

Educating the Girl-child in Nigeria for the Development of the Society: A Capability Approach

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Abstract

The culture of most Nigerian societies has been such that the girl-child has been underprivileged compared to her male counterpart because of the norms of the society which ascribes to the boy-child certain superior roles in comparison to the girl-child. Most societies in Nigeria believe that the education of the boy-child is more important than that of the girl-child hence the boy-child's education is prioritized over that of the girl-child, this is well pronounced among many Nigerian societies. This paper focuses on the importance of education for the girl-child and its impact on society generally in terms of national development. The paper investigated the impact of the capability theory as enunciated by both Sen and Nussbaum on the girl-child education in Nigeria. The paper is descriptive and it utilized relevant literature to show the importance of education of the girl-child in Nigeria. The paper recommends strategies that would impact the capability of the girl-child in realizing her potential. The paper posits that the empowerment of the girl-child

in terms of education is an important aspect of the rights that the girl-child has to enjoy. It is therefore imperative for Nigerian society to educate the girl-child to unleash her capabilities towards sustainable national development.

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Introduction

Education of the girl-child is not only important for the achievement of individual goals and community development but more so national advancement. However, the gender phenomenon has become a controversial issue in most societies today because it describes the subjugated roles of the girl-child compared to her male counterpart. Gender is a socially constructed phenomenon. Patriarchal societies have ascribed the girl-child to certain roles which are inferior to that of the boy-child. These roles have been such that girls and boys have imbibed them in such a way that they perform them as natural phenomena in patriarchal societies (Butler, 2011; 2020; Dasper & Finkel, 2020; Collica-Cox & Schulz, 2020; Bergstrom-Lynch, 2020; Judice & Boydstrun, 2020; Hedenborg White, 2021). In most societies the ascription of these roles to males and females are culturally constructed in such a way that everybody within the society performs these roles as if it is naturally given; but, as earlier pointed out, these roles are such that the culture of the society determines which roles have to be performed by each of the sexes. However, sex belongs to a biological category, which is a concept that emphasizes the physiological or the reproductive potential of males and females. Whereas gender is the social elaboration of the biological sex which elaborates on the behavioural patterns of each of the sexes. Therefore gender is usually thought of as belonging to nurture while sex is the result of nature.

Girl-Child and Education

Consequently, in most societies, girls are generally subjugated because the cultural norms of most societies in the world are such that girls are not considered as having rights hence we have inequality in those societies. In most

societies that are based on a patriarchal system, it is considered anathema for the girl-child to have any voice in the public sphere of the society. In most cases, in those societies, this kind of cultural norm has ramifications in other areas of the society. In these societies, the boy-child is prioritized more than the girl-child in terms of education (Hobbs, 2020; Yakubova, 2020). This cultural norm, as earlier pointed out, reinforces gender inequality in society. In Nigeria, for example, most societies believe that educating the girl-child is a waste of resources because in the end the girls that are educated would be married to a man, and these girls would be bearing the man's name rather than the family name (Onoyase, 2018; Odenigbo & Eze, 2019; Bichi & Imam, 2020).

Invariably this gender inequality has affected the education of the girl-child. For instance, it is estimated that most girls in Nigeria especially in the Northern part of the country are not educated or have no access to education. Out of 10.5 million out-of-school children in Nigeria today, the majority of them are girls (British Council, 2014; Bichi & Imam, 2020; Okafor, 2020; UNICEF, 2020). Most of them are from poor families and they cannot be sponsored to attend school by their parents. The situation is most prevalent in the North West and North East of the country. In recent times the insurgency and the criminality in the Northern part especially North West and North East of Nigeria have made smooth running of education impossible for the girl-child due to incessant attacks of schools leading to kidnapping, banditry, forced marriages, killings, and adoption by various Islamic fundamentalist groups notably, Boko Haram, Islamic State(s) West African Province (ISWAP). Geographical and gender disparities in education are rampant in Nigeria and the country was not on track to achieve education for all which was supposed to be in 2015. School enrollment, progression, and completion rates in basic education are still low with a net attendant ratio for primary education of 60% (British Council, 2014; NEEDS, 2014). As a result of this gender inequality, the girl-child has a high risk of dropping out of primary school and not transiting to secondary school, and also not attending university education. Some of the challenges of girl-child education in Nigeria include poverty, girl-child labour, gender norms, and traditional practices, including early marriage, religious misconceptions and inhibitions, low status of women, the opportunity cost of education, the distance of schools where the girl-child lives, teenage pregnancy

and abortion, gender blind curriculum, gender insensitive instructional materials, girl-unfriendly school infrastructure, skewed female-male teacher ratios and HIV/AIDS, STDs, VVF, gender discrimination/gender inequality, to mention but few (British Council, 2014; Umbugadu, 2017; World Bank, 2018; Shehu, *et al.* 2020; Elewa, 2020; Jacob, 2020; Ishaku, 2020; Ogunode, 2020). These are factors that have been identified as militating against the realization of girl-child education and constituted a lot of hindrances to the acquisition of functional quality education of the girl-child.

International Declarations for Change in Education

From the foregoing, the girl-child has some hindrances because of the patriarchal system in Nigeria, especially in the Northern zone. Nigeria is a signatory to many United Nations charters as well as African charters like UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) adopted in 1981 and its Women's Rights Protocol of 2003; Education For All (EFA) 1990; Millennium Development Goal (MDG), 2000; UN Sustainable Development Goal 5 concerns gender equality and is fifth of the 17 SDGs established by the United Nations in 2015. The African Charter on The Right and Welfare of the African Child (ACRWAC), 1999; and Child Rights Act (CRA), adopted in 2003. There are also some policies and declarations which the Federal Government of Nigeria has enacted to promote gender equality such as the national policy on gender in basic education which is supposed to act as a vehicle for the attainment of these goals. Despite these noble policies, Nigeria has not been able to attain gender equality as of 2015 which the millennium development goal 3 has specified as the year that countries should attain the goals.

Some United Nations charters have made education a basic human right. Article 26 (i) of the universal nation's declaration of human rights states that:

Everyone has the right to education. Education shall be free, at least in the elementary and fundamental stages. Elementary education shall be compulsory. Technical and professional education shall be made generally available and higher education shall be equally accessible to all based on merit (UN, 1948).

There have been declarations and treaties ever since these basic human rights were signed to make the ambitions into reality. The international bill of human rights has provisions on compulsory and free primary education and non-discrimination in education (UN General Assembly, 1948). Besides this, there is also the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discriminations against Women (CEDAW), (1979); and Convention of the Rights of the Child (1989). These two are comprehensive sets of legally enforceable commitments concerning both rights to education and gender equality. The Dakar Framework for Action and Millennium Development Goals, (2000) are drivers for education worldwide (UNESCO, 2000). The goals have many aims. Goal 2 aims for universal primary education, and goal 3 is to eliminate gender disparities in education. The specific targets of MDGs 2 and 3 are to:

- Ensure that by 2015, children everywhere, boys and girls alike, will be able to complete a full course of primary schooling;
- Eliminate gender disparity in primary and secondary education, preferably by 2005, and in all levels of education not later than 2015 (British Council, 2014).

The international community has made commitments to implement these goals and has therefore made a database to see whether these goals are being enforced worldwide. The Dakar framework for action deepens and complements the MDGs and in this regards it specifies more detailed goals and objectives mobilizing political wills as well as collectively committing nations to education for all. There is also a commitment to gender equality in the Dakar framework for action:

Goal 2: ensuring that by 2015 all children, particularly girls...have access to, and complete, free and compulsory education of good quality;

Goal 4: achieving a 50% improvement in levels of adult literacy by 2015, especially for women;

Goal 5: eliminating gender disparities in primary and secondary education by 2005, and achieving gender equality in education by 2015, with a focus on ensuring girls' full and equal access to, and achievement, in basic education (UNESCO, 2000).

Ambitions for education are essentially captured in Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG4) of 2030 essentially Agenda which "aims to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all" by 2030.

Goal 5: Gender equality: ending all discrimination against women and girls is not only a basic human right, but it's also crucial for a sustainable future; it's proven that empowering women and girls helps economic growth and development (Sustainable Development Goals Report, 2016).

As could be seen the goals target girls and also emphasize progressive achievements of gender parity and gender equality in education. The Dakar framework for action also deploys the language of human rights as well as commitments to earlier UN conventions that emphasize education for all.

Further, there has also been consensus by African nations on the Rights and Welfare of the child in the African Charter (1999). This charter notes the specific socio-cultural and economic realities of the societies in Africa. It challenges the cultural beliefs which militate against the rights of the child. It makes girls' education a priority and it grants girls the right to return to school after the delivery of their child. Most African nations are signatories to this charter including Nigeria.

Taking Stock of Current State of Gender Equality in Education

Despite repeated commitments and the approval of international and regional conventions and declarations for education for all and a multiplicity of programmes and projects which would have ensured access to quality primary and secondary education for all, there are still a staggering 57 million out of school children worldwide and most of these are in developing countries especially in sub-Saharan nations (UNESCO, 2014). According to the United Nations, children's Fund (UNICEF) girls are mostly excluded from the educational system though the enrollment rates have increased (United Nations Children's Fund [UNICEF], 2015). A recent statistical report shows that two-thirds of the world illiterates are women; over a 63million girls around the

world are out of school (UNESCO Institute of Statistics, 2016), and girls' percentage out of school is 47% and these girls are not expected to enroll in school as compared to 35% of boys (UNESCO, 2016). In Nigeria, the situation is mind-boggling in terms of girl-child education. 62% of girls are out-of-school children (EduCeleb.com, 2020). According to a more recent 2019 data released by the Federal Ministry of Education; Akwa Ibom, Sokoto, and Katsina are the three leading states with the highest prevalence of out-of-school girls (Federal Ministry of Education, 2019). These three with eleven other states have the highest population of out-of-school girls in Nigeria; these states are mostly where the Boko Haram insurgency is ongoing and where banditry and other forms of criminality are rampant in the Northern part of Nigeria.

In recent years there have been higher primary Gross Enrolment Rate (GER) and a primary Net Enrolment Rate (NER) regarding the primary gross enrolment rate as well as primary net enrolment rate the male has higher enrolment rate. This is also replicated in the secondary school enrolment rate. In terms of gender parity index at all levels of education, girls are lower compared with boys in terms of enrolment (UNESCO, 2014).

Between 1999 and 2010 the number of children out of school in Nigeria grew by 42% (UNESCO, 2014). In some cases, those living in rural areas could not access primary education since they are deprived of basic social amenities such as good roads, potable water, health centers, among other challenges. Thus out of school children are more in rural areas than urban areas - 36% to 12%. In Northern states, girls living in rural areas are less likely to attend school. Renewed efforts are needed to encourage the girl-child to enroll in school. Disparities between boys and girls are not something that should be tolerated in any society because:

Educating girls is good for development; girls' education encourages growth, contributes to stable and secure communities, reduces maternal and child mortality, reduces fertility rates, raises schooling levels for the next generation, and meets human rights standards. We still have far to go to meet the needs of all girls for basic education (British Council Report, 2014).

Framework

The framework of this paper is Sen's Capability Theory which has been designed as an alternative to all development theories such as neo-classical theory which focuses on gross national product (GNP). The capability approach directs development goals away from the general level of growth of the society and focuses it on individuals in terms of living their lives which they can value as well as having freedom which makes them make choices for themselves (Sen, 2004; 1985). In other words, the agency of the individual is given priority and this will lead to personal wellbeing, freedom and the agent would be able to influence social change and economic development.

Education is one of the main factors that propel economic development in the world today. Through education, most societies have developed. These societies are knowledge-based now through ICTs. They have given priority to the education of the girl-child because these girls would grow up and become mature women and contribute to the development of society. Women form half of the world's population and it would be wrong not to consider them in society. It is in this regard that feminist scholars criticize most development theories that do not challenge the power structure of the society which perpetuates subordination and inequality of women in the society. These feminists believe that there should be a radical structuring of the patriarchal society which would address the unequal structures or relations between men and women. It is believed that the notion of development cannot be gender-neutral because it has different impacts on men and women in society. It is therefore believed that women should be empowered to participate in the development of society (Biswas & Daylami, 2019; Schmidt, et al. 2021).

Again empowerment is the process of gaining access and developing one's capacities to participate actively in shaping one's own life and that of one's' community in economic, social, and political terms (United Nations Social Development, 2012; Biswas, et al. 2020; Gupta, 2021; Abdellatif, 2021). There are many levels of empowerment such as; social, educational, political, economic, and psychological. They are all related and intertwined. What empowerment connotes is that the capabilities of women as rational autonomous agents who decide their lives and participate in society are enhanced. Sen takes care of certain aspects of individuals in terms of their well-being which can make them function properly. He believes that any

development agenda should take care of individuals in terms of their abilities and provide resources that would lead to proper functioning.

The core concepts of Sen's capability theory are functionings and capabilities. When evaluating any development project we should look at the functionings that are available for anybody in terms of how resources have been able to allow people to achieve a certain quality of life that will enhance their lives. Functionings are, therefore "states of being and doing such as being well-nourished, having shelter, education, health facilities. Capability refers to the set of valuable functionings that an individual has access to and what this means is that functioning provides certain commodities which the person could deploy in terms of his capability to choose between different functioning combinations. In this regard, one can choose between different kinds of lives which one values. These sets of functioning relate to certain aspects of life – capabilities of literacy, the health of political freedom.

From the foregoing, the capability theory is anchored on individual development and takes care of girl-child accessibility to education. This has been expanded by Martha Nussbaum in her book *Women and Human Development* (2001). In the same vein, Nussbaum extends the capability theory of Sen to the area of justice and views justice as part of the capability for women to enjoy certain basic rights for them to function properly. The author further argues that justice must be linked with development which developmental economists have ignored. The author believes that gender difference and oppression are problems of justice because women in many patriarchal societies are not treated as ends in their own right but as mere instruments of the ends of others. Unequal, social, political, and economic arrangements give women unequal capabilities which could make women not have the capabilities to live a full life of opportunities and liberties. She argues that certain fundamental capabilities which make for full human functioning are necessary for any social arrangement. These are life, bodily health, and integrity, being able to imagine, think and reason, affiliation, recreation and have control over one's political and material environment, being able to have emotion (Nussbaum, 2001; 2011).

Nussbaum (2011) finds a common approach between the capabilities' approach and the rights-based approach which has dominated the

developmental discourse. She believes that rights should be seen as part of capabilities. She also believes that these capabilities if they are fully in operation in any society would lead to human dignity in an Aristotelian sense. The combined works of Sen (2004) and Nussbaum (2011) has become a cornerstone for development projects, especially for women. The capability approach gives prominence to certain rights which make developmental projects take cognizance of women's deprivation in any social arrangement. In this regard educating the girl-child is a capability to function properly in any society and to contribute in a meaningful and positive way to the development of the society (Dejaghre, 2020; Gil, 2020).

In the case of Sen, in his normative development aspect, it is concerned mainly with improving people's lives by providing certain practical capabilities which would make life more meaningful for people. For instance, girl-child education is seen as a capability for girls to function properly in any society. It empowers them to have relevant knowledge as skills to understand and deal with life challenges. Education makes girls marry at an appropriate age which eventually rubs on health problems. They would be able to understand the challenges of life and will take better care of their families' health and well-being. Educated girls become role models in their communities and inspire girls to pursue education. It makes them perform any work when they become adults and break what could be called the glass ceiling because they can do and perform any job which men can do especially in science, technology, and mathematics. It is argued that with education women can advance to any position and as such the glass labyrinth is achieved.

Girl-child education also will give them much wider opportunities when they grow up to become women. Jobs that expand women's agency will increase their spectrum of choices and strengthen women's capabilities to act on those choices. Besides this, jobs which they get when they grow up can also teach skills, build networks and change attitudes and behaviours all of which can improve their capabilities to act on things they value in life.

Strategies to Overcome Impediments to Girl-Child Education

The government at both federal and state levels should deploy certain strategies to stop school girl-child in Nigeria. The government should enact

laws that would prevent the girl-child from dropping out of school because of early marriage. The government should provide an enabling environment for the girl-child by providing free, compulsory education as well as a safe and supportive educational environment, free from abuse, with separate toilet facilities. More schools should be built in rural areas to avoid long distance trekking to school by the girl-child. The federal and state governments should also embark on advocacy and sensitization of communities to drum the importance of girl-child education. A greater role has to be played by the Ministries of Women Affairs all over the country by tackling certain challenges that the girl-child faces and to achieve this, constant pressure has to be brought to bear on the ministries. Literacy programmes should be incorporated with life skills components so that the girl-child can be well equipped to perform her roles more effectively (Onyido, & Osigwe, 2017). Traditional and religious leaders can also sensitize their communities of the importance of educating the girl-child for the overall development of their communities.

The non-governmental organizations (NGOs) also have some roles to play by seeking to protect the interest of the girl-child. They should also sensitize society about the importance of educating the girl-child to contribute to the development of society.

The parents and guardians should allow and encourage their female children to enroll in schools, overcome the paralysis of illiteracy, and acquire a proper awareness of their potentials, rights, and higher responsibilities in society.

The girl-child on her part should strive to break through developmental barriers with determination, perseverance, and the desire to overcome the natural challenges of her origin. She should be empowered to speak out on problems that affect her. This is done through workshops, drama, song, and creative arts. Through these, the girl-child learns negotiation skills on – how to speak out, have self-confidence, and develop decision-making and leadership skills.

Conclusion

For any society to develop, the girl-child should be given quality education. Girl-child education is a strategic development priority. Better educated girl-

child tend to be more informed about nutrition and healthcare, have fewer children, marry at a later age, and their children are usually healthier, (should she choose to become a mother). She is more likely to participate in the formal labour market and earn higher incomes. All these factors combined can help lift households, communities, and countries out of poverty. The girl-child should therefore be made to know that education is empowerment and when she is empowered, she can fight for her rights and exercise such. Education of the girl-child therefore must be a priority in the educational process of any nation. Lack of education of the girl-child denies her the knowledge and skills needed to advance her status and so she remains below the poverty level.

When the Girl-Child is educated, her knowledge base is expanded; she can understand and undertake socioeconomic, cultural, and political transformations necessary to achieve the development of the society. Education of the girl-child is positively related to her living standard and the only effective scheme to alleviate poverty. Sen's and Nussbaum's capability theory is important for the girl-child education because the theory emphasizes the functioning of the girl-child properly in society and as such her freedom is expanded. Furthermore, with education, the ability of the girl-child would have been unleashed and she would contribute positively to the overall development of society.

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