

## **Promoting Gender Equity in Girl Child Education in Rural Communities in Cross River State, Nigeria.**

**<sup>1</sup>Dr. Godswill Efiom Etim <sup>2</sup>Dr. Eyong, Emmanuel Ikpi & <sup>3</sup> Dr. Ojong, Blessing Mpantor**

**<sup>1,2&3</sup> Department of Educational Foundations and Childhood Education**

**Cross River University of Technology**

### **ABSTRACT**

Gender equity has been a long-term issue in the academic environment. This is because it determines who is capable of being educated, how well they do, and how far they progress. In most societies, being a female child is negatively associated with schooling in terms of enrolment, attainment and performance in the educational system. Most parents believe that the girl child is supposed to be the “chief and commander of the kitchen”. It is worrisome to state that this activity tends to demoralize the ego of the girls who should have access to quality education. So sad to say that in most parts of the Northern States, the girl child has become a source of income generation as they are given early marriages by most parents instead of being at school to attain their set goals. It is worth noting that the girl child occupies a central place in society and should be given full support for the attainment of quality education. Thus the paper sought to determine how Promoting Gender Equity in Girl Child Education in Rural Communities in Cross River State, Nigeria can be enhanced. In the course of the study, the paper raised certain salient issues with girl child education, factors hindering gender equity in the girl children and possible ways on how gender equity can be facilitated among girl children in Nigeria with emphasis on rural communities in Cross River State, Nigeria.

**Keywords: Promoting, Gender Equity, Girl Child and Education**

## INTRODUCTION

Education is the highest investment in the world. This is because countries like Finland, Singapore, Russia, China and the United States of America invested in building quality education to stand tall in the global education ranking. In this regard, educating the girl child is a powerful investment that benefits both individuals and society by unlocking the potential to improve health, nutrition, social justice, democracy, human rights, social cohesion, and economic prosperity for current and future generations. In Nigeria, particularly in Cross River State, gender equity is a basic fundamental human right, for the girl child to enhance a peaceful, prosperous and sustainable world.

In the language of Offorma (2009) girl-child is seen as a biological female offspring from birth to eighteen years of age. This period is made up of infancy, childhood, and early and late adolescence stage of development. To him, the girl-child is seen as a young female person, who would eventually grow into a woman and marry. She is conditional to look after the young ones, the home and the kitchen. Girl-child education is a catch-all term for a complexity of issues and debates surrounding education (primary, secondary, tertiary and health education for females (Okenmor, Ndit & Filshok, 2012). Girl-child education also includes areas of gender equality, access to education and its connection to the alleviation of poverty, and good governance, which are major ingredients in averting crime against women. It was recorded in the World Education Forum in Dakar Senegal noted that in Nigeria, the percentage of girls who did not complete elementary education in rural areas was 32.1% and in the urban centres was 14.6% as compared to boys with 20% in rural and 7.4% in urban centres. The forum also reported that the number of girls who complete elementary school in rural areas was 57.5% in urban centres (Swenson, Collins, Best, Flanigan, Fields & Comstock, 2013).

According to a study by UNICEF (2012) measuring exclusion from primary education, more than 4 million girls aged 6-11 years in Nigeria. In the northern part of Nigeria, the proportion of girls to boys in school ranges from 1 girl to 2 boys and even 1 to 3 in the rural areas. Commenting on the importance of the girl-child from an Islamic point of view has revealed that Islam has

enjoined the pursuit of knowledge on Muslim men and women alike in spiritual, religious and educational matters

Rights of Girl-Child to Education According to Adedokun and Olufunke (2010), every individual in society is entitled to the same rights as citizens of that particular society. The same is true of the girl-child. She is entitled to a lot of human rights but because she is regarded as being weak she is vulnerable to the violations of these rights. Like any other person in society, she likewise requires the right to enjoy and exercise these rights. Some of the rights of the girl-child as stated by The People Movement for Human Rights Education include the following: Right to freedom from discrimination based on gender, age, race, colour, language, ethnicity or the status of the girl child's parents, right to equal access to food and nutrition, right to freedom from cultural practices, customs and traditions harmful to the girl-child including female genital mutilation and right to education- free and compulsory primary education and freedom from all types of discrimination at all levels of education. Linked with the above rights is the right to information about health, sexuality and reproduction, and protection from physical and mental abuse.

Allowing the girl child to have access to the right to quality education is one of the surest ways of maintaining harmonious living in any society. And it is generally seen as the fight to end extreme poverty and sexual humiliation on the part of women who have access to quality education, as they are likely to live healthy, poverty-free lives. Hence, quality education for all girl children would be the most effective tool against poverty and instability worldwide. Girls who are denied equal access to quality education do not have a fair chance of escaping poverty. This reality continues to affect the world's girls. Although more girls are now attending primary school, there are still big gender gaps in how many get a secondary education.

Today girl child discrimination such as forced labour and child marriage has been a major issue facing the girl child's ability to have access to quality education. By way of definition, gender refers to the social attributes and opportunities backed with being male/female, man/woman or girl/boy. For instance, in the year two thousand (2000), the United Nations Organizations set up a list of goals targeted which was called the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) which was meant to focus on a more "human-rights based and multi-sectorial approach towards development"

(UNICEF, 2004). Some of the developmental issues addressed by MDGs are: The eradication of extreme poverty and hunger; achieving universal primary education, and prominently promoting gender equality and empowering women (United Nations, 2010).

In the context of Nigeria, non-discrimination is enshrined in the Nigerian Constitution-Chapter 4, Section 42 but in practice, the majority of Nigerian girls and women are unable to claim their constitutional entitlement. The constitution tends to fight against girl-child discrimination and promote gender equality. This is because when the girl child is denied access to quality can harm the next generation, making it harder for whole communities to come out of poverty. This has prompted most human rights activists around the globe are fighting back based on the fact that girl child education has the potential to become an equalizer that will foster gender equality for women and girls as it will impart them with the requisite skills and competencies they need to benefit from individual returns, which in turn will affect social and economic returns. Empowerment needs to go hand in hand. Indeed, acquiring skills and competencies to enter the labour market is one part of the story. When a girl child is given full access to quality education, they stand to be empowered it is based on the backdrop that the study focused on Promoting Gender Equity in Girl Child Education in Rural Communities in Cross River State, Nigeria.

### **Issues on a rethink on of girl child Gender injustice in Nigeria Report From 2012-2022**

An understanding of the place of the girl child is very important which may help to refocus on the issues surrounding the girl child's education. Some are outlined below:

- i. The death rate among girls during child labour has risen to about 1:20. This is attributed to the fact that 15-19-year-old girls in Northern Nigeria have delivered a child without the help of a health professional, traditional birth attendant or even a friend or relative. The rate of school dropout in Nigeria is 70% for females and 30% for their male counterparts. This implies that females drop out of school more than their male counterparts.
- ii. In Nigeria particularly in the core northern region States, over 77% of girls cannot read and write effectively.
- iii. Nigerian girls who enrolled in school leave school earlier than their male counterparts.

- iv. More than two-thirds of 18–25-year-old girls in Northern Nigeria are unable to read a sentence compared to less than 12% in the South.
- v. Over 95% of all girls (women) in the North are married or engaged by the age of 13 and are expected to bear a child within the first year of marriage.
- vi. Nigeria has one of the lowest rates of female entrepreneurship in sub-Saharan Africa. The majority of women are concentrated in casual, low-skilled, low-paid informal sector employment.
- vii. Quite paradoxically in most parts of Nigeria, most girls feel that education is mainly for males as such they can have access to education after their male siblings have completed their schooling.
- viii. Most parent humiliates the girl child and thinks it is reasonable for a husband to beat his wife if she burns the food, refuses sex or goes out without his permission.
- ix. Nearly half of unmarried women in parts of Southern Nigeria have experienced Physical violence.
- x. Statistics has it that girls from less affluent home (poorer family background) are more likely to marry young and have worse health outcomes. As they lack knowledge of family planning and the use of contraceptives.
- xi. In the majority of the northern state, girls and women are at a higher risk of childbearing age. This is because 10% of women deliver in a health facility.

## **Hindrances of Gender equity on Girls**

It may sound pathetic to outline some issues and picture how discrimination against women is affecting human and societal growth and development in Nigeria:

- i. Most sectors in the economy discriminate against women from being employed in to the labour market. For instance, most engineering positions feel that such a profession is highly masculine.
- ii. In 2012, Nigeria Gender Report has it that the contributions to household cash income and limited influence on spending at the family level. Of serious constraints to economic growth are the facts that women are kitchen owners, petty traders and subsistent farmers.
- iii. Girls (women) have been seriously marginalized in Political offices hence, denying women in decision-making positions

- iv. Most women shy away from responsibilities in politics due to a lack of economic empowerment which has further increased poverty among women. Hence, the increasing incidence of insecurity, violence and crime such as armed banditry, kidnapping, prostitution, child trafficking, cultism, and an increasing culture of begging are due to poverty in the society which women's empowerment can ameliorate.

### **How to promote gender equity in girl education in Nigeria**

Promoting gender fairness is one basic area Nigerians need to refocus on so that our pride can be restored. This is rooted in the fact that education is one of the most important means of giving the girl child the right education to foster empowering them with the knowledge, skills and self-confidence necessary to participate fully in the development process" (Action Aid Programme of Action, paragraph 4.2). Getting a quality education is essentially important to girls. This is because the educational achievements of women can have ripple effects within the family and across generations.

- i. To Akunyil (2010), quality girl child education can help in poverty reduction, hence, investing in girls' education is one of the most effective ways to reduce poverty.
- ii. Iyiola and Gbadamosi, (2006) informed that quality girl child education helps to protect against HIV/AIDS infection: Girls' education ranks among the most powerful tools for reducing girls' vulnerability. It slows and reduces the spread of HIV/AIDS by contributing to female economic independence, delayed marriage, family planning, and work outside the home as well as greater information about the disease and how to prevent it.
- iii. Promotes family lineage supports and unity: Mothers' education is a significant variable affecting children's educational attainment and opportunities. A mother with a few years of formal education is considerably more likely to send her children to school than an uneducated mother. (Adebanwi & Obadare, 2010).
- iv. According to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, 2005, giving girls (women) the right to education is a Safeguard of Human Rights. Education will help to equip them with those fundamental rights of the girl child.

- v. According to Obasanjo, (2002), quality girl child education helps to strengthen democratization. Thus, countries with smaller education gaps between rates of boys' and girls' schooling tend to enjoy greater democracy.

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, gender inequality has been a serious issue in contemporary society where a girl-child is denied access to quality education and in most cases, particularly in the northern region of Nigeria is given out for early marriage at a tender age (10-13). The young lad is deprived of her right to education. This practice has a significant negative effect on the attitude of most parents regarding the education of the girl-child. After being given out for marriage, the “husband” deprives her completely of education for household activities coupled with the superstitious belief that by most parents that the girl-child should always be in the kitchen and also to giving birth to children alone. This act in turn fosters racial discrimination which has become a global issue. Efforts are being made at different levels to combat the problem of discrimination against women as it affects social transformation.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

From the study, the following recommendation

- i. There should be extensive enlightenment campaigns on the need for parents, and religious bodies on the role of the girl child education.
- ii. Government should enforce and implement strict punishment on girl child abuse in the states in the states of the Country
- iii. Counselling strategies should be employed in schools to enlighten the parents on the importance of girl education and awareness of Child marriage to the family, community, and society at large.

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