

Social Values and Insecurity: Surmounting Obstacles to Girl-Child Education in Nigeria; A Sociological Perspective

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Abstract: *The apparent intractability of the issues and challenges associated with girl-child education in Nigeria portends great insecurity for the girl-child. This is in spite of noble programs aimed at availing the girl-child and her male counterpart equal opportunities for education. These include the Universal Primary Education (UPE), the Universal Basic Education (UBE) and the Family Support Program (FSP). However, these programs have in common, the top-down approach which excludes the girl-child, parents and the society at large in policy enunciation and implementation. Employing a sociological perspective, this paper explores the options of role modeling, re-socialization and family based education insurance program as avenues towards changing societal portrayal of the girl-child vis-à-vis her male counterpart. This, it is hoped will impact positively on the girl-child's sense of self worth. It is also aimed at changing societal values about the girl-child and including the girl-child, parents and the society at large in the effective and sustainable implementation of programs aimed at promoting girl-child education in Nigeria.*

Keywords: Socialization, Education, Girl-child, Society, Values

1. Introduction

The editorial column of the Guardian newspaper [1], bears the caption "Menace of Underage Marriage". It is a narrative of the plight of Aminat Hamisu, a 12 years old class one, student of Ansar – Ud – Deen Junior secondary school in Ado Odo/Ota local council area of Nigeria. She was betrothed by her father against her wish to a seventy year old Malam Ibraheem Mirago. In spite of Aminat Hamisu's vehement remonstrance and insistence on finishing school before marriage, Mallam Ibraheem Mirago convinced her father to give consent to the marriage proposal by promising him economic gratification. This story echoes the plight of millions of voiceless young girls in Nigeria whose rights are abused, ironically by the very parents, guardians and other relations that are supposed to be protective but whose actions are embedded in social values that subjugate the needs, personality and self worth of the girl-child to her male counterpart. More often than not, this negative attitude is subsumed within belief systems that cling tenaciously albeit spuriously to the superiority of the male child over the girl child. The reason adduced for this unfair attitude and beliefs include the fact that the male child will continue to bear the family name even after marriage while it is customary for females to drop the names of their family of origin and adopt their husband's family name after marriage. This preference for the male child is illustrated in table 1.

Table 1: Disparity in Labour Force Participation, Literacy and Education between Girls and Boys in Nigeria, 2000 and 2010[2]

Gender	Female (Ages 15-24)	Male (Ages 15-24)
Labour force participation rate (% of populations ages 15-24)	40.4	19.4
Gross enrolment rate (% of relevant age group) Primary	84.8	105.9
Gross enrolment rate (% of relevant age group) Secondary	22.4	7.3
Literacy rate (youth) (% of population age 15-24)	65.3	78.1

It also draws attention to the ramifications of the major obstacles to girl-child education in Nigeria, and the level of insecurity faced by the girl-child even in the hands of supposedly protective parents. It indicts societal values based on gender stereotypes that encourage forced girl-child marriages; it also indicts widespread illiteracy and abject poverty that mortgage the future of the girl-child for immediate gratification by parents. This indictment extends to a religious and socio-cultural belief system that revels in the inequitable distribution of opportunities on the basis of gender preferences. A political system too weak to enforce laws that it has enacted is also culprit. The insecurity is as a result of the ever present risk of not completing primary education. Also, there is the problem of dropping out of secondary school on account of either poverty or such socio-cultural factors as early marriage, betrothal or unwanted pregnancy. This is more so against the backdrop of the revelation by the National Population Commission (NPC) that fifty thousand teenagers die yearly in Nigeria due to early pregnancies. A comparative study carried out by NPC, shows that adolescent fertility rate in Nigeria is 121 lives per 1000, while in Gabon it is 89. In Algeria, it is 7, Egypt 38, Botswana 51, South Africa 58, Ghana 63, Togo 64, Namibia 72, and Gambia 88[3]. Chaaban and Cunningham [4] have reported that approximately one quarter of girls in developing countries are not in school while one quarter to one half of girls in developing countries become mothers before they attain the age of eighteen. Chaabban and Cunningham therefore opine that improving the socio-economic potentials for girls and young women is of central importance not only to this target population but the communities to which they belong and even the next generation. In the same vein the World Development Report 2012 [5] has it that sizeable gender gaps still remain for poor women and women in poor places. The report states that in education where gaps have narrowed in most countries, girls' enrollment in primary and secondary schools in sub-Saharan African countries and some parts of south Asia have not improved much. The report compares school enrollment

for girls in Mali, Pakistan and Ethiopia to those in the United States of America in 1810.

This study proceeds by discussing the major obstacles to girl-child education in Nigeria and reviews available literature on the issues and challenges of girl-child education and efforts made by the government and other stakeholders to address these issues and challenges. This is followed by measures suggested to surmount obstacles to girl-child education.

2. Obstacles to Girl-Child Education in Nigeria

Girl-child education in Nigeria and attendant issues have remained at the fore front of gender studies for a very long time. This is as a result of disparities observed in the number of girls in comparison to their male counterparts in schools at the primary and secondary levels. It is perhaps as a result of these observed disparities that programs aimed at availing the girl-child and her male counterpart of the opportunities for self actualization and becoming useful members of society through education were initiated by various governments of the federation.

These programs include the Universal Primary Education (UPE) which made primary education compulsory for children of ages 6 – 11years (1976), the Universal Basic Education (UBE), the Family Support Programs' (FSP) intervention in basic education (1994) and the National Mass Literary Campaign launched in September 1982 [6]. These efforts failed to check the disproportionate access to education and other socio-economic opportunities between boys and girls for various reasons. Thus with particular reference to Kano which is dominated by Islam, Adamu [7] opines that it is difficult to convince most people of the desirability of sending both boys and girls to school. This is as a result of an enduring suspicion of western education as an agent of Christianity. Using as his example, the upsurge in the number of girls seeking admission into secondary schools in 1986 and the inability of the state government to admit all girls that passed the state entrance examination on account of non availability of infrastructure, Adamu adds another dimension to the generally held view that parents do not allow their daughters attend western style schools. This is the case of gender stereotype in the choice of subjects and professions. According to him, even state governments exhibit gender bias in taking policy decisions on professions to improve the welfare of women and girls. They focus on nursing, teaching and social work while avoiding such professions as engineering, medicine and accountancy seen as the preserve of men.

Nzeakor [8] blames widespread illiteracy among women in Nigeria on traditional belief systems and pejorative attitudes towards women. Political instability is blamed for the failure of government efforts to boost girl-child education. Collaborative effort between Nongovernmental organizations, the private sector and government is suggested as a means of overcoming the challenges of girl-child education. These efforts are to be geared towards increase of job opportunities for girls, free primary education and medical insurance for female staff to raise their esteem. Offorma [9] has suggested a school feeding

program as a way of improving girl-child access to education as such a program introduced in Bangladesh increased overall enrolment by 34% and 44% increase for girls. She also recommends equitable distribution of teachers to both urban and rural places while providing the rural area with social amenities to retain teachers posted there.

Most studies on the challenges of girl-child education in Nigeria (Adamu [10], Nzeako [11] and Offorma [12] concentrate on formal education. Little or no attention is paid informal education. However, through informal education, the girl-child is socialized to accept a subordinate position to her male counterpart. In Nigeria specific roles are reserved for the male child while the girl-child is restricted to care giving, housekeeping and tending to the welfare of the male child. It is no accident therefore that the roles prescribed for the male-child expose him to socio-economic and political advantage while proscriptive norms limit the socio economic and political chances of the girl-child. Also attention is focused on poverty at the family and household levels leading to a high rate of girl-child withdrawal from school in order that the lean family resources may be maximized in the interest of the male child that is expected to inherit the family name. Poverty at the national level which makes it impossible for governments to meet their obligations to the citizenry is hardly considered. However, there exists a relationship between poverty at the national and family levels. This affects and in turn is affected by societal values which shape people's perception and attitude to early marriage, teenage pregnancy, socio-cultural and religious belief systems and gender stereotypes. All of these impact negatively on girl child education in Nigeria. This negative impact is exacerbated by the fact that in spite of her abundant endowment of human and natural resources, Nigeria remains a poor country. It is estimated that 69 percent of the population live in poverty in both rural and urban areas [13]. Life expectancy is also low as illustrated by table 2.

Table 2: Comparison of development indicators in five African countries in 2010[14]

<i>Growth Indicators</i>	<i>Nigeria</i>	<i>Gabon</i>	<i>Libya</i>	<i>Egypt</i>	<i>South Africa</i>
Population (millions)	154.7	15.0	6.4	8.30	49.3
Life expectancy at birth (years)	48.1	60.9	74.5	70.3	51.6
Infant mortality rate (per 1000 lives births)	85.8	51.5	16.8	18.2	54.3
Physicians (per 1000 people)	0.4	-	1.9	2.8	-
Rural population (% of total population)	50.9	14.5	22.3	57.2	38.8
Adult literacy rate (% ages 15 and older)	60.8	87.7	88.9	-	88.7
Youth literacy rate (% ages 15-24)	71.8	97.6	99.0	-	97.6
Mobile phone subscribers (per 100 people)	47.2	93.1	77.9	66.7	94.2
Internet uses (per 100 people)	28.4	6.7	5.5	20.0	9.0

3. Poverty as an Obstacle to Girl-Child Education

Poverty is caused when 'a distortion becomes so pronounced that people, groups and countries lose their capacity to adapt, change and survive' [15]. In Nigeria this distortion is traceable to the peripheral capitalism introduced through colonialism. Whereas in pre-colonial Africa, the urban centre was a place for industry and creation of wealth as obtains in the developed capitalist countries, peripheral capitalism has turned the post colonial African urban centre but Nigeria in particular into mere centers of consumption and distribution of goods and services from the International capitalist system of production [16]. The attendant competition to be relevant in this International capitalist system has polarized the Nigerian people and groups, entrenched ethnicity, religious/socio-cultural belief systems that perpetuate poverty. At the national level, poverty reduces investment in education. Thus budgetary allocations to education in Nigeria are yet to meet the internationally recommended benchmark of 26% of annual budget. Such reductions have adverse effects on the award of scholarships and free education to deserving pupils and students. Also shortfalls in the provision of infrastructural facilities, as in the case of Kano state used as an example in Adamu's study, militate against girl-child education. Thus in majority of the states in Nigeria there are more secondary schools for boys than for girls. Poverty also militates against girl-child education by exposing young girls to sexual delinquency and/or outright prostitution in order to meet financial obligations in school. It should be noted that economic status as illustrated by poverty does not exhaust the sources of disparity in educational attainment between the girl child and her male counterpart. Other socio-cultural factors include exclusion as illustrated by the case of ethnic minorities, orphan hood and disability. Urban and rural residences also accentuate gender inequality in access to education [17].

4. Surmounting Obstacles to Girl-Child Education in Nigeria

It is the view of this paper that most of the challenges associated with girl-child education in Nigeria are attitudinal. That is to say, girls are discriminated against in the provision of educational opportunities because their position as girls is subjugated to the position of boys. This explains the failure of earlier efforts such as the UPE, UBE and FSP to ameliorate these challenges. They all have in common, the top-down approach. These policies were formulated, and implemented by the government without the input and participation of the target population or recipients. This paper advocates a departure from this approach. It suggests approaches aimed at surmounting obstacles to girl-child education that will involve the girl child, parents and the society at large. These approaches are enumerated and explained below.

(a) Resocialization

The United Nations Development Programs Population Information Network (POPIN) stipulates that women empowerment has five components, which are;

Women's sense of self worth, their right to have and to determine choices, their right to have access to opportunities and resources; their right to have the power to control their own lives both within and outside the home and their ability to influence the direction of social change to create a more just social and economic order nationally and internationally [18].

In order to achieve the above stated objectives, the Nigerian society and the girl-child in particular require a re-socialization through the various agents of socialization. Re-socialization is when people make transitions in roles which require unlearning and relearning while Socialization is the process through which one internalizes the norms of the groups among whom one lives, so that a distinct 'self' emerges, unique to the individual [19]. The girl-child in Nigeria is socialized to accept a subordinate self image to the boy. This is because a close relationship exists between personality and culture in the sense that the development of personality and the acquisition of cultural traits are the same learning process. The suggested re-socialization is directed at the girl-child and the Nigerian society writ large. The social values which place higher premium on the boy than the girl-child need to be reordered and corrected. On the other hand, the girl child needs to understand that there is nothing inherently inferior in her in relation to the boy. In building the self image which to a large extent determines herself worth, the girl-child needs positive feedback from parents, friends, relations and the society at large. This is the essence of the re-socialization. The schools, churches and families must be made to understand that social roles are culture based. Thus, confining the girl-child to the care economy, domestic or household chores, street hawking and rural agriculture is actually not an advantage to her.

(b) Role modeling

A role refers to the behavior expected of one who holds a particular social position. Socialization is more of learning acceptable role behavior as child, student, husband, wife and parent. This implies that there are standards set by social values for particular roles. Those who are seen within a particular society as meeting the standard for particular roles are role models. In Nigeria, the peripheral capitalist nature of the economy tends to extol and rever materialism while such virtues as humility, sincerity and hard work are neglected. As a result, there is a general confusion in role modeling in Nigeria. Is it the affluent philanthropist in the neighborhood with questionable sources of livelihood and character or the average, hardworking, honest civil servant that is the role model in that neighborhood? The priorities of the girl-child have to be set aright from the family through primary and secondary schools. It should be noted that as the child grows S/he develops a 'wardrobe' of role personalities. It is the family, peer group and school that direct the child's attention to the particular role personality that becomes his/her model. For the girl-child, this paper observes an advantage in the Nigerian primary and secondary school system. The author has observed the 'feminization' of the primary and secondary school system in Nigeria. This refers to the preponderance of female teachers in primary and secondary schools. This phenomenon has reached the level whereby the position of a head master seems to be non-existent anymore, while male principals are few in number. The girl-child has the advantage of taking the numerous

female teachers in the primary and secondary schools as her role models. On the other hand, these teachers should conduct themselves in ways that are worthy of emulation. This will make the girl-child look up to them, desire to be like them and really work towards it.

(c) Family Based Education Insurance Policy

It is contradictory to discuss poverty alleviation or eradication measures in a peripheral capitalist economy like Nigeria that thrives on creating poverty. However, poverty on the part of parents and guardians of the girl-child has featured prominently in issues and challenges of girl-child education that efforts have to be made to remedy this parlous socio-economic situation. Past efforts at poverty alleviation in Nigeria such as the Directorate for Food, Rural Road and Infrastructure (DIFFRI) the Family Support Program (FSP) the Better Life for Rural Women program and the National Program on the Eradication of Poverty (NAPEP) depended on funds from the government to prosecute their projects. As a result they were hijacked by politicians and contractors. The poor masses in both rural and urban areas who were the target population of these programs remain poverty stricken. This situation is worsened by present day globalization and attendant deregulation, privatization and liberalization of the economy. In Nigeria these have translated into loss of employment, unemployment and underemployment for majority Nigerians including graduates of tertiary institutions. In the absence of the earnings of the family's bread winner on account of unemployment, the family suffers. This paper therefore suggests family based education insurance policy hinged on participation in cooperative societies as a way of ensuring that poverty within the family does not compromise the girl-child's educational opportunities. The education insurance scheme suggested is envisaged to employ the principles of the contributory pension scheme being practiced in Nigeria presently. With the attributes of 'mutual help' and 'democratic decision making' cooperative societies in rural and urban areas will cater to the needs of its members thereby cushioning the effects of capitalist exploitation. The cooperative societies will ensure that each member family fully subscribes to the education insurance while the insurance company to which such funds are subscribed make available the funds required for the education of children from the family.

5. Conclusion

This paper has analyzed issues and challenges associated with girl-child education in Nigeria. The challenges have persisted over the years in spite of such intervention efforts as the universal primary education, the universal basic education and the family support programs. These programs failed to adequately address the issues and challenges of girl-child education as a result of their top-down institutional approach which did not involve parents, the girl-child and society at large. Re-socialization, role modeling, family based education insurance are suggested as efforts aimed at surmounting obstacles to girl-child education.

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