

# GIRL-CHILD EDUCATION IN NORTH-EAST ZONE OF NIGERIA AND QUALITATIVE LEADERSHIP FOR SUSTAINABLE NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN A GLOBALISED ECONOMY

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## **Abstract**

This paper advocates for ways to tackle the socio-cultural cum political barriers preventing the development and growth of girl-child education in North-East geo-political zone. It notes that, for many decades, factors such as poverty, child marriage, government neglect and, recently, insecurity occasioned by Boko Haram insurgency have bedeviled the girl-child education in the zone. Reports indicate that while over 10.5 million Nigerian children of school age are out of school, the North East alone has 39.8 percent of that number, which are mostly girls. This situation, no doubt, poses a dangerous threat to socio-economic development as well as the security of the zone. Efforts should therefore be made not only to give the girl-child quality education but also to increase the percentage of girls that attend school in the zone. It is in this regard that the nation can achieve the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

**Keywords:** girl-child, education, qualitative leadership, development, sustainable development

## **Introduction**

Today, the girl-child education in the North-East geo-political zone of Nigeria which before now had not been taken seriously is in danger of being decimated. To a large extent, successive administrations in the zone should be blamed for the sorry state of the girl-child project in the zone. They paid only lip service to girl-child education. The point to be made, therefore, is that the girl-child education had a very poor foundation before the deadly Boko Haram sect emerged. The emergence of Boko Haram, especially during the hostile stage which began in 2009, has exacerbated the situation. This could be seen from the fact that the sect opposes any education which is perceived to be western, especially education for girls (Momah, 2013).

Since 2009, the activities of the deadly sect have succeeded in disrupting and grounding educational system in the zone. The evidence of this assertion becomes very clear when it is seen that the girl-child is used as a suicide bomber; her school and

home are constantly under attack; she is frequently abducted and internally displaced; and she now lives in internally displaced camps (IDPs) which is not her original home. The girl-child, along with her teachers, is on daily basis, traumatized which now makes her afraid to attend school. She actually desires and prays to be alive before going to school. The girl-child intermittently asks herself about her life and school but she never gets an answer. She has become downcast, dejected and hopeless.

The worrisome and hopeless situation of things in the zone could be seen from the rising number of out-of-school children. Reports indicate that while over 10.5million Nigerian children of school age are out of school, the North-East alone has 39.8 percent of the number of children (mostly girls) that are out of school (Zubie-Okolo, 2018). This outrageous number of children (mostly girls) out of school poses a grave danger to the development of the zone. Many reasons that include poverty, ignorance, early marriage, generations of inept leadership, corruption, insecurity, etc., have been advanced as the main causes of the problem. By implication, therefore, there are “wars” to be fought. The first “war” is how to defeat the Boko Haram sect overwhelmingly and not “technically” so as to restore peace and prevent further violations of children’s rights. The second “war” is how to restore the education of the girl-child so that she can now attend school freely without any element of phobia.

The achievement of the above-mentioned two goals calls for qualitative leadership in the zone. The leadership needed is such that will help to create a peaceful and enabling environment which will enable the girl-child to be back to school without any fear, threat of fear or violence. It is vital to note that once there is qualitative leadership in the zone as well as in Nigeria the dream of achieving the goals and target of the 2030 agenda for sustainable national development will be realized.

## **Clarification of Concepts**

### **Girl Child**

According to Black’s Law Dictionary (9<sup>th</sup> Edition) a child is any person (girl or boy) under the age of majority. The age of majority here refers to the status of a girl or boy who has attained the age of eighteen (18) years. At this age, she is entitled to full civic rights and considered legally capable of handling her own affairs. This, however, is not the case with the girl-child in the North-East zone of Nigeria. Here, the girl-child is forced into marriage before the legal age of eighteen (18) years. She is forced to be a suicide bomber and also forced to marry against her wish to Boko Haram captors

(abductors). She, in most cases, suffers sexual, physical, emotional and other types of violence and abuse.

## **Education**

The word education, according to historical records, is derived from the Latin words, *educare*, meaning “to bring up” or “to nourish”, and *educere*, meaning to “bring forth or draw out” (Ravi, 92015). According to Plato, the ideal state ruled by the philosopher king was made possible through an elaborate and rigorous scheme of education. He, therefore, defines education “as an instrument of moral reform, because it aims to mould and transform human souls” (Mukherjee & Ranaswamy, 2011). Aristotle, on his part, defines education as “the creation of a sound mind in a sound body”. To Dewey, as cited in Ravi (2015), education is the process of living through a continuous reconstruction of experiences. It is the development of all those capacities in the individual which will enable him to control his environment and fulfill his possibilities. Further, Ezeani (2005) asserts that the goal of education is to assist in socialization or to reproduce a culture. Education, to Alice and Ndu (1991), and Nwozor and Ocho (2003), is a life-long process of acquisition of experiences which starts from the cradle and ends in the grave.

From the above definitions, we can deduce that:

- i. Education is capable of inculcating the right values to the child (girl or boy); therefore, it is the key to the realization of a new social order in any society.
- ii. Education can inculcate the habits that would make it possible for the individuals to control their environments rather than merely to submit to them. This is because education helps in all-round development of the child.

## **Leadership**

The study of leadership has a long history which dates back to the Plato’s Republic in 400BC. Many social commentators all agree that leadership is a critical determinant of high performance in any organized group. Regretfully, however, there is less agreement on the definition of the concept of leadership. Each analyst or commentator usually presents definitions which reflect his individual world-views. To Chatuvedi (2006) leadership is the capacity in a person or in a group of persons to inspire confidence and to guide and govern the followers. On his own part, Ogbeidi (2012) defines leadership as a body of people who lead and direct the activities of a group towards a shared goal”. While some conceptual disagreements prevail, one definition accepted by many experts is that leadership is a process whereby one individual influences other group members towards the attainment of defined organizational

goals (Yukl, 2002). This definition contains three important aspects: (i) leadership involves influence; (ii) leadership involves goal attainments; and (iii) leadership requires followers. Leadership, essentially, is people-centred. It is also very vital because a group abhors confusion that may arise where there is no leader; that is where a leadership vacuum is created. This is because in the absence of leadership what you have is a crowd.

### **Qualitative Leadership**

Qualitative leadership is all about how good the leadership of an organization is, in practice. It is the leadership that is sound, objective and effective in achieving the desired results. It is one that meets the bench-mark or standard that is expected and which will give rise to growth and development of an organization or country. It is a leadership in which the performance index falls above mediocre performance.

### **Development**

Many scholars define the term development differently. In most cases, each definition reflects the person's worldview and idiosyncrasies. To some scholars, the term development must be defined and analysed relative to time, place and circumstances, and, thus, dismiss any universal formulae. To Mclean and Mcmillan (2003), development is a normative concept referring to a multi-dimensional process. To Ake (1972), any definition of development should be human-based and should be analyzed taking into consideration the interactiveness of man and his society. Rodney sees development as a process that involves physical development which includes man-made goods produced by use of technology as well as cultural development which comprises values, norms, traditions and also personal development that includes the psychological directions of individuals (Akalla, 2009). Nnoli (1981) asserts that "development is a dialectical phenomenon in which the individual and society interact with physical, biological factors for the betterment of the individual as well as the society". Development is, thus, human based.

From the above definitions we can deduce that development is a multi-faceted concept. First, it connotes, among other things, processes as well as changes in all aspects of man's life. In other words, it refers to all round development of a person as well as a nation. Secondly, it connotes increased general social welfare that embraces socio-political efficiency as well as changes in the social structure, spiritual and cultural attainments, personal dignity, respect for the rule of law as well as group

esteem. Thirdly, for there to be development, man must interact with his environment. All aspects of development are very important and inter-related.

### **National Development**

According to Edeh and Ogbu (2002), “National development encompasses the acts and processes of developing a nation. It is a process of socio-cultural, economic, environmental as well as political change which a nation experiences from time to time. It is people oriented and its success is evaluated in terms of the impact it has had in improving the lot of the masses (Modupe, 2015). National development thus deals with all round development of a nation and all aspects of national development are very important and inter-related. Consequently, where one aspect of national development is dysfunctional other aspects will be affected (Aggarawal, 2014).

### **Sustainable Development**

The term sustainable development is a United Nations (UN) initiative which recognizes the fact that it is only when national development is achieved and sustained (maintained) that a country moves forward. It is a development which when achieved and sustained will continue for a very long time before being changed. That is, it is development which is durable.

The concept was first used by the United Nations World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED) under the chairmanship of Brundtland in 1987. In its report entitled “Our Common Future”, the commission came up with an almost universally accepted definition of sustainable development: “development that meets the needs of the present, without compromising the ability of the future generations to meet their own needs (UN, 1987). Initially, sustainable development was associated with three primary factors (also called pillars) comprising: (i) the environment, (ii) social environment, and (iii) economic environment (Obanya, 2004). Later, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organizations (UNESCO) added culture as the fourth pillar (policy area) (Keith, 2011).

In a nut-shell, the initiative which came into focus following the unfinished job of the United Nations Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) of 2000-2015 was mandated to end poverty, promote peaceful and inclusive societies, create better jobs and tackle environmental challenges globally (Okolo, 2016). Specifically, its focus is on zero hunger (ending poverty), good health and well being, quality education, gender equality, etc.

## **Theoretical Framework of Analysis**

To fully understand the topic under study, theoretical framework of analysis is needed. Here, the failed state theory which has its origin following the collapse of the Pax Romano in the defunct Roman Empire about 2,000 years ago will be referenced. Around 27BC-180 AD, during the time of Emperor Trajan, the Roman Empire was at its greatest, being an embodiment of peace and laws. The peace, security and welfare provided by the Roman State were superb. This, however, did not continue for a long time because decline set in as a result of internal strife as well as barbarian raids especially by the Goths. This no doubt led to the failure of the Roman State (Prescott, 1982).

With the verdict of history stated above, we hereby list the underlying assumptions of the exponents of the failed state theory as follows:

- i. That there are some essential attributes that constitute a state.
- ii. That these basic attributes constituting a state are anchored on the ability of the leadership to maintain peace, security and welfare of the people, without which the state may be said to have suffered atrophy.
- iii. That the maintenance of peace, security and provision of welfare services are all part of the social contracts which the citizen reached with the state; as such, the state must perform its part of the contract.

These assumptions are also provided in Section 14(2) (b) of our 1999 Constitution (as amended). On the authority of the section, the essential indices to ascertain whether a state succeeded or failed are the provision of security and welfare to the people all of which are the primary purpose of government. Based on the provision of the 1999 Constitution it may be said that a state which is not able to secure and maintain peace, security and welfare for the people to a large extent is a failed state (Nwabueze, 2018). It is based on this constitutional provision plus other factors to be identified and discussed below that qualify Nigeria to be in the class of failed states.

This conclusion, as reached above, is succinctly corroborated by Rotberg, as cited in Achabe (2012), who proffers that a failed state is one “which is unable to perform the duties on several levels: where violence cascades into an all-out internal war, where standards of living massively deteriorate, where the infrastructure of ordinary life decay, and where the greed of rulers overwhelm their responsibilities to better their people and their surroundings”. The situation in the North-East Zone of Nigeria is presently characterized by economic deprivation, endemic corruption, social

inequalities, high degree of insecurity, poverty and penury, massive unemployment, selective justice, exclusive democracy, infrastructural deficit, early child marriage (oftentimes, forced), destitution, illiteracy, etc. All the above short-comings point to the fact that government, at all levels, has failed. This did not start today as there had been cumulative failures by successive governments in the past (Hassan, 2018).

Borun (2003), in an attempt to provide an answer for the failure by successive administrations in the North-East Zone of Nigeria, posits that “economic deprivation and corruption produce and exacerbate financial and social inequities in a population and this in turn fuel political instability”. We can therefore state that the harmful practices facing the girl-child in the zone, which include insecurity problems occasioned by Boko Haram insurgency and herdsmen menace in some states in the zone; destitutions (for instance the scourges of almajirism); and corruption are all direct products of bad leadership, not only in the zone but at the central government. Again, the abduction of about 411 Chibok and Dapchi girls, especially the non-release of Liya (Lear) Sharibu, point to the fact that governments at all levels in the zone have failed, especially the central government which has monopoly over the security agencies and the use of arms and ammunitions in the country. It shows that Nigeria may not meet up with the global goals on education.

### **Barriers to the Education and Development of the Girl-Child in the North-East Zone of Nigeria**

From the time the Western type of education was introduced into Northern Nigeria (during the colonial era) until the present time, the girl-child has not had it easy. Her desire to be educated has always been hindered by some barriers. Some of these barriers as well as their consequences are here discussed under the following headings: Child marriage; Government neglect; Poverty; and Boko Haram Insurgency

#### **Child Marriage**

Child marriage is a marriage contract between a girl-child under the age of majority (i.e. who has not reached the age of 18 years) and an adult male. Such marriage is not backed by the law. According to the United Nations Population Fund Activities (UNPFA), child marriage is “a human rights violation”. It is a harmful cultural practice that threatens the rights of the girl-child to education and livelihood. Factors that lead to child marriage are both economical and cultural.

Child marriage is often a strategy for economic survival. This is because in most cases an indigent parent will see it as a cost-reducing measure since such a girl-child married early will no more be catered for or assisted in any way. Again, education for girls was and still is considered unimportant since girls do not pay back what was invested in them because of marriage. Thirdly, many families do not have the required resources to fund the education of their children, especially the girls. In addition, many illiterate parents regard their daughters as commodities to be sold through payment of bride price. They see them as being fragile and subsequently conclude that child marriage is the only way to provide for their daughters' future. They reason that once the girl is married her husband shall be responsible for her upkeep as well as general care. To some, such marriage helps to prevent the birth of bastard children.

Culturally, beginning from the pre-colonial era, the people of the north-eastern Nigeria are used to the practice. They permit a culture that encourages families to give out their tender female children in marriage (Egbu, 2018). This cultural practice has continued because of the high level of poverty and gender inequality. The parents that indulge in making their daughters marry early do not usually consider the consequences of their actions on the education of such children. For instance, girls who marry early have an increased chance of being divorced very early. This is because the budding opportunities that abound for such girls (under 18 years) are not allowed to be realized. Again, the girl who is not of age before getting married may lack the necessary experience required in family matters. Equally, because such a girl is pressed or forced in some cases, the girl is not allowed to choose whom and when to marry, the marriage contract is based on forced consent. This eventually leads to sexual abuse, the result of which may be divorce and the disruption of her academic pursuit.

Another issue to be considered is the health challenge that could result from child marriage. The prevalence of vasino vaginal fistula (VVF) has a direct co-relation to early childbirth which in turn is mostly obtained in cases of under-age marriages. This too disrupts the education of the girl-child. Thirdly, child marriage is capable of effectively ending the girl's childhood and also curtailing her ability to acquire quality education. Girls who marry early in most cases become pregnant which now makes them drop out from school and may never go back, thereby making it impossible for them to be well educated in life (Duru, 2018). Where the child is prevented from being educated her future as well as the future of her community or zone looks gloomy.

## Poverty

Over time, the term 'poverty' has been defined differently by scholars. Idakwoji in Mojiohola (2015) defines poverty as "economic insufficiency as well as socio-political deprivation and marginalization". Kankwenda (2003), on the other hand, sees poverty as "a multidimensional phenomenon influenced by a wide range of factors such as lack of access to income earning and productive activities as well as lack of essential social services. The World Bank (2001) describes poverty as a situation of low income or inadequate income to meet the basic things of life like food, water, shelter etc. According to Scott and Marshall (2005), poverty "is a state in which resources, usually material, but sometimes cultural, are lacking". To them, there are two dominant concepts of poverty: absolute and relative. Poverty, in absolute terms, refers to a state in which the individual lacks the resources of subsistence. On the other hand, poverty, in relative terms, refers to the individual's or a group's lack of resources when compared with that of other members of the society – in other words, their relative standard of living. Poverty can however be said to exist when the citizen(s) find it difficult to meet his (their) basic needs due to some socio-economic cum political and cultural factors at play.

What then are the causes of poverty in the North-East zone of Nigeria? A look at the ownership of the means of production (and distribution) as well as the social relations of production will help put the question in the right perspective. The capitalist mode of production in practice in the zone polarizes the people into two: a very small group of elites (the bourgeoisie, the Alhajis) who monopolises the available means of production (and distribution) and the vast majority of low income earners, the proletariat (i.e. the masses, the talakawas and the almajiris), who have no means of production. The relationship between the two classes i.e. ruling class and the proletariats (the masses) is that of domination, subjection, exploitation and antagonism (Ake, 1981). Successive governments in the zone have milked and sucked the followers (masses) dry and they achieve their selfish purpose using the resources of the zone. These predators are everywhere: in the executive, judiciary, legislature, religious organizations, etc.

Poverty usually has some grave negative consequences on the individual as well as the nation. It debilitates the people, rendering them unable to assert themselves politically, economically and independently of wealthy patrons (god fathers). For instance, the poverty of the ideology of the masses, the down-trodden, usually militates against the effectiveness of their desire to be independent and free. Poverty

is cancerous and as such kills in millions (ogbunigwe). The reason for this is because poverty has a multiplier effect, and it is a well known fact that a hungry man is an angry man. Poverty is capable of breeding corruption, infidelity, inequalities, socio-political instability and upheavals such as anarchy, restiveness, insurrection, confusion, rioting, revolution etc. Under this type of situation, which prevails in the North-East Zone of Nigeria, the goals of education in the zone cannot be achieved. Consequently, the girl child education in the zone continues to suffer while the government, by extension, finds it hard achieving its goal; as entrenched in the sustainable Development Goals 4 and 7 of 2030.

### **Government Neglect**

A review of the educational sector of North-East geo-political zone will reveal a sector that has been neglected for so long a time; a sector that has suffered a great deal of reluctant attention from the successive administrations which has turned the sector intractable and moribund. This is a zone where its leaders had for a long time not encouraged education in general and girl-child education in particular. As a result, the barriers facing the girl child education such as poverty, child marriage, destitution, hunger, insecurity etc remain unaddressed. Instead of finding solutions to these problems successive leaders in the zone rather chose to play, “the emperors of Rome”; they play fiddle while the zone burns. It is against this back-drop that El-Rufui (2017) posits that “the declining state of education in the North was because of lack of sincerity and honesty of past leaders”. Further he asserts that “past leaders neglected public schools despite the fact that they benefitted from public schools”.

### **Boko Haram Menace**

Today, the girl-child education in the North-East Nigeria appears to be dysfunctional, in a complete mess, and the Boko Haram menace has a great part to play in that. From 2009, the Boko Haram insurgents intensified their attacks and the brand of terror it introduced this time was deeper in strategy and sophistication than it was at the beginning (Afaha, 2014). Mohammed Yusuf’s leadership which was peaceful initially later turned violent. The reason for this change in operation and strategy was because Yusuf was killed extra-judicially while in police custody in Maiduguri (Agbo, 2017). It is from this stage that the sect now came up with the idea of destroying the educational system in the region with the explicit goal of denying girls the right to education. This, to a large extent, agreed with their name “Boko-Haram” which means opposition to all and any education that is perceived to be western, particularly for girls. It shows their hatred for Western education which they see as being fake

education, that is, “a margar boko” meaning “fake bride” in Hausa marriage customs (Agwuele et al, in Uchendu, 2012).

The socio-economic consequences of the activities of the sect group on girl-child education are many. First, the sect’s activities have crippled the socio-economic activities of the zone. For instance, the deadly activities have led to massive destruction of educational institutions and other infrastructures. Since 2009, over 2,295 teachers have been killed and 19,000 persons (more than 60 percent are children) have been displaced. Again almost 14,000 schools have been destroyed with the majority unable to open because of extensive damage or because they are in areas that cannot be assessed easily by the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) (Olanrewaju, 2018).

There has been an increase in the out-of-school children phenomenon in the zone. According to the Executive Secretary Universal Basic Education Commission, (UBEC), Dr. Hamid Bobboyi about 8.7 million to 13.5 million pupils in Nigeria are out of school. According to him, the North East and North-West geo-political zones accounts for 58 percent and 51 percent of these children respectively that never attended schools or attend only quranic schools (Adesulu, 2018).

The activities of Boko Haram sects have made many qualified teachers and academics to flee from North East zone and there is no doubt that the dearth of highly qualified personnel with the education sector is jeopardizing the achievement of the desired educational goals in the zone. Also, members of the National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) now dread serving in the six states of the zone.

Under the social contract, the leaders of government have sworn to uphold and defend the constitution of the land. This, however, is yet to be done. For example, the detention of Lear (Liya) Sharibu (a secondary school student) by the Boko Haram commanders because of her faith is a serious violation of her right to freedom of worship which is guaranteed by the 1999 constitution (as amended).

Today, parents dread sending their children to Unity schools. The experience of Chibok and Dapchi girls’ abductions has caused many parents to think twice before sending their girl-children to Unity schools. Should this trend continue, Unity Schools may, in future, be closed since students’ lives as well as their properties may not be safeguarded in such schools.

## **Conclusion**

For a long time the girl-child education in the North East zone of Nigeria has been neglected. It has faced series of socio-economic, cultural and political barriers all of which prevent the achievement of its goals. Some of these barriers include early marriage of the girl-child; poverty, government neglect; as well as insecurity problems arising from the Boko Haram menace. To correct the anomaly, government at all levels in the zone must be alive to its primary responsibility of safeguarding the lives and properties of its citizens. They should encourage and improve the education of the girl-child by tackling all the barriers decisively. In this way, the underlying challenges confronting the girl-child education will be addressed so that the gap in the number of out-of-school children, particularly, girls, will be bridged.

## **Recommendations**

For girl-child education to grow and develop in North-East geo-political zone of Nigeria there is the need to tackle the various challenges discussed frontally. In essence the barriers facing the girl-child education should be removed. To achieve this objective, we recommend as follows:

1. Government at all levels should develop policies and programmes that would support girl-child education, protect the girls from sexual abuse of any kind and instill confidence in them.
2. Effort should be made to ensure that rulers at all levels rule within the framework of the rule of law. This is because sustainable development can only take place if a predictable and transparent framework of rules and institutions exist for the conduct of private and public businesses (World Bank Report, 1992).
3. Effort should be made to give the girl-child quality education through adequate funding. Such support will aid development, check the rate of dropout, give rise to knowledge-based and knowledge-driven economy. Such education which will be inclusive of all genders will no doubt help the nation achieve the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (DSGS).
4. Effort towards the eradication of the Boko Haram menace should be intensified. This is necessary since it has created a situation in which local farmers as well as other citizens are terrified. This has implications for the girl-child whose poor parents or guardians, mainly farmers, now find it hard to pay her school fees.

5. Effort should be made to protect the girl-child from the harmful practice of early marriage that threatens her rights to education and livelihood. The girl-child should be empowered while her rights to education should be guaranteed.
6. Leaders at all levels in the zone are advised to have faith in education. This is because education being the key to development can transform human destiny, as well as act as a catalyst for the realisation of the girl-child's budding opportunities. It is also capable of uplifting her ideological values and individual world-views.
7. Government at all levels as well as private individuals and non-governmental agencies should endeavour to increase their social investment schemes. Such venture will help address social vices, reduce the rate of destitution (e.g. almajiri menace or school absenteeism) and increase the confidence level of the girl-child, and in the long run reduce the rise in percentage of out-of-school children.

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