

Relevance of Basic Education for the Girl-child in Poverty Reduction for Inclusive Development in Nigeria

Abosede Yetunde ODUNUGA

Sikiru Adetona College of Education, Science and Technology
Omu Ijebu, Ogun State
Email: oloriabosedeodunuga@gmail.com (08032593535)

Abstract

Education plays a pivotal role in shaping the future of individuals and societies. In the context of developing countries like Nigeria, where poverty and gender inequality persist, ensuring access to basic education for the girl-child is crucial for poverty reduction and inclusive development. This paper examined the relevance of basic education in addressing the challenges faced by the girl-child in Nigeria and its potential impact on poverty reduction and inclusive development.

The girl-child in Nigeria faces multifaceted challenges such as cultural norms, limited resources, early marriages, and gender-based violence, all of which hindered her access to education. Basic education acts as a powerful tool for empowering the girl-child, breaking the cycle of poverty, and promoting inclusive development. It equips her with knowledge, skills, and confidence to make informed decisions, contribute to her family and community, and improve her socio-economic status. To maximize the impact of basic education for the girl-child, concerted efforts are needed from various stakeholders. The government should prioritise investments in education infrastructure, teacher training, and the development of relevant

curriculum. In conclusion, basic education for the girl-child is indispensable for poverty reduction and inclusive development in Nigeria. Engaging communities, religious leaders, and parents through awareness campaigns can help challenge deep-rooted socio-cultural norms and promote girls' education, Nigeria can unlock their potential, empower them as agents of change, and pave the way for a more prosperous and equitable society.

Keywords: Basic Education, Girl-child, Poverty, Reduction Development

Introduction

In Nigeria, like many other developing countries, ensuring basic education for all children is crucial for poverty reduction and inclusive development. However, the significance of basic education becomes even more pronounced when it comes to the girl-child. Historically, girls have faced numerous barriers in accessing education, particularly in impoverished regions. This essay examines the relevance of basic education for the girl-child in poverty reduction, emphasising its role in fostering inclusive development in Nigeria.

According to Murtala and Nasiru (2021), education has to be viewed not as a special privilege but as fundamental human right. As a right, it is to be exercised by everyone regardless of gender, age, race, ethnicity, religion, political orientation, economic disparity, nationality or geographical differences, and health barriers. Human development is recognised to occur through education. It serves as a means of acquiring and passing on knowledge, skills, character, values, and attitudes to the following generation. In order to understand the reasons behind variations in an individual or individuals, groups, or a country, one is exposed to their surroundings through education (Eze & Eze, 2018).

Education, in the opinion of Okafor (2016), is an acculturation process that aids in a person's potential growth. Eze and Eze (2018) defined education in another context as the process of passing along to

future generations the culture, norms, values, and ethics of a particular society. Education is a lifelong process that ought to be available everywhere, at all times, and in any situation. A number of documents, including the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights of 1966, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948, have ratified this right. International tools by themselves are insufficient, however, and lip service alone will not be sufficient to educate girls (Assefaw, 2010).

The girl-child in Nigeria faces multifaceted challenges such as cultural norms, limited resources, early marriages, and gender-based violence, all of which hinder her access to education. Basic education acts as a powerful tool for empowering the girl-child, breaking the cycle of poverty, and promoting inclusive development. It equips her with knowledge, skills, and confidence to make informed decisions, contribute to her family and community, and improve her socio-economic status.

Girls who have an education can make their own decisions and have a beneficial impact on their families. Girls' and women's lives are improved and saved by education. It gives individuals more control over their life and equips them with knowledge and abilities to support the sustainable growth of their society. In numerous nations, educated women have held or are now holding important positions as presidents, prime ministers, chancellors, or rival political leaders, ministers, community elders, consultants, researchers, managers, etc. It is also undeniable that there are many powerful women in leadership roles around the world. As managers and leaders, they have demonstrated their reliability, continue to carry out many beneficial tasks that increase productivity, and have done their share to help their nations develop sustainably.

Education as a Key to Poverty Reduction

Basic education plays a pivotal role in breaking the cycle of poverty. By equipping individuals with foundational knowledge, skills, and abilities, education empowers them to improve their livelihoods, secure gainful employment, and contribute meaningfully to society. Educated individuals are more likely to have better job prospects, higher incomes, and increased opportunities for socio-economic mobility. Thus, investing in basic education creates a path out of poverty for the girl-child.

According to the National Policy of Education (FRN, 2013), “education is the most important instrument of change and any fundamental change in intellectual and social outlook of any society has to be preceded by an educational revolution”. Education is the basis for the full promotion and improvement of the status of women educational programmes through efficient and effective learning and training, and empowers women to better understand issues affecting them. Education no doubt, is the beginning point for women’s advancement or empowerment in different areas of human endeavour as the adage says “educate a man, you educate an individual but educate a woman, you educate a nation” Empowering women through education is therefore the most effective way of combating or eradicating extreme poverty, hunger and promoting gender equality and women empowerment as enunciated in articles (1) and (3) of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGS) of United Nations (2008).

Education can therefore be regarded as the key factor in overcoming the barriers that women face and the basic instrument for poverty reduction among women in Nigeria. According to Mahuta (2010), education not only provides women with the necessary skills to improve their livelihood, but also empowers women to take their right places in the development process of the society. Education is therefore key to reducing poverty. There is therefore the urgent need to re-examine the qualitative and quantitative services in basic education, primary and secondary education for the purpose of using education to

achieve poverty reduction and if possible, poverty eradication among women in Nigeria.

Research from the world bank indicated that increasing secondary education for girls could result in an annual income increase of 0.3% per capita which show a correlation between female education and economic development (World Bank, 2008). This is because firstly, education is a means of reducing inequality because those who are educated can improve for self and families, expect higher salaries, and secondly, when per capital income rises, the opportunities for women increases (UNESCO, 2003). In Nigeria, there is considerable inequality between men and women. Despite the transformation agenda of the Jonathan administration to improve the lot of women and girls, policies and resources have not matched intentions expressed. In Nigeria today, child labour, child trafficking, prostitution, early marriage, child adoption by Boko Haram, and other cultural inhibitions are still preventing girls from obtaining access to education. Although Nigeria has passed the laws against such practices, they have not provided the means for enforcing them effectively. Often, it is non-governmental organisations championed by women which take the initiatives, for example, against child labour, child trafficking, child prostitution and child adoption.

Women living in poverty are usually illiterate and lack the knowledge to improve their lives. The contributions they make to the national economy, often through the informal sector, is difficult to access and is therefore hardly recognized. Yet studies (from Nwosu, 2010) shows that women are the main producers of food crops for their families and are responsible for the welfare of their households and upbringing of the future generations.

Gender Disparity in Education

Despite progress made in recent years, gender disparity in education remains a challenge in Nigeria. Deep-rooted cultural beliefs, socio-economic constraints, early marriages, and gender-based violence are

some of the factors that hinder girls' access to education. Consequently, the girl-child is often denied the opportunity to develop her full potential, perpetuating a cycle of poverty and exclusion. Addressing these barriers and promoting girls' education is essential for achieving inclusive development.

According to the UNESCO Institute for Statistics, girls' enrollment in primary and secondary schools in Nigeria has improved in recent years, but gender disparities persist. In 2019, the gross enrollment rate for girls in primary education was 83.6%, while for boys, it was 88.5%. At the secondary level, the figures were 45.5% for girls and 49.4% for boys.

According to (World Bank Group 2008), In low-income countries, secondary school completion rates for girls also continue to lag, with only 38% of girls completing lower secondary school compared to 43% of boys. Dropout rates remain high, especially among girls. Factors such as early marriage, cultural norms, poverty, and inadequate infrastructure contribute to the higher dropout rates for girls compared to boys. Many girls face pressure to leave school to marry or engage in household chores, limiting their educational opportunities.

Nigeria's literacy rates reflect the gender disparity in education. The overall literacy rate for adults (15 years and above) in Nigeria is around 62%, but the gender disparity is noticeable. The female literacy rate stands at 55.5%, significantly lower than the male literacy rate of 69.4%.

Gender disparities in education contribute to economic inequality. Limited educational opportunities for girls hinder their ability to secure well-paying jobs and contribute fully to the economy. This perpetuates a cycle of poverty and social exclusion. Education plays a crucial role in improving health outcomes and empowering individuals to make informed decisions. Girls with limited education are more vulnerable to early pregnancies, maternal mortality, and other health risks.

Empowering Girls through Education

Basic education provides girls with the necessary skills and knowledge to become active participants in their communities and the workforce. It enhances their capacity to make informed decisions, improves their health and well-being, and promotes gender equality. Moreover, educated girls are more likely to delay marriage and childbirth, reducing the risks associated with early pregnancies and enhancing their future prospects. By investing in the education of girls, Nigeria can empower a generation of women who can contribute significantly to poverty reduction and inclusive development.

According to the Sustainable Human Development approach, eradicating the gender gap in education, the economy, and cultures, to name just a few, is a requirement for achieving long-term and inclusive development (Hadiza, 2017). This approach places a strong emphasis on the participation of all sections of the population. It is equally accepted that all countries must educate their people, both male and female, in order to achieve genuine inclusive growth. Therefore, it is undeniable that education helps a country achieve economic and social prosperity by creating a dynamic workforce and a knowledgeable populace that is able to collaborate and compete on a global scale (Ibrahim, 2012).

Nigeria, a country in desperate need of inclusive development, shares the view that meaningful progress and development can only be made in a nation when its people are well educated and equipped to use their education as a tool to address the wide range of complex problems the nation faces. For instance, many developed countries with a long history of formal and non-formal education have largely succeeded in resolving many of their national issues, including ignorance, poverty, disease (like HIV/AIDS), infant and maternal mortality, as well as social and political problems. These were accomplished through a planned educational strategy and a national development program (Ibrahim, 2012).

The platform for action adopted in Beijing in the year 1995 underlines education as a human right and as an essential tool for achieving the goals of equality, development and peace. Non-discriminatory education benefits both girls and boys, and thus ultimately contributes to more equal relationships between women and men. Equality of access and attainment of educational qualifications is necessary if more women are to become agents of change. Literacy of women is an important key to improving health, nutrition and education in the family and empowers women in decision making in society. Investing in formal and non-formal education and training for women, has an exceptional high social and economic return, and has proved to be one of the best means of achieving inclusive development and economic growth (Assefaw, 2010).

According to Murtala and Nasiru (2021), educating women is like educating the next generations because they are the ones who are shouldered with the responsibility of training, educating and bringing up the next generations and thus, has proved to be one of the best means of achieving economic growth and sustainable development in the society.

Breaking Gender Stereotypes and Social Norms

Education can challenge gender stereotypes and social norms that perpetuate gender inequality. By promoting gender-responsive teaching practices and inclusive curricula, schools can help dismantle harmful stereotypes and foster an environment that encourages girls to pursue their aspirations. When girls receive education alongside boys, it helps to bridge gender gaps, promote mutual respect, and foster a more inclusive society. Basic education acts as a catalyst for transforming societal attitudes and norms, laying the foundation for sustainable development.

According to Kainuwa and Yusuf (2013), traditional beliefs and practices in some regions in Nigeria have a major impact on the educational opportunities accessible to girls, which creates a particularly

difficult environment for girls to pursue an education anywhere in Nigeria. Nigeria is home to a diverse cultural heritage, but some regions predominant authoritarian system is a major barrier to girls-child education. The area is characterised by a strong patriarchal tradition. Girls are particularly hard hit by the alarmingly high rate of kid out of school attendance in Northern Nigeria (Uyanga, 2009). Additionally, the report highlights the fact that societal beliefs and practices are significant barriers to the education of females in the area.

Many women in Northern part of Nigeria are unable to complete their education because of issues like early marriage, gender-based violence, and a lack of educational options (Mshelia, 2021). Inevitably, these challenges hinder women's educational opportunities. An examination of the reasons why girls in Northern Nigeria drop out of school revealed that early marriage and motherhood were major factors. Pia (2015), stated societal beliefs, like the idea that girls should prioritise household duties over education, were also identified as major barriers to girls' education in the area. The study discovered, for instance, that the view that girls should prioritize housework over schoolwork is common. It has been established that long-held cultural beliefs and practices play a significant role in maintaining the gender gap in education in Northern Nigeria. Cultural norms and beliefs that are deeply ingrained in many communities serve as a barrier to women's education (Jayachandran, 2021). The perpetuation of sexism is aided by this. Purdah, which mandates that women cover their bodies from head to toe, limits their mobility and prevents them from receiving an education. Equally limiting to girls' educational opportunities is widespread cultural consensus that schools are not necessary for their development as individuals or as members of society (Windels & Mallia, 2015).

Over 41,000 girls were reportedly pushed into underage marriages daily in 2017, according to the World Bank. The fundamental reason for these early marriages is how society and parents view girls. For instance, many people in Nigeria expect girls to prioritize home

responsibilities above school and job pursuits because they believe they are inferior to guys. Those people limit what their girl child may and cannot do. Girls need to learn from their parents that they have the right to an independent voice, a say, and a life of their own. Parents must also teach girls that society norms do not define who they can be. Making such an effort will empower girls.

Parents must encourage girls to pursue occupations in industries where men predominate in order to combat these misconceptions. Girls should pursue degrees in STEM fields (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics). Girls' attendance and participation in STEM hackathons and scholarships should be encouraged by parents. Such behaviours might inspire females to close the gender gap in science. In order to mentor young girls, teachers might collaborate with successful women in the STEM fields. They would learn more about their potential in STEM through the mentorship experience. Primary and secondary education in Nigeria should use gender-responsive curricula and instructional resources. A gender-sensitive curriculum promotes gender equality by taking into account the various needs and experiences of each gender. Evidence suggests that gender bias exists in Nigeria's primary and secondary curriculum, which frequently perpetuate gender stereotypes and unequal gender roles. For instance, the majority of textbooks used at the primary educational level portray men as wage earners and women as housewives. More successful women must be included in primary, intermediate, and tertiary school curriculums, according to the government. Girls and boys will benefit from the gender-sensitive effort by understanding the equality of gender roles.

Recommendations

- I. Strengthening policies and legislation that promote gender equality in education is essential. The Nigerian government should enforce existing laws, such as the Child Rights Act and the

Universal Basic Education Act, to protect girls' rights to education.

2. Ensuring equitable access to quality education requires investment in infrastructure, especially in rural areas. Constructing schools, providing safe transportation, and improving sanitation facilities are crucial steps to promote girls' enrollment and retention.
3. Engaging communities, religious leaders, and parents through awareness campaigns can help challenge deep-rooted socio-cultural norms and promote girls' education. It is essential to emphasize the benefits of education for individuals, families, and society as a whole.

Conclusion

Ensuring basic education for the girl-child is not only a matter of equity and human rights, but also a prerequisite for poverty reduction and inclusive development in Nigeria. By investing in girls' education and removing the barriers they face, Nigeria can unlock their full potential, empowering them to contribute actively to their families, communities, and the nation. Educated girls become empowered women who can drive sustainable development, challenge societal norms, and break the cycle of poverty, leading to a more inclusive and prosperous future for Nigeria as a whole.

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