

## **Female Education and the Interjecting Trajectories in Northern Nigeria**

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### **Abstract**

**Background:** The wide gender disparity in access to education in northern Nigeria has continued to place majority of young girls at a gross disadvantage. The collaborative efforts between the government, international development partners and Civil Society Organizations to address the problem of inequity for girls in educational access and achievement, has attracted ample intervention and research. However, the problem has persisted.

**Objective:** The aim of this study is to qualitatively assess the root factors that have affected girls' participation in education in northern Nigeria and why these factors continue to persist in spite of the collaborations and efforts to increase access and reduce gender gap in education.

**Methodology:** Primary data for this study was collated through in-depth interviews and Focused Group Discussion in five communities in three northern states of Katsina, Niger and Bauchi, while secondary data was generated from related literature.

**Findings:** The finding reveals that the continuous inequity in access in the face of the interventions is further exacerbated for girls due to factors such as poverty and insecurity issues among others. The factors continue to persist due to inadequate funding of the education sector and the lack of political will to tackle the problem of insecurity ravaging the north.

**Conclusion:** This paper concludes that the challenge of access to quality education for girls in the north will continue if factors such as security, poverty and patriarchal attitude towards girls and women are not adequately addressed.

**Unique Contribution:** The knowledge advanced in this paper should provide data based information that can enable policy makers, Non-Governmental Organizations, international development partners and other stake holders to take adequate and decisive action on issues of education for all, especially as it affects the girl-child.

**Key Recommendation:** The government should follow through with the promise of tackling the problem of insecurity in the north most especially in the north east. Parents will be more willing to send their children (particularly girls) to school if the safety of the lives of their children is assured.

**Keywords:** Education, Northern Nigeria, Girls education, Culture, Insecurity, Poverty, Western Education, Sustainable Development Goals.

## **Introduction**

With the intensification of both international and national efforts towards the target of achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the Education For All (EFA) objectives in Africa and most especially Nigeria, a major focal point has been the education of the girl-child particularly in Northern Nigeria which exemplifies a low gender parity indicators in education. Education (especially for girls) is key if the nation is to attain sustainable development. This is because, “the singular focus on getting girls into school would bring down the barriers that keep all children out of school” (Abdulkadri, 2018). A major reason why the United Nations from Okorie’s (2013) explanation uses education as its target and the measure of gender equality as its indicator of progress. Education in itself is a consciously directed activity or effort to advance and activate power. What Fannie Shaw (1957), refers to as, “the power to know, to think, to feel and to do”. Education thus, imparts skills that are instrumental in opening up options for individuals in all spheres of human endeavour. However, in spite of the efforts by the government, donor agencies and international development partners towards achieving equilibrium at all levels of education, the issue of girl’s access to education in many northern states remains worrisome, as “gender parity in educational participation exists at all levels of formal education with fewer girls than boys participating in and completing their basic education and continuing to post basic education” (UNDP, 2016). Even though, findings from relevant literature continuously showed that negative attitudes were changing, the frequency of occurrence shows that the change is slower than required to impact more significantly on girls’ educational outcomes by the year 2030 as projected in the Sustainable Development Goals. This is also in spite of the fact that, girls or women with basic or formal education in the society are more likely to seek medical care, make sure their children are regularly immunized, adopt sanitation practices and be sure about nutrition requirements for their children (Mensah & Jonathan, 2016).

The current situation according to UNICEF (2018) is thus” The north accounts for 69 percent of the 13.2 million out of school children in Nigeria with only 45 percent enrolled in schools. A further breakdown shows that, over 70.8 percent of women aged 20-29 in the north west are unable to read and write as compared to 9.7 percent in the south east, more than 2/3 of 15-19 years old girls in the north are unable to read a sentence compared to less than 10 percent in the south, in 8 northern states, over 80 percent of women are unable to read nor write compared to 54 percent of men”. In state like Jigawa, the record shows 94 percent of women are not literate compared with 42 percent of men. The report also revealed that only 4 percent of girls complete post basic school in northern Nigeria. This is against the back drop of the campaign all over the world today, of the need to alleviate mass poverty and reconstruct the conditions that under-write power relations between women and men in the society through the education of the girl-child.

This makes girls’ education central to the quest for women empowerment. The Human Development Report (2000) emphatically placed women and their education as a major focus of pro-poor policies. This means that educating girls and women is not an alternative to poverty reduction but it is crucial to achieving it. UNICEF (2012) reported that, Out of the 196 million illiterates in the world, two thirds are women and they constitute 70 percent of the world’s poor. What is worrisome about this trend is that, if women do not contribute to development, they

certainly are a source of underdevelopment. This means girls' education must be a central development goal of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

### **Literature Review**

Women and girls' right to education has been a subject of major debates and concern for all nations since the UN Decade for Women (1975-1985). Girls, it was noted are denied their human rights, especially the right to education in many countries but more so in the developing countries. Even when according to Abimbola et.al (2015), it is obvious that education does not only provide basic knowledge and skills for girls and women but empowers them to be actively involved in the development process. In line with this, the Women Decade ended in 1985 with a conference in Nairobi, Kenya, to create significant awareness among political leaders to the realization that the education of girls' is one of the most profitable investments any state can make towards sustainable national development.

Formal or Western education was introduced in Nigeria by Christian missionaries in the 20<sup>th</sup> century and was not readily accepted in areas of strong Islamic influence, while areas with strong Christian influence willingly accepted the new form of education. In essence, with the coming of Islam, parts of the country assimilated Islamic education into their indigenous systems. Western education (having been introduced by Christian missionaries) was associated with the Christian religion and hindered most parents in the Muslim north from sending their children to school. The situation in the Muslim north as shown by UNESCO(2009), is thus, characterized by: "large numbers of out of school children mostly girls, children who are in school but not learning basic skills such as reading and mathematics, this leads further to drop outs and low transition rates into secondary school and children who passed through school without learning relevant skills that will prepare them for adulthood".

This historical antecedent, according to Usman (1997), "has had the effect of polarizing the country in educational terms and giving rise to educational in-balance". This occurrence has remained a difficult challenge to the educational development between the Northern Region and Southern Region. At the onset, education was tailored towards equipping male children to work in the colonial service, trading companies and mission-based organizations. Everything about formal education, thus, carried the subtle message that education was for boys only and any girl who attempted schooling would have to prove twice tough to succeed. This message permeated the cultures and blended smoothly with the Nigerian patriarchal society. This notion has remained deeply rooted and influenced most programmes aimed at increasing Children's access to education. The instability in governance and the variability in economic wealth in the 1970s and 1990s also introduced instability in the way education was managed and implemented in Nigeria. However, "the adoption of the Nairobi forward looking strategy in 1986, pushed the federal government to take the bold step of developing a blue print for women education" (SAGEN Baseline, 2002). The document according to the baseline findings, not only identified major obstacles to women education in Nigeria, but also provides a blue print for achieving maximum access to education for girls. This led to the establishment of Women Education Units in federal and states ministries of education in 1986.

A very significant landmark in the development of education in terms of girls' access was the launching of the Universal Basic Education (UBE) programme. The UBE was set up to be the driving force for the actualization of EFA goals as contained in the National Framework for Education For All Programme. The Universal Basic Education goals were assimilated into the National Policy on Education (NPE) in the 2004 revision. The UBE, Act of

2004, provides for universal access to education at all levels. The primary and junior secondary schools constitute basic education that is to be compulsory and free.

Most of these policies are, however, generic in nature and targeted at both boys and girls, with the girls often losing out during implementation. In essence, despite the different attempts to address gender gap in education in the country, several challenges persisted with regard to enrolment, retention, completion and transition rates of girls, most especially in the northern parts of Nigeria. This has drawn the attention of several international development partners and NGOs within the country who, acting individually or under the auspices of Civil Society Action Coalition on Education For All (CSACEFA) engaged in activities and policy dialogue with government agencies to promote girls education in Nigeria. They include: The Forum for African Women Educationist in Nigeria (FAWEN), the Federation of Muslim Women Association in Nigeria (FOWAN), Change Managers Intentional, Action Aid Nigeria, UNESCO, DFID, World Bank, UNDP and of course UNICEF.

### **Research Methodology**

The study targets three states in the northern part of Nigeria: Bauchi (North East), Niger (North Central) and Katsina (North West). The method used to generate data for this study is basically qualitative. Therefore, qualitative content analysis was used for the study. Typically, the choice of a researcher design is aimed at aiding a researcher to achieve the study objectives. The primary source of data came from interviews (both Semi Structured/Key Informant and Structured) and Focus Group Discussion with parents and girls, staff of Ministry of Education, and staff of State Universal Basic Education Board (SUBEB) in the states spread across five communities of Gwam-paikoro, Chibani-Munya Local Government Areas in Niger, Rimi in Katsina and Darazzo and Dass in Bauchi. This study adopted the purposive sampling technique to draw a representative of the population under study. The paper targets a group of individuals in the population frame which from the researchers' judgment, are relevant to the subject of the study. This non-probability sampling approach, guarantees that data is generated from sources (respondents) that are crucial to this study.

The sample size for this study is 140. A 12 member Focus Group Discussion was organized in the five communities. In all, 60 (12 x 5 = 60) respondents participated in the Focus Group Discussion (FGD). 10 respondents/key informants from each community totaling 10 (10 x 5 = 50), made up of Traditional rulers, Parents Teachers Association (PTA) members, community leaders and parents took part in the semi-structured interview (SSI). The formal interview tool has a total of 30 (10 x 3 = 30) participants comprising of Ministry of Education staff, SUBEB staff, State Agency for Mass Education Personnel, and LGA Education Secretaries. Focus Group Discussion and interviews of various kinds were the primary tools used for data collection for this study. Each of the interview sessions lasted for an average of 40 minutes while each of the Focus Group Discussion session took two and half hours. An in-depth interview and Focus Group Discussion guides was designed to elicit information on the Root Factors that have Affected Girls Participation in Education in the study environment and why gender gap has persisted in the face of interventions. The language used during the interview and focused group discussion sessions in some of the communities was Hausa through an interpreter. This was subsequently translated and analysed in the body of the work. At other instances the English language was used where and when appropriate. Review and analysis from books, journals and electronic sources were accessed as secondary data for this work.

The reason for the choice of the region is notably because the north records the lowest school attendance rate for girls. It thus, has the largest gender gaps in the face of multifaceted

challenges in the area of girl-child education and therefore, calls for urgent and concerted intervention than other parts of the country.

### **Findings**

#### **Root Factors that have Affected Girls Participation in Education in Northern Nigeria**

A range of forces constraints girls access to education and women empowerment in the north; They live in societies that are highly stratified by factors such as gender, class, religion and other shared demarcations which have complex histories and subtleties. These intersecting demarcations currently entail forms of poverty, inequality, and consequently discrimination. The Muslim north is, thus, a difficult operational environment where there is a very powerful traditional and religious opposition to western style education before the interventions by development partners. This has resulted into a large number of women in the north with no formal education and female adult literacy rates are low.

#### **Poverty**

Top on the list of constraints limiting girls' participation in education in the north is poverty. This has precipitated in poor households making rational but gender biased decisions on girls schooling. This means that on the scale of priority, poor households tend to choose to send the sons rather than the daughters to school, while girls engage in petty trading (hawking). Corroborating this view, a female respondent in an interview in Chibani (Munya L G A, Niger state) expounds that:

My husband divided our children between us. He asked me to look after our female children, while he will take care of the male children. Because I don't have enough money to send them to school, they help me to sell to make small money for their up keep and also help with house chores until I find them good husbands. (7<sup>th</sup> May, 2016)

Although, officially, basic education (primary) has been declared free in the three states under study, there are many other costs associated with schooling in these states, such as development levies that impose heavy burden on poor parents, most especially in large extended households where parents with many children cannot afford to send all of their children to school. For example, an important component of the Hausa culture (one of the prominent tribe in the north), is the tradition of bride price paid to the head of the wife's family, usually the father. The sum may vary depending on several factors. However, the wife also brings a dowry to her husband's household (*KayanDaki*) in the form of cooking utensils, clothes, mattresses and room decorations. It is a material aspect of the Hausa mother's responsibility to provide part of this dowry. A mother in Katsina attests that "the goods (*KayanDaki*) may be seen as asset for the girl's future, because she may sell some of them to raise capital for her own trading activities" (interview, 22<sup>nd</sup> May, 2016). For poor mothers in seclusion, the only way they can amass enough cash (dowry capital) to buy these items is by sending their daughters out to hawk on their behalf. Some of these mothers withdraw their daughters from school, and even when girls attend school, their learning and performance outcomes are often affected due to prolonged hours spent on household tasks/hawking before and after school.

Adult women's dependence on their daughter's labour is so evident that it is common in Niger for girls to be fostered out to adult women without daughters or women looking for house helps. A respondent from Ministry of Education, Niger state explaining further, illuminates that:

Some are often female relatives such as aunts who take over responsibility for the girls in exchange of access to their labour. For the house helps, the

women make monthly remittance of ₦3,000- ₦6, 000 maximum to the girl's mother. (Interview, 5<sup>th</sup> may, 2016)

### **Early Child Marriage**

Closely intertwined with the factor above is the very prevalent case of early child marriage that is commonly practiced mostly in the Muslim north. The Demographic Health Survey of (2018) showed that Nigeria was the fourth largest contributor to girl-child marriage globally. The statistics according to the survey reveals that:

76 percent adolescent girls are in marriages in north west, 68 percent in north east and 35 percent in north central (incidentally the zone with the highest poverty rate in Nigeria), while the south east has 18 percent, south west 17 percent and 10 percent for south east.

Another respondent from Ministry of Education Minnedima cited poverty and religious misinterpretation as one of the major factors affecting girls' enrollment, completion and transition rates in Niger state. In her words, "religion is used to curtail girl-child education because of the religious misinformation that the Quran states that girls must be married off at the onset of puberty". Sharing her experience, she explains that "some old men are (especially in the rural areas) willing to pay high bride price to poor parents to lure them into giving their daughters out in marriage. This is arising from the belief that young blood will help to renew their age". From Darazzo, Bauchi another respondent sees early marriage, "as an assurance against pregnancy outside marriage with its consequence of shame and disgrace"

In the same vein, female and male respondents from Ministry of Education, SUBEBKatsina and Ministry of Education, Bauchi all pointed to "abject poverty and religious misinterpretation as the reasons behind early marriage in the states". According to them, "this has affected girls' enrollment, retention and transition rates" (interview, 14<sup>th</sup>, 15<sup>th</sup> may and 18<sup>th</sup> August, 2016). The implication is the high dropout rates witnessed in primaries four, five and six in the communities under study. In the worse scenarios, there was complete absence of girls in the classes stated above as stated by the head teachers.

### **Ignorance and the culture of Female Devaluation**

Most parents' aversion to their daughters' education in the north is also rooted in the belief that Western education exposes girls to Western values that are against Islamic views. Besides, womanhood in the states under study as in most part of the country is defined in terms of marriage and motherhood rather than education and employment. Therefore, obedience, docility, and modest behaviour for women are highly valued (cultural ideals of womanhood). Parents are thus, afraid that allowing their daughters access to Western education will diminish their chances of getting married. Respondents from Dobwa in Paikoro LGA, Niger State and Rimi, Katsina also attest that "before the girls education interventions, "education for girls was seen to breed wrong attitude and ill mannerism in girls and was thus, strongly discouraged". (Interview, 20<sup>th</sup> August, 7<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> May 2016, respectively).

In the Focus Group Discussion in Darazzo (Bauchi State), a participant illuminated that before the sensitization on girl's education:

We had no value for our daughter's education since they would end up in their husband's houses after going to school. Why should we bother to waste our lean resources and send them to school at all? Why educate girls if they cannot gainfully benefit from it! (FGD, 18<sup>th</sup> August, 2016)

The right to education in the north as in other parts of Nigeria is closely mediated by cultural relations of patriarchy. This implies that patriarchal attitudes about gender roles tend to

limit girls' educational opportunities. This has resulted in some parents ascribing huge importance to the education of boys than girls. This is stretched further when she finally gets the opportunity to be enrolled. Family constraints which manifest in household chores put her at a gross disadvantage. The girl, because of heavy burden of household chores such as cooking, fetching of water and firewood, the care of younger siblings, and washing, hardly has the time to study and do her homework which further affects her performance academically and of course, has an overall impact on her learning achievement. The following excerpts from the FGD session with female pupils of WaziriMazadu Central Primary School Dass, Bauchi as expressed by the Head Girl below captures it succinctly:

Some of the girls are always coming late to school, most times after the first two lessons are over or even at break time. This is because, apart from the house chores they do in the morning, some also have to hawk to sell some items before coming to school. This continues in the evening after school hours. Because of this, most of the girls are not doing well academically and most times more girls repeat in all the classes than boys in our school. At times, some of the girls are discouraged because of their performance and before we know what is happening, some of them drop out of school to marry, especially those asked to repeat. (FGD 19<sup>th</sup> August, 2016)

During an interview in Dass (Bauchi state) with a female participant, she laments, "I dropped out of school in primary three to look after my father during a prolonged illness and never returned back to complete my studies because I was married off shortly after my father's recovery". The message, therefore, that goes out overtly or covertly from parents and the society at large, is that, education has more relevance for boys than girls. The culture of son preference as a result of the low value placed on the woman generally in the Nigerian cultural context affects, to a great extent, the efforts both nationally and globally at girl-child participation in education. An interviewee from Katsina captures the perspective succinctly, expounding that, "the mentality of education for employment and not enlightenment, discourages parents from sending their female wards to school in the face of the high unemployment rate in the country". (Interview, 16<sup>th</sup> May, 2016)

In a similar tone, participants during a Focus Group Discussion session with women in Dobwa (Palkoro LGA, Niger), enthused that, "before now, we sent our female children to marry because we thought that educating our daughters was a waste of time and resources" (7<sup>th</sup> May 2016). In another instance in Qwam, (Paikoro LGA, Niger state) a male participant disclosed that in "a large house hold, if you send a child or children, most especially the girl-child from one of your wives to school, it is a clear indication that you hate that wife and her children". (FDG, 7<sup>th</sup> May, 2016).

The devaluation of the woman and her work alongside the culture of male child preference are gender based relations that result in female subordination. This was confirmed by the United Nations committee on the status of women in 1985. The committee reported that:

Women composed one-half of the world's population, performed two-thirds of the world's work hours, earned one-third of the world's income, owned less than one-hundredth of the world's property and everywhere,

poorer in resources and poorly represented in positions of power. (UNDP Report, 1997)

The summation above is a global reflection accruing from labour done in the domestic sector (cooking, cleaning, fetching of water, child care, care for the sick etc.) which is usually unpaid and unrecognized in terms of gross earnings. This has engendered various connotative and discriminatory practices against the ‘domestic staff’ in this sector (the woman), trickling down to the decision to educate or not to educate her. That is, according to one of the respondents in Niger state:

Does the woman need to be educated to clean, fetch, bear and rear (children)? In essence, the question in the mind of some of us here is, does the girl need to be learned to cook and clean effectively or bear and raise her children when she is already tailored and socialized only for these purposes”. (Interview, 7<sup>th</sup> May, 2016).

### **Unfriendly and Hostile School Environment**

The unfriendly and hostile nature of the environment in many schools in Nigeria presents yet another blockage to girls’ participation in education and the effort by Nigeria to achieve the Education For All (EFA) objective and the Sustainable Development Goals. The physical surrounding of a lot of schools in northern Nigeria presents a sorry sight, with dilapidated buildings, dirty class rooms without seats and writing tables, and dirty and lack of functional toilets. Such environment is not conducive for learning and clearly not girl-child friendly. UNICEF,(2016) reported that the absence of functional female only toilet facility is a singular reason why most parents in the north and some communities withdraw their daughters from school. This type of unfriendly environment tends to reinforce gender disparity in enrolment, retention and completion rates.

### **Western Education versus Traditional Islamic Values**

Participants from the Focus Group Discussion sessions reveal that some parents, traditional leaders and Islamic scholars in the Muslim north perceive “Western style education as a threat to girl’s socialization and traditional Islamic values and it brings them in contact with the opposite sex thereby, encouraging immodest behaviour”. One of the participants states that “any form of mix that could bring women and men into close contact is unacceptable and some parents would rather not risk it by sending their daughters to school”. For those who dared to, the head teacher of one of the primary schools in Qwam explains that

The school has made provision to shield female pupils from the ‘roamy eyes’ of the male pupils. Within the class rooms, girls are often seated at the back to fend from boys’ ‘eyes’. (Interview, 6<sup>th</sup> May, 2016)

This places girls at a distance from the teachers and blackboard and marginalizes them. However, while attempts are being made to shield girls from boys, who shields the girls from the male teachers? An interviewee further reiterates that, “Unfortunately, sexual harassment by male teachers is a fact or reason why some parents are skeptical about enrolling their female children in school” (Interview, 16<sup>th</sup> May, 2016).

### **Lack of Secondary Facilities**

One of the barriers that rural girls in some communities in the north are battling with is simply the lack of school (especially Secondary) in their vicinity. Distance to school is,



especially important for girls because of the cultural imperative of protecting them from boys, men and other forms of danger. A distance of 1 kilometer is often cited as the maximum distance girls can be expected to walk to school. In rural areas, the lack of Junior Secondary (JSS) and Senior Secondary School (SSS) is a serious deficiency in itself and apart from depressing the demand for girls' primary schooling, it also impedes transition rates for girls. The Focus Group Discussion with women in Dobwa (Paikoro LGA, Niger) generated quite some information on the issue of access. A participant complained that "the nearest Junior Secondary School to the village is in Paiko -a five to six kilometre walk from the village. This has left most of our children, especially girls stranded after Primary Six". Another participant bemoans that, "we have been encouraged to send our daughters to primary school but without a near secondary school for them to continue to college. We have indeed wasted our time and our resources" (FGD, Dobwa, 7<sup>th</sup> May, 2016). A respondent confirmed that "a similar situation existed in Rimi, Katsina state until the community through the SBMC, built a Junior Secondary School directly opposite the primary school". This according to the School Based Management Committee chairman "has increased the transition rates, we are also working towards adding more buildings to accommodate the Senior Secondary section soon" (Interview, 17<sup>th</sup> May, 2016). The views above tally with Sanubi and Apkotu's position when they reiterate that, "the education that brings development is that which is well funded, provided with state of the art facilities and equipment with well-motivated manpower"...(2015).

### **Insecurity**

Another key point that has played an important role in shaping the demands for girls' education in the north is the issue of security. The challenge of security can be glimpsed from three angles; sexual harassment from teachers and bigger pupils/students, the girl-child unfriendly nature of the school curriculum and environment and distance in terms of access. The nascent threat of Boko Haram insurgency that has effectuated gross damages to life and properties in the North East and North West zones remains palpable. The ever looming threat of Boko Haram attack, presents yet a major security challenge for girls' schooling in a state like Bauchi and other North Eastern states. School attendance in Bauchi is impeded by the recent and increasingly brazen extremism of the Boko Haram sect: An Islamist militant group that targets girls' education. The group strongly combats the Western-style education linked with formal training in Nigeria and seeks to consign women exclusively to the household. Given the increase in violence from 2010 forward, risks associated with schooling for girls and young women in the North East is very high in "the context where female enrollment, retention, completion and transition rates are already persistently low" (GEP One Memorandum). The April 2013 abduction of 234 girls from a physics class in Chibok, and the 2018 kidnapping of 118 girls from Dapchi all in Borno state has ingrained the fear of schooling in girls and parents. Even much more frightening is the avowal by the Boko Haram group to stamp out education at all cost. Abubakar Shekau the leader of the sect in a video on You-tube emphatically declared that "we will continue to carry out attacks on school till our last breath".

A respondent (SUBEB Bauchi), in an interview, gave the instance of "an attack on Government Girls Secondary School Yana, in Shira LGA in October 2014. Fortunately, there was no loss of life because the school was on holiday. However, the sect burnt down the hostel blocks and the Science Laboratory and destroyed other valuable properties". A flustered parent from the FGD in Dass succinctly explains the situation thus:

Schooling is very important and the life of our children is equally important. But if we have to choose between the two, we definitely choose the life of our daughters over schooling. (19<sup>th</sup> August, 2016)

### **Discussion of Findings**

The study showed that gender gap in education continues to persist as a child without an education in northern Nigeria is still most likely to be a girl than a boy. Most often, their numbers increase in times of conflict, social crisis and natural disasters. The data generated revealed that, although, the issue of early/child marriage has both religious and cultural connotations, poverty also underpins the decision to marry off girls at very early ages. There is a clear link in Katsina, Bauchi and Niger States between poverty, early marriage and girls' enrollment, retention, completion and transition rates. Parents' desire to get their daughters married off makes sending them to school an unattractive option. Besides, parents under the pressure of poverty have an interest in reducing the number of mouths to be fed, while the bride wealth serves as an incentive. This is one of the major reasons why gender gap continues to endure in these states. The consequence here is that, no society can experience growth when the common practice of child marriage condemns girls and women to a lifetime of diminished opportunity, needless deaths, shortchanged futures, ill health, and dysfunctional and disrupted family units.

Furthermore, a veritable ground for the persistent girl's low enrollment, retention, completion and transition rates in the north has its foundation on ignorance and the culture of female devaluation replete in institutionalized patriarchy across most cultures in Nigeria. Asogwa et.al (2020) also corroborated that "sex preference is a social phenomenon that has continued to persist even amidst modernization". While IdokoElakeche Olivia (2020) holds that, the Nigerian society is significantly dotted with pervasive gender ideologies and institutionalized patriarchal practices at the household, school and community levels which have promoted differential opportunities and outcomes for girls and boys. Most respondents from the Interview and Focus Group Discussion sessions concurred that most parents in the rural areas are unaware of the relative importance of girls' education. While some argued that most parents are culturally blinded to the positive impact of educating their daughters. The general belief is that, no matter the level of educational attainment of women, the final destination remains the domestic sphere, where they work as cooks, cleaners, wives and mothers. Girls were, therefore, trained to become good wives, in line with cultural expectations instead of allowing them access to formal education. Affirming this position, Abdulkadri et al., (2018) explains that societal attitude naturally determines the type of education girls and women are allowed to pursue.

The study reveals that poverty is a cardinal factor that has reduced girl's access to education in Nigeria and, most especially in the states under study and also underpins the culture of hawking among teenage girls in these states. Nigeria, as shown by UNICEF (2018) is one of the poorest countries in the world after India. According to the report, extreme poverty is growing by six people per minute and that there are 87 million people living in extreme poverty in Nigeria. Poverty is thus, a major impediment to girl's access to education and why girls' low participation in education continues to persist. The National Bureau of Statistics (2011) indicated that, "the percentage of Nigerians living in absolute poverty rose from 54.7% in 2004 to 60.9% in 2010, with 63% living below the national poverty line". Espousing further, Okorie (2013)

illuminates that “in every income bracket, they are more female children than male children who are not attending school and generally, girls in the poorest 20 percent of household have the lowest chance of getting an education”

In the north, the material aspect of poverty entails vulnerability that is associated with a lack of livelihood opportunities and religious insecurity. In spite of this, extended households are very common in the Muslim north. UNESCO (2018) revealed that, 44% of married women aged 15-49 are living in polygynous marriage and only 61% of married women in the same zone know anything about any modern method of contraception. The outcome, as shown by DFID Project Memorandum of (2011), is that, fertility rates are much higher in the north than other parts of the country. Consequently, households tend to be larger and poverty level higher. This study shows that the opportunity cost for girls is that they are forced to trade, as well as, give support and care for the sick. The decision to send girls to school is, thus, at the expense of the income that would have been generated if they were not enrolled.

This study also shows that the fear of Boko Haram, has affected parents psychologically and dampened their morale in an environment with a lot of misgivings on education, especially girl’s education. School participation has thus, remained a challenge in the North East and obstacles are particularly severe for girls in the face of threats from AbubakarShekau and his group. , and for states like Bauchi battling with internally displaced persons from neighbouring states of Plateau, Yobe and Borno, the scenario is even more complicated. Insecurity was thus cited by participants and respondents as a major contributor to the persistent gender gap in education in the study environment. The general consensus from parents is that, if the government puts in place structures to protect lives and properties, they are willing to send their children (especially girls) to school.

## **Conclusion**

The views expressed in this paper have affected girls’ education in northern Nigeria. This paper has examined different dimensions on the issue of girls’ access to education in northern Nigeria and why in spite of interventions, gender gap continues to persist. Alongside the problems identified is also the challenge on how to bridge the scripted demands of the education system with education that encourages girls and women to reflect on their own realities on their own terms. One tends to agree with Augusto Lopez Claros (2005) that, “without education of comparable content and quality to that given to boys and men, and relevant to existing knowledge and real needs, women will still be unable to access well paid formal sector jobs, advance within them, participate in, and be represented in government and gain political influence and relevance”.Moreover, the danger for the society at large is that the next generation of children will be similarly inadequately prepared. Besides, discrimination against women and girls in education and health is very costly from the view point of achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. It is in this respect that girls’ education should be an essential component of strategies designed by the government to achieve its human development agenda if it must develop and sustain its development.

## **Recommendations**

1.Education is a full government responsibility to all citizens. The government (Federal, State and Local Government) should wake up to its responsibility of providing quality and sustainable

education for all its citizens, especially the girl-child. This can be partly done through the strengthening of existing structures such as the Female Teacher Trainee Scholarship Scheme (FTTSS) and the Conditional Cash Transfer programmes initiated by UNICEF/DFID in its GEP project. Also, the provision of social and instructional materials will help lessen some of the cost of education for indigent parents. This is crucial if the country must develop, maintain and sustain both its human and natural resources.

2. Government through the Ministries of Education, SUBEB and State Agency for Mass Education should revive and establish guidance and counseling units in both primary and secondary schools in Nigeria, most especially in the north where they are very few female role models for girls to look up to and where girls do not have access to life and career information to guide them. The guidance and counseling units will also help to cater for the psycho-socio needs of some of the girls who drift through school without learning literacy, numeracy and life skills.

3. There is the need for continuous and regular advocacy, community sensitization and mobilization on the gains of girls' education, until the entire communities come to the realization of the importance of girls' education with a resultant attitudinal and behavioural change.

4. We need to rethink the cultural practices that encourage stereo-types and devalue girls/women and their labour.

5. The government in the northern states should work towards abolishing hidden user fees inform of development levies that prohibit poor parents from sending their children, most especially girls to school.

6. There is need for entrepreneurial skill acquisition schemes and other economic empowerment programmes for women in the north. This will help raise income for women in the study environment and curb the culture of hawking by girls at the expense of their education.

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