Gender Issues in Basic Education and National Development in Nigeria

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Abstract
Research has shown that education is one of the most effective development investments countries can make. Adequate investments in education facilitate the achievement of most other national development goals and increase the probability that progress will be sustained. Education is also universally acknowledged to benefit individuals and promote national development. Educating females and males produces similar increases in their subsequent earnings and expands future opportunities and choices for both boys and girls. However, educating girls produces many additional socio-economic gains that benefit entire societies. These benefits include increased economic productivity, higher family incomes, delayed marriages, reduced fertility rates, and improved health and survival rates for infants and children. Education builds the human capital that is needed for economic growth. Achieving gender equality in education therefore means that boys and girls will have equal opportunities to realize their full human rights and contribute to and benefit from economic, social, cultural, and political development. It is in the light of the above that this paper attempts to examine the equality of access as well as equality of learning process among boys and girls in the educational sector in Nigeria. The paper will also examine factors inhibiting gender equality in Nigeria education sector.

Keywords: national development, gender equality, education, access, learning process.

INTRODUCTION
Education is an instrument of power, prestige, survival, greatness and advancement of men and nations. It is also an agent of change, a key to knowledge and accelerated development. It is often viewed as a sequence of stages of intellectual, physical, and social development (AED, 2010). Education had also been viewed as a continuous process where individual continue to learn, re-learn and un-learn norms, values and attitudes to make them fit to the society they live. Various successive governments in Nigeria had placed education at its focal agenda in their service delivery to its people. Over the years, education has focused on access and parity that is, closing the enrolment gap between girls and boys—while insufficient attention has been paid to retention and achievement or the quality and relevance of education. Providing a quality, relevant education leads to improved enrolment and retention, but also helps to ensure that boys and girls are able to fully realize the benefits of education. The primary focus on girls’ access to education may overlook boys’ educational needs. This approach also fails to confront the norms and behaviours that perpetuate inequality.

Education is a process that brings about all-round development and progress of individuals and the society in general. It must be responsive to the needs of the society it is intended to serve to drive development appropriately. Gender issues in education had attracted national, international and intellectual recognition and interests. The perspectives, various interests and focuses had been on human rights, women inequality, women empowerment, girl-child educations, feminism, female educational opportunities performance etc. It is the opinion of this paper that these relative gender issues are more prevalent, obvious and consequential in Nigeria. The issue of gender inequality can be considered as a universal feature of developing countries. Unlike women in developed countries who are, in relative terms, economically empowered and have a powerful voice that demands an audience and positive action, women in developing countries are generally silent and their voice has been stifled by economic and cultural factors. Economic and cultural factors, coupled with institutional factors dictate the gender-based division of labour, rights, responsibilities, opportunities, and access to and control over resources. Education, literacy, access to media, employment, decision making, among other things, are some of the areas of gender disparity. Increase in education has often been cited as one of the major avenues through which women are empowered.

Education increases the upward socio-economic mobility of women; creates an opportunity for them to work outside the home; and enhances husband-wife communication. In Demographic and Health Surveys for various years within the last two decades,
school attendance ratio and literacy rate are used as measures of education. The former shows the ratio of girls’ school attendance to that of boys. Such gender gap between males and females in socio-economic indicators has negative impact on the overall development of the country in general and on demographic and health outcomes of individuals in particular. According to Kishor (2005), gender differences in power, roles and rights affect health, survival and nutrition through women’s access to health care and restrictions in material and non-material resources.

Gender can be defined as a set of characteristics, roles, and behaviour patterns that distinguish women from men socially and culturally and relations of power between them (Women Information Centre, 2005). These characteristics, roles, behaviour patterns and power relations are dynamic; they vary over time and between different cultural groups because of the constant shifting and variation of cultural and subjective meanings of gender (Hirut, 2004).

The difference in power relations between men and women results in different gender roles, social roles and socially appropriate characteristics and behaviours. All are culture-specific. Kabira and Masinjila (1997) identified action, locus, visualization and power, among other things, as components in the identification of different roles of men and women. This paper is significant in that it will help policy makers to focus attention on the areas where the country is lagging especially as it concerns international agreements, commitments and targets that enhances national development.

LIMITATIONS OF STUDY

The limitation of this paper is that it only focussed on issue of access to basic education by gender. There are other relevant issues such as quality and curriculum which have not been addressed by this paper but also have implications for national development even at the level of basic education.

Gender and Education in Nigeria

Research has shown that education is “one of the most effective development investments countries and their donor partners can make” (Basic Education Coalition 2004), “Adequate investments in education facilitate the achievement of most other development goals and increase the probability that progress will be sustained” (USAID 2005). Each year of schooling “increases individual output by 4.7 percent, and countries that improve literacy rates by 20-30 percent have seen increases in gross domestic product (GDP) of 8-16 percent” (Basic Education Coalition 2004). Education builds the human capital that is needed for economic growth (USAID 2005). It also produces significant improvements in health, nutrition, and life expectancy, and countries with an educated citizenry are more likely to be democratic and politically stable.

Educating girls achieves even greater results. When girls go to school, they tend to delay marriage, have fewer but healthier children, and contribute more to family income and national productivity. In fact, “educating girls quite possibly yields a higher rate of return than any other investment available in the developing world” (Summers 1992). Despite this fact, “in 2005 only 59 (about one-third) of 181 countries with data available had achieved gender parity … in their [gross enrolment rates] for both primary and secondary education” (UNESCO 2007). While disparities in primary and secondary enrolment rates are decreasing, they have not yet been eliminated (UNESCO 2007). The mid-term targets of the Universal Basic Education [UBE] include the elimination of gender disparity in basic education by 2008 (Obanya, 2010). Gender disparity continues to exist in Nigeria as depicted by Tables 1 and 2 at the primary and junior secondary level of education. It is only in the South-South and South-West geopolitical zones that there are more girls than boys in Primary 1 to Primary 6. The situation in the Northern part

Table 1: Girl-Boy Ratio in Primary Schools 2010/2011 and 2011/2012 School Year by Geo-political zones

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>North</td>
<td>0.88</td>
<td>0.91</td>
<td>0.88</td>
<td>0.88</td>
<td>0.87</td>
<td>0.90</td>
<td>0.89</td>
<td>0.90</td>
<td>0.90</td>
<td>0.90</td>
<td>0.99</td>
<td>0.89</td>
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<tr>
<td>Central</td>
<td>0.79</td>
<td>0.78</td>
<td>0.76</td>
<td>0.74</td>
<td>0.81</td>
<td>0.78</td>
<td>0.78</td>
<td>0.79</td>
<td>0.79</td>
<td>0.64</td>
<td>0.77</td>
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<tr>
<td>North</td>
<td>0.77</td>
<td>0.75</td>
<td>0.79</td>
<td>0.75</td>
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<td>0.73</td>
<td>0.79</td>
<td>0.72</td>
<td>0.78</td>
<td>0.73</td>
<td>0.81</td>
<td>0.73</td>
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<tr>
<td>West</td>
<td>0.99</td>
<td>0.99</td>
<td>0.99</td>
<td>0.81</td>
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<td>0.97</td>
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<td>South</td>
<td>1.02</td>
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<td>South</td>
<td>1.04</td>
<td>1.03</td>
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<td>1.05</td>
<td>1.15</td>
<td>1.06</td>
<td>1.07</td>
<td>1.08</td>
<td>1.06</td>
<td>1.09</td>
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<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>0.88</td>
<td>0.87</td>
<td>0.88</td>
<td>0.84</td>
<td>0.89</td>
<td>0.86</td>
<td>0.90</td>
<td>0.87</td>
<td>0.89</td>
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</table>

Source: Universal Basic Education Commission
of Nigeria is quite worrisome and requires more efforts even though there are various interventions by the government and non-government actors who have been involved in improving education with special interest in girl-child.

The situation in the Junior Secondary is not different significantly different from that of the primary level of education. The gender disparity is worse in northern Nigeria (Table 2).

The issue of gender equality has become an area of concern in development planning during the last few decades. The marginalization, from development programs, of women for a long period of time is challenged with changing policy perspectives from Women in Development (WID), which aims to include women in development projects in order to make the latter more effective, to Gender and Development (GAD), which aims to address inequalities in women’s and men’s social roles in relation to development (March et al., 1999). Gender mainstreaming, the integration of gender issues into every aspect of development programs, is aimed at empowering women to enable them participate in and benefit from the programs equally as men, being supported by international and national policies.

Table 2: Girl-Boy Ratio in Junior Secondary Schools (JSS) 2010/2011 and 2011/2012 School Year by Geo-political zones in Nigeria

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<tr>
<td>North Central</td>
<td>0.78</td>
<td>0.79</td>
<td>0.78</td>
<td>0.78</td>
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<td>0.77</td>
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<tr>
<td>North East</td>
<td>0.72</td>
<td>0.74</td>
<td>0.72</td>
<td>0.74</td>
<td>0.76</td>
<td>0.68</td>
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<tr>
<td>North West</td>
<td>0.59</td>
<td>0.76</td>
<td>0.64</td>
<td>0.63</td>
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<td>0.64</td>
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<tr>
<td>South East</td>
<td>1.15</td>
<td>1.16</td>
<td>1.16</td>
<td>1.19</td>
<td>1.17</td>
<td>1.18</td>
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<tr>
<td>South South</td>
<td>1.04</td>
<td>1.05</td>
<td>1.04</td>
<td>1.03</td>
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<tr>
<td>South West</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>1.01</td>
<td>1.00</td>
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<td>1.01</td>
<td>0.99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>0.83</td>
<td>0.89</td>
<td>0.85</td>
<td>0.84</td>
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Source: Universal Basic Education Commission

In Nigeria, as far as primary and secondary school level is concerned, the proportion of females attending primary school is found to be lower compared to that of males. For instance in 2007, among females of primary school age, only 38.2% in Niger, 47% in Burkina Faso, 59.3% in Nigeria and 72.6% in Ghana were attending school, while the respective figures for males are 51%, 56.2%, 64.8% and 71.9% (World Bank, 2012). Current data from the Universal Basic Education Commission [UBEC] show that gender disparity is still an issue in Nigeria. The disparity is widening at the primary education level (Fig 1). The situation is worse in the northern part of Nigeria. At the level of junior secondary education there is a slight reduction in the gender disparity at this level of education nationally (Fig 2). An examination across the geo-political zones show that the gender disparity is widening and this does not portend a good omen in Nigeria having the required human capital that will be required in meeting our developmental aspirations in the near future.

Different studies indicated the low status of women in developing countries in general. Lack of access to productive resources such as land; lack of access to education, employment opportunities, basic health services, and protection of basic human rights; low decision making; violence and harmful traditional practices are some of the indicators of the socioeconomic marginalization of women in the country.

![Fig 1: Girl-Boy Ratio in Primary School for 2010/2011 and 2011/2012 School Year by geo-political zones](image-url)
conferences recognized that the integration of gender issues into the general development plan and program of a country is crucial and unavoidable step for overall sustainable development and that needs to get proper attention by government and every stakeholder.

A number of factors and practices affect the girl-child education in Nigeria. These include poverty/child labour, illiteracy/ignorance, early marriage Islamic religious practices and social stratification/family background. Socio-cultural value, peer influence etc. Some of the factors militating against girl-child education include the following:

a) **Poverty/Child Labour**: It is common practices to see girls of school age hawking various article of trade in many parts of Nigeria, especially in Northern Nigeria. This situation had been blamed exclusively on the unacceptable poverty level in Nigeria.

b) **Illiteracy/Ignorance**: Closely related to poverty and child labour is ignorance and illiteracy. The value of education for girls had not been fully acknowledged by most parents in Northern Nigeria particularly those that reside in the remote villages.

c) **Islamic Religious Practices**: Though Nigeria is a secular country, but the Northern Nigeria is predominantly Muslims. The Islamic moral tenants based on chastity discourage fornication. Based on this belief most parents encourage their females to marry at the expense of formal schooling.

d) **Socio-Cultural Value**: The socio-cultural set up in most part of the country encourages the education of males in favour of the female who are expected to perform various domestic chores at home. The social background and family structure of the girl-child to a large extent depend on their chances of enrolment to formal education. Enlightened parents or families do not discriminate against female education.

### Equality of Access to Education in Nigeria

The report which succinctly stated that “Women are Nigeria’s hidden resource”, (National Population Commission and ORC Macro, 2004, 2009) exposed that over 1.5 million Nigeria children aged 6-14(8.1%) are currently not in school, a situation which has effortlessly earned Nigeria the world’s largest out of school children country-an unfortunate achievement of a robust nation. In eight Northern States, over 80% of women are unable to read compared with 54% for men (National Population Commission and ORC Macro, 2009). Apparently, we have failed to realize that just a few investments have as large a payoff as girls’ education.

In different surveys, at the secondary level, rates of attendance among youth age 12–17 were low in Nigeria. A review of the various Demographic and Health Survey [DHS] 2003, & 2008 and DHS EdData Surveys 2004, 2010 reveals the following:

i. The percent of youth ages 12–17 that attended secondary school increased from 35% in 2003 to 44% in 2008.

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**Fig 2: Girl-Boy Ratio in Junior Secondary School for 2010/2011 and 2011/2012 School Year by geo-political zones**

At international level, the Convention on Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), the Beijing Platform for Action (BPA), and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) are the main strategies and conventions introduced for the achievement of gender equality, CEDAW incorporates the following measures that governments have to take to guarantee gender equality; elimination of discrimination against women in employment opportunities and benefits of service; ensuring gender equality in all areas of socio-economic life such as legal rights to contracts and property, and access to financial credit; equality of women in national constitutions; and abolishing existing laws, regulations, customs and practices that discriminate against women.

**Gender equality in Education in Nigeria**

It is an approach in the distribution of resources such that it is fair to both men and women. It is done in such a way that existing gap in equality is closed. For example, women were discriminated against in terms of access to education, the principle of equity demands that they should have a fair share to bridge that gender gap. The principle of equity may manifest in forms of free education or special schools (i.e. girls colleges), scholarship awards. The equity principle ensures that there is real equality in access to education, health facilities, housing and economic resources. Under equity, women are not discriminated against; they receive equal treatment before the law and in other areas of social services provision and social interaction.
ii. Whereas 37% of the population age 15 and older had completed primary school in 1990, half of them had done so in 2003 and nearly 2 in 3 by 2008. In all the three years, men were more likely than women to have completed that level of schooling.

iii. In 2003, 20% of men and 12% of women ages 15 and older had completed secondary school, compared with 29% of men and 20% of women in 2008.

iv. Literacy rates have remained constant, with half of the women ages 15–49 able to read a simple sentence in 2003 and 2008, compared with 3 in 4 men ages 15–59 for both years.

v. In 2003, there was a 16-point gap in the GAR by sex (GAR among males of 69, compared with 53 among females). In 1990, the GAR among males was 40, compared with 30 among females. By 2008, the gap was only five points (GAR among males of 68, compared with 63 among females).

Educating and empowering the girl child implies preparing her for future motherhood challenges that will in the nearest future affect a family and the larger society either positively or negatively.

CONCLUSION
It had been observed that gender bias exist in girl-child education in Nigeria. The danger of this trend cannot equate the merits of educating the prospective housewives, mothers and career women. By extension, their contributions to national development cannot be quantified. We hereby join the crusade to dismantle all forms of institutional and man-made impediments to girl-child education in Nigeria.

RECOMMENDATIONS
Even though recommendations had been made in the past aimed at improving the girl-child education, not much had been done to enforce the recommendations, policies and programmes. Nevertheless, the following approaches may further amplify the needs for female education for sustainable national development.

Government should put in place the necessary legal instruments endorsed by the legislative arm of government to prohibit and prosecute those that encourage gender bias to girl-child education. The issue of early marriage should be discouraged, this can be through the passage of the child rights bill in all the states of the federation. The current idea by the Senate of the Federal Republic of Nigeria to expunge from the constitution the portion in the constitution that presumes a girl even when below 18 is mature should be pursued to its logical conclusion. Individuals, communication networks and non-governmental organization should sponsor educational campaign through the mass media, rallies, seminars, workshops and conferences to discuss the needs and way forward for girl-child education. It is vital to have religious leaders and organization preach the needs for formal education as a necessary tool for advancing spiritual fulfilment.

Scholarship and bursary should be given to females to encourage them to progress in their educational pursuits. Improving girls’ education focusing on retaining girls in schools, creating opportunities to marginalized women by means of alternative schooling (neighbourhood mobile classes). There should be more focus on gender sensitive rural development programs; and more importantly working to bring a cultural revolution towards gender equality in all aspects. Strategies of such programs should consider region specific problems, causes and traditions in order to be effective.

REFERENCES


National Population Commission (NPC) [Nigeria] and ORC Macro (2009), Nigeria Demographic and


