

## **Girl-child Education: A Tool for Community Development**

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Girl-child education and community development are interconnected issues. When girls are educated, they become empowered and have the potential to contribute to the development of their communities. Educating girls can lead to better health outcomes, reduced poverty, and increased social and economic development. However, in many parts of the world, girls face barriers to education, including poverty, cultural norms, and lack of access to resources. It is crucial to invest in girls' education and provide them with the opportunity to fully realize their potential, which in turn leads to a more prosperous and equitable society. Therefore, community leaders, policymakers, and educators must prioritize and support initiatives that prioritize girls' education and empower them to become leaders in their communities.

**Keywords:** Girl-child, Education, Community Development.

### **Introduction**

The importance of education in the life of an individual particularly, the Girl-child cannot be overemphasized. Female education is very crucial for national development and the role of women cannot be under estimated. There is a general belief that 'when you educate a man, you educate one person but when you educate a woman, you educate a nation'. This statement reiterates the importance of female education for national development. Educating the girl child produces mothers who are educated and will in turn educate their children. Kiki (2010) asserted that the girl child needs to be educated to acquire knowledge and skills needed to advance her status for social interactions and self-improvement. The girl child education also prepares her to face reality in the society and teaches her to be a good wife and mother. Kiki further stated that when the girl child is educated, she realizes her full potentials and enables her to take decisions that affects her life.

### **Concept of Education**

Education is a process of acquiring knowledge, skills, values, and attitudes that are essential for personal development and societal progress (Asiegbu, Okorji&Bosah, 2014), makes individual learns good health habits, principles and practices which promote healthy living and longevity (Uzoma, (2013), as well as acquire marketable skills that confer economic power on the educated

thereby lifting the possessor up from the poverty arena (Agbakwuru, 2002). It is a lifelong journey of learning and encompasses formal, informal, and non-formal methods of instruction. The primary purpose of education is to enable individuals to understand the world around them, develop critical thinking abilities, and acquire the necessary tools to navigate and contribute to society. Education at basic and post primary school is a fundamental right of every child as it unveils their great potentials, an essential for the exercise of all other human rights. It promotes individual freedom, empowerment and yields important development benefits.

Formal education typically takes place within structured institutions such as schools, colleges, and universities, where students engage in a systematic curriculum designed to provide them with a broad range of knowledge in various subjects. Formal education often leads to certifications, diplomas, or degrees that validate the successful completion of a specific level of education.

Informal education occurs outside of formal institutions and includes learning experiences that take place in everyday life, such as interactions with family, friends, and the community. It involves acquiring knowledge through observation, exploration, and personal experiences. Informal education plays a crucial role in shaping individuals' values, beliefs, and social skills.

Non-formal education refers to organized educational activities that do not follow a conventional curriculum or lead to formal qualifications. It includes workshops, vocational training programs, community-based initiatives, and other learning opportunities that aim to develop specific skills or address particular needs.

### **Concept of Girl Child Education**

A "girl child" refers to a female child or a young girl who is in the stage of childhood. It is a term commonly used to emphasize the specific experiences, challenges, and rights of girls in society. The term "girl child" highlights the distinction between girls and adult women, acknowledging that children, including girls, have unique needs and vulnerabilities that should be addressed to ensure their well-being and development.

Offorma as cited by Fareo and Ateequ, 2020 defines girl-child as a biological female offspring from birth to eighteen years of age. This period is made up of infancy, childhood, early and late adolescence stage of development. 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 kitchen.

In many contexts, the term "girl child" is used to draw attention to issues such as gender inequality, discrimination, and the violation of girls' rights. It recognizes that girls often face specific challenges, including limited access to education, healthcare, protection from violence and abuse, child marriage, and child labour. By highlighting these issues, efforts can be made to

promote gender equality, empower girls, and create opportunities for their growth and advancement.

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 refers to the provision of formal and informal education opportunities specifically targeted at girls. It emphasizes the importance of providing education to girls and ensuring equal access to education for both girls and boys. The term recognizes the historical and ongoing disparities in educational opportunities between genders, with girls often facing greater barriers to accessing quality education.

Girl-child education is the process through which the girl-child acquires knowledge and realizes her potentialities and uses them for self-actualization, to be useful to her and others thereby making her a functional member of her society (Iwalaiye, Abah, Johnson, Giwa & Ali, 2016). It is a means of preserving, transmitting and improving the culture of the society.

Girl-child education also includes areas of gender equality, access to education and its connection to the alleviation of poverty, good governance, which are major ingredients in averting crime against women. Today's girl-child education is for her tomorrow's living. Ugwu in Fareo and Ateequ, 2020 defines girl-child education as the education that would make a girl-child become aware of herself and her capacity to exploit her environment, and involves training in literacy and vocational skills to enable her become functional in the society.

Girl child education programme has been viewed by different people interested in the programme in different ways. For instance, the ministry of education is likely to see it as the formal school programme for all girls in school to ensure they obtain the best learning experience. Those from the non-formal sector see it as an educational programme designed for out of school girls to help them make up their missed chance of schooling. Some see it as a programme aimed at giving out of school girls vocational skills to help them break through economically (Okorie, 2017; Abdulkarim & Mamman, 2014).

Girl-child education aims to address gender inequalities by promoting girls' enrolment, retention, and completion of primary, secondary, and tertiary education. It recognizes the positive impact that education can have on the lives of girls, including improved health outcomes, economic empowerment, reduced vulnerability to exploitation, and increased participation in decision-making processes.

Efforts to promote girl-child education encompass various aspects, such as removing financial barriers, improving infrastructure and facilities, providing gender-sensitive curricula, promoting positive gender norms, and addressing cultural and societal factors that hinder girls' education. These initiatives often involve collaboration between governments, non-governmental organizations, communities, and individuals working together to ensure that girls have equal opportunities to acquire education and develop their full potential.

### **Importance of Girl-child Education**

Several authors Ahmad & Najeemah (2013); Uzoma (2013); Asiegbu, Okorji&Bosah (2014); Omede&Agahiu (2016); UNESCO (2017) and Okorie (2017); Fareo and Ateequ, (2020) highlighted several importance of Girl-child education, some of which are:

1. **Empowerment:** Education empowers girls by equipping them with knowledge, skills, and confidence. It enables them to make informed decisions, exercise their rights, and advocate for themselves. Educated girls are more likely to have control over their lives, pursue higher education and career opportunities, and contribute to their communities' development. Through education, girls develop a sense of agency.
2. **Gender Equality:** Education is a fundamental right, and ensuring equal access to education for girls is essential for achieving gender equality. By addressing the disparities in educational opportunities between genders, girl-child education promotes social justice and challenges discriminatory norms and practices.
3. **Breaking the Cycle of Poverty:** Education is a key factor in breaking the cycle of poverty. Educated girls have better employment prospects and income-earning potential, which can lift them and their families out of poverty. They are more likely to invest in their children's education, creating a positive intergenerational impact.
4. **Health and Well-being:** Education plays a critical role in promoting health and well-being among girls. Educated girls are more likely to have knowledge about hygiene, nutrition, reproductive health, and disease prevention. They are better equipped to make healthy choices for themselves and their families, leading to improved health outcomes.
5. **Reduced Child Marriage and Early Pregnancy:** Access to education can help delay child marriage and early pregnancies. When girls are in school, they are less likely to be married off at a young age or become mothers before they are ready. Education provides alternative opportunities and pathways for girls, allowing them to pursue their dreams and aspirations.
6. **Social and Economic Development:** Girl-child education contributes to overall social and economic development. When girls are educated, societies benefit from their skills, talents, and contributions. Educated women are more likely to participate in the labour force, engage in entrepreneurship, and contribute to economic growth. They also tend to have smaller and healthier families, leading to improved population and community well-being.
7. **Gender Equality in Leadership and Decision-making:** Education is instrumental in promoting gender equality in leadership and decision-making positions. By ensuring girls' education, more women can participate in politics, governance, and other sectors traditionally dominated by men. This leads to diverse perspectives, inclusive policies, and a more equitable society.
8. **Gender Equality and Social Justice:** Girl-child education is essential for achieving gender equality and promoting social justice. It challenges discriminatory norms, practices, and

stereotypes that limit girls' opportunities. Education ensures that girls have equal access to quality education, enabling them to break free from cycles of oppression and contribute to a more equitable society.

9. **Social and Cultural Transformation:** Educated girls become agents of social and cultural transformation within their communities. They challenge harmful practices, such as genderbased violence, discrimination, and harmful traditions, and promote more inclusive and egalitarian values. Educated girls can influence social attitudes, break down barriers, and inspire positive change.
10. **Inter-generational Impact:** Girl-child education has a positive inter-generational impact. Educated girls are more likely to educate their own children, breaking the cycle of illiteracy and poverty. By prioritizing the education of their children, they contribute to the long-term development and well-being of future generations.
11. **Global Development Goals:** Investing in girl-child education aligns with various global development goals, including the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). It contributes to Goal 4 (Quality Education), Goal 5 (Gender Equality), Goal 3 (Good Health and Well-being), and Goal 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth), among others. By prioritizing girl-child education, societies progress toward achieving these goals and building a more sustainable and inclusive future.

### **The Relationship between Girl-child Education and Community Development**

The relationship between girl-child education and community development is deeply interconnected and mutually reinforcing. Highlighted below are some key aspects that illustrate this relationship:

**Human Capital Development:** Girl-child education enhances human capital within a community. When girls receive education, they acquire knowledge, skills, and abilities that contribute to their personal development. Educated girls become productive members of society, capable of engaging in various fields such as healthcare, education, entrepreneurship, and governance. This strengthens the overall human resources of the community, leading to its development.

**Poverty Reduction:** Girl-child education plays a crucial role in poverty reduction. Educated girls have better employment prospects and income-earning potential, enabling them to lift themselves and their families out of poverty. As educated women contribute to the household income, the economic well-being of the community improves. Reduced poverty levels lead to better living conditions, access to basic services, and overall community development.

**Health and Well-being:** Girl-child education is closely linked to improved health and well-being outcomes within communities. Educated girls are more likely to seek and have access to healthcare information, make informed decisions about their own health, and adopt healthy behaviours. They have better knowledge of hygiene, nutrition, and disease prevention, which they can share with

their families and community members. They become agents of change, disseminating health knowledge and promoting healthy practices within their families and communities. This contributes to reduced healthcare burdens, improved health indicators, and community well-being.

**Gender Equality and Social Transformation:** Girl-child education promotes gender equality and catalyses social transformation within communities. By educating girls, societies challenge traditional gender roles, stereotypes, and discriminatory practices. Education empowers girls to assert their rights, participate in decision-making processes, and challenge gender-based violence and discrimination. As girls become agents of change, community attitudes shift, leading to more inclusive and egalitarian social structures.

**Family Planning and Reproductive Health:** Educated girls have a better understanding of family planning and reproductive health. They are more likely to make informed decisions about their own reproductive health, including timing and spacing of pregnancies, which contributes to healthier outcomes for both mothers and children. Educated girls also promote reproductive health awareness, leading to reduced maternal and child mortality rates and improved population health.

**Education of Future Generations:** Educated girls prioritize the education of their own children. They recognize the value of education and actively work towards providing quality education for their offspring. This creates a positive cycle of education within the community, leading to higher literacy rates, increased knowledge, and improved opportunities for future generations.

**Community Participation and Leadership:** Educated girls are more likely to engage in community development initiatives, participate in civic and political processes, and assume leadership positions. Their education equips them with critical thinking, problem-solving, and communication skills necessary for community engagement. The active involvement of educated girls in community development decision-making processes leads to inclusive policies, responsive governance, and overall community progress.

**Social and Cultural Change:** Educated girls contribute to social and cultural change within their communities. They challenge harmful practices such as child marriage, gender-based violence, and discrimination. Educated girls advocate for equal rights and opportunities, promoting a more progressive and inclusive community where everyone can thrive.

**Sustainable Development:** Girl-child education is integral to achieving sustainable development goals. It contributes to several SDGs, including quality education, gender equality, good health, and reduced inequalities. When communities prioritize girl-child education, they invest in the long-term development and sustainability of their societies. Educated girls become agents of change who actively work towards achieving the SDGs, addressing social, economic, and environmental challenges.

**Inter-generational Impact:** Girl-child education has a transformative inter-generational impact within communities. Educated girls are more likely to prioritize the education of their own children, breaking the cycle of illiteracy and poverty. As educated mothers provide better

opportunities for their children, the future generations benefit from improved education, health, and socio-economic outcomes. This creates a positive ripple effect that strengthens community development in the long run.

### **How Communities can Support Girl-child Education**

By actively supporting and investing in girl-child education, communities can create an enabling environment where girls can thrive, contribute to community development, and achieve their full potential. Here are some ways in which communities can contribute to and support girl-child education:

***Raise Awareness:*** Communities can raise awareness about the importance of girl-child education through various means such as public campaigns, community meetings, and workshops. They can highlight the benefits of education for girls and the positive impact it has on the community as a whole. Raising awareness helps to create a supportive environment and encourages families to prioritize and invest in girls' education.

***Overcome Barriers:*** Communities can identify and address the barriers that hinder girls' access to education. These barriers may include cultural norms, economic constraints, distance to schools, lack of safe transportation, and gender-based violence. By working collectively, communities can develop strategies to overcome these barriers, such as providing scholarships, establishing safe transportation systems, and ensuring schools have proper infrastructure and facilities.

***Engage Parents and Families:*** Communities can actively engage parents and families in supporting girl-child education. They can conduct parent-teacher meetings, workshops, and counselling sessions to highlight the benefits of education and address any concerns or misconceptions. Communities can also establish support groups or mentorship programs where experienced parents or community members can guide and support families in navigating the educational journey of their daughters.

***Collaboration with Schools and Educators:*** Communities can collaborate closely with schools and educators to ensure a conducive learning environment for girls. This can involve monitoring school facilities, curriculum quality, and teacher-student ratios. Communities can also encourage and support training programs for teachers that focus on gender-responsive pedagogy and creating inclusive classroom environments.

***Scholarships and Financial Support:*** Communities can establish scholarship programs or provide financial support to girls who face economic constraints. This can include providing uniforms, textbooks, and school supplies, as well as covering school fees or transportation costs. Communities can mobilize resources through community funds, partnerships with businesses, or seeking support from local government or non-profit organizations.

***Safe and Supportive Environment:*** Communities can work towards creating safe and supportive environments for girls to pursue their education. This includes addressing issues of gender-based

violence, bullying, and harassment in schools. Communities can establish mechanisms to report and address such incidents promptly. They can also promote values of respect, equality, and nondiscrimination within the community to ensure girls feel safe and valued.

**Mentorship and Role Models:** Communities can provide mentorship programs and role models for girls. Mentors can be successful women from the community who can inspire and guide girls in their educational journey. This helps girls envision a future where education leads to success and provides them with valuable guidance and support.

**Community-Based Education Initiatives:** Communities can establish community-based education initiatives to provide education opportunities to girls who may face challenges accessing formal schooling. These initiatives can include community learning centres, mobile schools, or adult literacy programs that engage girls and women in educational activities within their own communities.

**Monitoring and Evaluation:** Communities can actively monitor the progress of girl-child education initiatives and evaluate their impact. This helps identify areas of improvement and ensures accountability. Communities can establish monitoring committees or engage local organizations to regularly assess the status of girl-child education and make informed decisions based on the findings.

### **Factors Militating against Child Girl Education**

Girl-child education in developing countries, especially Nigeria, faces various challenges that hinder access, retention, and quality of education. Some common challenges include:

**Gender Inequality:** Deep-rooted gender inequality is a significant barrier to girl-child education. Societal norms, cultural beliefs, and discriminatory practices often prioritize boys' education over girls' (Omede and Agahiu, 2016). Girls may face restrictions, early marriage, or limited opportunities due to traditional gender roles and expectations, leading to lower enrolment and higher dropout rates. **Poverty and Economic Constraints:** Poverty and economic constraints pose significant challenges for girl-child education. Many families struggle to afford the direct and indirect costs associated with schooling, such as school fees, uniforms, textbooks, transportation, and supplies. Girls from poor households are more likely to be engaged in household chores or income-generating activities, limiting their time and resources for education.

**Lack of Infrastructure:** Inadequate educational infrastructure, particularly in rural areas, hinders girls' access to education. Limited availability of schools, classrooms, and sanitation facilities, as well as long distances to schools, pose significant challenges. The absence of safe and appropriate infrastructure, such as separate toilets for girls, also contributes to girls' low enrolment and high dropout rates.

**Safety and Security Concerns:** Safety concerns and a lack of security contribute to girls' educational challenges. Girls may face risks of gender-based violence, harassment, and bullying



on their way to school or within the school environment (Obinaju, 2014). These safety concerns, coupled with the lack of adequate support mechanisms, can deter parents from sending their daughters to school.

**Early Marriage and Pregnancy:** Early marriage and pregnancy are significant barriers to girl-child education. In many developing countries, girls are married off at a young age, leading to their withdrawal from school. Early pregnancy often results in girls dropping out of school due to social stigma, lack of support, and limited access to educational opportunities for young mothers.

**Quality of Education:** The quality of education provided in many developing countries often falls short of providing relevant and inclusive learning opportunities. Inadequate infrastructure, lack of qualified teachers, outdated curriculum, and limited resources impact the quality of education. Girls may face further disadvantages in terms of receiving lower-quality education compared to boys, leading to diminished learning outcomes.

**Cultural and Social Norms:** Cultural and social norms can perpetuate gender disparities in education. Traditional beliefs that prioritize boys' education, assign girls to domestic roles, or discourage girls' participation in certain subjects or activities create additional barriers for girl-child education (Fareo and Ateequ, 2020). Overcoming deeply ingrained norms and changing community attitudes is a complex challenge.

**Lack of Role Models and Mentorship:** Limited access to female role models and mentors in educational settings affects girls' motivation and aspirations. The absence of inspiring women in leadership and teaching positions may limit girls' belief in their own potential and hinder their educational progress.

**Insufficient Policy Implementation:** Although policies and legislation may exist to promote girlchild education, their effective implementation is often lacking. Limited resources, weak governance, corruption, and political instability can hinder the successful implementation of policies, resulting in limited impact on improving girls' access and quality of education.

Addressing these challenges requires a multi-faceted approach involving governments, communities, civil society organizations, and international partners. Strategies may include promoting gender-responsive policies, increasing investment in education, addressing poverty and economic constraints, improving infrastructure, ensuring safety and security measures, enhancing teacher training, promoting gender equality, and engaging communities in awareness and advocacy efforts.

### **Strategies for Improving the Girl- Child Education**

To overcome the challenges of girl-child education, various strategies can be implemented. Highlighted below are some effective strategies:

**Promote Gender-Responsive Policies and Legislation:** Governments should develop and implement gender-responsive policies and legislation that prioritize and protect the right to

education for girls. This includes laws that prohibit discrimination, ensure equal access to quality education, address early marriage, and promote gender equality in schools.

**Improve Access to Quality Education:** Efforts should be made to improve access to quality education for girls. This includes building schools and classrooms in rural areas, providing safe transportation options, and ensuring the availability of adequate infrastructure and resources. Special attention should be given to establishing separate and safe sanitation facilities for girls.

**Address Economic Barriers:** Initiatives should be implemented to address economic barriers that hinder girls' education. This can involve providing scholarships, stipends, and financial assistance to cover school fees, uniforms, textbooks, and other educational expenses. Income-generating programs and vocational training for parents can help alleviate economic constraints and promote investment in girls' education.

**Enhance Teacher Training and Support:** Teacher training programs should focus on gender-responsive pedagogy, inclusive teaching methods, and addressing the specific needs of girls. Teachers should be equipped with the skills to create a supportive and inclusive learning environment, challenge gender stereotypes, and ensure girls' active participation and engagement in the classroom.

**Raise Community Awareness and Mobilize Support:** Community awareness campaigns should be conducted to highlight the value and importance of girl-child education. Engaging community leaders, parents, and local influencers is crucial in changing societal attitudes and promoting girls' education. Mobilizing community support through parent-teacher associations, mentorship programs, and community-based organizations can create a conducive environment for girls to thrive in their education.

**Empower Girls and Provide Role Models:** Girls should be empowered through life skills training, leadership development, and mentoring programs. Providing girls with positive role models, both within and outside their communities, can inspire and motivate them to pursue education and challenge traditional gender norms. Engaging successful women as mentors and showcasing their achievements can help girls envision a future with greater possibilities.

**Address Cultural and Social Norms:** Efforts should be made to challenge and change harmful cultural and social norms that hinder girls' education. Community dialogues, sensitization programs, and advocacy campaigns can help create a shift in attitudes and behaviours. Engaging religious and community leaders as allies in promoting girls' education can be particularly influential in challenging negative norms and promoting positive change.

**Strengthen Monitoring and Evaluation Systems:** Governments should establish robust monitoring and evaluation systems to track progress, identify gaps, and ensure accountability in girl-child education initiatives. This includes collecting and analysing data on enrolment, attendance, retention, and learning outcomes disaggregated by gender. Regular evaluation allows for evidence-based decision-making and the refinement of strategies and interventions.

**Foster Partnerships and International Cooperation:** Governments, civil society organizations, and international partners should collaborate to leverage resources, expertise, and best practices. This can involve partnering with non-governmental organizations, international agencies, and private sector entities to enhance investments in girl-child education and support comprehensive programs that address multiple barriers.

By implementing these strategies, it is possible to overcome the challenges facing girl-child education in developing countries and create an environment where all girls have equal access to quality education, enabling them to reach their full potential and contribute to their communities' development.

### **Conclusion**

Girl-child education is crucial for empowering girls, promoting gender equality, reducing poverty, improving health outcomes, and fostering social and economic development. It is an investment in the present and future well-being of girls, their families, and society as a whole.

Girl-child education is a catalyst for community development. It enhances human capital, reduces poverty, improves health outcomes, promotes gender equality, fosters social transformation, encourages community participation, and contributes to sustainable development. Investing in girlchild education is a powerful strategy for creating inclusive, prosperous, and resilient communities.

Educated girls have a positive impact on community development by contributing to economic growth, improving health outcomes, promoting gender equality, empowering individuals, fostering social and cultural change, and actively participating in community initiatives. Investing in the education of girls yields numerous benefits that create stronger, more prosperous, and equitable communities.

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