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EDUCATION OF THE GIRL-CHILD IN NIGERIA FOR A JUST, PEACEFUL, HARMONIOUS SOCIETY AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Review Article

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EDUCATION OF THE GIRL-CHILD IN NIGERIA FOR A JUST, PEACEFUL, HARMONIOUS SOCIETY AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract

International instruments, declarations and local laws set the pace for appropriate human development, peace and harmony. 10.5 million children in Nigeria are out of school; approximately 60 percent are girls (UNICEF, 2014). They are dropouts due to various factors: socio-cultural, economic, governance etc. vulnerable to forms of abuses, harms- female genital mutilation, insurgency effects and other negative influences which deny her rights and dignity are discussed. Assessments of education statistics at basic education level over (1990-2010) revealed imbalances in enrolments and gender disparity in favour of males and the education statistics from 2014 to 2016, revealed increases in enrolments and a gender parity index ranging from 0.80 to 1.0. Various government efforts and interventions by international development partners to bridge the gender gap and heal the harms are enumerated. Benefits of educating the girl child which are critical for the development of a just, peaceful, harmonious society for sustainable development are highlighted. Recommendations included: ensuring the rights of the girl child, (development, participation protection and survival), sustaining gender equity, government's strong political will, more funding for education, international aid, empowering girls/women with various life skills, ensuring girls retention and completion in school, effective implementation of the National policy on gender in basic education etc.

Keywords: International instruments, Out of school children. Discrimination and abuse, Education and gender equity.

1. Introduction

International instruments: the United Nations Charter(1945), United Nations Universal Declaration on Human Rights UDHR(1948), the United Nations International Covenants on Civil and Political Rights as well as Economic Social and Cultural Rights (1966) , the African Union(AU) Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (AUCRWC,1990),Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against–Women (CEDAW,1979), United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC,1990), 1991 Ouagadougou Pan African Declaration on Education for Women and girls; and Declarations: the Education for All Jomtien, (EFA, 1990), Goals2&5; Millennium Development Goals 2&3, (MDGs, 2000) and the Sustainable Development goals etc.; set the pace for appropriate human development, peace and harmony with the earth and ourselves. Despite these instruments and Declarations, 10.5 million Nigerian children are out of school and about 60 percent are girls (UNICEF, 2014).

These girls suffer from lots of harms, insecurity and negative influences caused by some inherent socio-cultural, religious and socioeconomic factors etc. which deny her right to quality education, freedom, dignity, opportunities, peace, her well - being and self-worth, make her vulnerable and hinder her full development as a human person.

The Preamble UDHR 1948 states:

“Whereas, recognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world”. (UDHR, 1948, p.42)

Early in 1948, with the horrors of two world wars, and various anthropological incidents of gross violation of fundamental human rights in all nations a remarkable group of men and women gathered at the behest of the newly formed United Nations to draft the first “international bill of rights” (p.4). The distinguished members of this controversial commission set to work under the determined chairmanship of most extraordinary figures in American 20th Century history Eleanor Roosevelt. The document they crafted, the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948, is the single most important reference point for cross-cultural discussion of human freedom and dignity in the world today. One can imagine the various harms and negative influences people of the world, most especially girls and women must have experienced during the world wars that invoked the creation or crafting of these noble treaties.

Nigeria ratified the UNCRC on April 16th, 1991. These international legal instruments on human rights had formed the foundation of all forms of Bills on fundamental human rights now found in the Constitutions and laws of different nations and non-governmental organizations. These international antecedents are associated with Nigeria’s Universal Basic Education; for example, the UDHR 1948 under which the right of everyone to education was emphasized and with particular reference to basic education, Art 26:1 “Everyone has the right to education. Education shall be free at least in the elementary and fundamental stages. Elementary education shall be compulsory. Article 26.2 further states, “Education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and to strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. It shall promote understanding, tolerance and friendship among all nations, racial or religious groups and shall further the activities of the United Nations for the maintenance of peace” (UDHR, 1948, p.46). Under the UNCRC, 1990, Art.28; and in the domesticated Nigerian Child Rights Act (CRA, 2003), Section 15:1,2, is supportive and specifies in section 15.5: “That a female child who becomes pregnant, before completing her education shall be given the opportunity after delivery, to continue with her education on the basis of her individual ability” (p.3). This shows the importance given to girl-child education. The CRA 2003 incorporates all the rights and responsibilities of the child and provides protection, care, guarantees the rights of the child to survive, develop fully, protected against all kinds of harms or discriminations and to participate in all issues concerning her/him. It provides special measures for the protection of children with disabilities to enable them to enjoy their full rights.

Other supportive and follow up actions included the National Policy on Education, (2004 Revised; 2014), the Universal Basic Education Act (2004), the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (1999), the Education for All (EFA) Fast Track Initiative and the Commonwealth Plan of Action are working towards meeting all the targets set, in particular, those on education and gender equality.(MDGs 2&3 & SGDs 4and 5).

Nigeria endorsed all of the above legal instruments and committed to their implementation, for example, UNCRC, 1990, was domesticated in Nigeria as the Child Rights Act (CRA, 2003): about 28 out of 36 states have domesticated it and commenced implementation while others are in the process of doing so.

The UNCRC further grouped together the articles of rights under themes: *Survival rights*: include the child’s right to life and basic needs such as nutrition, an adequate living standard,

etc.; *Development rights*: include the right to education, play, freedom of thought, etc.; *Protection rights*: ensure children are safeguarded against all forms of abuse, neglect and exploitation etc. *Participation rights*: encompass children's freedom to express opinions etc.

In the context of this paper discussion, the girl child is referred to as the female human being, a child under 18 years of age (Child Labor Convention, 1999, [No. 182], CRC, 1989; CRA, 2003; the Nigerian Constitution, 1999)-the girl child who will grow and eventually become a woman; and reference to young women in this context would mean the adult female human being, a girl-child who has grown to become a woman; a woman who builds a nation. This paper will focus attention on the education of the girl child in Nigeria as a right, inequities and various issues: such as dropouts and causes, harms and negative influences and consequences denying her full rights as a human person, an examination of education statistics on imbalances on gender gaps. Governments' efforts and various interventions by the international partners to bridge the gender gap, progress made in MDG which needs to be sustained in SGD, the benefits of educating the girl child and recommendations to heal the harms and ensure sustainable development.

The Universal Basic Education Programme (UBE) was launched on 29th September 1999 to provide a nine-year free and compulsory education that covers primary and junior secondary school as well as nomadic and adult education. The objectives of UBE are to ensure unfettered access to nine (9) years of formal basic education; provision of free, and universal basic education for every Nigerian child of school-going age; reducing drastically the incidence of drop-out from the formal school system, through improved relevance, quality and efficiency; ensuring the acquisition of appropriate levels of literacy, numeracy, manipulative, communicative and life skills as well as the ethical, moral and civic values needed for laying a solid foundation for life-long learning. Thus in response to the above legal instruments and in her pursuit to meet the targets of EFA, all the six goals of EFA were embedded in the UBE goals.

As regards education, the MDGs goal 2, was to achieve universal primary education while goal 3- was to promote gender equality and empower women by 2015. Post MDGs led to the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) with goals 4 and 5 focusing on inclusive and equitable quality education, promoting lifelong learning opportunities for all and to achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls. Nigeria's slogan being '**leave no one behind**'.

1.1. Factors responsible for dropping out of school

The factors responsible for dropping out of school include socio-cultural, economic and socio-economic, school-based, governance as well as some bottlenecks. The socio-cultural factors include: poor and negative parental and community attitudes, aversion to western education which is seen as incompatible with Islamic education, early marriage; girl children are forced to marry against their will, teenage pregnancy, large family sizes making parents decide who goes to school and who stays at home and in many cases the girls are left behind to carry out domestic chores; the boys are better prized and they carry the family name; the girl child is accorded a lower status in the family and there are peer pressures etc. There are some vulnerable groups such as special needs children, nomadic and migrant fisher folks and those in difficult terrains, persons infected by HIV/AIDS also constitute out of school children.

The economic factors include child labor, hawking, begging, trafficking, prostitution etc. which cause girls to drop out of school. Poverty is a major issue. With 71 percent of the Nigerian population living on less than a dollar (\$1.00) a day, girls are often withdrawn from school to work in various places, as domestic servants in households to make money and augment family income while boys are sent to school; to hawk wares or beg for money in markets/streets. Some

parents cannot meet up with school needs like school uniforms, textbooks, school levies, writing materials, transportation, and feeding costs. "Child labor and child trafficking have caused a wide gender gap and poor achievements in schools, disrupt school enrolment. School attendance, scholastic achievement and exacerbate dropping out from school (Falayajo et al., (E-1997), p.41. Enrolment is not the only issue; retention remains a major challenge. Many of the girls that do attend school, drop out before reaching primary school (UNICEF, 2007). There are some out of school children called `Almajirais` (those children wandering the streets whose parents believe that itinerary is synonymous with the search for knowledge and street begging and not working, is the order of the day and it is okay); this is common in the northern part of Nigeria and is more of a socio-economic factor.

The school-based factors include issues of inadequate implementation and articulation of relevant policy to basic education such as: shortage of teachers and caregivers at all levels of basic education schools, inadequate school infrastructure, safety/security of the children, bullying, sexual harassment or other dangers at or on way to school, incessant and prolonged teachers `strike actions` and low teacher commitment, learner unfriendly school environment, poor quality teaching leading to dissatisfaction from parents, and opportunity costs, levies and charges etc. Other factors of high dropout rate in schools are lack of provision for the education of special needs learners in basic education, weak or non-existence of social protection of vulnerable children.

Governance is another reason. These include lack of political will, the politicization of basic education, weak school-level governance and inadequate financing of education in Nigeria.

The above scenario shows a very gloomy picture of the girl- child`s wellbeing, dignity, and development. The deprivations and threats faced by children especially girl children constituted a major obstacle to the achievement of the MDGs.

2. The harm and negative influences: forms, effects/consequences

There are various harm and negative influences the girl- child and young /women face in Nigeria which undermine their status, often exacerbate the magnitude of interruption in schooling, cause psychological trauma and so many other negative effects which are violations against their fundamental human rights (development, survival, protection, participation rights) enshrined in legal instruments These harms and negative influences/ and their effects are briefly discussed below.

Child Abuse- In the different forms of child abuse, early marriage, child labour-hawking, child workers/street children, child trading, street child beggars, physical and mental violence, intimidation, sexual exploitation, child prostitution, female genital mutilation, child trafficking; children suffer from various diseases and maltreatment such as respiratory problems, injuries and accidents, physical and sexual violence such as rape and molestation especially the girl child, online abuse ,malnourishment ,extortion of income, police harassment, and participation in harmful or delinquent activities.(Aderinto,2000; Hope,2005).

Both boys and girls work as street hawkers throughout the south of the country, whereas in the north of Nigeria this activity is predominant among the girls (Vinola & Fubara, 1986);

Ebigbo (1988), had highlighted street hawking and an aspect of child abuse and neglect. However, a baseline survey revealed that 80% (n=454) said there was a great of child abuse and neglect in Nigeria; major city centers are filled with children hawking; 87% of respondents (n=490) believed that hawking was not a good way of preparing a child for future employment and 93% (n= 526) of respondents do not believe that children selling on the streets are generally free from harm. (Ebigbo, 2011 pp.60, 61). Studies and classified reports have shown that about eighty thousand (80,000) children aged 8-14 years with more girls than boys are used as

domestic servants in Nigeria, including under-aged prostitution, pawning, (Ebigbo, 1988; Ebigbo & Izuora, 1985) some have taken to all manner of petty crimes from picking pockets to the sale of dubious articles of dubious value, and trafficking in girls for commercial sex work. In some cases, the adolescent girls are often lured by child traffickers with the idea of taking them abroad/overseas to study and live better lives (this is common in Benin City in Nigeria). Some girls in Nigeria have been promised good livelihood in places like Italy, Paris, America, and Benin Republic and so on; only for them to realize that they have been tricked into prostitution.

The effects are that a class of young destitute illiterate child divorces and women with minimal education are created having no means of making a decent livelihood; many resort to low paying jobs or become commercial sex workers. CRA 2003, section 28 1(a, b, c) stipulates that no child shall be subjected to any forced or exploitative labor---Also Article 3 of International Labour Organization Convention No 182 is against child labor. Child labor has detrimental effects on children's health, social and educational wellbeing.

Early marriage -This is the practice of giving a girl-child in marriage without the consent of the girl and at an early age to older men, even as young as 7or 8years old. Meanwhile, early marriage deprives the young girls of a school education or acquisition of skills needed for survival. Many of the brides become pregnant and give birth before they are physical, mentally or emotionally prepared. The practice often adversely affects the health of the girls including their reproductive health. The girls show high rates of maternal mortality and the rates of infant mortality are high among their offspring. It affects their mindsets and total development. Health issues such as Vesicovaginal fistula (VVF), Sexually transmitted diseases (STIs) which undermines the girl's personality or self-worth are common. Early marriage and child pregnancies are associated with so many risks. The CRA, 2003 prohibits any child under the age of 18years from contracting or being contracted into marriage under any guise.

Female genital mutilation (FGM) - "About 40% prevalence is recorded for Nigeria's total female population" of about 60million (N=25,601 200) have undergone one form of female genital mutilation or the other (WHO, 1998, pp. 11, 17). FGM is widely practiced among the three major tribes in Nigeria Hausa Ibo and Yoruba. Though the prevalence is considered low, it is a form of violence against girls and women that has serious physical, psychosocial consequences which adversely affect health and is also a reflection of discrimination against girls and women. However, a recent FGM scoping study noted that Nigeria has the world's third highest FGM/Cutting prevalence. It estimated that 25 percent or 19.9 million Nigerian girls and women, 15 to 49 years old underwent FGM/C between 2004 and 2015 according to Mberu (2017), FGM is a cultural/traditional phenomenon and involves cutting or cutting off, or physically tampering with the most sensitive part of the female sexual organ known as the clitoris. FGM causes serious harms due to severe bleeding, extreme pains, urinary infections, urine and vagina leakages, chronic pelvic inflammatory diseases, neurogenic shock, as a result of the agony and trauma, HIV and overwhelming infections. Death may result at any time as a result of any or all of these.

In the longer term, the girls or women may suffer feelings of incompleteness, anxiety, and depression (UNICEF, 2005). FGM is a violation of the right to life and dignity (CRA, 2003; Articles: 3.4, 11). In all actions concerning children, the best interests of the child to be of paramount consideration in all actions (Article 1); right to protection from all forms of physical or mental violence, injury or abuse, (CRA 2003, Art.11a,) right to health to be protected from harmful traditional practices (Articles 13 and 24). All these harms are attempts to confer an inferior status on the girl-child and young women by branding them with marks which diminishes them and reminds them that they are inferior to men.

Negative Influences- Negative influences include discriminations-gender stereotypes, voicelessness emergency situations, floods, poverty, food insecurity; conflict/violent situations, insurgency Boko Haram in Nigeria etc. All these cause interruptions of schooling, school drop- out, gender gaps, health problems and diseases such as HIV & AIDS, psychological traumas, severe pains, lack of self-worth and even death in some cases.

Discrimination- The girl child often faces discrimination from the early stages of life through childhood to adulthood (Beijing, 2000; United Nations, 1995). There are a lot of gender stereotypes in everyday life and even in materials used in schools. Culturally boys are favored and better prized than a girl –child. Gender discrimination begins even before birth with the desire of the typical parent for sons rather than daughters. Girls are considered inferior to boys and this is reflected and reproduced by countless social and economic practices and norms throughout the life cycle. Girls are usually kept at home and made responsible for additional domestic, agricultural, or informal labour for the benefit of the household while the sons are sent to school to gain an education and prepare to take up professions. This situation violates the legal instruments (CRA, 2003; Art.10 Freedom from discrimination and the Nigerian Constitution, 1999). The economic activities open to girls and women are thus removed or reduced, and this can help force them to low skilled, low paying jobs in the informal sector or in street trades. Their lower social status means that they are less well protected from economic predators and are more vulnerable to bonded labour. In contexts of poverty, many girls are lured into commercialized sex or `survival sex` and have relations with older men. Many others become prey to sexual exploitation through trafficking for sexual purposes, pornography prostitution, including child prostitution or as domestic house helps they are sexually abused by the man in the house. All these constitute grave abuse of right

The scenario from children speaking:

Amina, girl, (aged 12) said, “My brother was sent to school by my parents with the money made by sending me to work as a domestic servant where I was maltreated. I was not happy at all. I felt like killing myself at times”.

Hadiza (girl, age 9) stated, “At times, some men would pretend that they want to buy things from me, but later would be touching my body. I was raped twice and became pregnant on one occasion by two men who dragged me inside their house and raped me. My parents aborted the pregnancy so that it wouldn't ruin my education”

(Accounts from girls from a Girl child Tribunal at which I was chairperson held in Abuja, Nigeria)

Emergency situations (floods, oil pipeline/ fire outbursts, disease outbreaks such as yellow fever, cholera/measles, food insecurity, refugees,); conflict/violent situations such as communal wars, kidnapping, killings , farmers and herdsman clashes, insurgency (due to *Boko Haram* a Hausa term for ‘Western education is forbidden’) is a radical Islamic group which officially calls itself ‘Jama’atul Alhul Sunnah Lidda’wati walJihad’ that is meaning ‘people committed to the propagation of the Prophet’s teachings and Jihad’) etc. have had negative influences on children and girls and sometimes have stopped them from attending school. In April 2014, about 276 Chibok school girls were abducted by Boko Haram insurgents from their school, Government Secondary school Chibok in Borno North East of Nigeria. Schooling has been disrupted and a lot of infrastructure has been destroyed. (MDG 2015, p. 25).

Despite strong international treaties, domestic laws and legal instruments, Acts, policies etc. put in place to outlaw these harms and negative practices, there are some deep-set cultural traditions, poverty issues and strong resistance to child labor which do not respond readily to morals and harms.

3. Statistics of out of school children/imbbalances

Education is a fundamental human right, however, in Nigeria 10.5 million children of school age are out of school the highest number in the world followed by Pakistan; 60 percent of the children out of school are girls, and most of them live in the north of the country. Almost 1 out of every 3 primary age children is out of school, and roughly 1 out of 4 junior secondary age children is out of school (UNICEF, 2014). This situation is quite worrisome.

However, a UNESCO Policy Paper No 4 (2012) reported that in 2010 there were 19 countries with more than 500,000 out of school children. A number of these countries are in Sub-Saharan Africa-and noted that Nigeria alone is home to 10.5 million out of school children i.e. 3.6 million more than in 2000.

An assessment of statistics in education by this author from 1990 -1995 1995-2000-2005, 2006-2010 revealed imbalances of enrolment of girls and boys from pre-primary, primary, junior secondary to adult education and gender parity has been in favour of boys; and over the years (2014-2016); the scenario has gradually changed in favour of girls with more enrolments and equity in gender parity index. (See Annex 1). This assessment is supported by the MDG 2015 end line report which noted that imbalances have gradually decreased and appreciable progress recorded was trending towards parity between males and females though the goal 2 has not been met (MDG,2015).

Literacy level in Nigeria has steadily and gradually deteriorated, especially within the 15 - 24 age group. By 1999, the overall literacy rate had declined to 64.1 percent from 71.9 percent in 1991. The trend was in the same direction for male and female members of the 15-24 age brackets. Among the male, the rate declined from 81.35 percent in 1991 to 69.8 percent in 1999. The decline among the female was from 62.49 percent to 59.3 percent during the same period. (MDGS, 2005)

The magnitude of gender gaps as well as their causes was more pronounced in the Northern states than in the southern states according to studies (Awe & Adedeji, 1990; Teboho, 2000). A British Council report on Gender in Nigeria revealed that in eight Northern States, over 80% of women are unable to read (compared with 54% for men). In Jigawa State, 94% of women (42% of men) are illiterate. Nigerian girls who enroll in school leave school earlier than their male counterparts. More than two-thirds of 15–19 age brackets, girls in Northern Nigeria are unable to read a sentence compared to less than 10% in the South. Only 3% of females complete secondary school in the Northern zones (British Council, 2012).

4. Government educational efforts and UBE programme

The Federal Government in collaboration with state governments and international development partners -DFID/UNICEF is accelerating various efforts and interventions to close the gender gap and ensure the basic rights of development, survival, participation and protection of the girl child in Nigeria and to meet the MDGs 2 & 3, and the current sustainable development goals targets. Some of these efforts include:

The UBE Programme is Nigeria's strategy for the achievement of Education for All (EFA) and the education-related Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) 2 & 3. Appreciable progress was achieved in the areas of access and gender parity, however, more efforts are being made to sustain the progress and in view of relevant SGDs.

The National Poverty Eradication Programme (NAPEP) 2001 was established to eradicate poverty in Nigeria by 2010. However, poverty is still rampant especially in the communities

and states and more efforts are being made to improve the situation through entrepreneurship programmes.

The African Girls' Education Initiative (AGEI, 2001-2003) is a programme for African countries, funded by the Norwegian Government 2001-2003, and was implemented by UNICEF in eight pilot states having the low enrolment of girls in primary schools in Nigeria. The impact in the target states in Nigeria recorded: 28% increase in girls' enrolment, 80% decrease in dropout rates, 50% reduction in gross enrolment rate (GER), gender gap and 40% increase in the number of female teachers in the target schools (FGN/UNICEF, 2003).

The Strategy for Acceleration of Girls' Education in Nigeria (SAGEN) was launched in July 2003 by the Federal Ministry of Education and UNICEF thus making girls' education a priority. The initiative which focused on an integrated approach to achieving gender inspired other development partners under SAGEN Plus. SAGEN addresses three of the MDG goals on achieving Universal Basic Education, promoting, gender equality and empowering women and also combating HIV & AIDS, malaria and other diseases in 11 priority focus states with the highest levels of gender disparities (Kebbi, Sokoto, Zamfara, Katsina, Kano, Jigawa, Bauchi, Yobe, Gombe, Borno, and Adamawa led to the launch of Girls education project (GEP) (FGN/ UNICEF, 2003).

The enactment of Trafficking in Persons (Prohibition Law) Enforcement and Administration Act 2003 and the creation of an agency, the National Agency for the Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons (NAPTIP) for the enforcement and monitoring of trafficking of persons, bans the practice of trafficking and prescribes punishment for its violation. Many young girls and women are being trafficked overseas for sexual exploitation. More efforts are being put into the implementation of trafficking law by the states in Nigeria.

UBE Act 2004 was enacted in order to facilitate the full implementation of the UBE programme. The Act makes provision for basic education comprising of early childhood care and education, (ECCE), primary and junior secondary education. The Universal Basic Education Commission (UBEC) was then established to coordinate the implementation of the programme at the states and local government through the State Universal Basic Education Boards (SUBEBs) of each state and the Local Government Education Authorities (LGEAs). Though financing of basic education is the responsibility of states and local governments, however, the Federal Government through the Act intervened in the provision of basic education with 2% of its Consolidated Revenue Fund (CRF) with certain criteria for states to access it. This fund has been utilized for activities targeted at increasing girls' access to education in schools where gender gaps exist and to ensure the uniform development of basic education in the country. The UBE Act 2004 stipulates appropriate sanctions against parents who fail to enroll their children in school.

Private sector roundtable held in 2004 titled "Children Missing an Education" organized by Federal Ministry of Education (FME) and UNESCO; its focus was a major call for private sector participation in support of girls' education by sponsoring research and providing support in various other ways to schools.

The Girls Education Project (GEP, Phase I, 2004—2008) was a joint initiative between the Federal Government of Nigeria, the Department for International Development DFID and /UNICEF, including the states and local government education authorities and communities. The initiative targeted six pilot states: Bauchi Borno, Jigawa, Katsina, Niger and Sokoto with high gender disparity in education. It aimed to eliminate gender disparity in education through improving the quality of life of girls in Nigeria by a collaborative approach to girl's education and to achieve the relevant EFA Goals and MDGs. DFID committed a 25 million pounds

funding. The project recorded a lot of success through a number of key interventions in GEP states and FME Achievements so far improved active support for gender equity in basic education, enhanced capacity for gender-focused policy and programmes in selected states, LGAs and communities, greater community involvement, especially for women in school governance and management, improved coherent strategies and planning with regard to girls' education, integrated programmes of community support (including nutrition health, hygiene and life skills). Phase II of the GEP 2008-2012 scaled up to cover the 36 states of the federation and the FCT. Now in its third phase, ensuring quality is the focus for primary secondary and junior secondary schools. Five states in northern Nigeria: Bauchi, Katsina, Niger, Sokoto, and Zamfara are the focus. The GEP 3 (2012 -2019) had three outputs as follows: increased access to and demand for girl's education, improved capacity of teachers to deliver effective learning for girls and improved governance to strengthen girl's education (UNICEF, 2014). The success recorded in the GEP has motivated different states in Nigeria in developing various initiatives on improving the education and plight of the girl child in Nigeria.

The National Policy on Gender in Basic Education (2006) as well as its implementation guidelines was produced by the Federal Ministry of Education to ensure that gender is systematically mainstreamed, ensure equal access to basic education and promote retention, completion and high performance for all pupils, with the required attention and provisions for the disadvantaged children, especially girls at the basic education level. In addition, the policy should act as a vehicle for the attainment of the sustainable development goal 4.

As a response to the dire state of education in Nigeria in the 1990s, the Child-Friendly School Initiatives (CFSI) was developed as a partnership between the Federal Ministry of Education, UNICEF and other international development organizations.

CFSI was used to advocate for and promote quality basic education for girls and boys, it is gender sensitive; child-friendly; child- seeking for ensuring child's right to quality basic education and attracts more girls to schools. The CFSI is characterized by the provision of enabling environments and establishment of School-Based Management Committees (UNICEF, 2009).

The integration of 'western education' in non-formal Islamic education centers particularly for the northern states; pupils from non-formal Islamic education centers are being mainstreamed into formal basic education system especially the '*Almajarais*'. In partnerships with civil societies and faith-based organizations, Government has set up campaigns on enrolment, retention, and completion, increased advocacy in affected areas, provided learner friendly schools and integrated Quranic schools (*Tsangaya*) into the UBE programme.

Establishment of the 'Girl's only' schools and boarding facilities for girls with a quality environment, and reproductive health education. This initiative is being taken to scale by the Universal Basic Education Commission which has developed a national framework for all girls' school initiative.

Second Chance Education programs are encouraged where girls who drop out from school can continue learning academic knowledge and technical skills and the provision of adequate facilities and equipment and provision of salaries for facilitators.

Encouraging the men to play a pivotal role in achieving gender equality including improving women's and children's health, reducing HIV & AIDs transmission, and eliminating child marriage and gender-based violence.

Establishing Innovative girl child encouragement clubs in schools in collaboration with Parent Teachers Associations (PTA) and School-Based Management Committees (SBMC).

Effective awareness campaigns have been conducted to inform sensitize and dispel religious misconceptions and cultural inhibitions against girl's education in the north and boy's education in the south-east of Nigeria.

There is a national legislation criminalizing FGM; the Violence against Persons (Prohibition) Act was passed into law on 28th May, 2015 for protection against different forms of violence.

Gender-responsive curriculum- the Federal Government of Nigeria(FGN) makes it mandatory for the new editions and new texts that are to be used in schools to be censored for gender sensitivity.

Government through the Federal Ministry of Women Affairs and Social Development launched the Nigerian Girls Mentorship Programme (NGMP) to provide girls from different backgrounds opportunities to acquire requisite knowledge and skills to develop and make positive changes in their lives, contribute meaningfully to the society thereby redressing the poor status of the girl child.

Government through the Nigerian Educational Research and Development Council has produced a comprehensive Nine 9 year basic education curriculum (for primary and junior secondary schools) through which students will be empowered with appropriate levels of literacy, numeracy, manipulative, communicative and life skills as well as ethical moral and civic values needed for laying a solid foundation for life-long learning as a basis for scientific thinking.

In 2011, government launched the Youth Enterprise with Innovation in Nigeria (a You-Win) programme specifically for young talented girls and young women and supported them with funds as grants to promote entrepreneurship so they can be employable and also become employers of labor; also the Growing Girls and Women in Nigeria (G-Win), and the gender and Youth programme of the Federal Ministry of agriculture and rural development etc. so that girls/ and women can drive the economy in view of the Transformation Agenda of Government.

In line with the Transformation Agenda of the Federal Government of Nigeria and the desire to ensure that the Nigerian education system attain global standards, the Federal Ministry of Education developed the 4-year Strategic Plan for the development of the education sector (2011-2015) which made significant provisions in activities for ensuring girls and women's full participation and education as a fundamental human right and as a way of ensuring justice, peace, harmony and sustainable development.

Policy framework on the girl child. The Federal Government launched the policy framework on the girl child, women education on 28 July 2012, to ensure access and sound education for the girl child and young women in Nigeria.

Capacity building in gender mainstreaming in the basic Education sector is ongoing for all personnel in the basic education sector (Federal level including UBE states) using various strategies: workshops for target groups, policy sensitization briefs ,development of gender training materials for the sector and incorporation of gender issues in the teacher training and in-service training curriculum.

State Initiatives -The state's initiatives are focused to increase access for girls, empower, encourage their participation in education. There are child rights laws in states prohibiting child hawkers, hawking during school hours; laws in some states stipulating two years imprisonment for any parents who withdraw a child from school, and early child marriages,

motivate, boost self-esteem, self-reliance and create awareness of the importance of education of girls. These are states' laws promulgated against girl child marriages or betrothals; there are also role model initiatives; incorporation of sexuality Family Life Education (FLE) into the school curriculum, establishment of vocational oriented schools for girls; publication and provision of subsidized textbooks; gender balancing in programming, involvement of community leaders in sensitization.

There are also the Home Grown School Feeding and Health programme, initiatives for eradicating girl child hawking "*Fansar yan Talla*" in Kano (-meaning compensation for girl child hawkers) in future. There was the establishment of a nomadic primary school in Iyalase village, Oyo state in Southwest Nigeria. Public enlightenment campaigns in form of advocacy, social mobilization and sensitization on girls, establishment of Female Education Board (in Zamfara), development of the state education sector plans and operation plan (SESP-SESOP), improvement of quality assurance in basic education schools; establishment of girl's child centres, girl child non-governmental organization initiatives, for example the Forum for African Women Educationists of Nigeria (FAWEN), Children and Women's First International Foundation (CAWFIF) and others promoting the rights of the girl child.

In view of the SDGs, an office of the Senior Special Assistant (OSSAP-SDG) to the President has been set up in the Federal Ministry of Education with a wide array of relevant stakeholders: drawn from line ministries, civil society, organized private sector, academia, development partners, youth groups, women organization, persons with disabilities, and media organization, and has put in place institutional and regulatory measures to ensure successful implementation of the SDGs. The OSSAP-SDG is already upscaling the Conditional Grants Scheme (CGS) acclaimed as a best practice for implementing the development agenda. All the various efforts and initiatives and the successes achieved so far are found useful and are being increased towards the actualization of the targets: inclusiveness, equitable and quality basic education of goal 4 and gender equality goal 5 in Nigeria.

5. Nigeria's MDG report in education

Nigeria's MDGs report (2015) indicated that Nigeria has made appreciable progress in the attainment of MDGs in the last 14 years, particularly, in the area of universal primary education enrolment; achieving gender parity in education goal 2, net enrolment in basic education (as domesticated in Nigeria to mean six years of primary schooling and three years of junior secondary education) had a fluctuating history of an upward trend to the mid-point assessment year.

This positive trend was however halted in later years as a result of the disruptions brought about by the Boko Haram insurgency. The insurgency led to the destruction of many schools with school children constituting a large size of the internally displaced population. Consequently, the net enrolment of 60% in 1995 declined to the end-point net enrolment of 54% in 2013. With respect to primary six completion rate, the trend and end-point status show a strong and significant progress. Nigeria remained mainly on track towards achieving this indicator. The completion rate which stood at 73% in 1993 trended upwards in most of the subsequent years culminating in 82% at the end-point year.

The literacy rate trended marginally upwards in most of the years from 64% in 2000 to 66.7% in 2014. The significant rate of 80.0% achieved in 2008 could not be sustained. There were marked variations across states and between the north and the south. With respect to variations across geopolitical zones, the North-east recorded the highest rate of illiteracy with the insurgency compounding the problem. However, the policy environment at both the

national and sub-national levels is very supportive especially with active and growing collaboration between Nigeria and international development partners.

For goal 3, gender parity in basic education in Nigeria has witnessed strong progress when seen against the prevailing patriarchal culture and practices in most parts of Nigeria. There has been a steady increase in the ratio of girls to boys in basic education in Nigeria. The end-point status of 94% in 2013 was a significant achievement compared to the 82% achieved in 1991. The statistics from both the World Bank and MICS corroborate the high gender parity index recorded by Nigeria. The overall conclusion on goal 3: Strong progress made in gender parity but weak progress in women empowerment. Goal not met. (MDG, 2015).

6. Benefits of educating the girl-child for a just, peaceful and harmonious society and sustainable development

If all the rights of educating the girl child and all other rights for her development, participation, survival and protection as explicitly set out in the legal instruments and policies are implemented will provide immense benefits in the life of the girl-child : socially, economically, culturally and politically, to herself, her society and country. Some of these benefits include:

Educating girls and women is an important step in overcoming poverty. Poverty reduction enables the fulfillment of her right to education and other rights of the girl- child and young women which serve as a powerful tool in making a change in her life; enhances gender equality, self-esteem, empowerment, social wellbeing, leadership, and critical spirit. Girls education is the best investment in a country's development as it is a guaranteed way to increase a country's human capital development, economic productivity, facilitates good health practices, family planning, lower infant and maternal mortality, improve nutritional status better ability to cope with stress and more effective management of chronic diseases and HIV prevention.

Girls who go to school and complete schooling become educated and are able to have more access to more privileged social positions, better-paying jobs, and higher income. Educated girls are empowered, gain a lot of knowledge and skills that will enable them fit into every sphere in life without fear of gender discrimination and neglect and its negative effects thereby making a remarkable change in their lives. Educated girls help themselves, their families, their communities and their countries and encourage other girls to be educated. Education of girls provides more opportunities and choices available to girls and women for development to their full potential. Educated girls as prospective future leaders will be assertive, have a Voice and take critical and right decisions for the development of a just, peaceful, harmonious society and sustainable development.

7. Recommendations/suggestions for equity – a way forward.

There is a need for a strong political will at the three levels of government to fully implement the relevant legal instruments and Declarations and work towards meeting the targets set by the SGDs. Strong commitments and support of all stakeholders, civil societies, the private sector, NGOs parents guardians and support from the international community are needed.

International aid should be increased by all donors and partners and be directed to female child survival, development, participation and protection and promotion of human rights. The WHO should continue its commitment to the abolition of all forms of female genital mutilation.

Governments should increase funding for education and provide scholarships and grants for the education of the girl child ensuring gender sensitive plans and budgets.

Need for more systemic changes and a consolidation of the various interventions of the successful GEP project and other initiatives that have brought about remarkable changes in access of girls to school.

Government's school feeding programme should be established in all schools or institute a meal or commodity voucher scheme for the extremely poor families, enhanced tax relief for low-income families that is linked to the number of children attending school to ensure retention and completion of children in schools.

Need to strengthen the social protection mechanism by establishing a separate Ministry of Child welfare and training the staff on child rights, safety and protection issues in order to ensure that all issues concerning the child especially the girl child are given appropriate attention.

Need for attitudinal change, a re-orientation of societal and parental values and attitudes towards the education of girls would be necessary as there is a negative conception of perceiving girls 'education as **'worthless'** or **'valueless'**. There is a need to invest more in girls and young women in order to increase productivity, sustainable growth, peace and better health of the next generation.

Economic barriers to education should receive urgent attention. The free and compulsory primary education should indeed be free; items such as user fees, levies, and charges demanded from parents should be abolished for children and all girls in primary/secondary schools. The SBMCs, civil society organizations and community-based organizations should monitor closely issues of fees and levies in schools.

Schools should be made safe, peaceful and attractive places for girls by providing adequate security, adequate safe drinking water, sanitation facilities, quality teachers and the necessary enabling environments to ensure that all girls complete primary and secondary school.

The government should stop the terrorist activities of Boko Haram and focus on issues related to education, peace, preventing conflict and violence which have a direct impact on gender equity, inclusion, protection, access, and quality education.

The school curriculum should include various life skills, ICT, entrepreneurial skills to empower girls, to keep them out of poverty etc. and other life-enhancing skills, soft skills such as building self-esteem, assertiveness training, effective communication and decision-making skills, conflict resolution and peace building skills as part of strategies a girl child would need as a prospective leader and these should be enhanced at home and in the community among women groups.

Early marriage should be outlawed and parents should be educated about the benefits of later marriage; illegal child labor and other forms of child abuses, discriminations such as female genital mutilation should be abolished. There is, therefore, need for full enforcement of the relevant policies and laws and punishment of violators.

The need for gender mainstreaming in all policies, curriculum, plans, and activities should be advocated in order to enhance effective implementation on the National Policy on Gender in Basic Education. In addition, an effective monitoring and evaluation framework for tracking progress in the implementation of all the activities prescribed in the gender is needed.

We must ensure that girl- child education is all-inclusive; the disadvantaged groups, the unreached or hard to reach, the nomadic pastoralists, and fisher –folks, the disabled and handicapped groups must benefit from a good and quality education.

We all need to work together as individuals and countries to promote the cause of peace, promote love and harmony in our continent. The educated girl- children and women must promote peace and security on the continent.

There is a need to scale up of existing conditional cash transfers to families that are linked to enrolling children in schools.

Every girl child should be given her right to education as it is the key right that unlocks all other human rights. Teachers should, therefore, avoid gender stereotyping.

8. Conclusion

In this paper, the precedents and antecedents to the international instruments and bill of rights that led to most other local and domestic instruments of rights have been discussed and their relationship to the UBE program in Nigeria is highlighted. A high percentage, 60% of girls dropping out of school do have implications for gender gaps for girl child development in all its manifestations. Socio-cultural, economic, school-based and governance factors etc. causing dropouts have also been highlighted. The various abuses, harms and negative influences faced by the girl child: early marriage, child labor, hawking, sexual exploitations, trafficking, various kinds of discriminations, insurgency etc. and their various effects and consequences which are grave violations of human/child rights have been highlighted as well.

Author assessments of statistics in education in past decades which reveal low enrolments of girls causing gender gaps at education level have been discussed and updated with the progress in equitable access and gender parity in more recent education statistics. Child focused interview responses from a tribunal which indicated discrimination, sexual exploitation and harms on the girl child have also been discussed. Governments` efforts and initiatives, as well as collaborative efforts with international development partners and best practices employed, are yielding good results in progress in access and gender parity as reported in the MDG 2015 end line report. The benefits of educating the girl child in terms of human, political, cultural; social and economic which will lead to her full potential and sustainable development have also been discussed. Recommendations include: ensuring the rights of the girl child (development, participation, survival and protection) via increasing funds for education and more international aid, strong political will and commitments by governments and all stakeholders to educate inclusively and empower girls/women with life-enhancing skills, entrepreneurship, changing mindsets etc. thereby healing the harms and negative influences will lead to achieving a sustainable development in Nigeria and globally.

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APPENDIX 1

Tables I-V show data at Pre-primary, primary, junior/senior secondary and adult education level enrolments by gender and gender parity index- 2013-2016

Table I: National ECCDE and Pre-primary Enrolment by Gender 2013/2014-2015/2016

Yr.	Gender		Total Male/Female	%Female	GPI
	Male	Female			
2013/2014	2,212,616	2,074,132	4,286,748	48.38	1.06
2014/2015	3,383,233	3,366,095	6,749,328	49.87	0.99
2015/2016	2,119,724	2,069,473	4,189,197	49.40	0.97

TableII: National Primary School Enrolment by Gender 2013/2014-2015/2016

Yr.	Gender		Total Male/Female	%Female	GPI
	Male	Female			
2013/2014	13,255,789	12,545,408	25,801,197	48.62	.94
2014/2015	13,393,310	12,049,255	25,442,535	47.35	.89
2015/2016	13,435,940	12,155,241	25,591,181	47.49	.90

TableIII: National Junior Secondary School Enrolment by Gender 2013/2014-2015/2016

Yr.	Gender		Total Male/Female	%Female	GPI
	Male	Female			
2013/2014	3,311,470	2,891,624	6,203,094	46.61	0.87
2014/2015	3,260,109	2,920,182	6,180,291	47.24	0.89
2015/2016	3,093,546	2,745,441	5,838,987	47.0	0.88

Table IV: National Senior Secondary School Enrolment by Gender 2013/2014-2015/2016

Yr.	Gender		Total Male/Female	%Female	GPI
	Male	Female			
2013/2014	2,321,183	1,971,306	4,292,489	45.92	0.84
2014/2015	2,640,335	2,295,404	4,935,739	46.5	1.15
2015/2016	2,417,192	2,058,117	4,475,309	45.98	0.85

Table V: National Adult Basic Literacy Enrolment Gender 2014-2016

Yr.	Gender		Total Male/Female	%Female	GPI
	Male	Female			
2014	637,851	597,041	1,234,892	48.34	0.93
2015	561,234	617,432	1,268,666	48.66	0.94
2016	233,592	187,703	421,295	44.55	0.80
National Total	1,522,677	1,402,176	2,924,853	14.02	0.92

Source: Federal Ministry of Education, (2017).