

Girls and Schooling: Examining the Challenges of Girls' Education in North-Eastern Nigeria

Johnson E. Dudu¹, Talatu Banu², Ireroturi Otto³

¹ Ph.D, Acting Director of Research: Centre for Population and Environmental Development, Benin City, BS-1 and SM-2, Ugbowo Shopping Complex, EDPA Housing Estate, P. O. Box 10085, Ugbowo Post Office, Benin City, Edo State, Nigeria.

²CPED Think Thank Initiative Mentee and Lecturer: Department of English, School of Languages, Federal College of Education, Yola, Adamawa State, Nigeria.

³Research Officer: Centre for Population and Environmental Development, Benin City, BS-1 and SM-2, Ugbowo Shopping Complex, EDPA Housing Estate, P. O. Box 10085, Ugbowo Post Office, Benin City, Edo State, Nigeria

Abstract: Despite the benefits of education as a tool for economic emancipation and social integration, girls in the North Eastern part as well as other parts of northern Nigeria lagged behind in major indices of being educated. This paper examined the challenges and solution of girls' education in North East Nigeria. To access the needed information, the paper relied on qualitative data, entailing the use of in-depth interviews and focus group discussions in three States of Adamawa, Bauchi and Gombe. Identified challenges restricting girls education from the result of the study include: traditional/cultural factors such as: low rating of the girl child by the society, early marriage occasioned by need to procreate, fulfill religious obligation and the need to encourage chastity; parents' inabilities to pay for the education of their girls. Additionally, the experiences of violence, security concerns, inadequate laws supporting girls' education and poor administration of the entire system of education have been major reasons why girls stayed away from schools. Outlined solutions by participants in the study to overcome known challenges include: awareness/advocacy on the benefits of girls education to major stakeholders to reduce all cultural issues militating improve girls education; enactment of new legislations to encourage the girl child education; free education for the girl child and enhancement of income generating options for parents of schooling girls. To reduce security concerns and violence in school, the paper called on government to provide adequate security for schools, while school heads should monitor students' discipline of fellow students. Lastly, governments at all levels were asked to provide female friendly infrastructure, adequate funding to schools, build only girls schools and to provide female tutors who will serve as role models to the girls in school.

Keywords: Girls, Schooling, Challenges, North East, Nigeria.

1. INTRODUCTION

Education is the process of providing information to an inexperienced person to help him/her to develop physically, mentally, socially, emotionally, spiritually, politically and economically. It means the process of helping the individual to acquire adequate and appropriate knowledge, skills and attitude and value known as cognitive, psychomotor and affective behavior to be able to function optimally as a citizen [1]. Put in other words, education is the process of facilitating learning, or the acquisition of knowledge, skills, values, beliefs, and habits. The girl child on the other hand is a biological

female offspring from birth to eighteen [2]. It is the age before one becomes a young adult. This period ranges from early childhood (crèche nursery) of 0-5 year, primary 6-12 years and when they are in their post primary schools. During this time the child will be under the adult who may be his parents or guardians or older siblings. It is made up of infancy, childhood, adolescents' stage of development. During this period, the girl child develops her own personality and characters. She depends on others from whom she models her behavior through observations, repetitions, and imitations, her mental, physical, social, spiritual and emotional development starts and progresses to a peak at the young adult stage [2]. The girl child simply put is the female child that is not yet an adult. Hence, girl child education is the process of providing information to the girl child to help her develop physically, mentally, socially, emotionally, spiritually, politically and economically.

The Cairo as well as the Beijing conferences affirmed the significance of education as tool for the empowerment of women. Education Impacts skills and competencies that is central to human development and enhanced quality of life, bringing wide ranging benefits to both individuals and societies. Investing in girl's and women's education in particular produces exceptionally high social and economic returns [3, 4]. When it comes to education, women suffer a great deal of discrimination. Among children not attending school, there are twice as many girls as boys, and among illiterate adults there are twice as many women as men [3]. Offering girls basic education is one sure way of giving them much greater power -- of enabling them to make genuine choices over the kinds of lives they wish to lead. The Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women establish it as a basic human right [3]. Women in Africa have been having challenges having equal education like their male counterparts for a long time despite the recognition of education as a basic human right since the declaration of The Universal human rights in 1948 [5]

The issue of gender disparity in education dates back to the 1960s, when most African states began to gain their political independence - Girls' enrollment figures were very low throughout the continent. Up until the 1970s, considerably more boys than girls participated in education [6]. The native traditional philosophy during these times was that a woman's place is at home and this kept many girls away from education [6]. According to Grace [7] the estimated number of out-of-school children stood at 121 million. Out of this population of out-of-school children, 65 million or 53.8% were girls and over 80 percent of these girls live in sub-Saharan Africa. King and Winthrop [8] in their paper believed three categorizations of the problem of disparity of girls' education. Firstly, there were about 80 countries where progress on girls' education has stalled — still struggling to enroll all girls and boys in primary school and close the gender gaps between boys and girls at both the primary and secondary levels; Secondly there were an additional 30 countries that have successfully enrolled girls and boys in primary and secondary education but are trapped in low-quality learning - still struggling to ensure that girls and boys master foundational skills such as basic literacy, numeracy, and science concepts. Finally, there were another 30 countries where children are successfully enrolled and learning. However, girls are behind boys in math. Most African Countries belong to the first category with an average net enrollment rate at the primary level put at 75.6 percent for girls compared with 80.9 percent for boys. The average girls' net enrollment rate in these countries is more than 5 percentage points lower than the average for low income countries, more than 16 percentage points lower than for middle-income countries, and more than 20 percentage points lower than for in high-income countries, thus pointing to Africa as the continent with the lowest primary school completion rate [8; 9]

In Nigeria, there are large disparities between the education that boys and girls received. Many girls do not have access to adequate education past a certain age. UNICEF [10] points out that, for every 2 or 3 boys who are in school, there is only a girl [10]. This figure varied by states. Even when children enroll in schools, many do not complete the primary cycle [4]. Though the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) data for primary and secondary schools enrolments, recorded an increase to 47.3% in 2013 from 45.3% in 2010, showing an increase of 2%, this figure is still below international standards even within Sub-Africa where the figure is 74,8%[8]. According to Tyoakaa, Amaka and Nor [9], Nigeria has 9 million (37%) out-of-school children, which is more than one-third of its primary school age children and this is the highest in Africa. Nigeria is also rated as one of the nations in West Africa that has the highest number of girls that are out of school [11]. The British Council report on girls' education [12] estimated the figure of out of school girls at 5.3 million. This

figure of out of school population is the largest in the world and it is growing. Of the staggering 10.5 million out-of-school children in Nigeria today, the majority are girls. According to the report, 40% of women have never attended school as against 28% of men in Nigeria. The Net Enrolment Rate at primary school level is 56% for girls and 61% for boys [13].

One attributes of these figures is that there are regional differences in terms of girls' education coverage. While South West, South-South and South - East have adolescents' girls literate rate of 94.2%, 92.9%, and 91.2% respectively, the figures for North Central, North East and North West is 73.6%, 54.9% and 46% respectively. This indicates that though there is great improvement in the North Central Zone, the total statistics point to backwardness of the northern regions compared to their southern counterparts in term of girls education. More pointedly, the figure revealed the acute skewed nature of the Nigerian educational attainments for the girl child against the regions of North East and North West whose figure for the girls literate stood at 54.9% and 46% respectively. , Tyoakaa, Amaka and Nor [9] believed that Girl-child education in northern states follows a specific pattern which ends with the girls being denied from the system, the chances to attend primary school or further their education beyond primary school. A plethora of reasons have been adduced for the low rates of girls education in the Northern Nigeria and indeed Nigeria

Girls are less likely to attend primary and secondary school as result of different societal factors militating against them which include: location of residences [8,13]; tradition/culture [8, 13, 14, 15]; poverty and schooling is more costly for girls[8, 9,13, 16, 17,18, 19]; patriarchal nature of the society which give everything to men [20] colonialism through "housewifization syndrome"[21]; poor school environment, which may be hostile to the girl child[8, 19, 22, 23]; the weak position of women in society which relegate women to the background[22]; conflicts which prevent girls from attending schools due to fear of abuse such as rape and adoption as in the case of Chibok School Girls in Nigeria, who are still missing[19, 22]; early marriages [24]; religion [8, 13, 25]; child labour [13]and unwanted pregnancies[8, 13, 25].

Educating the girl-child is beneficial and there are several reasons why the girl must be educated. The educated women are less likely to die from child birth and more likely to have healthy children than her counterpart who is not [13]. In term of schooling, the educated woman is more likely to send her children to school due to her knowledge, financial status and overall social standing [13]. According to National Population Commission of Nigeria [26], Girls' education is good economics due to the enhancement of growth rate of the economy which reduces social disparities; bring forth women with higher educational qualifications who are more likely to be in formal wage employment than those with only primary schooling. Also, education by girls put them in positions where they are able to compete with their male counterparts for leadership, and this expands country's leadership alternatives which help them to contribute to national development as change maker. Schooling provides grounds for early leadership training as adolescents [8, 27], which is later taken to the communities [28]. Another benefit of a girl –child education is that, educations enable the girl to be able to protect herself against society danger such as widow inheritance, unhealthy cultural norms and other issues affecting them [8]. Lastly education, enhances women self assessment and improves their images and personality and become more confident like their male in all areas of life. Yet girls and women suffer educational exclusion across Nigeria especially in the North East and North West of Nigeria. Therefore, it is the goal of this paper to examine the challenges of girls' education in North Eastern Nigeria by identifying specific problems associated with the schooling of the girl by answering these two questions: (1) What are the challenges of schooling by girls in North East Nigeria? (2)What ways can these challenges be overcome for the benefits of the region and other parts of Nigeria? Addressing these issues will greatly reduce ignorance of people in the region as well as other parts of Nigeria to see the importance of the girls' education.

2. METHODS

The Study Area:

The study was conducted in three Northern States of Adamawa, Bauchi and Gombe in Nigeria, comprising a population of 10,197,056 and made up of 5,220, 764 male and 4,976, 292 female. The three states are made up of schooling age of 5 to 18 years population of 3,737,125 comprising 1,971,582 male and 1,765,543 female. Also, the primary school population of age 5 – 12 years in the study states stood at 2,402,547 comprising 1,277,556 male and 1,124, 991 female. Similarly, the

secondary school population of age 13-18 years of the three states under consideration are; 1,334,578 – made up of 694,026 male and 640,552 female [29]. In each State, two Local Government Areas (LGAs) were selected purposively; bringing the studied LGAs to six with a population 1,298,226, comprising 666,666 male and 631,560 female [29]. The six local government areas are: Numan and Ganye in Adamawa State with primary and secondary age of 5 -18 which had the population of 95, 534, comprising 49, 393 male and 46, 141 female; Toro and Kirfi in Bauchi State with primary and secondary age of 5 -18 which had the population of 187, 804, comprising 96,912 male and 90, 892 female and Akko and Dukku in Gombe State with primary and secondary age of 5 -18 which had the population of 212, 235, comprising 115,859 male and 96, 376 female. In each local government three communities were selected for this study including one urban or semi-urban town and two communities that were rural in nature. All the selected communities had primary schools as well as secondary school, bring the total number of primary schools that took part in the study to 18 primary schools and 18 secondary schools.

Data Collection and measurement:

The study commenced with recognizance visits made to the study area to set contact with stakeholders such as: Ministries of Local Government and Chieftaincy Affairs and Ministries of Education, Local Government Areas Authorities, Principals of Schools and leaders of community and to get their consent to participate in the research with an assurance of confidentiality. It was at the end of the contact setting that the main activities of data collection started. The study population was purposefully and strategically selected from the community and schools which served as the units for data collection. A qualitative study design was used in data collection using focus group discussions and in-depth interviews with guides. As in Table 1, the research entailed the use of 24 in-depth interviews (IDIs) and 18 FGDs. In each LGA, four IDIs were conducted – one from an urban or semi-urban community, another from a rural community and the last two from the Headmaster of a primary school in the LGA and a school Principal. In terms of FGDs, a total of 18 of them were also conducted; comprising three each for an LGA. The three FGDs in an LGA involved two in the communities that were subdivided into male and female FGDs and an FGD that was conducted in a secondary school in an LGA with female students. Each FGD and interview took an average of one hour. All participants for the study were carefully selected based on their experiences and competency on the subject of education and as opinion leaders of their communities. The 48 girls who participated in the study were selected from secondary schools across the 6 LGAs (8 students each, with two students each, from Junior School 3 to Senior School 3 in any of the schools 3 secondary school in an LGA).

Table 1: Number of in-depth interviews and FGDs for the study

| Locations | Urban/Rural | In-depth Interviews | | FGDs | |
|------------------------------------|-------------|---------------------|--------|------|--------|
| | | Male | Female | Male | Female |
| Adamawa State | | | | | |
| Ganye LGA | | | | | |
| Community one | Urban | 0 | 2 | 0 | 1 |
| Community Two | Rural | 1 | 0 | 1 | 0 |
| Community Three | Rural | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| Numan LGA | | | | | |
| Community one | Urban | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 |
| Community Two | Rural | 1 | 0 | 1 | 1 |
| Community Three | Rural | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| Sub-Total for Adamawa State | | | | | |
| Bauchi State | | | | | |
| Kirfi LGA | | | | | |
| Community one | Urban | 1 | 1 | 0 | 1 |
| Community Two | Rural | 1 | 0 | 1 | 0 |
| Community Three | Rural | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| Toro LGA | | | | | |
| Community one | Urban | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 |

| | | | | | |
|---|-------|-----------|----------|-----------|-----------|
| Community Two | Rural | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| Community Three | Rural | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| Sub-Total for Bauchi State | | | | | |
| Gombe State | | | | | |
| Akko LGA | | | | | |
| Community one | Urban | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 |
| Community Two | Rural | 1 | 1 | 1 | 0 |
| Community Three | Rural | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| Dukku LGA | | | | | |
| Community one | Urban | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Community Two | Rural | 1 | 0 | 1 | 1 |
| Community Three | Rural | 1 | 1 | 0 | 1 |
| Sub-Total for Gombe State | | | | | |
| Total of IDs and FGDs by Sex | | 15 | 9 | 6 | 12 |
| Total of IDs and FGDs for studied Area | | 24 | | 18 | |

Source: Field Survey 2016.

The selection of community participants was jointly done by the community leaders and researchers, while that of the students was done by the school authority based on the criteria of their classes (Junior school 3 – Senior school 3) and sex. In all, a total of 156 persons took part in the study comprising 24 persons who were participants in IDIs (15 male and 9 female) and 132 participants in FGDs (42 male and 90 female). Each FGD in the community either for male or female was made up of 7 persons while the one for students was comprised of 8 girls each in all the participating LGAs in the three states in the study. Male FGDs were conducted by male including researchers and field assistants and female FGDs were conducted by females who were recruited field assistants. All research assistants were trained with interviews as well as FGDs pilot tested. All IDIs as well as FGDs were tape recorded with interview guide and FGDs guide used. Notes were taken in the course of the interviews as well as the FGDs. The major objects of discussion were the views of participants on girls' education, the challenges of girls' education and possible way forward of improving girls' education in north east Nigeria particularly and the north in general. The data were collected in mid 2016 till late March, 2017. The IDIs and FGDs were conducted in English and the corrupted version – pidgin and sometimes in Hausa language

Data analysis:

Tape-recorded interviews were first transcribed verbatim. Before coding the data, the researchers read the typed interview transcripts and field notes line by line and word by word. The type transcripts were imported into N6 NUD*IST software was used to code and conduct content analysis. During the coding process, data were continuously reviewed and revised, emerging patterns noted, and relationships between constructs identified.

Ethical Considerations:

As traditional with study of this type, approval was done by the CPED ethics committee. Study participants were reassured that taking part in the study was voluntary. Confidentiality was maintained from data collection to report writing. The field notes and audiotapes had no identifiers that could be linked to a particular study participant. Consent forms were not signed. However, verbal consent was requested from students after a discussion with their principal whom this study considered their guardians in the school environment.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Demographic Characteristics of Study Participants:

In-depth Interviews: As evident in Table 2, nine of the 24 participants were male, 18 were female. The age group of 41-50 years had the most representation with 12 participants, followed by the 31-40 years age group with eight participants. The age range of 20-30 and 51-60 years had 2 participants each respectively. More of the participants (13) spent 21-25 years in

school; seven of them spent 16-20 years in schools while two each of them spent less than 10 and 10-15 years respectively in school. Nine of the participants are from urban residence as against fifteen of them from rural communities. More of them (15) were Muslims while 9 of them were Christians.

Focus group discussions: As also indicated in Table 2, one hundred and thirty two participants took part in the 18 FGDs. Among them, 90 were female, 42 males. Twelve FGDs were made up of females, six of males. Seven participants were less than 20 years of age. The age groups of less than 20 years had 48 participants; 41-50 years had 29 participants each and the age group of 31-40 years had 24 participants. Nineteen and 12 participants are from 51-60 years and 20-30 respectively. Eighty-four participants were married compared to 48 of them who were single. Forty-five and 39 participants spent 16-20 and 21- 25 years respectively in school; while 31 and 17 participants spent 10-15 and less than 10 years in school respectively. More of the participants (111) in the study lived in the rural areas compared to 21 of them who reside in the urban area. The dominant religion for the study participants was Islam since 80 of them were Muslim compared to 52 of them who were Christians who took part in the study.

Table 2: Characteristics of study participants for In-depth Interviews and FGDs in the studied area

| | In-depth Interviews (N=24) | | | | | | Focus Group Discussions (N=132) | | | | | |
|--------------------------|----------------------------|-----------------|-----------------|----------------|----------------|-----------------|---------------------------------|------------------|------------------|-----------------|-----------------|------------------|
| | Adamawa State | | Bauchi State | | Gombe State | | Adamawa State | | Bauchi State | | Gombe State | |
| | Ganye LGA (n=4) | Numan LGA (n=4) | Kirfi LGA (n=4) | Toro LGA (n=4) | Akko LGA (n=4) | Dukku LGA (n=4) | Ganye LGA (n=22) | Numan LGA (n=22) | Kirfi LGA (n=22) | Toro LGA (n=22) | Akko LGA (n=22) | Dukku LGA (n=22) |
| | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 |
| | FGDs | FGDs | FGDs | FGDs | FGDs | FGDs | FGDs | FGDs | FGDs | FGDs | FGDs | FGDs |
| Age Group (yrs) | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| <20 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 8 | 8 | 8 | 8 | 8 | 8 |
| 20 -30 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 2 | 2 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 2 |
| 31-40 | 0 | 1 | 2 | 1 | 2 | 2 | 4 | 5 | 4 | 4 | 3 | 4 |
| 41-50 | 3 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 1 | 6 | 5 | 6 | 4 | 3 | 5 |
| 51-60 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 3 |
| Sex | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Female | 2 | 1 | 1 | 2 | 2 | 1 | 15 | 15 | 15 | 15 | 15 | 15 |
| Male | 2 | 3 | 3 | 2 | 2 | 3 | 7 | 7 | 7 | 7 | 7 | 7 |
| Marital Status | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Married | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 14 | 14 | 14 | 14 | 14 | 14 |
| Single | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 8 | 8 | 8 | 8 | 8 | 8 |
| Year in School | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| < 10 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 3 | 3 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 2 |
| 10 -15 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 5 | 6 | 6 | 4 | 6 | 4 |
| 16-20 | 2 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 2 | 0 | 7 | 6 | 8 | 9 | 7 | 8 |
| 21-25 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 3 | 2 | 2 | 7 | 7 | 6 | 6 | 5 | 8 |
| Place of Resident | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Urban | 2 | 2 | 2 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 7 | 0 | 7 | 0 | 7 | 0 |
| Rural | 2 | 2 | 2 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 15 | 22 | 15 | 22 | 15 | 22 |
| Religion | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Christianity | 1 | 3 | 0 | 2 | 2 | 1 | 10 | 12 | 1 | 13 | 11 | 5 |
| Islam | 3 | 1 | 4 | 2 | 2 | 3 | 12 | 10 | 21 | 9 | 11 | 17 |

Source: Field Survey 2016

What are the Challenges of girls' education in the North East?

This paper addressed two basic questions in line with the goal of the study: (1) What are the challenges of schooling by girls in North East Nigeria? (2) What ways can these challenges be overcome for the benefits of the region and other parts

of Nigeria? The finding in this section addressed the first question: What are the challenges of schooling by girls in North East Nigeria? From the analyses of the data, various issues were raised as challenges which are militating the progress of the girl child education in the North East of Nigeria in particular and the northern part of Nigeria in general as exemplified by the responses of participants of the study in the six local government areas of Ganye and Numan in Adamawa State, Kirfi and Toro in Bauchi State and Akko and Dukku in Gombe State as presented below,

The study raised series of tradition/cultural issues working against the education of girls. The participants pointed to several issues relating to gender norms and stereotypes which exclude the girl child from being educated such as preference for the male children. Across the three states which took part the study, there was consistency in pointing out this factor as the two excerpts below depict;

“Mazaje kullum gani su ke iya mace bat a da muhimmancin da na miji, wannan kuwa koma baya yake kawowa, yan matan iyaye maza sun gwammaci su tura yara maza makaranta kan mata”

(Our husbands believed that our girls are not as important as their sons and this is not helping our girls. They preferred to send their boys to school and leave the girls at home)

-----**Female FGD in Toro LGA, Bauchi**

“Kai ne duk sane da nakasa daga dukiya da shi muhimmanci ta amfani da kadan da muke da sosai da kuma yin mai kyau zabi. Yan mata za a samun aure da daukar sunan wani mutum. Saboda haka, da kudi kadan Ina da ya kasance gare ta samarai domin ba gare su, su sha”

-----**A male interview at Dukku LGA in Gombe State**

(You are all aware of the scarcity of money and it important using the little we have very well and make good choices. Girls will be getting married and bearing the name of another man. So, the little money I have should be for my boys in order not for them to suffer)

The extent of tradition and culture as a negative influence on the education of the girl was also evident in the perception of the society to marry. Many people believed that a woman should marry on time in order to be able to give birth to her God-given children. Timely marriages are also seen as a way of protecting girls from promiscuity and keeping the pride of the girls before marriage to be able to get the needed bride price which is a source of wealth to girls' families. Schooling is seen as an impediment to getting the bride wealth and also an obstacle to early birth which is seen as natural blessing from God as captured in these excerpt below:

“It the belief by some persons here that girls should marry on time so that they will not become wayward, so that their pride can still be there when they are getting married. Because, if they are pure, their parent will get good bride price and good name. Bride price is a source of money to some poor families”

-----**A section of interview by a school headmaster in Bauchi State**

“Girl time dey pass. E good make she marry quick quick so that she go fit born her children. If she take all the time go school when she go come born when all her mate don born three to four children?”

-----**Part of interview from Ganye LGA in Adamawa State**

(Girl has age limit of given birth, hence it is important she marries on time in order to give birth to her children. If all her time is expended going to school, when we she give birth to her own children when all her peers have given birth to three to four children?)

Similarly, the societal functions place on girls, equally affect their schooling. Girls are seen as wives and mothers and must be seen as performing these functions. Hence, some persons see it as an aberration for the girl who is in school as going to the wrong direction as a portion of an FGD of girls in Kirfi LGA captured this:

“Our duty as girls from the belief of some our parents is to become wives to our husbands so that we can born our children and become mothers. Those of us in school are seen as not fulfilling our roles as wives and mothers. People are not looking at our parents with good eye because we are in school – we are looked at as failure and wasting our time”

Schooling by girls in Northern Nigeria is seen by a section of the populace as adulteration of culture of womanhood who must be chaste. Going to school is perceived as a way of corrupting the girl child- hence, some people are not happy when you talk about sending a girl to school. To some parents, going to school is synonymous to cultural bleach and westernization of their children especially among Muslims communities where educating the girls is equal to bad morals. To others, schooling will lead to bad western influence, including sex before marriage and pregnancy. An interview with one of the Principal in Gombe State put this in the right context:

“Educating the girls is a huge task here due to many reasons especially among those of us who are Muslims. Some of us suspect that going to school is a way the oyinbo is trying to bring in their bad culture of nakedness and spoil our girls like them. Infact, to some of the parents, going to school will lead to sex and pregnancy and spoiling the family name which will prevent the benefits of marriage that the parents will get from the girl, hence, it is better a girl gets married on time instead of going to school”

The perception people attaches to religion also play a significant role in the education of the girl child. Some people in northern Nigeria especially among Muslims believed that it a religious and divine duty to make sure their daughters marry on time; hence, schooling is an obstacle to that religious fulfillment as this interview with a school principal in Adamawa State captured it succinctly:

“Early marriages are encouraged in different parts of Nigeria but I must say that the practice is more common here in the northern part of Nigeria. Some of us do not see anything wrong in this because it is a divine duty that must be carried out. It has some benefits physically to the parents. It enables the girls to give birth on time to meet the aspiration of their parents and to make sure they married when still keeping their honor intact which is a religious obligation either as especially among Muslims”

Another cultural impediment to the education of the girl child is the role of the girl as a helper to her parents. Many parents believed that the girls are more useful at home than their male counterparts. Hence, in making a choice of who should go to school, the boys in the homes are usually considered so that the girls could remain at home as this interview from a school principal in Gombe State put it:

Girls are more useful at home than most boys are so, some parents are reluctant to send them to school. They see it as waste of time and money if such girls are sent to school, considering their domestic usefulness

From the content analysis of the study data, it was explicitly obvious that, apart from traditions and culture as challenges of girls' education in the North East, another militating factor is economic reason. Most families' inability to meet up with different levies charged in most schools had resulted in girls dropping out from school. The first author witnessed this scenario, where the immediate elder sister had to be stopped from going to school because his eldest brother could not afford to send him and the elder sister to school. This is the typical life of most families in Nigeria including the North East especially with families which preferred male children and had discrimination against the girl child; thereby truncate her education as the extract from a Toro LGA interview with a headmaster revealed:

“When things are difficult and the parents are to make a choice of who should go to school or not, the girl child is usually the victim. Why? The society preferred the boy. However, this preference is brought to play whenever there is economic reason if only one child can go to school, the girl child is usually sacrificed in other for the boy to continue his school – if available money in the family can only carry one person in the event of two children”

A related economic reason which is a challenge to educating the girl child is the economic value which parents place on their girls. Though this is as stated earlier on is a cultural, parents due to economic gains from the bride price of their girls

have willfully truncated the education of their children by giving them out in marriages in order to collect the bride price of such girls. The excerpt from an FGD in Numan, Adamawa State gives more insights into this point

“Amina was my friend in JSS 2. She was equally intelligent, but the parents were poor. I learnt say she was married out to a man to pay some debt the father was holding a man old enough to be his age. People in our area believed say, the father give her out to the man because of the money the man get. The money him father hold the man was not pay and he come pay plenty bride money give him father. Today. I am in SSS2. Amina for still be with us today if not for the marriage”

Similarly, another FGD by girls in Toro, Bauchi equally expressed how economic consideration added to poor girls' education in the North East as seen below.

“When we started JSS 1, Aishaitu came to me one day that the parents want say she marriage now to one rich Alhaji that he will give money to the family. I come asked her what she want. She say, she get no choice but she go tell the father that she want go school. But she come tell me say that, her new husband will kuku ba allow her continue go to school. She was very very happy. She come say yes. She come marry and went to the man house but by three month, she get pregnancy, and she stop school”

The cost of paying for education came up strongly in the various interviews and FGDs as a strong economic factor that had held back most girls from being educated. These payments from the study are in different forms such as: buying of books, paying for school or tuition fees, enrolment for examinations, schools development levies, parent teachers' contributions, desks payment, inter-house sports payments among others. Most parents have problem paying for all these multiple charges in their communities and these are strong reasons for girls dropping out of school as the interview with a school principal in Gombe indicate below:

“As a principal, there has been a recurring issue when it comes to paying for education of children. Many parents have difficulties paying levies charged for the schooling of their children. The case of the girl is more pathetic. Most the parents are of the opinion especially when they are poor not to pay charges for girls when she can be given out and make money for the parents. Hence, a huge number of girls have been withdrawn from school due to school fees and being use as means of funding the education of their brothers when they are married to rich suitors”

Also, a community elder in Akko LGA FGD has this to say about the issue of payment as an impediment to girls' education.

“Nan iwma biyawaya mace kudin makaranta abune mai wuya garemu. Ganin irin dawainiyar da muke dauke da shi.zan lura shi MA wata dawainiya ce daban ake karawa kan dawainiyar da muke dauke da shi.kudaden makaranta na dukkan dalibai maza da mata abune mai wuya a nan, ganin yadda makarantun suke caccanza kudaden makarantun”

(Paying for the education of a girl is a huge sacrifice here. We are poor and taking care of our food is huge burden. Paying for the education of our children is what I will describe as extra job. Both boys and girls, paying for their schools fees is not easy, especially with the different charges from schools)

Evidences from the analyzed data also indicate that, there have been frustrations from parents about the lack of employment for their children who graduated from tertiary institutions. This is having a serious rethinking among parents. To them, why should a huge sum of money –sometimes debts been incurred to send a child to school who cannot find a place to work? The extract from an interview in Numan LGA tell the rest of the story;

“Ilimin boko yanzu ba kamar da ba. Yaro zai je makaranta ya bata shekara da shekaru, iyaye su kashe dukiya wajen hidimar karatun yaro, a karshe yaro yazo ba aikin yi, me zaka fada Hakan? Ai yanzu gara a tura yaro kwadago ko zai sami sana 'ar da zai gwamance, in kuwa mace ce ta yi aure. Yin haka zai kwantar wa iyaye hankali”

(Education does not pay today again as it used to. How do you explain after the sacrifice of paying expensive school fees in the big schools and a child cannot get work at the end? It is better to send the child to learn something. As for the girl, getting married will be a better option, at least, that will save the resources of the parents)

A hindrance to the education of the girl child as evident from the studied participants has to do with the family background of the girl child. Home were the parent are literate and have some measure of education, against all odds will educate their children irrespective of their sex as the extra from a headmaster interview in Dukku revealed;

“Whether a girl is educated or not is depended on the status of the girl in question. For example, I have been living here and I am a Muslim. Insha Allah (By the Grace of God), all my girls are in school. I know many families like mine who are doing the same because they are educated”

In some families, the life styles of the parents do not encourage education either for the boys or girls. For example, in nomadic families where the parent move around with their cattle, the children may not be stable to attend school and this also affect the girl child as the extract from an FGD in Kirfi showed:

“Yawanci iyaye fulani kuwa suna da matsalar tura ya yan su makaranta sabo da yanayin rayuwarsu. Fulani kullum kan tafiya yake. In ya zauna ruga dai na dan watani ne. Wanan irin rayuwar kuwa ba mazan ba har da matan”

(Most Fulani cattle rearing families have difficulties sending their children to school due to their nomadic life style and this has also affected their female children)

The challenges to educate the girl child as the content analyzes of the data from this study suggested also included the issue of security and violence in schools in the North East. The issue of over 200 Chibok Girls captured by boko haram was mentioned as a case in point. To most participants, how can parents observe the scenarios of Chibok Girls and still be confident to send their children to school? Also, the participants equally mentioned harassment of the girls in most school by fellow students as well as tutors who are supposed to be their guidance as the excerpts below revealed;

“The Chibok Girls issue is still in our head. We are afraid. Some of us here have been withdrawn from our preferred schools due to security concerns by our parents”

-----**An FGD of female students in Numan LGA**

“As a girl my worry is about my senior, they want to friend you and if you say no you become enemy and they will deal with you. Some teachers look for us to friend us. If you say no, you are in trouble. This is the fact of what we are seeing every day and many girls has been pregnant due to this thing because we cannot say no. If you say no, the teacher will punish you and the senior students will beat you”

-----**Excerpt from a female FGD in the study**

“If there are insinuations of male tutors harassing girls sexually in some school, this is a correct observation by such girls, as a principal I have dealt with several of such case where tutors got their students pregnant. But I know that no schools tolerate this kind of nonsense since it is unethical for a tutor to have a sexual affair with a student. In situation like this, appropriate disciplinary measures must be applied but the consequences of the action would have taken place- most time stopping the girl in question from continuing with her education”

One of the last challenges the data from the study showed was in the area of laws and school administration. Most participants believed that strict laws dealing with girls’ education in the North East have not been put in place. Some participants said that the governance of the schools system in general is affecting the girl child just like her male counterpart especially funding and administration of the school at all levels. Additionally, participants believed that laws with appropriate sanctions be evolved to compare parents to send their girls to schools. The portion from an interview in Bauchi State captured this:

“The problem of the girl child is a reflection of what is happening in the larger educational system in Nigeria. Funding for education is still far below expectation. There are no laws in place to make sure our girls attend school, again this is the failure of the larger educational system”

Dealing with Challenges of Girls Education in North Eastern Nigeria

A host of challenges confront girls' education from available evidences as provided by the study. In line with attempt at answering the second question of this study, that is, what ways can identified challenges of girls' education in the North East be overcome for the benefits of the region and other parts of Nigeria? From the data in the study four basic interventions strategies were advanced by the participants in the study.

It was obvious that some traditional and cultural practice worked against the promotion of girl child education, hence participants believed that awareness creation and advocacy program be put in place to educate the populace in the North East, all of the North and indeed the whole of Nigeria, the significance of the girls education by highlighting the benefits from the exercise and equally pointing out the danger of continuously holding on to traditions as the interview from Toro LGA below indicate

“The government and other persons who want good of the girl should continue to talk about the benefits of educating the girl just like the boy and point out the evil of holding to stale belief system. In this way, more people will leave their old ways and begin to see more reasons of sending their girls to school”

The study equally believed that the government must take some drastic measures to end such belief such as early marriage of the girl child by passing appropriate legislations. In addition to this, the participants were of the opinion that enlightenment be given that girl will still give birth to children after their school years and that the school is not a place to promote promiscuity among young girls as portions of the interviews and FGDs showed below:

“We must involve government in this matter to make good laws to stop early marriage among small girls. This will make them to be afraid”

-----**Extract from an FGD in Ganye LGA, Adamawa State**

“The fear of not giving birth because one spends time in school is very wide spread among some parents. It comes in two ways. First, the parents who nurse that fear consider the life span of a girl and secondly, they look at history of abortions- whether real or not which have prevented some women who had them from having children. This one is coming from the fear that once you are in school, you become wayward. It is good for awareness to tell the parents the truth, to remove such unfounded fear from their mind”

-----**Excerpt from an interview with a school principal in Akko LGA, Gombe State**

The participants were in agreement that, Muslims must be educated that educating the girl child is not against Islam. Sections of the interviews as well as FGDs revealed that the leaders and civil society organization including religious group in the region must lead the campaigns to promote the education of the girl. The message according to them is that, a girl can still be a very dedicated Muslim event after being educated. One of the interviews from Bauchi State captured this more aptly.

“I am a Muslim Scholar as well as a school principal. Most of our parents today have been deceived that modern schooling and Islam cannot go together. This is not correct. Here in Nigeria, I have heard of well educated Islamic women. For example, I know of Idimi daughter from Bornu who studied in Harvard University. I was in University of Jos with my friend to celebrate the graduation of the daughter. Insha Allah (By the Grace of Allah), some parents are getting the truth. Our Leaders such as governors, Local Government Chairmen and other communities' people including NGOs and religious leaders must lead the awareness raising”

On suggestion to deal with issues of economics as obstacle to girls education, participants were of the view that, the government in all North Eastern Schools and indeed all of the North should strengthened their free education system or a best reduce considerably the extent of payments in schools. Furthermore, the link between poverty and a school payments

was established when some participants in the study posited that, government must enhance income generating options of parents of school girls as a way of being able to fulfill some obligations which the schooling of their children may bring their way. The parts of the FGDs below captured these points more succinctly:

“My own is that governments should make school fees free for all of us because our father and mother is very poor”

-----*extract from school girls FGD in Bauchi State*

“Paying for school is going to be a problem in the North for a long time; the government should either make school attendance at level free. This will increase school attendance for all children including boys and girls”

-----*A portion of an FGD by a principal in Dukku, Gombe State*

“Ta yaya za'a ce iyaye su taimaka ka 'in da Na' in a harkar karatun ya'ya bayan da kyarkyar ake ciyar da gida. Ya kamata gwamnati ta dauki karatun ya'ya mata da yakar talauci da muhimmanci, ta nan iyaye zasu ga muhimmancin ilimin boko, har su rungume shi da hanu biyu-biyu ko da kuwa mace ce ko na miji”

(How can our people participate fully in their children education when they have not been able to eat very well? Government should promote girls education alongside poverty alleviation by increasing income producing activities. In this way, the parents will be more comfortable dealing with issue of education for their children whether a boy or a girl)

-----*An FGD participant in Numan LGA, Adamawa State.*

A group of participants who raised the issue of low employment as the reason why parents do not want to send their girls to school believed that, though, solving this problem will be difficult, government should work on the enabling environment to promote more investment that will create general employments for young graduate and a percentage of employment be reserved for the female graduate –promoting gender equity as a portion of the interview in Gombe indicate

“Government should promote more investments to create employment and some of these employment be reserved for female graduates as incentives to promote girls education”

Other ways to enhance girls education as advocated by the participants in the study was that, governments at all level should take issue of security of school more seriously and that, principal should monitor the level of bullying by fellow students in their school. A group of participants here strictly indicate that separate schools been created for boys and girls to deal with the issues of bullying among students and that government should enhance overall safety environment of the schools. Furthermore, participants also advocated that management of the school system should be enhanced at all level from Federal to LGAs in term of funding and general administration through adequate monitoring and evaluation.

As part of measures to promote girls education, sections of participants advocated for female teachers mentorship program and inbuilt incentive mechanism as the interviews extracts indicate;

Teachers are important to building the lives of the girl child and must be well trained to take on their duties. To encourage girls, girls in schools must be mentored by their female teachers who are women. Sometimes, successful women in different fields of endeavors like law, medicine, engineering, teaching, academic, politicians among others must be approached to talk to girls in school as an incentive to encourage them.

-----*A headmaster interview in Numan LGA, Adamawa State*

“Idan har ana bukatar ilimin boko na ya'ya mata ya bunkasa, toh ya kamata gwamnati ko masu hannu da shuni, kungiyoyi masu zaman kansu su ajiye kyauta ta nussman don arika jawo hankalin dalibai mata”

(To encourage girls in schools special reward programme should be sponsored either by government or private individual as a way of attracting attention of girls to education)

-----*A community participant in an interview in Kirfi LGA, Bauchi State*

The last issue relating to promoting girls education in the North East is in the area of infrastructural development. Participants believed that in setting up schools, the design must take cognizant of our culture and gender perspective in mind. Mention was made of toilet building, dormitory exclusively dedicated to female usage and in extreme situation, schools for girls only be built if that will encourage parents to release their daughters to attend schools.

4. CONCLUSION

Despite the benefits of education as tool for economic emancipation and social integration, girls in the North Eastern part as well as other parts of northern Nigeria lagged behind in major indices of being educated. This paper examined the challenges of education in North East Nigeria. The challenges identified by the study participants include: traditional/cultural factors such as: low rating of the girl child by the society, early marriage occasioned by need to procreate, fulfill religious obligation and the need to encourage chastity. Also, education for the girl is equally being hampered by host economic factors – especially parents’ inability to pay for the education of their children, including girls. Furthermore, the experiences of violence and security concerns have been major reasons why girls stayed away from schools. The research also, indicates as a challenge inadequate laws supporting girls’ education and poor administration of the entire system of education.

As solution, participants believed that that awareness/advocacy be done about the benefits of girls education to major stakeholders to reduce all cultural issues militating improve girls education. From the participants’ point of view, drastic measure like new legislation to encourage girl child education should be enacted to stop some practices which make schooling difficult for the girls. To deal with economic challenges, the people advocated for free education for the girl child and enhancement of income generating options for parents of schooling girls. To reduce security concerns and violence in school, government was called upon to provide adequate security for schools while school heads should monitor students’ discipline of fellow students. Lastly, governments were asked to provide female friendly infrastructure, adequate funding to schools - in extreme situation construct girls only schools and to provide female tutors who will serve as role models to the girls in school.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

This work was sponsored by Think Tank Initiative of IDRC, Canada and Centre for Population and Environmental Development (CPED), Benin City, Edo State, Nigeria

REFERENCES

- [1] Dewey, John (1944) [1916]. *Democracy and Education*. The Free Press. pp. 1–4.
- [2] Denga, D.I. (1993). *Education at a glance: From cradle to tomb*. Calabar: Rapid Educational Publishers Ltd.
- [3] Girls' education: A lifeline to development (<https://www.unicef.org/sowc96/ngirls.htm>)
- [4] National Bureau of Statistic (2014)2013 Statistical Report on Women and Men in Nigeria For (<http://econ.worldbank.org>).
- [5] Swann, J. and Graddol, D. (1988) 'Gender equalities in the classroom talk'. *English Education* 22/1:48-65
- [6] Kitetu, C (2001). 'Gender in education: an overview of developing trends in Africa'. CRILE Working paper, Egerton University, Kenya.
- [7] Grace, E.T. (2010). *Girls Child Education: Rising to challenge*. *African Journal of Reproductive Health*, 14(3): 107.
- [8] King E.M and Winthrop R(2015): *Today’s Challenges for the Girls’ Education, Global Economy and Development*, Working Paper 90, June, 2015.

- [9] Tyoakaa, L.M, Amaka, J.I. and Nor, A: Problems and Challenges of Girl-Child Education in Nigeria: The Situation of Kalgo Local Government Area (L.G.A) Of Kebbi State. *IOSR Journal of Research & Method in Education*; 2014, 4 (4 :) 1-5
- [10] UNICEF(2014): The Children:Education:http://www.unicef.org/nigeria/children_1937.hl
- [11] Nigeria UNICEF Country Office (2007). Girls Education. <http://www.unicef.org/wcaro-nigeria-factsheets-girls-education.pdf>.
- [12] British Council (2014): Girls' Education in Nigeria: Report 2014:Issues, Influencers and Action, www.britishcouncil.org.ng , 2014, accessed, 22nd April, 2017
- [13] UNESCO (2014). Education For All: Global Monitoring Report. *Teaching and Learning for All*. UNESCO: Paris
- [14] Goodluck, I. & Odaro, O:Issues in girl-child education in Nigeria: implications for library and information support, centre for learning resources, covenant university, Ota, Nigeria
- [15] Beaman, L., Duflo, E., Pande, R., and Topalova, P. 2011. "Female Leadership Raises Aspirations and Educational Attainment for Girls: A Policy Experiment in India." *Science* 335(6068): 582- 586. doi:10.1126/science.1212382.
- [16] UNESCO. 2010. *EFA Global Monitoring Report –Reaching the Marginalized*, Paris, France:
- [17] Filmer, D. 2008b "Inequalities in education: Effects of gender, poverty, orphanhood, and disability," In Mercy Tembon and Lucia Fort (eds), *Girls'Education in the 21st Century*, Washington, DC: The World Bank, pp. 95-114.
- [18] Lloyd, C. B., Mensch, B. S., and Clark, W. H. 2000. "The effects of primary school quality on the educational participation and attainment of Kenyan girls and boys." *Comparative Education Review* 44(2): 113–147.
- [19] ActionAid (2011). *Transforming education for girls in Nigeria and Tanzania: a cross-country analysis of baseline research*. ActionAid: London.
- [20] Adeniran, Adebunsi Isaac.(2007) "Educational Inequalities and Women's
- [21] Adeniran, Adebunsi Isaac.(2007) "Educational Inequalities and Women's
- [22] DFID (2005) Girls' education: towards a better future for all, Department for International Development, accessed, 22nd April, 2017
- [23] Prinsloo, S. 2006. "Sexual harassment and violence in South African schools." *South African Journal of Education* 26 (2): 305–318.
- [24] Field, E., and Ambrus, A. 2008. "Early marriage, age of menarche and female schooling in Bangladesh, " *Journal of Political Economy* 116(5): 881-930.
- [25] Williams, D.H. (1960). *A Short Survey of Education in Northern Nigeria*. Kaduna: Government Press, Northern Region.
- [26] National Population Commission Nigeria and ICF Macro (2009). *Nigeria Demographic and Health Survey 2008*. Abuja, Nigeria: National Population Commission and ICF Macro.
- [27] O'Neil, T., Plank, G, and Domingo, P. 2015. *Support to women and girls' leadership: A rapid review of the evidence*. London: Overseas Development Institute.
- [28] Abbott, P. Haerpfer, C., and Wallace, C. 2008. "Women in Rwandan politics and society." *International Journal of Sociology*, 38 (4): 111–125.
- [29] NPC(2010): *2006 Population and Housing Census Priority Table Volume IV Population Distribution by Age & Sex (State & Local Government Area)*National Population Commission, Abuja, Nigeria April, 2010