GIRL CHILD EDUCATION AND ITS IMPACT IN THE MODERN WORLD
(A Case Study of Dr. Ngozi Okonji Iweala of Nigeria)

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Abstract: This paper tries to evaluate the backlash and the importance of training the Girl-child. Educating girls is pivotal to the development of society, despite many global declarations and development goals, and significant effort by the international community, gender disparity in education continues to exist. The problem of the girl child in Africa most especially in Nigeria’s educational system has some socio-economic challenges, which one of the factors that has militated against women's equality in education is the traditional belief that “a woman's place is in the kitchen” and that “a woman should be seen but not heard”. A famous African proverb apprises us, “If you educate a man, you educate an individual, but if you educate a woman you educate a family (nation)”. The paper further examined the concept of girl-child education to be all inclusive, some hindrances to effective girl-child education such as economic factors, sexual violence and abuse, political factors, the school environmental factors and socio-cultural and religious factors were highlighted. Finally in this study, we will have an insight into the life of Dr. Ngozi Okonji Iweala who stood out among women to demonstrate the Impact and Significance of Girl-child education.

Key Words: Girl-child Education, Child abuse, Gender equality, Human rights, Impacts.

1. INTRODUCTION:
In Africa, women are considered as men’s properties or pleasure objects. They are also considered as a ‘machine’ meant for producing children. These situations have resulted in unfair treatment of women especially with regards to education of the male-child than the female child. In the traditional Nigerian society, there exists the belief that women are second class citizen. It should be noted that what Nigerian girls /women are today and what they will be tomorrow depends on what plans Nigeria as a country has for the girl child. According to Oniyi (2008), Nigeria is craving for patriotic citizens to develop their potentials politically, economically, socially and technologically. The actualization of these wonderful goals is dependent on the provision of functional education to the citizenry especially the girls who are future mothers, future teachers of children. I strongly believe that education is a key driver for their development. Education in its general sense is a form of learning which the knowledge, skills, values, benefits and habits of a group of people are transferred from one generation to the next through storytelling, discussion, teaching, training or research. Education has been described as the most important aspect of human development, a key to a successful living, especially girl-child education. Denying the girl-child access to education implies making her a dysfunctional member of the society. Statistics show that many girls are not enrolled in school. The global figure for out of school children is estimated at 121 million, 65 million are girls, with over 80 percent of these girls living in sub-Saharan Africa including Nigeria (UNICEF, 2007). The concern of this paper is that despite the campaign by the Federal Government, United Nation Children Education Fund (UNICEF) and stakeholder in education to improve girl-child education in Nigeria, the level of discrimination on girl-child education is still high. Therefore, this paper seeks to redress the challenges that negate the effectiveness of girl-child education in Nigeria.

Since it is believed that the right place for women is in the kitchen, some parents and others have considered it not necessary to provide equal educational opportunities to women with their male counterparts. In fact, as far as some parents are concerned, any amount of money they spend on their daughter’s education is regarded as a waste. This is because it is believed that they would eventually end up in the kitchen or in somebody’s house, while on the other hand, any amount of money spent on a boy’s education is regarded as useful investment because it is believed that a boy propagates the family name. This indeed has made many families, (especially in the area under research), feel reluctant to send their girls to school.

Examining the case of Dr. Ngozi Iweala, we see clear evidence that Girl-child education has positive returns both to the family and to the society at large. Ngozi Iweala as a woman got a good educational background setup from her parents undermining the gender inequality perceived or generally believed by the society that training a woman is a waste of resources and time they are born to end up in the kitchen of a man's house. She has set History by proving that girl-child education and training has tremendous benefits and values added to the family, society and the world at large.
2. An Insight into Girl-Child Education: Ngozi Okonji Iweala's Biography:

Dr Ngozi Iweala as a woman secured her primary, secondary and tertiary education. The parents acknowledging the importance of education especially girl-child education did not stop at that but also furthered her studies up to PhD level. After acquiring her PhD, she immediately was awarded an International fellowship from the American Association of University Women (AAUW). She proceeded to having a 25-years career at the World Bank in Washington DC as a development economist, rising to the No. 2 position of Managing Director as a woman among men. In 2010 too, she was made chair of the IDA replenishment, the World bank's successful drive to raise $49.3 billion. Taking it from there, she served twice as Nigeria's Finance Minister and also as Minister of Foreign Affairs. She was the first female to hold both positions and during her first term as Minister of Finance under President Olusegun Obasanjo's administration.

In support of her girl-child education, she empowered women and youth with the Growing Girls and Women in Nigeria Programme (GWIN); a gender-responsive budgeting system and the highly acclaimed Youth Enterprise with Innovation Programme (YouWIN). With all these achievements as a woman who was expecting to end up in a kitchen, they started issuing death threats that even led to the kidnap of her own mother. After serving in Nigerian Government, she was made a member of the International Commission on Financing Global Opportunity. As a woman, she founded Nigeria's indigenous opinion-research organisation, NOI –polls. She also founded the Centre for the Study of the Economics of Africa (C-SEA). Ngozi Iweala who had vast knowledge as a woman also in 2020 got appointed by the International Monetary Fund's Managing Director to an external advisory group to provide input on policy challenges. Also in the same year 2020, she was appointed by the African Union (AU) as special envoy to solicit international support to help the continent deal with the economic impact of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Taking it further from here, as if its not enough to show the relevance of a woman, in June 2020 President Muhammadu Buhari nominated her as the country's candidate to be Director-General of the World Trade Organisation (WTO) still standing out as a woman among men and today History has now been written as Dr Ngozi Iweala became the First female African person to ever chair the position of DG -World Trade Organisation. All these are the proves and evidences that Girl-child education is a NECESSITY and not just IMPORTANT.

Education is one of the most critical areas of empowerment for Women Education is central to development and improvement of the nation's welfare. It is a powerful 'equalizer', opening doors to all to lift themselves out of poverty. Below are the roles of girlchild education to Nation Building:

- Increase Women’s Labour Force Participation Rates and Earnings: Girl-child education has been proven to increase income for wage earners and increase productivity for employers, yielding benefits for the community and society.
- Lower Infant and Child Mortality Rates: According to Ocho (2005), women with some formal education are more likely to seek medical care, ensure their children are immunized, be better informed about their children’s nutritional requirements, and adopt improved sanitation practices. As a result, their infants and children have higher survived rates and tend to be healthier and better nourished.
- Poverty Reducing Effects: Girl-child education can vitally contribute to the attainment of the Millennium Development Goals. While two of the goals pertain directly to education, education also helps to reduce poverty, promote gender equality, lower child mortality rate.

3. Human rights:

Education is one of the fundamental rights of individuals. Article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in December, 1949 stipulated that:

- Everyone has the right to education. This shall be free at least in the elementary and primary stages.
- Elementary education shall be compulsory while technical and professional education shall be made generally available.
- Higher education shall be equally accessible to all on the basis of merit.
- Parents have a prior right to choose the kind of education that shall be given to their children (Nwangwu, 1976).
- The child is born helpless and has to rely entirely on parents and other older members of the society to survive and satisfy her growth needs in all their ramifications.
- The degree and quality of participation in the life of the society depends to a large extent on the degree and quality of her education. This will enable her perform her political and other citizenship duties and exercise the rights pertaining thereto effectively.
- Since every citizen benefits from the result of the education of her fellow citizen and since every generation receives its education from an older generation, every generation has a duty to reciprocate by educating the generation that comes after it.
4. Obstacles: Socio-cultural and religious practices, attitudes and behavior

“It is generally believed that the family name is preserved in the lineage of the male child, hence the male child should be better equipped than the female in order to get a good job and provide for the family. It is believed that women are mainly for the purpose of reproduction and domestic activity, hence (there is) no need to educate them, as this is a waste of resources”. “Some tribes believe that women/girls don’t need education, therefore women and girls have no right to get educated. In the Wazaramo tribe for example, most girls end in standard 7, then get married. For graduate females most of the women are busy taking care of their children and husband.”

This has resulted into scarce resources. As a result of this, choice has to be made between whom to send to school. Most often, it is the girl-child that remains at home. Due to poverty, girls get withdrawn from schools so as to help to supplement family income through hawking, trading or even working on the farm so as to support the family. In some cases, the girls are given out as house helps or even sent into early marriage because of a huge bride price. Child marriage is a violation of human rights whether it happens to a girl or a boy, but it represents perhaps the most prevalent form of sexual abuse and exploitation of girls. The harmful consequences include separation from family and friends, lack of freedom to interact with peers and participate in community activities, and decreased opportunities for education. Child marriage can also result in bonded labour or enslavement, commercial sexual exploitation and violence against the victims. Because they cannot abstain from sex or insist on condom use, child brides are often exposed to such serious health risks as premature pregnancy, sexually transmitted infections and, increasingly, HIV/AIDS. We also have the problem of sexual abuse which also hampers the girls from going to school due to this fear of sexual violence; most parents deny their girl-children access to school. Often most parents are scared of sending their female children to school in distance places and would rather keep them at home. According to Obinaju (2014), curricular, textbooks and other materials are usually gender-biased.

5. Barriers to Girls’ Education:

In many countries it is very much clear that the girl is discriminated against from the earliest stages of life, through her childhood. It is more common in countries where men outnumber women and particularly in Third World countries. The gender gap in education can be understood only in the wider context of female disadvantage in India. Gender bias pervades all spheres of life and society and influences political decision making as well as intra- familial attitudes and values. The nature and intensity of this bias varies across economic systems and regions and over the life cycle of individuals within households. This cycle of disadvantage starts before birth and continues into the old age. The problem is further aggravated when class, caste and religious discrimination compound gender disadvantage.

- Illiterate parents or guardians have little awareness of importance of education, particularly for girl child.
- Financial constraints of various types and crisis at home (no parental support, densely populated houses with poor light etc) snub need to study. Other costs such as lost income or household labor also derail girl's chances of attending school. If household money or chores are needed, girls often land up in the paid child labor force or are required to fetch water, find firewood and care for younger siblings or ill family members, while their parents work to make a living.
- Peer pressure from non-school going friends who discourage the pursuit of education.
- Lacks of aspiration as the only professional options are the traditional ones which don't require education.
- Discrimination or perception of discrimination by higher caste peers and teachers at school discourage them to attend school. Perception of the value role and abilities of young girls are bought into the classroom. Girls are often expected to conform to the values and norms of the male dominating society, in which little or no encouragement is provided for them to develop their own aspirations.
- Poverty, both at the state and household level, is a major factor, but so too are cultural and social constraints that interact with poverty to setup barriers to girls' education.

6. Benefits and Importance of Girl-Child Education:

- Future Educated Generations: An African proverb says, “If we educate a boy, we educate one person. If we educate a girl, we educate a family – and a whole nation. By sending a girl to school, she is far more likely to ensure that her children also receive an education. As many claim, investing in a girl's education is investing in a nation.
- Increase Involvement in Political Activities: Educated women are more likely to participate in political discussions, meetings, and decision-making, which in turn promote a more representative and effective government.
- More Productive at Work: An educated woman will also be more productive at work -- and better paid. Indeed, the dividend for educational investment is often higher for women than men. Studies from a number of countries
suggest that an extra year of schooling will increase a woman's future earnings by about 15 per cent, compared with 11 per cent for a man.

- **Improve Socio-economic Growth:** Educated women have a greater chance of escaping poverty, leading healthier and more productive lives, and raising the standard of living for their children, families, and communities. They can share the burden of men in the different walk of life. They can serve the society as teachers, lawyers, doctors and administrators. They can work at banks, hospitals, government offices and large businesses. They can play an important role during war.

- Teachers and educators can be trained to increase their self-awareness on this subject and to educate existing learners, including boys, about gender disparities and the importance of educating girls. These learners may then create further awareness through educating their families and communities.

### 7. CONCLUSION:

The challenges to female education are many and extend beyond the education system into society as a whole. As a result, long-term solutions to educating women must also address societal attitudes and behaviour; hence, the need for the education system to form close linkages with society and be informed by it. The education system can no longer operate in isolation but must integrate and reflect society’s needs and be the medium for transforming society so that women and men can enjoy equal rights. Without education, girls are denied the opportunity to develop their full potentials and play productive role in Nation Building. Although some efforts have been made to improve girl-child education in Nigeria, much still needs to be done if women must realize their potential and fully contribute to the political, socio-economic and technological transformation of the country. Finally, the success of female education and training requires leadership and commitment from all levels of society and the international community. The government may have the primary responsibility for education but every individual has a role to play and a contribution to make in order that female education becomes a reality.

### 8. RECOMMENDATION:

Government at all levels should give more attention to girl-child education. This is because if they are well educated, they will have chances of contributing to nation building. Secondly, Government and non-governmental organization(s) should immediately commence a child-seeking mapping exercise with communities and schools participating to seek out children out of school, determine why they are out of school and bring them back to school. Finally, the Nigerian society should not use socio-cultural and religious factors as yardsticks to relegate the girl-child to the kitchen. The education of the girl-child should be as important as that of the boy-child if not more important as peoples’ opinion assert that when a woman is educated, a nation is educated. Using Dr. Ngozi Okonji Iweala as a lesson to one and a lesson to all, may we all know that girl-child education is a NECCESITY.

### REFERENCES: