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POLICY BRIEF

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GIRL-CHILD DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA: AN ASSESSMENT OF SYSTEMIC CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

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0.1 Summary

This policy brief argues that most of the factors hampering the development of the girl-child in Nigeria are institutionalized and require a systematic approach to tackling them. Factors such as poverty, cultural and religious doctrines, biased and negative attitude of parents towards education and gender roles, early marriage, street hawking, insecurities and dearth of policies and programs that lend a supportive environment for the development of the girl-child are some of the obvious, but largely ignored challenges. Institutionalized persuasive gender ideologies both at the household and community levels tend to skew differential mental, intellectual, social, political and economic development opportunities and outcomes in favor of the boy-child. This brief highlights the following legislative intervention and policy options to help address some of the challenges to the development of girl-child in Nigeria:

1. Community based sensitization and human capacity development through NGOs and CSOs targeting the girl-child should be prioritized by the government;
2. Government should initiate programs and policies like provincial and territorial child protection legislation/policy that guarantees socially safe and supportive educational environment that is devoid of abuse and discrimination of the girl-child;
3. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs should constitute a “Child’s Right Act” Domestication and Implementation Committee with representatives drawn from the State Ministries of Women Affairs. 25 of the 36 states in Nigeria have localized the Child’s Rights Act. Currently, 11 states, all in northern Nigeria, have yet to domesticate the Child’s Rights Act. The Committee should be saddled with the responsibilities of ensuring the Act is domesticated in every State of the Federation as well as monitor its enforcement and make quarterly report to the Minister;

4. The National Assembly may make a law to abolish or prohibit child marriage by specifying that a girl-child must not marry or given to marriage until she attains at least 16 years of age and possesses a minimum educational qualification of SSCE or equivalent;

0.2 Introduction

There are three fundamental issues raised in this policy brief. The first deals with the deliberate or inadvertent institutionalization of discriminatory and persuasive gender ideologies and attitudes. These set of attitudes constitute the major challenges affecting development of the girl-child in Nigeria. The second issue in this brief relates to creating educational and leadership opportunities for the girl-child to make salient contributions to national development. Thirdly, the brief highlights efforts by various institutions to develop and empower the girl-child as a responsible and independent member of the society. The brief is divided into four sections. The first section deals with Human Capital Formation and Man-planning Model in relation to the development of the girl-child; second concentrates on global discriminatory attitudes and abuse that have affected the development of girl-child; the third focuses on challenges of girl-child education in Nigeria; while the fourth section concludes and proffers opportunities and recommendations.

03 Human Capital Formation and Manpower-Planning Model

A relative analysis of the framework of the human capital formation and manpower-planning model emphasizes on the need for the provision of accessible and affordable developmental opportunities to help equip and empower the girl-child with creative skills and knowledge to make informed choices and take responsibilities for her decisions¹. The model argues that education, skills and experience are indispensable factors that establish an encompassing development for any nation ²and when applied to the girl-child; a necessary and functional ingredient for development and leadership role as an active member of the society. Adherents of this model believe that acquisition of proper knowledge and skills comes handy for the girl-child in the areas of boosting her values and competencies to assist her actualize her aspirations for self-fulfillment and to the advantage of the society³. Lastly, the model advocates that an investment in the human resource development and education would in turn on the long-run generate semi-skilled and skilled manpower with its attendant socio-economic gains (Jhingan, 2007).

06 Challenges to Girl-Child Education in Nigeria

¹ Udofia, E., and Bberevbie, D. (2019). Girl-Child Education for National Development in Nigeria: A critical Discourse

² Deboral, B.A (2016) "Girl-Child Education and its challenges in Kagorko and Sabon Gari Local Government Areas of Kaduna State" Ahmadu Bello University, Zaira Nigeria

³ Mulkah, A.A (2015). Enhancing Women/Girl-Child Education: A Panacea for National Development" International Conference on Education and Social Science 2nd-4th February, Istanbul, Turkey

Nigeria is among the African and Asian countries that have suffered setback in the areas of equal education, especially for the girl-child⁴. Ishaku (2021) quoted the Nigerian President that Nigeria has 13.2 million out-of-school children and that the girl-child accounts for 60% of this figure. Nigeria accounts for one in five out-of-school children anywhere in the world⁵. The report further stated that although primary education is officially free and compulsory, only 67% of eligible children, majority of whom are boys, eventually enroll into primary schools. One of the factors affecting girl-child education is early marriage. A national survey by UNICEF (2017)⁶ found that Nigeria has the largest number of child brides in Africa: 23 million girls and women were married as children.

In many parts of Africa, particularly in Nigeria, the girl-child encounters serious obstacles including cultural and societal values placed on the boy-child over the girl-child, in accessing proper education⁷. Thus, the girl-child seem to have her aspirations, education and development restricted by both tradition and religion, societal and parental factors on account of biological sex.

0.7 Areas for Legislative Action/Consideration

The girl-child is an integral and significant member of the society. In order to legally protect the girl-child and bridge gender gaps hampering her education and general development in Nigeria, it is recommended that the following interventions be floated:

- i. Negative Gender-based ideologies, discriminations and stereotypes should be addressed through domestication and full implementation of the Child Right Act, 2003, by every State and local authorities. Beyond passing resolutions, the National Assembly should further empower the Federal Ministry of Women Affairs to constitute the Child Right Act Enforcement Committee, saddled with the responsibilities of ensuring full implementation of the Act in the overall interest of the girl-child,
- ii. The National Assembly may enact a legislation abolishing early girl-child marriage and make it compulsory for a girl to attain at least 16 years of age and possess a minimum educational qualification of SSCE or equivalent,
- iii. National Assembly may initiate educational policies and programmes like special scholarship or bursary for girl-child studying specified courses at higher educational institution within or

Ishaku, E. (2021). The Challenges of Girl-Child Education: A Case Study of Yobe State, North-East Nigeria

⁵ UNICEF (2017). Situation of Women and Children in Nigeria” [HHPS//www.unicef.org/Nigerian/situation-women-and-child-Nigeria](https://www.unicef.org/Nigerian/situation-women-and-child-Nigeria)

⁶UNICEF (2017). Situation of Women and Children in Nigeria” [HHPS//www.unicef.org/Nigerian/situation-women-and-child-Nigeria](https://www.unicef.org/Nigerian/situation-women-and-child-Nigeria)

⁷ Oluyemi, J.,A and Yinusa, M., A (2016). Girl-Child Education in Nigeria: Issues and implications on national development. Zimbabwe Journal of Education Research, Vol.28,no 1 PP. 44-60

- outside Nigeria. Other development opportunities with features of healthy competition in all professions may be encouraged, both for the boy-child and the girl-child.
- iv. Vocational training colleges may be established to allow girls acquire skills and aspire to attain top positions in their chosen careers.
 - v. Social Welfare and Domestic Affairs institutions may be empowered through legislation to identify victims of child marriage with a view to offering them psychosocial services and creating a safe and supportive social environment for the girl-child to become a productive and responsible member of the society.

0.8 Conclusion

This policy brief has aptly analyzed some of the factors affecting girl-child in Nigeria, and argued that the girl-child should be availed opportunities for educational/vocational development, political participations and leadership roles through early and strategic capacity building. Issues relating to discriminatory attitudes and stereotypes against the girl-child and women in general was also x-rayed. It is believed that domestication and implementation of the Child Right Act, 2003 by every State and local government would eventually provide protection as well as reduce abuses and vulnerabilities of the girl-child in Nigeria. Lastly, the brief highlighted some of the challenges affecting the education of the girl-child in Nigeria. Early marriage, cultural and religious belief, societal and parental factors are found to constitute the major obstacles to accessing educational opportunities by the girl-child.