

CHAPTER THREE

THE EFFECT OF GENDER INEQUALITY AND EARLY MARRIAGE ON GIRL-CHILD EDUCATION IN IKOT EKPENE SENATORIAL DISTRICT

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INTRODUCTION

The recent wave of globalization has greatly improved the lives of women worldwide, particularly the lives of women in the developing nations. Nevertheless, women remain deprived in many areas of life, including education, employment, health and civil rights. According to the U.S. Agency for International Development and the World Bank, 57% of the 72 million primary school aged children who do not attend school are females. Additionally, girls are 4% less likely than the boys to complete primary schools (Gender statistics, 2010). There is still world-wide gender disparity in education. In most families, there are more female children than male children who are not attending schools. Generally, girls in the poorest 20% of household have the lowest chance of getting an education this inequality does not necessarily change in adulthood (Nnachi, 2010).

Statistics showed that the 774 million illiterate adults worldwide, 64% are women, the figures virtually unchanged from the early 1990s. The United Nations Millennium Development Goal (MDG) to promote gender equality and empower women therefore uses education as its target and the measure of gender disparity in education as its indicator of progress. Through the efforts of the international community, the UN hopes to eliminate gender disparity in primary and secondary education in all levels of education no later than 2020 but this was abortive (Gender Statistics, 2010).

This brought about the questions: Can this Sustainable Development Goal be achieved? What progress have countries made to achieve this goal? And specifically, how far has Nigeria as a nation gone to meet this goal? Nigeria is still among the nations facing many challenges in reaching that target by 2030 as well bridging gender gap in primary, secondary and tertiary education. It is imperative to say that education plays an important role as a foundation for girls' development towards adult life. At the time ensuring gender equality requires adapting equally to the needs and interests of girls and boys. International human rights law lays down a three-fold set of criteria whereby girls should have an equal right to education, and their rights should be protected and promoted through education (Obanya 2007).

Gender inequality in education is intense. Girls are less likely to access school, to remain in school or to achieve in education. Despite almost 30 years of the Convention on the Elimination of All forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), and 20 years of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), today girls make up around 56 per cent of the 77 million children not in school, and women make up two thirds of the adults who are illiterate. Even girls who do enrol in school may have irregular attendance due to other demands on them, and the fact that their education may not be prioritized. Girls are more likely to repeat years, to drop out early and to fail important subjects, and in most countries girls are less likely to complete the transition to secondary schooling. Inequality in society inevitably has an impact on the provision and content of education. According to Effiong (2019), majority of women who have basic education are with hearing impaired (56.3%), epilepsy (52.9%), leprosy affected persons (46.7%) while physically impaired (43.1%) and the least visually

impaired (28%). Hence, the need to examine and address the issues surrounding poor education of women in our society cannot be over emphasized (Gender Statistics, 2010).

Education is a right to which every child must have access because it is the most powerful and valuable instrument for socioeconomic development. It is a vital tool for national development and integration. UNICEF (2011) report stated that when children have access to quality education it will create a ripple effect of opportunity that impacts generations to come. That is one reason education ought to be readily accessible to all despite gender. In Nigeria, despite the free education policy at primary and secondary school levels, access to education for all remains so on paper. Though women and girls are seen to be the most affected by the disparity in access to education, there are very strong evidences to show that the males are also affected in the Igbo speaking states of the country (Nnachi, 2010). According to Obanya (2007), the girl-child educational attainment is low as records have shown that fewer girls go to school than boys. Offorma (2009) noted that this is because the girl-children have not been so lucky to be cherished, protected and loved in Nigerian society due to certain traditional practices, stereotyping, cultural and religious beliefs which put them at the risk of abuse and neglect. Gender refers to the roles, privileges and responsibilities society gives because a child is born male or female. Gender is used as an instrument of social inequality. The issue of gender inequality is about access to quality education for all. However, access is not wide enough to absorb all because of socio-cultural, economic, religious and other constraints. These inequalities condemn thousands of women to a life without quality education, to a life of missed opportunities and aborted dreams (Ohiri-Aniche 2002, Daniel, 2010).

Gender inequality is a problem to human existence, healthy relationships and development. The issue of discrimination against the girl-child has remained an unresolved issue and a major concern in the academic discourse. More so, gender discrimination against the girl child education is contrary to fundamental human right, equity, natural justice and good governance. Section 42 of the constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1999 provides for freedom from discrimination on the grounds of ethnic group, origin, gender, religion, circumstances of birth, disability or political opinion. Unfortunately, gender discrimination on girl child's education permeates every facet and this comes in several forms in Nigerian society including Ikot Ekpene Senatorial district of Akwa Ibom State (UNICEF 2011).

CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATIONS

Gender Inequality

Gender is a critical factor in structuring the types of opportunities and life chances faced by individuals and groups, and these strongly influence the roles they play within social institutions from the household to the state. Although the roles of men and women vary from culture to culture, there is no known instance of a society in which females are more powerful than males. Men's roles are generally more highly valued and rewarding than women's role (Ibrahim, 2004; Giddens, 2010).

Generally, gender inequality in Nigeria is not a new phenomenon. It has been topic of concern to NGOS, stakeholders and educators, etc., resulting in the outcry for equality in education for women and the girl-child. This is because the girl-child dimension of gender inequality in education has been on for a longer time and is more noticeable. Gender equality is about providing equal opportunities, justice, equal hearing and treatment to all members of a social group irrespective of their sex (Nnachi, 2010). Gender inequality in education is not about political buck-passing or propaganda; it is not about the number of women in politics or governance, and not also about separate schools for both sexes. It is also not about the levels of educational attainment of boys and girls, nor the female/male ratio of the population. It is not about which of the sexes can contribute more to benefit the family, it is about equal access to education and retention of these students.

Looking at education in Nigeria, there is the need to balance access for both sexes. For instance, the Nigerian census population figures (2006) indicated that there are more males than females. In contrary, research by Ofoegbu (2009) showed that literacy rate for males is higher than for

female in the North due to early marriage, unbelief in western education and other religious constraints. In the Igbo speaking States, according to Nnachi (2010), females dominate in education and other vital sectors of life; this is largely due to socio-economic considerations. He stated further that a parent in Igbo speaking states encourages their daughters to go to school and persuaded their sons to go for trade. Similarly, Okoro (2002) asserts that as advocacy at all government levels are succeeding in getting girls to complete primary school, economic pressure appear to influence the early withdrawal of boys especially in Abia, Anambra, Enugu, Imo States. In addition, Ohiri – Aniche (2002) cited in 1996 Nigeria Human Development Report asserted that the alarming unemployment rate of secondary school leavers put 71.8% for urban and 68.0% for rural youths is a reason many parents especially in Igbo areas prefer their male children either to go trading or learn a trade outside of school. According to Akpan and Effiong (2021), investments in inclusive employment and livelihood interventions are critical to addressing the unemployment challenges. These could include entrepreneurship training and business advisory services, promotion of locally produced assistive devices and accessible workplaces.

Again, the Federal Government in the guideline for Universal Basic Education (UBE) programme (2000) states that ‘the boy child dimension of gender disparity is a rising phenomenon in some parts of the country’. This therefore confirms that gender inequality in education in Nigeria affects both sexes. Nnachi (2010) argues that equity in gender consideration refers to providing equal opportunities and treatment to all irrespective of their sex and that if more favourable considerations is tailored towards one of the sexes, this is inequity. Daniel (2010) opines that “gender equity is not only fair but also an important means for society to fully integrate its member”. It equally enables society to develop. To achieve this, equal access to, and retention in education for all must be encouraged.

Gender Inequality in Education and National Development

The effects of gender inequality in education are like a chain reaction. It affects the people and society. It produces a crop of unenlightened minds that can be negatively manipulated. There is also a high school dropout rate and a great percentage of illiteracy because of those who did not attend school at all. This translates into illiterates and semi-literates forming a large percentage of unskilled manpower, victims of child abuse and youth unemployment resulting into prostitution, thuggery, militancy and the uncontested imposition of a ruling cabal among others. Without access to and equity in education, affected children and adults face a lifetime of disadvantages. However, educating the citizens of a country contributes to national development. All over the world, education has been found to be a means of improving the welfare of both men and women. It is a vital instrument of empowering them to contribute meaningfully to national development. The role of education for sustainable development is incontrovertible. The Asian countries which catapulted from Third World to First World has been due largely to education of her citizens (Igbokwe, 2011). Education is like a vaccine- in essence; a ‘cure-all’ as it were for most societal ills, which after its injection brings about amazing positive results for individuals and nations. It has a direct impact on health, nutrition, employment, science and technology and citizenship. It develops human capital and makes boys and girls participate in the labour market.

In Nigeria, educated artisans and skilled workers will be better placed to use their skills to drive industrialization, be a producer of goods and not a dumping ground for goods from other nations. Education also drives economics competitiveness, improves productivity leading to higher incomes, higher literacy/education levels resulting in effective power sharing and clean emotions for peace and progress of the nation. There can be no true liberation without education. After all, knowledge is power. Okebukola (2002) asserts that if citizens are educated, they would be able to understand the meaning of democracy and be well informed to act wisely, ignorance would be reduced and people would be empowered to make right choices for national and personal development. Furthermore, it enhances inter-cultural, inter-tribal understanding and reduces crime rate because if all children have access to education and are retained in schools, absenteeism, school dropouts and the like which are precursors of delinquent and violent behaviours would be reduced.

This study posits that an educated female has the skills, information, self-confidence needed to impact positively on national development by being a better mother and productive citizen. Equity and access to qualitative education for boys/girls is perhaps the most effective means of combating poverty and contributing to positive national development. This is because sustainable national development depends on the expansion of individual human opportunities and their involvement in the development process. Again, education underscores the achievement of all Sustainable Development Goals equips people with the knowledge and skills to break the cycle of poverty and shape their future lives. Equity in education must therefore be a policy priority to drive national development. The country must plan of the future by adopting the Chinese proverb-‘if you are planning for tomorrow, sow rice..., if you are planning for a lifetime, educate people’’. It is, however, ironic that society which stands to benefit from the education of all her citizen is the main hindrance to her own development. This is because society is made up of parent who dictates, carry out socio- cultural norms, religious rules and make family decisions. It is these same parents who to a large extent deny their children and ward access to and retention in education (UNICEF 2007).

Girl-Child Education and Sustainable Development Goals

The girl-child is seen as a young female person, who would eventually grow into a woman and marry. Offorma (2009) defines the girl-child as a biological female offspring from birth to eighteen (18) years of age. This period is made up of infancy, childhood, early and late adolescence stage of development. She is conditioned to look after the young ones, the home and the kitchen. She is taught to be obedient and to internalize the notion that she is someone’s property and responsibility at childhood and her husband’s in adulthood. The gender apartheid places the girl-child in disadvantage position. Her potentials are suppressed and self-actualization is not achieved.

According to UNICEF (2007), girls’ education does not only bring the immediate benefit of empowering girls, but is seen as the best investment in a country’s development. Education helps girls to develop essential life skills including self-confidence, the ability to participate effectively in society. UNICEF (2007) further asserts that girls’ education also help in cutting children and maternal mortality rates, contributing to national wealth and controlling disease health status. In education parlance, it means that the individual has acquired adequate and appropriate knowledge, skills and attitudes and values, known as cognitive, psychomotor and affective behaviours to be able to function optimally as a citizen. These behaviours are the focus of institution of learning. The programme is organised. Planned and systematically implemented. In an informal education, there is no plan and the training is haphazard and incidental (Francis, 2000; Offorma 2009).

Ocho (2005) asserted that education involves a process through which individual are made functional members of their society ; as it is a process through which the young person acquires knowledge and realizes his/her potentialities and uses them for self- actualization to be useful to him/ herself and others. It is a means of preserving, transmitting and improving the culture of society. Education connotes acquisition of something good worthwhile. Education is one of the fundamental rights of individuals. Article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Right, 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 /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 (Tabir, 2005; Cuttman 2009)

Peculiar problems facing Girl-Children in Nigeria

In most Nigeria communities, especially Ikot Ekpene senatorial district, there are general problems, facing girl- children which are directly and indirectly limiting their education opportunities and potentials. Scholars have identified and some of these peculiar problems which amongst others include;

a. **Family Abuse and Domestic Violence**

The girl child problem starts from the home and the same continues as she interacts with the general society. Fisho – Orideji (2001) argued that traditionally, to give birth to a girl in most traditional societies is almost synonyms to curse. A girl child is born and socialized into the belief of being inferior or sub human with attendant marginalization and abuse. She is often held responsible and punished for any misfortune of her parents. Physical, Verbal and other related abuses are common practices against girl children. These acts affect the psycho-social and educational performance of young learners especially the girl – children (Charles and Charles, 2004)

b. **Sexual Abuse**

Child sexual abuse especially against girl-child, has assumed a worrisome dimension in Nigeria. This is a basically done by adult relatives and in some cases by the step father of a girl or close relative in the family. There are many reported cases where girls are regularly abused sexually, threatened never to open up to anybody or else be killed, and some are forced to abort the pregnancies that might result from the abuse in order to cover up the abuse (Mwangi, 2004).

c. **Female Infanticide and sex –Selective Abortion**

Female infanticide is the murder of a young girl child, often occurring as a deliberate murder of a girl infant or young girl child or as a result of neglect, selective abortion, also called gender-selective abortion, sex selective abortion, or female feticide is the abortion of foetus because it is a female. Medical technology has made it possible for parents to discover the sex of a foetus at earlier stages of pregnancy. Thus, so many women from communities with a preference for boys practice selective abortion. Female infanticide and feticide are predominantly practised in India and Nigeria. One reason boys are more valued than girls are preserving lineage; a family lineage and family name are carried only by males in most societies. Igube (2010) pointed out that to eradicate female infanticide and feticide in Nigeria, public awareness of the issues and grassroots support of local communities are essential. The government must take steps to implement programmes to educates the public and encourage NGOs to take actions on these practices.

d. **Poverty and Economic Issues**

With 70% of the populations living below the poverty line, girls are often sent to generate income for families by selling commodities in the market or on the street (Ogundipe, 2007).

e. **Early marriage and Teenage Pregnancy:**

These have also militated against girls' attendance, retention and achievement in schools, About 30% of school-age girls drop out of school having already begun childbearing before the age of 18 (Giddens, 2010).

f. **Traditional Cultural Practices:**

Also traditional cultural Practices strongly mitigate girl's enrolment in educational system. Finally with limited resources tend to place more priority on boy child education recognizing them as future heads of household. Meanwhile when girls are enrolled, they often face many

more barriers to learning than boys do. For example, given the paucity of adequate day-care centres throughout the developing world and high level of women's participation in the informal labour markets, it is not uncommon for young girls to bring younger siblings to school disrupting not only their own studies but those of other children (Giddens 2010).

g. **Religious practices:**

Religion can be seen as a contributing factor to the inequalities between men factor to the inequalities between men and women. Charles (2004) opined that Islam has been connected with low participation of female in schools. There is that wrong notion of imposition of western female education for the purpose of converting people to Christianity. For these reason, Islamic communities oppose female education especially for female for the fear that western education promotes value contrary to cultural norm.

Need for Girl-Child Education

Education is very essential in today's society and the girl child must be educated in order to have a bright future. Part of the fundamental human right of a child is access to education (FRN, 2004). Education is a light and indispensable especially in this fast changing world. According to Francis (2016), education is a process by which a society, through certain formal and informal institutions, deliberately transmits its cultural heritage from one generation to another. It is a conscious effort to prepare students through monitoring, teaching and training for their role in the future. Daniel (2010) also asserts that education remains an important means of making members of society advance in their thinking and ability in life. It is based on the above that we can conclude that education emancipates. Like literacy, it breaks the shackles of ignorance, poverty and sets one free to make appropriate decisions, conduct research, construct, invent, write and promote cultures as well as strive for the betterment of mankind.

The gains of education are endless. For instance, it provides opportunities for betterment of life. Fatimanyin (2004) opines that education and by extension, literacy, is of great value for personal emancipation and survival. This means living a quality life by meaningfully participating in politics, enjoying economic fairness, being socially acceptable and having personal fulfilment. However, he lamented that education which enabled Nigeria attain that pre-independence feat has over the years been ignored based on the forgoing female child's need for inclusion and quality education.

Educating the girl child is educating the nation. How can a woman be empowered without education? In a society where the girl child is seen as a "second class citizen", where more relevance is placed on the male child, the importance of girl-child education cannot be over stressed in correcting the injustice. Girls, especially in the African continent are at disadvantage in accessing formal and informal education. There have been beliefs and cultural practices that dampen the aspiration of girl-child to compete with male (Abdulazeez, 2004).

A common adage in Nigeria says "Educate a man, you educate an individual, but educate a woman, you educate a nation". The above summarizes the essence of education to the girl child and indeed, to every educated human being, and so calls for special attention to be focused on the girl-child. No nation can afford to toy with the education of her citizens, especially, the child, who will be the father or mother of tomorrow, because education is the bedrock of all facets of development. Children are leaders of tomorrow and mothers are guardians of the future, and the first aim of every family and society should be to raise healthy and productive individuals who are physically, socially, psychologically and mentally well developed. These can be achieved through the education of the child who will in turn become a mother in the future. Offorma (2009) identifies some critical issues relating to girl child education such as socio-cultural factors, geographical, economical, religious and political factors which often result to poor access to education and dropout rate. Research has shown that millions of girls do not have access to school despite the concerted efforts to push the cause forward. Alibi & Alabi (2012) identify child labour, poverty, lack of sponsorship, quest for wealth,

bereavement, truancy, broken homes, as well as engagement of children as house helps to be factors or the clog in the wheel of children's access to education.

Strategies for Enhancing Girl-Child Education in Nigeria

Education is an important tool in liberating and correcting the social and institutional injustice and discrimination against girl children. Braun *et al* (2004) observed that "feeding children in school is of significant benefit to children. Also, almost 3 million children across 14 States in Nigeria benefit from Buhari's school feeding programme. The wife of the Executive Governor of Akwa Ibom State, Mrs. Martha Udom Emmanuel who has shown commitment in shaping the minds of the Akwa Ibom Girl-child to become an asset to family and a vehicle to societal growth through her pet project called Family Empowerment and Youth Reorientation Programme (FEYREP). "Girls uphold your dignity" is a sensitization campaign that advocates for complete abstinence from premarital sex which is responsible for unwanted pregnancies and health hazards. Mrs. Martha Udom Emmanuel has ceaselessly stressed that mother should take responsibilities to inculcate good values in their children, especially the girl-child (Udoh, 2019).

The social cultural context of Nigeria is such that it is multi-cultural, multi-linguistic and multi-religious based. Such diversity and value system could be the focus of education to ensure that quality education is given to the children. All round girl child Empowerment from the grassroots level ought to be another way out of girl child education in Nigeria. The girl child needs a safe and supportive educational environment, free from abuse, with separate toilet facilities, safe drinking water, equal attention with boys and a gender sensitive curriculum (Asare, 2009).

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This research work relies on a number of theories propounded by different Schools of Thought in examining gender inequality and women education.

Radical Feminist Theory

Radical feminism theory propounded by Lengerman and Nieubrugge in 1995 was adopted in this study to explain the reasons for inequality and education challenge of women in Nigeria. At the heart of the radical feminism is the belief that men are responsible for and benefit from the exploitation of women as well as girl-education. The analysis of patriarchy is a central concern. Patriarchy is viewed as a universal phenomenon that existed across time and cultures. Radical feminists often concentrate on the family as one of the primary sources of the women's oppression in society (Igbube, 2004). He contended that there are some patriarchal structures which restrict girl-children as well as women's education opportunities and help maintain male domination. These are: paid employment, patriarchal relations within the household, patriarchal culture, sexuality, violence towards female and the state. Each of these structures has some independence from the others, but they can affect one another, reinforcing or weakening in different structures.

Offorma (2009) believes that paid employment has been and remained a key structure in creating disadvantages to women and girl- children in particular. In a traditional and even contemporary Nigerian Community, the degree of inequality between men and women in terms of pay, position, condition and access to well-rewarding occupations has declined only slightly. The gap between men and women's wages has only been reduced a little and women continue to predominate in low paid, part time employment. When girls and women decide not to seek for formal education nor seek paid job, they do so more because of restricted opportunities open to them because of cultural values that suggest that mothers and wives should stay at home. The state's policies and priorities are systematically biased towards patriarchal interest. Women often experience violence and the state effectively condones the violence with its refusal to intervene except in exceptional cases.

Two distinctive forms of patriarchy are identified as private and public, private patriarchy is domination of women and girls which occurred within the household at the hand of an individual

Patriarchy. Girls are socialized to the belief that they cannot take independent decisions on their own but depend on males around them. Public patriarchy is more inclusive. Girls as well as women may involve in the public life such as education, employment and politics but the quality and levels of involvement are generally lower compared to their male counterparts (Igube, 2010). In Nigeria, for instance, the enrolment ratio of girls to boys is generally lower from elementary, Secondary and tertiary institutions (Offorma, 2009). Igube (2010) asserts that though women's population is higher than men in Nigeria, the number of women in labour force is lower than men and more of these women are in low paid informal employment.

Liberal Feminist Theory

Liberal feminist theory is a conceptual orientation that is premised on the understanding that individual ignorance has contributed to gender prejudice. In order to address this prejudice the affected individual has to take action. Education is therefore seen as a variable that can be used to improve the situation. Liberal Feminism also concerns with equal rights and freedom of the individual. Hence, it therefore should be reformed; such reform should be gradually introduced without radically upsetting the status quo. Liberal feminism has moderate aims, it does not radically challenge the existing values and as such they aim for gradual change in political, economic and social systems (Haralambos and Holborn 2000). Gender disparity has been attributed to number of factors including culture and the way men and women are associated within the culture. Another factor includes discriminating attitude of individual. All these can be changed through empowerment and education. Generally, liberal feminism calls for gradual reforms through advocacy for equal rights for all, laws and policies that promote equality.

Liberal feminism explains gender inequalities in social and cultural parameters; they seek gradual change. They seek to “focus their energies on establishing and protecting equal opportunities for woman through legislation and other democratic means” (Giddens, 2001). The liberalist argues that education fosters personal development and self-fulfilment it encourages the individual to develop his mental, physical, emotional and spiritual talents to the full. The relevance of this theory in education of a girl-child is that government should provide free education for all because by providing free education it gives everyone an equal perspectives, academic credentials are awarded on merit in a system of fair competition in the same way jobs are awarded on merit and there is a strong relationship between educational qualifications and occupation status. The liberalist are of the view that the expansion of education will reduce inequality in society particularly as the educational attainment of members of the working class rises, their bargaining position in the market will improve and as a result their income will rise.

Women Education and Traditional Beliefs

Females in some Local Communities in Akwa Ibom State, especially Ikot Ekpene Senatorial District encounter socio-cultural and religious challenges which hinder their regular participation in education (Okoro, 2022; Nnachi, 2010). Traditional practices and beliefs impose a lot of restrictions on female education. It is regrettable that despite our progress as a society there is still an underestimation of the value of the girl-child. The psychological effect of gender inequality and socio-cultural beliefs on the women is the internalization of the low value accorded them by society. Inequality has other serious implications on women education such as it leads to absenteeism in school among pupils and students; Absenteeism leads to increase in dropout. Okoro (2002) opined that the rate at which female's dropout of primary and post primary institution in Nigeria is alarming and ascribed violence as one of the major reason. UNICEF (2003) reported that in Sub-Saharan Africa, the number of girls out of school each year has risen from 20 million in 1990 to 24 million in 2002.

Most children walk far distances to schools in remote areas. Access is the opportunity provided for the girl child to be educated. Access deals with the availability, convenience and ability to be educated (Okeke, Nzewi and Njoku, 2008). The incidence has prevented millions of girls from having access to education which is their fundamental human right. Poverty and the level of education

of mothers are some factors hindering females' access to education. In line with that over 70% of Nigerians live below poverty line (UNICEF, 2010). This has prevented many Nigerian parents, especially large families with limited resources from enrolling their female children in schools while their male counterparts are given preference. Some parents also keep their daughters out of school due to economic and religious beliefs.

Gender based discrimination is a problem that limits girl education, causes poor enrolment and attendance in Primary and secondary schools. This is because girls continue to face many obstacles that impede their part to learning. Thus, it is generally believed among some Nigerians that enrolling girls for formal education is a waste of time and resources, as she would be married sooner or later. To buttress this belief, cultural aspects like forced marriage, inheritance law, sexual harassment, unintended pregnancy and domestic responsibilities tend to conflict with enrolment and attendance of girls in schools. Statistics has it that the enrolment percentages of the boy child are consistently higher than that of the girl child, and out of the number that enrol in primary school in Nigeria, only 43% enter Secondary school (UNICEF, 2003). Most children who drop out of schools usually experience psychological trauma. WHO (2010) explained that abused girls are more likely to suffer depression, anxiety as well as psychosomatic symptoms. It further pointed out that violence against the girl child affect their ability to learn or even the willingness to take part in school activities. Also physical violence such as kicking, rape, slapping, intimidation, oppression sexual harassment, being laughed at and unfair treatment whether at home or in school can all lead to children running way from school and home subsequently exposing them to serious danger?

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study examines the effect of Gender inequality on women education and the effect of early marriage on the girl-child education in Ikot Ekpene senatorial district. It was motivated by the high level of gender disparity of women education with particular reference to primary and secondary school in Ikot Ekpene senatorial district. Education empowers citizens especially women for sustainable development and increases their capacities to transform their visions of society into reality. It is an instrument not just for some or a few workforce to be reckoned with because its citizens ranked among the most educated globally and that based on this, Nigeria was billed to provide the needed leadership to liberate Africa from colonialism as well as acquire the needed technology for development. The past years have witnessed improved-but not significant enrolment of the female population in primary and secondary education. However, a closer analysis of secondary education statistics revealed the different nature of the problem in different socio-cultural and economic contexts. A number of cultural barriers still exist in the Nigerian Society which seriously impedes women's development as citizens and professionals. Efforts to improve female education in Nigeria needs to go beyond rhetoric and should involve policies and programmes with measurable results.

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations were made:

- i. Parent and children should be well informed on the rights and privileges of a girl-child education.
- ii. The State government and NGOs should carry out programmes and policies that will promote girl-child education in Ikot Ekpene Senatorial District.
- iii. The State government should assist parents who due to lack of finance cannot send their daughters to school with "free education".
- iv. Parents who are low income earners should be empowered through skill acquisition and training to boost their means of livelihood.
- v. The media (Press) should play their role by informing, educating and creating awareness on the benefits of education disregarding gender through programmes, jingles, adverts etc.

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