The Girl-Child: A Sociological View on the Problems of Girl-child Education in Nigeria.

By

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Today's girls are tomorrow's women; the differential treatment of girls and boys can hardly be separated from the preferential treatment of men to women in our society. Being born and growing up as a girl in a developing society like Nigeria is almost like a curse due to contempt and ignominy treatment received from the family, the school and the society at large. The cumulative effects of these discriminatory, exploitative and unjust treatments have had profound negative impacts on education opportunities available to girl-children. This paper therefore examined the general problems facing a girl-child and the peculiar challenges facing their education opportunities in Nigeria. Information used by the authors were collected from published articles, text and internet sources. The paper revealed some the cultural and traditional beliefs and practices in Nigeria which constitute major barriers to the education opportunities of girl-children. The authors concluded by suggesting some ways of enhancing girl-child education through holistic approach.

INTRODUCTION

The issue of discrimination against the girl-child has remained an unresolved issue in the society and a major concern in the academic discourse. In every civilized society and especially in the African context, children are regarded as the pride of the parents and the greatest value the society possess. This is why children are mostly cherished and consciously protected from all forms of hazards and abuse. However, girl-children have not been so lucky to be cherished, protected and loved in our society due to certain traditional practices, stereotyping, cultural and religious beliefs which put them at the risk of abuse and neglect.

A lot has been done in the area of documentation and assessment of the situation of the girl-child vis-à-vis the male-child. Available data have shown the detailed situation reports of the girl-child from birth. Some researchers have documented the general inferior economic, social and political status of the girl-child while recent studies are also showing the state of her existence from the formative-infancy stage through youth to the adult stage (Igube 2004; Asare 2009; Offorma 2009).

The girl-child problem around the world has many dimensions but the root of all kinds of discriminations and bias against the girl child lies in the customs, traditions and typical mindset of the society which considers the girl child and women as inferior beings. Women and girls have been treated in the most inhuman ways from the inception of human civilisation (Marx and Engels 1848; Fisho-Orideji 2001; Igube 2004). The legacy of injustice against the girl child has continued in some parts of the world especially in African and Asian countries. Female feticide, female infanticide, sexual abuse, marginalization in terms of nutrition, health care and education, violence against women and bias against women in all spheres of life including social, political, economic and religious spheres is a common norms in today's world. Generally, girls as well as women do not have decision making power of their own; it is always somebody else who makes decisions for them. An adolescent girl is married without her consent and becomes pregnant long before her body and emotional/psychological feelings are mature or ready for it. Half of the total sexual assaults in the world are committed against girl children (Bass 2004; Guttman 2009; Alabi and Alabi 2012). One of the leading causes of death among girl children is the complications from pregnancy and child

bearing (Fisho-Orideji 2001). This paper therefore, examined the general problem facing girl-children and the implications on the education opportunities available to them.

CONCEPTUAL ISSUES IN GIRL-CHILD AND EDUCATION

The girl-child is a biological female offspring from birth to eighteen (18) years of age. This is the age before one becomes a young adult. This period covers the crèche, nursery or early childhood (0 to 5 years), primary (6 to 12 years) and secondary school (12 to 18 years). During this period, the young child is totally under the care of the adults who may be her parents or guardians and older siblings. It is made up of infancy, childhood, early and late adolescence stages of development. During this period, the girl-child is malleable, builds and develops her personality and character. She is very dependent on the significant others, those on whom she models her behaviour, through observation, repetition and imitation. Her physical, mental, social, spiritual and emotional developments starts and progresses to the peak at the young adult stage (Fisho-Orideji 2001; Ibrahim 2004; Offorma (2009).

For a girl child to become a proper and useful adult, she needs both informal and qualitative formal educations. These will enable her to develop her mind, intellects and skills to be able to contribute meaningfully to her society. Education prepares a person, especially a girl child, to fit properly into the web of social interaction and equally enhance better performance in the social roles in the society.

Education, according to Offorma (2008), is the process of providing information to an inexperienced person, particularly the girl-child, to help her develop physically, mentally, socially, emotionally, spiritually, politically and economically. That is why, in university setting at graduation ceremonies, one hears the Vice-Chancellors pronounce these words while awarding degrees to their institutions' graduates,

"… you have been found worthy in character and learning…"

In education parlance, it means that the individual has acquired adequate and appropriate knowledge, skills and attitudes and values, known as cognitive, psychomotor and affective behaviours to be able to function optimally as a citizen. These behaviours are the focus of training individuals in institutions of learning. The planned and systematic training given in an institution of learning is formal education. The programme is organized, planned and systematically implemented. In an informal education, there is no plan and the training is haphazard and incidental (Ocho 1988; Charmes 1998; Francis 2000; Offorma 2009).

Ocho (2005) asserted that education involves a process through which individuals are made functional members of their society; a it is a process through which the young person acquires knowledge and realizes his/her potentialities and uses them for self-actualization, to be useful to him/herself and others. It is a means of preserving, transmitting and improving the culture of the society. In every society education connotes acquisition of something good and worthwhile. Education is one of the fundamental rights of individuals. Article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in December, 1949 stipulated that:

- Everyone has the right to education. This shall be free at least in the elementary/primary stages.
- Elementary education shall be compulsory while technical and professional education shall be made generally available.
- Higher education shall be equally accessible to all on the basis of merit.
- Parents have a prior right to choose the kind of education that shall be given to their children (Nwangwu 1976; Tahir 2005; Guttman 2009).

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Gender is a critical factor in structuring the types of opportunities and life chances faced by individuals and groups, and strongly influences the roles they play within social institutions from the household to the state. Although the roles of men and women vary from culture to culture, there is no known instance of a society in which females are more powerful than males. Men's roles are generally more highly valued and rewarding than women's roles (Ibrahim 2004; Giddens 2010).

Radical feminism theory shall be used in this paper to explain the reasons for education challenge of a girl-child in Nigeria. At the heart of the radical feminism is the belief that men are responsible for and benefit from the exploitation of women as well as girl-children. The analysis of patriarchy is a central concern. Patriarchy is viewed as a universal phenomenon that existed across time and cultures. Radical feminists often concentrate on the family as one of the primary sources of the women's oppression in the society (Igube 2004). Walby (1990); Rese (2005); Igube (2010) contended that there are some patriarchal structures which restrict girl-children as well as women's education opportunities and help maintain male domination. These are: paid employment, patriarchal relations within the household, patriarchal culture, sexuality, violence toward female, and the state. Each of these structures has some independence from the others, but they can affect one another, reinforcing or weakening in different structures. Walby believes that paid employment has been and remains a key structure in creating disadvantages for women and girl-children in particular. In a traditional, and even contemporary Nigerian communities, the degree of inequality between

men and women in terms of pay, position, condition, and access to well-rewarding occupations has declined only slightly. The gap between men's and women's wages has only been reduced a little and women continue to predominate in low-paid, part-time employment. When girls and women decide not to seek for formal education nor seek paid job, they do so more because of restricted opportunities open to them because of cultural values that suggest that mothers and wives should stay at home. The state's policies and priorities are systematically biased toward patriarchal interest. Women are routinely experienced violence and the state effectively condoles the violence with its refusal to intervene, except in exceptional cases.

Two distinctive forms of patriarchy are identified- private and public. Private patriarchy is domination of women and girls which occurred within the household at the hand of an individual patriarchy. Girls are socialized to the belief that they cannot take independent decision on their own but by male around them. Public patriarchy is more inclusive. Girls as well as women may involve in public life such as education, employment and politics but the quality and levels of involvement are generally lower compared to male counterpart (Walby 1990; Igube 2010). In Nigeria, for instance, the enrollment ratio of girls to boys is generally lower from elementary, secondary and tertiary institutions. Igube asserted that though women's population is higher than men in Nigeria, but the number of women in labour force is lower than men and more of these women are in low-paid informal employment.

PECULIAR PROBLEMS FACING GIRL-CHILDREN IN NIGERIA

In most Nigeria communities, there are general problems facing girl-children which are directly and indirectly limiting their education opportunities and potentials. Scholars have identified some of these peculiar problems which amongst others include:

Family abuse and domestic violence
The girl child problem starts from the home and the same continues as she interacts with the general society. Fisho-Orideji (2001) argued that traditionally, to born a girl in most traditional societies is almost synonymous to a curse. A girl child is born and socialized into the belief of being inferior or sub human with attendant marginalization and abuse. She is often held responsible and punished for any misfortune of her parents. Physical, verbal and other related abuses are common practices against girl children. These acts affect the psycho-social and educational performance of young learner, especially, the girl- children (Charles and Charles 2004; Igube (2004).

Sexual abuse
Child sexual abuse especially against girl-child, has assumed a worrisome dimension in Nigeria. This is basically done by adult relatives and in some cases by the step-father of a girl or a close relative in the family. There

are many reported cases where girls are regularly sexually abused, threatened never to open up to anybody or else be killed, and some are forced to abort the pregnancies that might resulted from the abused in order to cover up the abuse (Mwangi 2004).

Rejection and neglect
Togunde and Carter (2008) asserted that the neglect and rejection of a girl-child normally starts from birth when the news of safe delivery is broken to the family and especially to the father. As soon as the sex/gender status of a child is announced by the medical attendant during/after the delivery as a girl, some parents receive such (good) news with disappointment and dismay. Some even could go to the extent of asking midwives question like: why it is a girl and not a boy? Some parents reject their girl-children from the hospital, refuse to pay for hospital bills and other expenses relating to the child delivery. Some parents, in their efforts to get male children, change the female foetus to male foetus in its formative stage of pregnancy. If the prescriptions are strictly adhere to, the sex, it is believed would change. Although the process for this may be boring and difficult to follow and at time, it is expensive and involves a lot of dangerous processes to follow, many Nigerians women prefer to go through the processes without considering the consequences only for the sake of having a baby boy. Unfortunately, in the process, many of these mothers die because of injuries imposed on them and/or the combination of different herbs. At times, the herbs would cause damage to the unborn child. The effects of the herb may lead to blindness of the unborn baby or if it affects her brain, then she develops a mental problem. To his mother however, that is not a problem as long as the baby is a boy (Kolawole 1998; Fisho-orideji 2001).

Genital mutilation
According to UNICEF (2004), an estimate of one hundred million girl-children in Africa undergoes genital mutilation operation yearly. In Nigeria, most of these girls that undergo this raw and barbaric practice are under a year. Female circumcision is a violent traditional way of removing the clitoral prepuces and tip of the clitoris for no just cause. Such operations normally lead to mutilation of the girl-child's genital organs. This custom is generally perpetuated against girl-children with a belief of protecting her chastity and reducing her sexual enjoyment. This however, posses a great rick to a girl child because, in most cases, the operation is performed by old and unqualified persons with unsterilized knives and razors. Apart from the external lost of sexual enjoyment and the constant pains she has to go through each time she has sex, she experiences constant hemorrhage, shock and septicemia as she become adult. This is part of the regular long-time urinary infection and difficulties in coitus and child-birth (Fisho-Orideji 2001; Murphy and Mei-Mei 2001; Ibrahim 2004). Fisho-Orideji (2001) contended that this singular ill treatment against girl-children has led to many

unimaginable health hazards, emotional and psychological strains.

Forced and early marriage

Another disturbing issue of girl-child challenge in Nigeria is the incidence and complexity of child marriage and forced marriage. Aderinto (2000) and Fisho-Orideji (2001) asserted that a girl-child, before twelve or at her early teen years, is giving out in early marriage to friends, benefactors, visitors, strangers or bethroded to local hero or cleric. In some cases, she is forced to marry an older man in his 50s or 60s. The tendency for her is to be aggressive toward him which in most cases would be sent parking often after pregnancy. Many of the Nigerian girl-mothers in this category have met their untimely death through the practice of early marriage. Some, when they pack out of their matrimonial homes while carrying babies, they have no place to go because they are equally rejected and abandoned by their parents. When they give birth to their children under uncompleted building or bridge or elsewhere, they abandon the children especially if they are girls, at the spot of delivery. Some parents, erroneously, justify the denial of girls of their right to education to prevent them from bringing shame to the family through early pregnancy. Yet others believe that women who are at the same level of education as the men are a disgrace to the community because more often than not, they will not get married and if they do, it will be to a foreigner. For such parents, early marriage is the best way to prevent this and at the same time preserve traditions Aderinto (2000); Fisho-Orideji (2001; Schmitz-Robinson 2006).

Victims of suspicion of witchcraft

The girl-child is always a victim. If she is suspected as a witch, that demands a public death, she may be stoned to death. It is difficult to cite an example of a boy who was alleged as a wizard to be stoned to death (Anyanwu 1993). Where there is one, however, there is always a serious consideration and compassion that he is a boy, may be, the only boy or the first boy of the family-so his life will be spared. In some religious circles, girls are always victims to suspicion and believed to be the cause of failure or ill-luck in businesses, careers and/or family. If she is the only child in the family, she is believed to be the barrier to child delivery within the family (Murphy and Mei-Mei 2001; Ibrahim 2004; Ogundipe 2007).

Girl-child homicide

Physical killing of the girl-child in preference to a boy is not a new thing in most traditional Nigerian communities. Some decades ago, girl-child homicides were limited to the traditional/rural areas but gradually crept into urban centre (Fisho-Orideji 2001). Cases abound in which a girl-child was killed based on some traditional beliefs that she is a cursed child or the "carrier of evil loads" or a "covenant-child" to the gods of the sea or river, or simply that her birth is a shame and a let down to the family. She

is therefore offered as a sacrifice to the gods when the need arises (Kolawole 1998).

Some girl-children often die as a result of sufferings imposed on them because they are not wanted. Some are tied to trees to die of hunger depending on the command/demand of the gods or the priest (Ibrahim 2004; Offorma 2009).

Inducement to prostitution

There are cases in which parents directly or indirectly induced their children to engage in prostitution (Alabi and Alabi 2012). Some poor parents, especially, single female-headed family induce or force their daughters to commercial sex under various pretences. If any of such daughters refuses to succumb to the pressures, she is thereby castigated, ridiculed and sometimes rejected by the family. Some girl-children could not pay for their school fees and are forced to engage in commercial sex in order to pay for their fees.

Child labour

The girl children's education opportunities hampered by child labour in most household in Nigeria. Togunde and Carter (2008) asserted child labour is a pervasive problem throughout the world and especially in the developing countries like Nigeria. Africa and Asian countries account for about 85% of total child employment in the world (UNICEF 2004). Alabi and Alabi (2012) contented that majority of the child labourers, especially, domestic/house helps, are girls. The difficulties faced by the Nigerian child labourers pose a serious challenge as they have proven over the years that they are problems which are here to stay. International Labour Organization (ILO 2006) reported that child labour has been made worse in recent times because some of these children have no solid background, no education and no parental care. In these circumstances, they in most cases become street hawkers, prostitutes, robbers, a "reserve army" for fomenting political/religious crises and other related criminal activities. They work in the streets during the day, and in some cases work even late till 11pm at night, having no time for formal education or training. This further placed a barrier to their social and career mobility (Kolawole 1998; Charles and Charles 2004; Ogundipe 2007; Togude and Carter 2008).

NEED FOR GIRL-CHILD EDUCATION

Why should a girl-child have the right to education? The answers to this question are given thus:
- The child is born helpless and has to rely entirely on parents and other older members of the society to survive and satisfy his/her growth needs in all their ramifications.
- The degree and quality of participation in the life of the society depends to a large extent on the degree and quality of his/her education. This will enable him/her performs his/her political and

- other citizenship duties and exercises the rights pertaining thereto effectively.
- Since every citizen benefits from the result of the education of his/her fellow citizen and since every generation receives its education from an older generation, every generation has a duty to reciprocate by educating the generation that comes after it (Ocho, 1988; Offorma 2009; Asare 2009).

Education is very essential in today's society and the girl child must be educated in order to have a bright future. Part of the fundamental human rights of a child is the right to education. Education is a light and this light is indispensable especially in this fast changing world. Educating the girl child is educating the nation. How can a woman be empowered without education? In a society where the girl-child is seen as a "second class citizen", where more relevance is placed on the male child, the importance of girl-child education cannot be over stressed in correcting the injustice. Girls, especially in the African continent are at disadvantage in accessing formal and informal education. There have been beliefs and cultural practices that dampen the aspiration of girl-child to compete with male. There are myopic fears that once a girl gets married, she becomes someone's responsibility and loses contact with her parents. Igube (2004) asserted that some traditions also make the woman to be solely dependent on her husband for every need and want. Some cultures in Nigeria believe that the place of a woman is in her husband's kitchen and bearing children. Ogundipe (2007); Offorma (2009), asserted that with adequate education, a girl-child is enlightened on health and national issues; a better way of bringing up her children; make informed decisions about her future and protect herself from trafficking, sexual exploitation, STDs, HIV/AIDS and other health and social problems. United Nations Children Education Fund (UNICEF 2003) advocates investment in girls' education as a way for all children to fulfill their right to a quality basic education. An educated female child is more aware of her rights and can assert them. Education prepares a girl-child to be economical productive and independent and enhance leadership relevance. Research has shown that there can be no significant, sustainable transformation of the nation and no significant reduction in poverty until the girl-child receive the basic education she needs to take her rightful place as equal partners in development (Birungi 2008; Offorma 2008).

A common adage in Nigeria says "Educate a man, you educate an individual, but educate a woman, you educate a nation" The above summarizes the essence of education to the girl-child and indeed, to every educable human being, and so calls for special attention to be focused on the education of the girl-child. No nation can afford to toy with the education of her citizens, especially, the child, who will be the father or mother of tomorrow, because education is the bedrock of all facets of development. Children are future leaders of tomorrow and

mothers are guardians of the future, and the first aim of every family and society should be to raise healthy and productive individuals who are physically, psychologically, socially, and mentally well developed. These can be achieved through the education of the girl-child who will in turn become a mother in the future. Offorma (2009) indentified some critical issues relating to girl child education: access to education, retention and dropout rate.

Access to Education

In some instances access simply means the right to education. It is also the opportunity provided for the girl-child to be educated. Access deals with the availability, convenience and ability to be educated. It is true that many governments make provision for the education of their citizens, but the provisions most of the time do not take cognizance of the peculiarities of the girl-child. In that case the girl-child may not have access to education, which is a fundamental human right.

Research has shown that millions of girls do not have access to school despite the concerted efforts to push the cause forward. Okeke, *et al.,* (2008) and Alabi and Alabi (2012) identified child labour, poverty and lack of sponsorship, quest for wealth, bereavement, truancy, broken home, engagement of children as house helps, as factors or the clog in the wheel of children's access to education. According to World Bank (2003), More than 350 million people, over half of Africa's population, live below the poverty line of one dollar a day. This implies that poverty, too, excludes children, including the girl-child, from school.

In Ethiopia, girls are sometimes abducted for marriage when they are no more than eight years. In West Africa, they are recruited from poor rural families to work as domestic servants in coastal cities or even neighbouring countries. In Nigeria, it is not very difficult to find a house help, mostly girls, in virtually every household (Togunde and Carter 2006; Alabi and Alabi 2012). In South Africa, a report by Human Rights Watch 2008 warns that sexual violence and abuse are hampering girls' access to education. In Afghanistan, girls are simply been barred from school under the Taliban regime. According to Guttman 2009,(a UNESCO courier journalist), customs, poverty, fear and violence are the reasons why girls still account for 60% of the estimated 113 million of out-of-school children, and a majority live in sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia.

Offorma (2009) asserted that most of the factors that militate against the girl-child access to education are socio-cultural. According to World Bank 2003, most countries in African were ranked among the poorest in the world and thus faced with: poverty, disease and HIV/AIDS epidemics, over-crowding in cities, tribal warfare and despotic governments have contributed to the degeneration of the beautiful African land into a human rights catastrophe. At the centre of the devastating situation is the girl-child. The girl-children appear to be the

most vulnerable and most undervalued members of the world society. In a region where many are struggling to get enough food and to stay alive, remain out of reach of the various violent rebel armies, and to care for those stricken with various diseases, a basic education, especially for girl children, is low on the list of priorities.

The right to education, which is a fundamental human right, is frequently denied to girls in some Africa countries. The then United Nations Secretary General, Kofi Annan, stated that in Africa, when families have to make a choice, due to limited resources, of educating either a girl or a boy child, it is always the boy that is chosen to attend school. In Africa, many girls are prevented from getting the education entitled to them because families often send their daughters out to work at a young age, so that they can get the additional income they may need to exist beyond subsistence level, and finance the education of sons.

It was been reported in BBC News (2006), that African patriarchal societal viewpoint favours boys over girls because boys maintain the family lineage. Additional reasons why girls do not have adequate access to education in Africa include the fact that many have to stay home to nurse sick relatives and people with certain diseases such as HIV/AIDS. Also, in some cases uneducated mothers are another reason that makes such mothers believe their daughters do not need to be educated. Furthermore, some families do not believe in education of girls. In Ethiopia child brides face early pregnancy, responsibilities to their children and in-laws, and reticence of their husbands, who are usually much older, to let them out of the house.

In Kenya for example, girl–child education is elusive. Mwangi, (2004) wrote that a combination of poverty, disease and backward cultural practices continued to deny the girl-child her right to education. Even with the introduction of free primary education, access to education is still remaining a wide dream to many Kenyan children. Despite the introduction of free primary education in the country which accounted for an increase in enrolment, a sizeable number of children, especially girls, still find themselves out of school due to a number of reasons. These reasons include: demands for their labour in the homes such as assisting in looking after their young siblings; child marriage, doing house chores, death of their mother, and looking after the sick member of the family (Aderinto 2000; Togunde and Carter 2008). Some of the girls are given to marriage against their wish and when they refuse, they are threatened with death. The children are given to marriage at a tender age in quest of dowry from the husbands. However, the amount of the dowry and length the dowry last are problematic. The girls lament that because of the setbacks they still did not escape from poverty and their parents had nothing to show for the dowry received (Igube 2004; Offorma 2009).

Retention/Dropout

UNICEF (2003) reported that in Sub-Saharan Africa, the number of girls out of school each year has risen from 20 million in 1990 to 24 million in 2002. However, the number rose to over 26 million in 2009 (Offorma 2009). Of the 25 selected countries studied, fifteen (15) were in sub-Saharan Africa. The criteria studied were: low enrolment rates for girls; gender gaps of more than 10 percent in primary education; countries with more than one million girls out of school; countries included on the World Bank's Education For All Fast Track Initiative and countries hit hard by a range of crises that affect school opportunities for girls, such as HIV/AIDS and conflict. The fifteen countries included Chad, Nigeria, Sudan, Tanzania, Eritrea, Ethiopia and the Democratic Republic of Congo.

The worst hit is Southern Sudan, which has been seriously affected by civil war for decades. UNICEF noted that in the area, as few as 15 percent of primary school-aged children were in school and girls represented only one quarter of the number. By the time the upper primary level was reached, there were hardly any girls left in school and at the territory's foremost secondary school, Rumbek, there was a solitary girl. Only 560 of the 8,000 teachers in southern Sudan are women, which constitutes a mere seven percent (Nduru, 2003; Offorma 2006; Ogundipe 2007).

In rural areas, social and cultural patterns combined with relatively poor quality of schooling place girls, their education and development in a disadvantaged and vulnerable position. Girls bear the heaviest burden for household responsibilities, including care of sick parents and siblings, and are first ones to drop out of school.

In Nigeria, only in the South East geo-political zone is where there were cases in which more boys than girls drop out of school (Offorma, 2006). The drop-out syndrome is a function of some factors that distract the boys from schools. These factors include: preference for a trade, quest for money, parental decision, lack of employment opportunities, hawking/street trading, the long process of education and lack of counseling.

WAYS OF ENHANCING GIRL-CHILD EDUCATION IN NIGERIA

Education is an important tool in liberating and correcting the societal and institutional injustice and discrimination against girl-children. In enhancing girl child education, a wholesome approach must be taken, starting from the family attitude. As in the case of South Africa having changed their curriculum to be responsive to the demands of their nation after the post apartheid era, the Nigerian value and education system must change to suit the educational need of girl-child. The South African curriculum is child-centred, no more teacher-centred approach. This idea could be borrowed by other African countries especially Nigeria. Like in Kenya, where the government took some initiatives in promoting the

children's education by enshrining this right in the Children's Act, 2001; the same must be done in Nigeria. The Kenyan Children Act created a department for children to deal with their rights and welfare. Application of such laws as, imprisonment of any person found guilty of negligence in this case, knowingly and willfully causing a child to become in need of care and protection has helped towards the promotion of the children's right to education. The Nigerian government should promulgate such laws so as to improve access to education of the girl-child. Of significance also is the fact that a number of NGOs have been allowed to operate in areas where early marriage is prevalent. NGOs as well as government agencies should step up the efforts in educating the people on the importance of girl child education and the inherent dangers of marrying them off to older men at younger age.

Though the governments, in collaboration with NGOs have established centres where girls rescued from early marriage and prostitution are accommodated and counseled, the need to effectively monitor the programme/scheme cannot be overemphasized. If government will strictly implement and monitor these schemes/programmes, this will create opportunities for the children who have been out of school to pursue their lifelong dreams.

Braun *et al.*, (2004) observed that 'feeding children in school has paid significant educational dividends in Bangladesh, the same should be encouraged for rural and urban poor children in Nigeria. A school feeding programme in Bangladesh, for instance, has resulted in a 35% overall increase in enrolment and a remarkable increase 44% increase of girls.' It is recommended that governments should emulate Bangladesh so as to achieve the Millennium Development Goal number two, which is attaining Universal Basic Education. Most of these are to be found in the urban areas, leaving very few teachers in the rural areas. Teachers should be equitably distributed and social amenities put in place in the rural areas to retain teachers.

The socio-cultural context of Nigeria is such that is multi-cultural, multi-linguistic and multi-religious based. Such diversity and value system must be the focus of education to ensure that quality education is given to the children. All round girl child empowerment from the grass root level is another way out of girl child education in Nigeria. Feasible and pragmatic programmes directed at increasing girl child rights, privileges, and opportunities should be aggressively pursue by individuals, organizations and government agencies. Such programmes may include free and compulsory education for girl children, organizing girls' movement, girls' forum, and gender sensitive activities that tend toward promoting the rights and privileges of girl children. Nigerian government should strengthen the power of her relevant agencies in protecting child rights and enhancing their opportunities. Such agencies should be empowered to deal with the protection of children's right where children's courts can

be set up to provide speedy trial of offences against children or of violation of child rights. They should also be actively involved in addressing problems associated with trafficking of children for labour and prostitution, discrimination in education, physical and sexual abuse and other age-long cultural practises that are against the health and social wellbeing of girl children. Government should also ensure the parents from rural areas are enlightened on the need to educate and reduce the bias toward the girl child

Girls need a safe and supportive educational environment, free from abuse, with separate toilet facilities, safe drinking water, equal attention with boys and a gender sensitive curriculum. The school curriculum also needs to be revisited, to ensure gender and cultural sensitivity and to include life skills, HIV/AIDS education, citizenship and conflict resolution "Non-formal education, essential to increasing access for out-of-school girls, needs to be accredited as a complementary means of learning. If the Federal Government, all stakeholders in the private and public sectors and the entire citizenry will join UNICEF in the fight against girl-child discrimination in attaining basic education for the developmental processes of the nation, accelerating the girl-child education" will be a fight that can be won in Nigeria as it was obtainable in other part of the world.

CONCLUSION

Education is the right of every girl everywhere and key to transforming her life and the life of her community. Without education, girls are denied the opportunity to develop their full potential and to play a productive and equal role in their families, their societies, their country and their world. Finally, that schools in Africa are often substandard, especially in rural and isolated areas, means that even the few girls lucky enough to get access to an education often receive one of the poor quality and limited duration. Many schools in Nigeria as well as other African countries are nearly destitute, with classes being held in crowded, poorly constructed structures, in which there is very limited access to paper and pencils, and even less access to text books and computers. Also, some cultural practices place major obstacle to the education of girl-children in Nigeria. Although much has been done to improve the caliber and existence of girls' education in African countries, there is still much that needs to be done.

The largest hurdle that needs to be overcome before all African girls can get the education they deserve is the prevailing social thought that discourages or minimizes the importance of education for girls. To stop this, countries in Africa and Nigeria in particular, need to pass laws banning the early marriage practices that keep girls out of school. Finally, African governments must pass legislation that makes the education of girls mandatory for primary school, and then enforce these laws stringently, especially, in the rural communities.

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