

Policy Issues towards Enhancing Girls' Education and Sustainable Development in Nigerian Higher Institutions of Learning

Asia Pacific Journal of
Academic Research in
Social Sciences
Vol. 2, 30-35
November 2017
ISSN 2545-904X

T. L. Adepoju (PhD)

Department of Educational Management, Faculty of Education,
Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, Osun State – Nigeria
adepojutaiwo2004@yahoo.com

Date Received: October 2, 2015; Date Revised: July 24, 2017

Abstract - Education is recognized all over the world as an essential instrument for the empowerment and social transformation of individuals therefore, any form of education being put in place is aiming at increasing the level of illiteracy rate in the society. Achieving gender parity in education is one of the aims of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and it is also a primary objective of the 1990 World declaration on Education for All (EFA) as well as the Dakar framework of action (2000). But till date, gender equality still remains elusive. The paper examines girls and women education in Nigeria vis-à-vis sustainable development. It further evaluates several programmes being put in place by various governments and development partners to achieve gender parity in education as proposed by the MDGs. The problems facing girls and women education in Nigeria were also discussed in the paper. Finally, some planning and policies issues were raised as conditions for ensuring gender parity in Nigeria's education system.

Keywords: Gender; Education; Sustainable development; Millennium Development Goals; Girls and women education; Education for All.

INTRODUCTION

In Nigeria, there is a gender gap in literacy with girls and women at a disadvantage; this has led to government increase in literacy drive for girls in particular at the basic education level. Because of this, there is a tendency for government not to take cognizance of what goes on at the tertiary level particularly as it relates to female enrolment. Although, Nigeria educational reform as stated in National Economic Empowerment and Development strategy (NEEDs) document also shows considerable focus on girls higher education. But one can say that up till now, a lot of Nigerian girls and women unlike their male gender are still not enrolled at the tertiary level [1].

Achieving gender parity in education is one of the aims of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and it is also a primary objective of the 1990 World declaration on Education for All (EFA) as well as the Dakar framework of Action (2000). But till date, gender equality still remains elusive not only in Nigeria but also in most of the developing nations. According to UNESCO report [2] girls make up 60% of all out of school children and women represents two thirds of illiterate adults.

Generally, the illiteracy rate in Nigeria is gradually on the decline. Between 1985 and 1990, the percentage of girls enrolled in schools rose from 7.2% to 42%. The enrolment of females in technical schools rose from 4.5% in 1984 to 15% in 1990 and 20% of the present enrolment in Nigerian Polytechnics is made up of females. In Universities, there is a rise of 22% in 1980 to 24% in 1990. All these notwithstanding, there is a glaring case of serious discrimination against females in education in Nigeria. This has created many gender gaps in school enrolment as well as teachers and lecturers [3].

Many States in Nigeria have introduced some educational reforms backed by legislation to provide increased access to female education. Schools for nomads have also been established and funding of women education is made a joint effort of all tiers of government (Nigeria, 1986 Blueprint).

The reform initiatives introduced towards addressing gender disparity in Nigeria are numerous but some of them would be discussed here: the Women's Research and Documentation Centre (WORDOC) of the University of Ibadan was founded and through the centre the university introduced several courses in various disciplines to encourage the

study of gender issues; In 2002, a roundtable discussion was put in place. This roundtable discussion was based on the Nigerian Private Sector and the Education for All Initiative, the forum served mainly to create awareness of the private sector on EFA and the contributions the sector could make for its achievement. Among the major objectives of the discussion were how to increase girl-child education in Nigeria and probable strategies to eliminate gender gap. That was the first time the Nigerian Organised Private Sector was being directly brought into discussions with full participation of the Federal Ministry of Education and the International Development Partners; and also in 2002, the meeting of the Second-High Level Group on Education for All took place in Abuja, Nigeria from 19th-20th November, to sensitize all stakeholders on the need to eliminate gender gap in the country.

Several other sensitization national workshops, programmes, conferences and seminars were held in 2002 towards the attainment of EFA goals and more particularly on strategies that could engender more girls and women participation in education. Examples of such programmes are: World Bank support in June 2002 for EFA activities towards National Action Plan (NAP) preparation; The National EFA forum held from 12-14 November, 2002; A special parliamentary forum attended by Chairmen of Legislative Committees on Education, State Commissioners and Director-General was held on 18th November, 2002; Dialogue on organised teachers' forum to review current policies on teachers role and gender inequality in January, 2003; and sponsored capacity building workshop for civil society organisation members in the six geo-political zones in January, 2003.

The year 2003 witnessed several sensitization programmes on girl-child and women education. For instance, a roundtable workshop was organised by the FME/UNESCO/Private Sector on "Building Momentum to Eliminate Gender Gaps by 2005". Several indicators and measures to improve and strengthen the education of girls and women were put in place [4]; recently, the Universal Basic Education Commission (UBEC) set up a technical committee on girl-child education and other disadvantaged groups in December, 2005. Participants agreed that the girl-child in particular and other disadvantaged groups in Nigeria have been unjustly deprived of quality education and suggestions were made to address the issues; the years 2006 and 2007 witnessed legislations at the state level making it compulsory for all parents to send their children to

school and failure to attract punishment ranging from reprimand to imprisonment. This effort is to address gender gap in education in Nigeria; and the introduction and implementation of The National Economic Empowerment and Development strategy (NEEDs) which aims at eliminating all forms of gender disparities.

The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and Girls' Education

The eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), which range from halving extreme poverty to halting the spread of HIV/AIDS and providing universal primary education, all by the target date of 2015, form a blueprint agreed to by the 192 United Nations' (UN) member states. The targets are intended to increase efforts to meet the needs of the world's poorest, reducing global poverty and increasing living standards.

The goals were officially agreed upon at the 2000 Millennium Summit when world leaders adopted the UN Millennium Declaration. The goals listed above today guide the efforts of virtually all countries and have been commonly accepted as a framework for measuring development progress [5]. Of all the goals, only Goal No. 3 addresses issues relating to gender disparity in primary and secondary education and the need to eliminate the observed disparity.

Goal 3. Promote gender equality and empower women

Eliminate gender disparity in primary and secondary education, preferably by 2005, and to all levels of education no later than 2015.

In addition to the target of eliminating gender disparities in primary and secondary education (MDG 3) by 2005, the EFA gender goal calls for achieving gender equality in education by 2015, with a focus on ensuring girls full and equal access to a and achieving in basic education of good quality. Studies ([6]-[9]) have shown variations in the global progress recorded across countries. While some countries have made progress, some are still battling in the process. The variations are caused by several factors (economic, socio-cultural, political and other factors).

Data on the State of Girls' Participation in Tertiary Institutions in Nigeria

Table 1 presents the Gender Disparity in Technology and Science Education. Female participation is a major problem in technology and science education as shown in Table 1. The rate of

participation which favours male gender has led the federal government to establish science and technical colleges for girls only in order to close the gender gap.

Table 1: Gender Disparity in Technology and Science Education

Academic Year	Type of Institution	Male/Female participation (by Numbers and Percentages)		
		Male	Female	Total
2000/2001	Technical Colleges	73,239 (81%)	16,799 (19%)	90,038
2000/2001	Polytechnics	111,468 (60%)	74,612 (40%)	186,080
1999/2000	Universities (Science and Technology enrolment)	147,836 (73%)	53,989 (27%)	201,825

Sources: i. NUC and NBTE Statistics; ii. Adelabu & Adepoju [1]

Table 2: Enrolment by Field of Study in Universities in 2000

Programme	Total Enrolment in 2000		
	M	F	Total
1. Technology & science-based Programmes	147,836 (73%)	53,939 (27%)	201,875
2. Arts/Humanities programmes	134,456 (58%)	97,590 (42%) *	232,046
Total	282,292 (65%)	151,529 (35%)	433,821

Source: i. NUC Statistics, 2003; ii. Adelabu & Adepoju [1].

From Table 2, the ratio of admission in technology/science to arts/humanities programmes was 47:53 in 2000. Enrolment in remedial programmes in 2000 was 14,359 out of which females were 4,657 (32.4%), i.e., about 3% of the enrolment in degree programmes. Statistics from other years that might indicate a trend are not available.

Table 3. Total output (Degree, Diploma and Certificate) of Universities in 2000

Programme	Total Enrolment in 2000		
	M	F	Total
1. Technology and science-based Programmes	18,057 (79%)	4,863 (21%)	22,920
2. Arts/Humanities programmes	30,533 (69%)	13,572 (31%) *	44,105
Total	48,590 (72.5%)	18,435 (27.5%)	67,025

Source: i. NUC Statistics, 2003; ii. Adelabu & Adepoju [1].* The percentage has shown that women are

mostly found in Arts/Humanities-based courses in the Universities.

Table 3 shows that females compete fairly with males in their participation in the arts/humanities (30,533 or 69.2% males to 13,572 or 30.8% females) when compared with their participation in the technology/science programmes (18,057 or 77.8% males to 4863 or 21.2% females). Also, the output was more (67%) in arts/humanities than in technology and science (33%) in 2000.

Table 4: University Admission Statistics for 2001

Programme	Total Enrolment in 2000		
	M	F	Total
1. Technology & science-based Programmes	28,521 (70%)	12,231 (30%)	40,752
2. Arts/Humanities programmes	29,472 (54%)	24,975 (46%) *	54,447
Total	57,993 (61%)	38,206 (39%)	95,199

Source: i. NUC, 2001; ii. Adelabu & Adepoju [1]

* Impressive participation

In sum, the analysis in Table 4 shows that the ratio of admissions in technology/science to arts/humanities was approximately 43:57 in 2001, i.e., the prescribed ratio of 60:40 is yet to be attained. The proportion of females admitted for technology/science is 30% as against 45.9% in arts/humanities programmes. The causes of the age-long disparities between males and females, on the one hand, and between technology/science and arts/humanities programmes, on the other, are both social and economic. In other words, the Nigeria higher institutions have not complied with full implementation of NEEDs policy document in relation to women higher education instead, emphasis is on basic education.

Factors Responsible for the State of Girl-Child Education in Nigeria

According to Adelabu and Adepoju [1], in spite of government efforts toward addressing gender disparity in Nigeria, there are still gaps due to problems. There are other reasons which include lack of capacity to monitor and mainstream gender issues into education programme the most recurring and important among them all is the problem of fund. There is also socio-cultural problem which hinder the full participation of girls in school, when funds are limited in the family, preference is given to educating boys over girls while girls are used to run errand at home and as caregivers

in the family. Other socio-cultural problems include harmful traditional practices that affect girls emotionally and cultural practices such as early marriage and in some cases where religion constraints girls for aspiring into higher status as boys.

Unwanted pregnancies have been found to be responsible for dropout in Nigeria. This is also caused by high incidences of pre-marital sexuality which in turn have negative impact on girls more than boys and in most cases has had effects on girl's education. These sexual activities often have critical consequences, which tend to be more serious for girls than boys. When sexual activity results in pregnancy, there are negative consequences for female than males. It is the girls that are expelled from schools and often terminate their education and they also face the shame and social cost of seeking clandestine abortion. One distinct fact about women education in Nigeria is that, fewer women apply for entry to universities as a result of fewer girls completing secondary education. Of importance to note again is the fact that a smaller proportion of women applicants (as compared' with male applicants) succeed in gaining admissions is a reflection of girls' relatively lower success rates in the senior certificate examinations [4]. Expectedly, observations have revealed that these two factors have a direct influence on the status of women in society in terms of the jobs they do and the roles they perform [1].

Why Girl-Child' Education?

A lot of benefits are attached to girl-child particularly if the breadth (skills development) and height (length of training) of her education are high, her productivity is increased so also her earnings and savings. A married woman has improved family survival rate, improved education of her children, improved health for the entire family and improved her empowerment and therefore take up better jobs, right to decision making positions and complete on merit and with less emotions with men.

UNDP's human development reports [10] estimate the earned incomes of women to be 532 dollars while the comparable figure for men is 1,254 dollars. This means that a woman's income is barely 42 percent of a man's income. The same report shows female economic activities as representing only 56 percent of those of men; thus for every woman engaged in economic activity, there are at least two men. Obviously, education, higher education for women in particular will reverse the trend of extreme poverty in half of the country's population.

Girls and Women increase in schooling at various levels offers the following benefits as summed up by Ram [11] and Standing [12].

- i. it raises their potential earning power and thus provides them with a strong inducement to seek employment;
- ii. it raises their occupational aspirations;
- iii. it changes their attitudes toward women's traditional roles in the household and in the workplace; and
- iv. it provides them with the necessary credentials for employment in many jobs.

In the few countries for which sex-specific rates on return on educational investment have been calculated, the rate of return for men is usually higher than that for women, although, for secondary and tertiary education, the average difference between male and female rates of return is less than 2.5 percentage [13],[14] . In several countries, the rates of return to investment in education are actually higher for women. The implication is that more - educated women are somewhat better off than less - educated women.

Education contributes to the growth of national income and individual earnings. Economic growth however, currently depends on the capacity to produce knowledge-based goods whereas, the future of knowledge economics depends more on their capacity to produce knowledge through research and development rather than on knowledge-based goods. Hence, knowledge economics place greater value and accord higher priority on educational institutions, which are a major source for providing the human capital, required for knowledge production. If knowledge is a source of economic growth, disparities in its distribution become a source of inequality among nations. Studies [11], [12], [15] have shown that income inequalities are high where enrolments in higher education are low. A comparison between developing and developed countries is a reference point here. It is argued that low enrolment rates in higher education and high-income disparities co-exist.

Strategies and Issues towards increasing Girls' Education

There is the need to increase girl-child education to increase their social and economic transformations. For this to be achieved all the measures designed to achieve the objectives of the NEEDs should be implemented. These include:

- i. Implementation of the provisions of the United Nations' Convention on elimination of all forms of discrimination against women.
- ii. Promotion of access to micro finance and other poverty alleviation strategies, with a view to reducing poverty among women.
- iii. Reduction of women's vulnerability to HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases by empowering them through sustained advocacy, education and mobilization.
- iv. Establishment of scholarship schemes at the secondary and tertiary levels to expand education opportunities for female students where necessary.
- v. Expansion of adult and vocational education programs that cater for women beyond formal school age.
- vi. Increasing the access of women, youth, and children to information on key national issues.
- vii. Provision of social security for unemployed women, youth, and children.

Since the women still have low access to education government should make education available and affordable for women through subsidy and incentives to motivate girls and women by way of scholarship and prizes should be instituted by government and Non-government and Non-government organizations

Preferential admission for girls into studying related courses is recommended. Accordingly, formulation and planning of government education of policy in line with United Nations declaration for the emancipation of women particularly in the fine and applied sciences.

There is the need to address specific obstacles to Girls and Women's education. Towards achieving this objective, the following strategies should be put in place by the Government, Non-governmental Organizations (NGOs) and other stakeholders in education industry in Nigeria: Changing societal attitudes in favor of girls' education; Provision/enrichment of school infrastructure to make them more girl-friendly; Gender awareness training for teachers and teacher trainers; Guidance, counselling and assertiveness training for girls; Enhancing the gender sensitivity in curricula, teaching-learning materials, and classroom processes; and Support for existing women in basic science-based courses (mathematics, science and technology).

There is also the need to targeting and mobilize supports in the geo-political zones where the gender gulf is very critical. Supports for girls and women in very difficult circumstances should not be left out.

Also important is the need for the promotion of the employment of women by government and private sector.

Government should also increase the job opportunities for young female 'starters' - vocational training. Government affirmative action towards increasing massive support for access to and quality education for girls should continue. Closing the gender gap in science and technology education necessitates more government efforts in the area of establishing more science and technical colleges for girls only.

CONCLUSION

Attempts have been made in this paper to advocate for girl-child education because of the multiplier effect on sustainable development. The reasons for girls and women education and major obstacles to education of women are also discussed. The paper came up with some planning and policy strategies towards increasing gender education in Nigeria. Some empirical evidences on the relationship between women schooling and sustainable development as well as gender inequality in Nigerian educational system were established. Towards achieving this objective, some recommendations were made in the paper.

It is hoped that if all the strategies and policies earlier discussed in the paper are put in place by the concerned stakeholders, gender inequality in education would be reduced.

REFERENCES

- [1] Adelabu, M. A., & Adepoju, T. L. (2009). Women and higher education: implication for development. *East African Journal of Educational Research and Policy (EAJERP)*, 1, 15-36. Kampala International University, Uganda
- [2] UNESCO (2006). *Global education database* (October) Paris.
- [3] UNICEF (1995). The Women's Equality and Empowerment framework: Training manual. UNICEF
- [4] UNESCO (2003). A report on the 2003 FME/UNESCO/Private Sector Round Table on "Building Momentum to Eliminate Gender Gaps by 2005" Abuja Office UNESCO.
- [5] Adepoju, T. L., & Fadokun, J. B. (2008). Quality university education in Nigeria and millennium development goals: The challenges. Paper presented at the Third International Conference on Quality Assurance of Higher Education in Africa held between 15 -17 September in Dakar, Senegal

-
- [6] World Bank (2005). *World Bank development report on Equity and development*. Washington, DC.:World Bank.
 - [7] Al-Samarrai, S. (2007). *Changes in employment in Bangladesh, 2000- 2005: The impacts on poverty and gender equity*. Washington, DC. World Bank, South Asia Region.
 - [8] UNESCO (2007). *EFA global monitoring report. Education for All by 2015: We will make it?* Paris: UNESCO/Oxford University Press.
 - [9] UNESCO (2008). A compilation of background information about education legislation, governance, management and financing structures and processes. Background paper for EFA Global Report. 2009
 - [10] UNDP (2002). *Human development report. Retrieved on December 10th 2014*
 - [11] Ram, R. (1982). Sex differences in the labour market outcomes of education. In Kelly, G., & Elliot, C. (Eds). *Women's education in the third world* Albany: State University of New York Press.
 - [12] Standing, G. (1981). *Labour force participation and development* (2nd Ed.) Geneva: International Labour Office.
 - [13] Psacharopoulos, G. (1973). *Returns to education: An international comparison*. Sam Francisco : Jossey-Bass
 - [14] Psacharopoulos, G. (1985). Returns to education: A further international update and implications. *Journal of Economic Resources*, 20, 4, 583 – 97
 - [15] Tilak, J.B. G. (2007). Higher education poverty and development. *IIEP Newsletter* Vol. XXIV No. 4 (Dec) UNESCO – Paris
 - [16] Federal Office of Statistics (1995). Reports on gender statistics in Nigerian educational system. Lagos: FOS Publication Press.
 - [17] Federal Ministry of Education (2002). *Baseline 2001: A handbook of information on basic education in Nigeria*. Abuja: Government Press.
 - [18] Federal Ministry of Education (2003). *Education sector status report*. Abuja: Government Press
 - [19] Federal Republic of Nigeria (2003). National economic empowerment and development strategy (NEEDS) Document. Lagos: Government Press
 - [20] International Institute for Educational Planning (2007). *Newsletter UNESCO – Paris: Vol. X X X, V, No1* (January – March).