

Education and Development in Northern Nigeria

We need to declare a "state of emergency" on Education in Northern Nigeria with a view to doing all that is possible to reverse all the negative trends identified in this area.

(The Chief Servant, Dr. Mu'azu Babangida Aliyu, OON (Talban Minna), Executive Governor of Niger State)

The elites of the North in general, and the leadership in particular, have betrayed the dreams and vision of our late Premier [Sir Ahmadu Bello, Sarkaun Sokoto] with a mortal perfidy that smells of a self-destruct, self-stabbing or willful suicide. How come that the shoes of one man remains too big for the feet of first, six men, then twelve men, and now nineteen men? ...In our admiration and adulation of the man, we sing his praises by day and even want to build monuments to immortalize his name, but by night, we plot with all the devious skills that are antithesis of his strategy, and inimical to the realization of his unique vision.

(Abubakar Gimba)

The book, *Education and Development in Northern Nigeria*, does not only add to the literature on 'Education and Development in Northern Nigeria' but also sustains the debate and points to new options to be considered by policy makers and executors as they grapple with the daunting task of raising the educational standard and development of the Northern States of Nigeria.

(Prof. M.A. Chado)



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✕ **DEDICATION**

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that some day in no distant future
the educational problems of Northern Nigeria
will be permanently overcome

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Feminists Strategies for Girl-Child Equity in Spite of Northern Nigerian Norms and Customary Policies

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Abstract

The girl (the female adolescent) in Northern Nigeria context , to be specific has been grossly placed on the low key as weak sex. She is socially abused; used as hawker, at home; as housemaids, subordinates, and inferior beings. The domestic level is evidently coded and influenced by cultural dictates and policies that affect the right and freedom of the girl-child. Formal Education is liberation for the girl. Awareness develops individual mental talent against conversation supervision, harassment which the girl child faces. With education, the mind becomes broadened. The focus of this article is on the Northern Nigeria girlchild education as the major weapon of enlightenment for fight against domestic abuse, sexual assault/ rape, child marriage, promiscuity and genital mutilations at birth. Measures that could be taken to sensitize and mobilize the girl-child include gender awareness training and work shop involving the media, government and religious/ traditional leaders or scholars.

Introduction

The placement of the girl-child has been very sentimental. The girl-child is used either as a hawker housemaid, inferior being and generally as subordinate in all spheres of life. Hence, the child once a female is deprived of educational privileges.

The ideas in this article aim at supplementing various Nigerian non-profit, non governmental gender movements and organizations such as WARDC (Women Advocates Resource and Development Centre), WORNACO (Women Organization for Representative National Conference), CEWHIN (Centre for Women's Health and Information), WODEF (Women Development Foundation), WOCON (Women Consortium of Nigeria), among others. The main objective of this article is to promote the image of the girl-child in the age of globalization, and to facilitate a re-balancing between girl and boy in terms of human rights, citizenry, and equal social relations. It examines the predicament of the female with a focus at the domestic level, coded and influenced by cultural dictates and policies that hinder the welfare and growth of the female. The northern female girl is used as a major focus. Hence, stereotype examples are drawn from this particular setting. The northern setting used here is Niger State and the scope in Niger is Bida Emirate. The realities of issues that effect the female gender are enumerated here to sensitive and mobilize the female towards pathways that negate the existing stigma and measures that relegate the Nupe female to a second class status. This article, in opposition to patriarchal notions, accentuates the uniqueness of the girl at the domestic level and all other levels of human development the political, educational, social and national levels. The data collated for analysis here; the oral interviews recorded are interpreted and reviewed subsequently. The unique ways in which gender discrimination can be eliminated and equality facilitated between the male and the female are strengthened as imperatives for the individual and the government at large.

Another major aim of this article is to reaffirm the general discovery that gender stereotypicalism is socially and culturally determined i.e the cultural system is characterized in such a way, that women are made subordinates. They are forced to be behind schedule in every developmental activity.

As in many Nigerian settings, gender discrimination in Niger State: Enagi area of Bida begins with the hope for a son instead of

a mere girl-child. The Nupe female tend to live within a patriarchal setting, surrounded by the extended family members, who earmark unprogressive ideas, conditions and attitudes in the traditional set up. The women's cause and curse is, therefore, man's statutory laws; religious laws are both derived from customary laws. The salient policy maker is the culture, in the Nupe ethic setting. The question is how can the Nupe female get better customary and adequate legal rights and best rule out the earlier image that domestically relegates and limits her to the background? Why, for instance, is it a social abuse, in Nupe worldview, belief, religion, ideology and practice to educate the female child? Why are women in the same setting derived of free public movements? And why can't the female also participate in family interactive meetings on matters that affect them? It is noted that the female on the land do most of the hawking. They are denied good employments. The best they can get is to work in the local government secretariat. And even then, they are threatened to be sacked, not promoted, for their adamant refusal to comply to men's request for sexual act in the whistled at market nights. Some men even touch women buttocks and breasts freely. The female as observed in the area is perceived as an inferior being, a slave, a ward, a house girl! The female is so much degraded, merely because her gender is feminine and the society has stigmatized this gender in various dehumanizing and humiliating ways.

By global age, the writer of this article, presupposed the present contemporary society of the geo-political area under observation, on the situation of women. The article delves into sexual policies, as established in the traditional context of Niger area. The male-centre social and psychical structures of Niger area, consists of biological men, as enforcing agents, for these gender unequal structures. Women are oppressed, marginalized and at the same time, made to become ironical privileged to escape into work and self-development in the area. Hence, many women in the area turn full time farmers, cloth weavers, rice processors etc. dynamism has aided and expanded women's

position over the last century in the Niger environment. This is a negation to the discriminating history of feminism within both family life and society at large. Over the years, the Enagi Bida female has used self recovery strategies stated here for negating the tag placed on her by customary policies. She develops herself and advances forward. This research detects that, marxism and feminism have a premise within a large framework of social reality. The same culture that harbors feminist perception, offers challenges leading to domestic, economic and political changes. The marxian theory which says humans are defined by the work they do or do not, becomes relevant here. Work is the means by which people construct and change their material and imaginative worlds. The area of focus here is not an exceptions.

In Niger-state, each sex is connected with procreation functions. One of the sexes, i.e the male sex is being seen as superior to the other. The thinking of the society is reflected in the society. The beliefs can be located in the traditional and religious practices of this set of people within Niger State of Nigeria. The two institutions of religion and tradition are adapted to cultural dictates used to discriminate against girls in the Bida Local Government Area. In the said society, part of the reason why the females are subordinated to their male counterparts is that the girl-child is forced into under age marriage. This is because she is considered as a weaker sex. A Niger State man will for a further example, adorn his wife on the ground that she gives birth to female children. The man even goes ahead to marry more wives, as a result of this. Spending on the girl child is considered a waste, in the communities that constitute the North. Hence, the girl-child falls a victim of having to live with custodians other than her parents. Similarly, she becomes used as housemaid and street hawkers. Such neglected? Female take to prostitution, during hawking in attempt to re-ascertain her lost joy, love and happiness. Also, wife beating and maltreatment of women is condoned by the Niger Nupe men. Some of the men cause physical injury on their wives. They inflict pain and mental insecurity on the female sex. And this will be

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better coded under the following sub-titles that expose the categories of the female and also the various ramifications of discrimination against the female. This article reviews cause and types of problems on the women, based on some fieldwork findings and realities on ground. It suggests further strategies for combating the major sexual hindrance.

Various Facets of Inequality

(a) Domestic Discrimination against the Girl-child in Bida, Niger State

Olowoyeye, (1998)² opines that:

The family constitutes the first world of the child. The home is the first agency of the child's education. The public without the home function, will have no foundation upon which have no foundation upon which blind.

Despite child custody and total family guardiaship as part of the responsibilities of women's role. Women generally should demand for their economic rights in addition to the above, since, they gradually became the sole maintaner of the family, said to be owned by the man. For instance, there is no longer any provision by the Niger State men for the under listed family essntials: shelter, food medical expenses, clothing, education, etc. The women become the bredwinner in the home. Many Niger men leave their families in places rather too far from them for a number of months and weeks on the pretence that working in the urban areas will fetch them more money and that, it is too costly having a family, in the said recent urban cities: accommodation and feeding wise. The actual reason for staying like a bachelor, however, is the self freedom that enables the men to mess around with other ladies while their obedient wives are kept in isolation at the background locality. Prolonged absence on the part of the men, adds to their wives problems, mentally and psychologically. Failure to provide sexual satisfaction would be the emotional distress by the man, in addition to loneliness. This is why perhaps a young and newly married lady quickly fades out like an old cargo train. Women are said to be nose-pokers and interrupters as a

result of certain historical recounts, formulated in story telling. One of these stories thematically refers to a very inquisitive woman who nosed into chieftaincy decisions. For this reason, witchcraft became associated with women in Niger State. These stories gave room for male chauvinism to become expressed, established and sustained in the Niger State customary practices. The society constructed a world of the male. Bida land, therefore, the case is that of gender conflict generated from the political struggle of a woman who thought she needed to participate in decisions that will affect the entire citizenry, though they are decisions meant to be taken by the male-folk only³. The woman faces the rigour of pregnancy, child delivery, child care; she cook, food, fetches water, farms, weed grass, harvests crops, fetches firewood and looks after domestic animals like goats, hen, cock, tortoise, duck, etc., sells crops and petty goods in the market, goes for shopping on bare feet with loads on head. She mends torn clothes, washes plates and wash clothes of both her husbands and children. The female in this area, moulds-mud bricks for community school buildings meant for male use only.

(b) Female Genital Mutilation of the Girl-Child at Adolescent Age

Gender discrimination varies at home, in open communal areas and in other public places. Gender discrimination has, thus, been categorized here according to types and as relevant to the Niger female situation. At birth, the Nupe society, like most Nigerian societies, wishes that the child yet to be born should be a male. Women who produce only female children are considered as incompetent beings, and are as a result not permitted to have much say in serious matters. They are denied affection.

Female gender mutilation varies and is widespread in Nupe land. It is the amputation of the top of the vagina clitoris. The belief in Nupe society on this, is that such clitoris amputation will curtail female promiscuity and prostitution. Genital mutilation is considered as a treatment of frigidity and emotional excesses. Modern experience and medical experts

have, however, revealed that it is rather a denial or reduction of the female sexual desire and emotional upliftment. The cutting is done by traditional women and birth attendants in Bida, Niger State.

Our tradition has been an adaptable element of social change. In civilized and global age, Therefore, there is the need to moralise, reinterpret, reorganize the girl-child predicament in the hands of barbarism, such as exemplified in sexual mutilation.

(c) Denial of Education of the Northern Girl-Child: A Case Study of Bida Female

Education is the process that provides the young with knowledge, skills, values, enlightenment necessary for any society especially a developing one like ours. It could be formal, semi formal or informal. Emphasis is on formal education here. The best that a Nupe girl is believed to be capable of doing is cooking good food, and helping in the household jobs. The men prefer to educate the male children rather than the female for two major reasons. In the first place, it is believed that it is the male that will carry forth the family name and the female will end up in her husband's household to be further controlled by the man. World of men is specially gender centred one. The females are deliberately left uneducated for the fear of their being enlightened, hence, exposed to their rights. The fear is that an educated female may refuse husband's control. Therefore, the few educated Nupe female are not given the opportunity to work in government or public offices for the same fear of their being self-reliant.

Nigerian females especially in the area under focus lack formal education and this has served as the main constraint to their effective participation in societal activities and subsequent national issues. Education is a vital force for women empowerment. Without functional education, social and economic emancipation of every citizen, especially, women, would be difficult. A girl without education will be narrow minded and less intelligent. She will remain disorganized and

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unpleasant not only to herself but to the community at large. And this is the situation at present. The need arises for a search for solutions to this impending problem. Good education is one of the problem solving strategies. It creates awareness.

(d) Public and Legal Injustice Against the Nupe-Niger Girl

In the public, the Northern girl is compounded with limited access to structural policies and citizenship resources. Nupe women are not allowed to participate in the local politics because of certain cultural, social, religious and legal factors all of which restrict them against public appearances. There are society deliberately implanted factors that militate against women's involvement in partisan politics in the area. Hence, women in Bidaland are denied governance and democratic rules, which the society claims to operate. The local Government considers democratic violence, for instance, as a family problem about which little can be done. Ezeigbo T.A.(1990)⁴ observes that: this generally allows for the persistence of violence, harassments, verbal and physical assaults; hence, women suffer in the laws themselves. For examples, the Islamic law is male-forced and dominated and perhaps a mis interpretation of Allah's good intention on the freedom of human, gender notwithstanding. It is, therefore, apparently clear that it is the customary and traditional dictations, regarding the female, as a weaker sex, that is being codified in the Muslim family law in Nupe land or perhaps the presentation of the laws by the male-chauvinistic minds. The application of the existing laws on the land is faulty and oppressive. At the dissolution of marriage for example, the wife must refund the bride price even though she was not given the dowry. A man can unilaterally divorce a woman by mutual consent, but a woman cannot divorce a man unless through the court of law. And even she must have genuine reasons to be granted her divorce request.

The Nigerian constitution is itself discriminatory. For further instance, it is in the masculine gender. The language use in the constitution is made domineering. And this exemplifies the

stereotype thinking that women are after thoughts and not equal citizen and do not have the rights of the male citizens.

Conclusion and Imperative Strategies

The case of the girl child in the North is similar to other Nigerian settings. As enumerated in this article, the girl in the North is highly discriminated against in all spheres of life. However, it is hoped that this contribution to gender issues will inform northern policies, norms and customary laws to change the female conception.

Programmes should be designed for the area, for the sake of the girl-child safety, security and awareness. All the findings here, in term of the oppression and educational debasement, house girl-maid, housewives peculiar to the area, under aged forceful marriage, custody guardianship, lack of moral and financial support which are all aspects of discrimination against the girl-child on the land should be discouraged. Also, other public literacy enlightenments could help to safeguard against the persistence or even total deterioration of the girl child condition, as the male advance in their application of domineering and oppressive attitudes.

Gender awareness training and gender analysis on the male-centric biases in law or constitution and society would help to make the people's mind open (both male and female). Training for the religious and traditional leaders and scholars in the area is, therefore, necessitated, since they are the authorities for the informal injustice mechanisms. They could be made to justify mechanisms, since the general cultural and religious beliefs themselves are that, wrong injunctions are punishable by God. Women organizations should further work towards female (girl child) empowerment, education and liberation and extend this to remote areas in the northern zone of the country. The police, lawyers and other authorization male-chauvinists need to be trained. There is, in fact, the need to overhaul the present legal institutions. The mobilization of strategies in addition to this over hauling would aid effective participation of the girl-child in

the on-going civil rule programmes. The male should also develop positive inclination towards women and erase gender inequality in the Nupe socio-cultural and socio-political terrain. The women in Nupe setting can also be seen as their male counterparts as equals and as superior beings or first class citizens. And the media (radio and television) can also be powerful sources of awareness change in the female status quo, new awareness and re-orientation of women would help to erase female discrimination in Nupe land. Hence, women can say although they are women, they are also contributors to the progress of the community. In his alternative suggestions to the notions of feminists subjectivity, Agee T., (1996)⁵ sums up every opinion thus:

The gendered dimensions of restructuring the global and national communities extend far beyond the economic. Instead, the current round of restructuring entails a fundamental redrawing of the familiar boundaries between international and national, the state and economy, and the so called "public" and private.

Other dimensions that can be used to curb both private and public discrimination are underlisted below:

- (i) Education of the Girl-child in northern communities should be promoted.
- (ii) Empowerment through workshops in northern language of the girls underlisted; to enable them make informed and autonomous decisions about their lives:
 - To make them understand that their bodies belong to them and to no other person, and hence, that they should take the responsibility of protecting their dignity, bodily integrity and personal hygiene.
 - Learn effectively how to articulate and defend their rights and their physical and emotional needs.
 - Challenge unequal power relations.
- (iii) A change in traditional gender roles; the girls should be involved in communal activities like male-like recognised

roles.

- (iv) Resources should be provided for the distressed female in the area
- (v) Changes in issues affecting women have to start from the family level, before it can spread to the wider society.

Naturally, the girl-child's expectation in the years to come should be that these obstacles in their development, would be addressed and made outdated, so that they can fully belong to the community of their birth and be partners with men. This can be possible through the girl-child empowerment in the northern area which has been identified as a major strategy to be used to enable the female folk enjoy their rights and have equal opportunity to participate in the life beyond their community.

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