. There should be ample access in the political arena where women are given room to participate in electoral processes. Women who are elected are more likely to speak, advocate, symbolize, and act on behalf of women and children compared to their male counterparts.
- v. Government and communities should provide adequate security for all children in and out of school.

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