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Gender Disparity in Enrolment into Basic Formal Education in Nigeria: Implications for National Development

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Abstract

Research studies have pointed to inequality in access to formal Education in Nigeria in favour of the male; despite the nation's commitment to equality of all, irrespective of race, sex or gender as buttressed by section 18, of the 1999 Nigerian constitution. This situation has grave implications for national development in Nigeria. The enlarged access to qualitative and functional educational opportunity for all, boys

and girls inclusive, is perhaps one of the most effective means to combat poverty, reduce misunderstanding, political and religious intolerance as well as lack of respect for others, which had been the major causes of friction, revolts and intermittent civil crises in the nation. Girls education would not only contribute to move the nation forward economically, politically and technologically; it would also go a long way to liberate the women folk from their natural way of dependency, inferiority, superstition and other shackles that impede national development. This paper therefore examines the issue of gender disparity in enrolment into formal education in Nigeria with special focus on enrolment in basic education that is at the primary and junior secondary schools level, the reason for the imbalance in enrolment and its implications for national development. Recommendations are also proffered on how to ameliorate the situation.

Key words: Gender, Disparity, Enrolment, Formal Education, Development.

Introduction

In the African traditional education, high values and conscious efforts were given to the instruction and the discipline of the young (girl-child inclusive). Though largely informal, African traditional education was an education for living. Functionalism was the guiding principle. Both boys and girls received education that emphasized social responsibility, job orientation, spiritual and moral values. Although there were no fixed venues such as classrooms or laboratories, education could be found anywhere, in farms, the sacred shrines or even the market place. Every adult is a teacher although the more specialized forms of training are traditionally entrusted to older members of the family circle, the village elders, the senior ranks of the secret societies, the craftsmen and the diviners. While the boys were put through a series of vigorous exercises designed to improve their physical fitness as they had the responsibility of defending the community against external attack in addition to making provision for the household, girls were given skill training in agriculture, crafts, weaving, plaiting, dyeing in addition to character development and wisdom geared towards making them good wives and mothers. (Fajana 1978) In Nigeria, the Yoruba word "eko" correspond to the English word "Education" meaning knowledge of religion and oral literature, skill training in agriculture and crafts, the building of physical strength and agility, and above all, the formation of character and development of wisdom. No wonder Callaway (1964) noted that the Yoruba concept of "eko" had a greater emphasis on discipline than the contemporary permissiveness found in many British and American homes and schools. Its aims were to discipline all the faculties of the individual to bring out the best human qualities at each stage (Fafunwa, 1994).

With the British colonization of African state, the myth of European racial superiority was for all practical purpose accepted by Africans whilst the natural pride

of the African peoples in their own cultures and their self-confidence was dealt serious blows as a result of their inability to read and write. No doubt, the technical inferiority of the indigenous cultures vis-a-vis the technical superiority of the Europeans account for the high esteem with which the European cultures were held. Invariably, Africans developed appetite for western education and schooling became a predominant and the most accessible mechanism for social mobility and development in West Africa. The early schools in West Africa were however pioneered by the missionaries, while Sierra-Leone which had been set apart by Britain for the freed slaves became the pivot of Christian missionary excursion and incursions into several parts of the West African States including Nigeria African girls were not altogether neglected in the early missionary education because records showed that the wives of missionaries undertook the teaching of girls (Fajana, 1978; Ajayi, 1985 Fafunwa, 1994). The fact however remains that girl's education in colonial West Africa did not make rapid progress as that of the boys.

For many centuries, there has been a universal devaluation of women in Africa. The female sex's social role has been traditionally linked to the home and it has always been assumed that they can find happiness and fulfillment only as mothers and wives. Adeel (1994) defines education as a means of transmitting worthwhile ideas that are considered necessary for an individual to conveniently adjust to his total environment. Chabaud (1970) emphasizes the fact that formal education not only improves the status of women in society, it also contributes largely to eliminating the inferior stereotyping of women. Gender is defined by Babson (1991) as a psychological terms describing behaviour and attributes expected of individual on the basis of being born either a male or a female.

Expanding education, especially basic formal education has been on objective of the education policies in developing countries over the past two decades (Kelly, 1981; Fioro and wolf, 1990). The benefits of education are now well established. Education raises the quality of life; it improves health and productivity in market and non-market work; increases individuals' access to paid employment and often facilitates social and political participation (Deble, 1980).

King (1990) is convinced that the total benefits of education to the society are multiplied when basic education is extended to girls. Females who participate in basic education do not only aspire to further their education; but also have smaller families, fewer of their children die in infancy, and their children are healthier and better educated than women who have never had access to, or who have limited exposure to, basic education. Bowman and Anderson (1978) demonstrate that those countries such as Brazil, the Philippines and Argentina which implemented universal free primary education programmes are now reaping the benefits. Some of them are now middle level income countries and have 100 percent literacy, for both boys and girls.

Studies in gender differences in participation in formal education reflect lower enrolment and higher dropout rates for girls than boys in developing countries (Odagaand Heneveld, 1995 & Jatoi Megin, 1996). An average 9.6 percent of these girls drop-out of primary schools as compared to 8.2 percent of boys.

Gender continues to play a major role in determining who goes to school, how well they do, and how far they progress. Being female is negatively associated with enrolment, attainment and performance in the educational system. According to Deble (1980), in all low-income countries, boys exceed girls in their participation in formal education, in terms of access, persistence and achievement.

From the above survey, it is clear that the education of girls needs more than a cursory and half-hearted approach in developing countries such as Nigeria. This is premised on the fact that women should be seen as able partners with the men and optimal national development cannot be achieved without the input of the women in the society.

Gender Disparity in Enrolment into Basic Formal Education in Nigeria

Section 18 of the 1999 Federal Republic of Nigeria constitution dealing with the fundamental principles of state policy, reflects the nation's commitments to equality of all, irrespective of race, sex or gender; while the national policy of Education (2004) stipulates that every Nigerian child should have a right to equal educational opportunities. Yet research studies have pointed to inequality in access to education in favour of the male, UNESCO (2003) records that the literacy rate for Nigerian girls and women stood at 47% while male was 53%, yet the female forms the larger proportion of the population. UNESCO (2003a) data revealed that girls' enrolment was lower in the North with Bauchi 39%, Kastina 27% and Sokoto 15%.

This low enrolment of girls in formal education is a pointer to the fact that majority of Nigerian women live in a state of extreme deprivation in spite of their important position in national development. Though the Federal Government of Nigeria launched universal basic education programme in 1999 and the programme became compulsory for all children of school age as from 28th of May 2004, yet, there seems to be no concrete efforts of government to ensure equal access for girls' enrolment, retention and completion of basic education. This invariably has robbed most Nigerian women of the opportunity to contribute maximally to national development.

It is no longer a matter of debate that females constitute more than fifty percent (50%) of the world's active population. It was noted at Dakar, in 2000 that some 113 million children, 60% of whom are girls, have no access to primary schooling (UNESCO, 2003b)). Although African women have been making immense contributions to national development, they still face a number of inequitable

difficulties that limit their potentials in promoting personal and collective development (Assimang, 1990).

African scholars' key area of concern is that girls' education in Africa can at best be described as dwindling because it is less than equal to that of their male counterparts (Indabawa 1998; Obanya, 2003; UINESCO 2003b) The National Report on Situation and Policy Analysis in Nigeria (1993), confirmed that disparity in access to education exist in favour of the male children. Article 28 of the convention on the Right of the Child (1989) states that education is a right which must be achieved on the basis of equal opportunity.

The literacy situation in Nigeria was in 2003 analysed by UNICEF and the major highlights are as follows:

- The overall literacy rate has declined, from 57% in 1990 to 49% in 2001;
- Literacy among women declined from 44 to 41% during the same period;
- There are striking geographical discrepancies urban areas 67%, rural areas 42%;
- There are also striking regional (or geopolitical) differences, as illustrated in Table 1 (below), both in overall literacy rates and in women's literacy rates.

For instance, from Table 1, on Regional and Gender Differences in Adult literacy rates in Nigeria, the figures for women stood at 60% and men 74% in the South East Zone while the corresponding figures for the South West Zone were 55% for women and 74% for men respectively. The figures for women in the North West Zone stood at 22% while that of men stood at 40% and for the North East -21% for women and 42% for men.

Why are there such wider gaps in literacy rates, even in the Southeast and Southwest Zones; which got even more pronounced between the Northern and Southern Zones? The answer according to Obayan (2003) lies in a disabling environment, characterized by:

- Lack of encouragement from the wider society particularly from the men folk, and even from fellow women.
- Women being overburdened by household chores, frequent child bearing, and family sustenance obligations.
- The dead-end nature of many literacy programmes ("After Literacy courses what next?")
- The fact that many literacy programmes are not sufficiently functional, in that they fail to empower the women beneficiaries in the way explained above.

The argument so far points to the fact that development in Nigeria becomes endangered if it is not engendered since girls education is a must for the development of any country especially Nigeria. The enlarged access to qualitative and functional educational opportunity for all, boys and girls, is perhaps one of the most effective means to combat poverty, reduce misunderstanding, political and religious intolerance as well as lack of respect for others which had been the major causes of frictions, revolts and intermittent civil crises in the nation. Girls education would not only contribute to move the nation forward economically, politically, and technologically; it would also go a long way to liberate the women folk from their natural way of dependency, inferiority, superstition and other shackles that impede national development (Osokoya, 2008)

Table II (at the back) also shows the proportion of girls enrolled in the primary education in Nigeria in 2000. From the table it is clear that fewer girls than boys actually enrolled except in eight of the thirty six states of the country. Furthermore, Table III shows that there were 2,214,964 pupils in secondary schools in Nigeria in 1997 and that 47% of these were girls while 53% were boys. The table also shows that thirteen states; Abia, Akwalbom, Anambra, Cross Rivers, Delta, Edo, Enugu, Imo, Lagos, Ogun, Ondo, Oyo and Rivers had achieved gender parity in junior secondary school enrolment. Twenty three other states and the federal capital territory (FCT) Abuja are still far from attaining gender parity. The most affected states include; Adamawa Bauchi, Benue, Borno Gombe, Jigawa, Kaduna, Kano, Katsina, Kebbi, Nassarawa, Niger, Sokoto, Taraba, Yobe and Zamfara among others.

Reasons for Gender Disparity in the Enrolment

The poor number of enrolment of girls into schools in Nigeria as above highlighted and illustrated is determined by the following factors:

Cultural Beliefs and Practices: Over the years culture has continued to play a leading role and barrier to gender equality in education in Nigeria. This could be traced to the patrilineal nature of Nigerian society that is male dominated and based on male chauvinism that subjects the women to playing the secured fiddle position to the men. Some of the cultural obstacles to women education include subjecting women to early marriage, educating the boys in place of girls, demand girls to be inferior and destined to play the roles of wife and mother (Okafor and Arinze, 2012).

Households and Families Constraint: This include high incidence of poverty in the home, societal preference for the male-child, overburding of the girl-child with house hold chores and labour concern for the security of the girl child, In case of long distance between home and school. For instance, in some areas in Nigeria where the input of the girl child with the family income is so high through generating income by means of hawking food items, the parent of such girl might

discourage them from going to schools. Also, poverty compels many parents to marry off their daughters to wealthy men instead of sending them to school, while the rising unemployment and economic hardship in the country compel some parents to withdraw their children especially girls from schools.

Religious Encumbrances: This contributes to the gender imbalance in education enrolment in Nigeria. For instance, looking at the Islamic religion, the totality of the ways of a Muslim is dictated by the religion and as such any behavior contrary to the teaching of the religion is strongly opposed. The principle of Islamic early marriage and special way of dressing for females have also been seen as contributing much to keeping many girls away from schools especially in the North [Jades and Debban, 1996].

The School Factor: This includes the school and its environment often not gender friendly [that is, not conducive to the needs of girls], poor gender awareness on the part of teachers and the curriculum, didactic materials and teaching-learning activities often reflecting the high level of gender insensitivity on the wider society.

Gender gap between male and female that had its root in primary schools becomes even more manifest in secondary education as;

- A smaller proportion of girls are able to transit from primary to secondary schools.
- Female dropout becomes more acute, as a result of such adolescent girls environment hazards as early marriages, unwanted pregnancies, gender insensitive educational environments, curricula and teaching methods as well as lack of encouragement from the wider society.

Implications for National Development

The gender imbalance as regards lack of equal access for girls enrolment, retention and completion of basic education and which is skewed in favour of the boys as above highlighted portends great implications for national development in Nigeria.

First, it contributes to heightening the natural way of dependency of women on the male. This should be discouraged in an age of economic melt-down, where the male might find it increasingly difficult to cater for the needs of the family alone, without the female (wife's) staunch support.

Another implication of the gender inequality in access to formal education also manifests in contributing largely to inferiority stereotyping of women in an age of feminism where female juggernauts in the likes of Dr. Okonjo Iweala, the former Vice President of World Bank (African Region), Nigeria's minister of Finance and Coordinating Minister of the economy, Dr. Obiageli Ezekwesili, the former Vice

President of World Bank (African Region) and Former Nigeria's Minister of Education and Elly Johnson Sir Leaf, President of Liberia and others are making indelible imprints on the sands of time.

Furthermore, those females (or girls) not exposed to formal education are thereby incapacitated to contribute their maximum quota to national development. Such ladies are prone to all manners of child abuse such as street hawking, working as maid (or servants) etc. with all its attendant hazards.

Women education plays an important role in reducing infant mortality, increasing life expectancy of future generation and improves child rearing and development. Women education leads to more knowledge and understanding of hygiene, child and mother nutrition control and prevention of disease, family planning, general health practices and child care (Ballara 1992, Okonta, 2014). Thus women education is vital to ensuring a healthy nation.

Finally, the gender disparity will lead to the escalation of the crisis situation in the country, if not properly addressed. An adage says "devil finds, work for an idle hand". Such uneducated girls would not only constitute nuisances to themselves, but also to the society at large, through taking recourse to cultism; prostitution, armed robbery, fraud (419), smuggling, child trafficking and cocaine pushing, at local, national and international levels, thereby denting the image of the country.

Conclusion

This paper has examined the issue of gender disparity in enrolment into basic formal education in Nigeria. It traced the historical background to the problem right from the colonial days. It established with the aid of data that the balance is still skewed in favour of the male through a comparative evaluation. The paper highlighted reasons for the poor enrolment of girls into school and its implications for national development. Finally, the work is rounded off with recommendations on how the situation can be improved upon.

Recommendations

The government, the parents, the teacher and the society at large have roles to play in order to address the gender imbalance. The following recommendations will go a long way in addressing the gender disparity and its attendant implications, if properly implemented:

- ◆ The government should be more committed to the universal basic education programme by making primary and secondary education free for all (including girls and boys). This would help in solving the problems related to poverty as regards girls poor enrolment into schools.

- ◆ The parents should desist from overburdening of the girl-child with household chores and labours.
- ◆ Cultural beliefs and practices which militates against female enrolment in schools such as early marriage should be addressed
- ◆ The teacher has a lot of roles to play in making the school and its environment gender friendly (that is conducive to the needs of girls). This calls for better gender awareness on the part of teachers. There should be a re-orientation in societal preference for the male-child especially as modern development has proved that girls (women) are in no way inferior to boys (men).
- ◆ Finally, according to Okafor and Arinze (2012) curricular in schools should be reviewed with a view of removing all forms of gender biases in content. Curriculum in history and social studies should also include more of the prominent contributions of women in national development and peacemaking processes as exemplified by the roles of Madam Tinubu and Queen Amina of the past, late Dr. Mrs Oby Ezekwesili and Okonjo Iweala and Prof. Dora Akunyili of our contemporary times. This will generate values and enhance general image of women

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Table 1: Nigeria-Regional and Gender Differences in Adult Literacy Rate

ZONE	WOMEN	MEN	F + M
South East	60%	74%	67%
South West	55%	74%	64%
North West	22%	40%	31%
North East	21%	42%	32% /

SOURCEUNICEF: (2003)

Table II: Nigeria -Proportion of Girls Enrolled in Primary Education.2000

STATE	% GIRLS	STATE	% GIRLS	STATE	% GIRLS
ABIA	50.7	ENUGU	50.3	OGUIP	48.9
ADAMAWA	41.8	GOMBE	41.7	ONDO	49.7
AKWA-IBOM	50.8	IMO	50.1	OSUN	50.4
ANAMBRA	52.0	JIGAWA	35.9	OYO	51.1
BAUCHI	39.6	KADUNA	42.5	PLATEAU	46.0
BAYELSA	48.3	KANO	40.3	RIVERS	50.7
BENUE	44.4	KATSINA	32.6	SOKOTO	20.0
BORNO	39.8	KEBBI	33.2	TARABA	29.4
CROSS RIVER	49.7	KOGI	48.5	ZAMFARA	26.0
DELTA	48.9	KWARA	45.4	FCT	44.6
EBONYI	49.2	LAGOS	50.2	NATIONAL AVERAGE	42.9
EDO	48.8	NASARAWA	38.2		
EKITI	52.8	NIGER	33.2		

Source: Federal Ministry of Education (2000)

Table III

Junior Secondary Enrolment, 1997

STATE	MALE	FEMALE	TOTAL
ABIA	39028	50617	89645
ADAMAWA	45645	10498	56143
AKWAIBOM	39311	45853	85164
ANAMBRA	27804	54447	82251
BAUCHI	22298	13402	35700
BAYELSA	8468	7138	15606
BENUE	49868	33458	83326
BORNO	26923	16100	42023
CROSS RIVERS	18093	21655	39748

DELTA	34927	42545	77472
EBONYI	14860	13114	27974
EDO	31215	33311	64526
EKITI	14156	13238	27394
ENUGU	32282	40452	72734
GOMBE	19956	9644	29600
IMO	24622	33794	58416
JIGAWA	11376	3810	15186
KADUNA	42581	33755	76336
KANO	39105	27797	66902
KATSINA	24759	15115	39874
KEBBI	13697	3691	17388
KOGI	33918	26714	60662
KWARA	31973	27690	59663
LAGOS	108625	116617	225242
NASARAWA	24472	12027	36500
NIGER	23782	16867	40649
OGUN	68113	63042	131155
ONDO	20109	22795	42904
OSUN	56858	51368	108226
OYO	79301	81399	160700
PLATEAU	40324	33256	73580
RIVERS	31867	31931	63798
SOKOTO	15167	5950	21117
TARABA	16216	7429	23645
YOBE	50721	6520	57241
ZAMFARA	10873	1871	12744
FCT	12117	10613	22730
NATIONAL TOTAL	1,173,641(53%)	1,041,323(47%)	2,214,964

SOURCE: Federal Ministry of Education. 2000