

# THE ROLE OF MASS MEDIA IN PROMOTING GIRL - CHILD EDUCATION IN NIGERIA

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## ABSTRACT

*Education of the girl child in any society is crucial to the development of the entire nation. This is because women constitute more than half of the population of the world, and their input to the overall development of a country cannot be overemphasized. It is evident that gender inequality exists between sexes with regards to education in Nigeria and these have negative consequences on the development of the country. However, for this disparity to be addressed, the role of the mass media is critical in educating the populace on the need for the girl child to be educated. The article argues that the mass media play a significant role in the education process. This is owing to the fact that the media is a powerful agent of transformation in the society. The paper noted that despite government efforts to address gender gaps in the education sector in Nigeria, disparity continue to persist especially in the Northern part of the country where the enrolment rate of girls have continue to dwindle over time. Since the mass media have the capacity to draw the attention of the public to important issues in the society, it can serve as a veritable platform for advocacy to raise the issue of girl child education to the front burner. The article concludes by recommending the integration of the conventional mass media with the traditional media of communication in the promotion of girl child education in Nigeria.*

**Key words:** Education, Girl- Child, Mass Media, Nigeria.

## INTRODUCTION

Despite significant progress in the development of education in Africa during the past decades, girls' participation in education continues to trail that of boys; gender continues to play a major role in determining who goes to school. In general, primary school enrolment ratio for girls in Africa is less than that of boys in about 22 countries and their dropout rate is also greater than that of boys leading to a few numbers of girls completing the primary school cycle (UNICEF, 2003). In Nigeria, gender disparity exists in the enrolment rate of boy – child and the girl – child access to education across all the levels of education. Offorman (2009) reported that in the southern part of the country, a moderate bias towards boy's enrolment is

evident in the south west, while the south east displays a bias towards girl's enrolment.

According to Thisday newspaper report of 18<sup>th</sup> May 2013, reported that eight states, among them Kebbi, Sokoto, Bauchi, Jigawa, Yobe, Zamfara, Katsina, and Gombe have the worst performance across all indicators on firstly, lowest girl-child education; secondly, highest female illiteracy; thirdly, highest adolescent girl 'marriage', fourthly, highest under-18 child bearing; and lastly, highest under-15 child bearing placing them in the highest risk category for maternal death and injury (Thisday, 2013). The report further noted that although worst performing states are from the north, it's a serious national problem affecting all states. For instance, Ebonyi State was number 12 (57.8%) for

highest percentage of girl children not in secondary school - scores worse than north-central, north-east and north-west states such as, Nasarawa 56.7%; Benue 56.4%; Adamawa; 53.1%; Kaduna 45.3%; Plateau 45.3%; Kogi 36.4%; and Kwara 35.4%.(Thisday, 2013).

The northern part of the country is in favor of the boy – child than in the southern part of the country. Findings from the National School Census (2006) revealed that the number of children out of school in Northern Nigeria is particularly high and the proportion of girls to boys in school ranges from 1 to 2 boys and even 1 girl to 3 boys in some states. However, this is quite different in south – eastern states where there are more girls than boys in the secondary schools, but more boys than girls at the pre-primary school level except for Ebonyi and Imo states (Thisday, 2013). Several factors account for the low enrolment rate of the girl – child in the education system in Nigeria. Most of these factors borders on cultural and socio-economic background of parents.

Nigeria is a signatory to the United Nation Convention on the rights of the child, which stipulates in article 18 that every child has a right to education, and that the states duty is to ensure that primary education is free and compulsory, to encourage different forms of secondary education accessible to every child, and to make higher education available to all on the basis of capacity. However, over 140 million of children in the world still do not attend schools and two third of them are girls (Jeiyol, 2007). It is imperative to note that for any society to experience progress in its economy, if gender discrimination in the education of its citizens is not addressed nation's development will be retarded.

Worried by the dwindling level of girls drop out in schools among African countries, UNESCO and UNICEF Joint Committee on Education in conjunction with the government of Burkina Faso organized a Pan-African

Conference on the Education of girls in the continent in Ouogadougou, Burkina Faso on 28<sup>th</sup> March 1993. After thorough deliberations on the state of girl – child education in Africa, the conference acknowledged that the continent had not given due attention to improving the status of girl-child education in the continent compared to other parts of the world. According to UNICEF (2007), the global figure for out of school children is estimated to be 121 million, out of which 65 million (approximately 53%) were girls and over 80 percent of these girls live in sub-Saharan Africa. Goodluck (2011) cited in Mvendaga, Ifeanyichuku and Apine equally maintain that Nigeria has 9 million (37%) out of school children, which is more than one-third of its primary school age children and this is the highest in Africa. They further argued that the Northern part of the country is worse hit by the low enrollment of the girl child in the primary school level. This data is further validated with findings from the Federal office of statistics (2004) which shows that, literate women constituted only 20% from the North – West, 20% from the North – East, and 45% from the North Central. This clearly indicates the levels of backwardness of women as compared to men in Northern Nigeria.

Nigerian government has been making emphatic efforts to address gender-gaps in the educational sector of the country. Several policies have been initiated to ensure that this gap is closed. For instance, the Millennium Development Goals (MDG's), which had an eight point agenda including eradication of poverty, universal basic education and gender equality. Despite government efforts to address these issues, gender inequality still exists in the education system in Nigeria. The need for the mass media to mobilize all stakeholders towards the promotion of girl – child education is imperative given the provisions of the goal No.3 of the UN Millennium Development Goals (MDG's)

which is emphatic on promoting gender equality for sustainable development in the target year of 2015. The goal states that “gender equality is a human right and at the heart of achieving the MDG’s. It is a prerequisite to overcoming hunger, poverty and diseases. This means equality at all levels of education and in all areas of work, equal control over resources and equal representation and in all walks of life” (MDG’s Report, 2005).

The import of the above statement underscores the important role accorded to the girl – child in the development of society. A popular maxim says when you educate a woman you educate a nation. This is true because 48.79% of Nigerian population is made up of women (National population Commission, 2006). At the global level, Akubue (2001) and Acha (2009) cited in Acha (2015) further says that women form about half the world population and any society which neglect such a large number of human resource potential cannot achieve any meaningful development. And when these women have access to education, they have the potential so significantly effect a change in the economy of the country. It is against this background that this paper examines the place of the mass media in promoting girl – child education in Nigeria.

## **CONCEPTUAL DISCOURSE**

It is imperative to conceptualize the basic terms that form the core aspect of this article. This is necessary to ensure that the concepts are understood within the context of the study.

### **Conceptualizing Education**

Education has been recognized globally as an important index of the quantity and quality of meaningful contribution to national development. Supporting this view, Amunadi (2008) asserts that education is one of

the instruments by which individuals are equipped to participate in the socio-economic and political life of a nation and to make their contribution for the promotion of social change. Education does not lend itself easily to definition. It is difficult for any definition to be comprehensive enough to satisfy the different concept and interpretation of education which changes with people, place and time. However, a few of these definitions will be examined. Education has been defined as the process by which every society attempts to preserve and upgrade the accumulated knowledge, skills and attitudes in its cultural setting and heritage in order to foster continuously the well being of mankind and guarantee its survival against the unpredictable, at time horrible and destructive elements and forces of man and nature (Ukozor, 2007). This definition emphasis that education helps in the preservation of societal values and norms from extinction. The National Policy on Education (2004) defines education as the process that helps to develop the whole man, physically, mentally, morally, politically, socially and technologically to enable individuals discover their potentials towards achieving self goal and contributing to national development. Education therefore, empowers an individual to acquired adequate and appropriate knowledge, skills and attitudes and values, known as cognitive, psychomotor and affective behaviors to be able to function optimally as citizens.

### **Understanding the Concept of the Girl – Child**

The UN convention on the rights of the child says a child is every human being below the age of eighteen years. Similarly, The Nigerian Child Rights Acts (2003) defines a child as a person who has not attained the age of eighteen years. The girl – child is a biological female offspring from birth to eighteen (18) years of age. This is the age before one becomes young adult. This period covers the

crèche, nursery or early childhood (0 – 5 years), primary (6 – 12 years) and secondary school (12 – 18 years). During this period, the young girl is totally under the care of her parents or guardians. It is during this stage that the girl acquires and develops emotionally, mentally and socially to fit into the society. At this stage, education helps in shaping the future behavior of the child. And when this is lacking or not provided, the child would be negatively affected in regards to the kind of personality that she will acquire throughout her life time. It is in recognition of this fact that education is one of the fundamental rights of individuals. This is given expression in article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights which was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in December, 1949 which stipulated that:

- I. Everyone has the right to education. This shall be free at least in the elementary and primary levels.
- II. Elementary education shall be compulsory while technical and professional education shall be made generally available.
- III. Higher education shall be equally accessible to all on the basis of merit.
- IV. Parents have a prior right to choose the kind of education that shall be given to their children (Offorman, 2009).

Despite these laudable provisions, access to education for the girl in Nigeria still suffers due to parents unwillingness to send their girls to school, religious and socio-cultural issues, the problem of early child marriage, and government poor policy in regards to girl child education. The net enrolment rate for girls into secondary school and primary school keeps declining. This is especially worse in the northern part of the country, where parents

often prefer to give away their daughters in marriage at early stage. It is therefore the responsibility of government to provide education for these future leaders of tomorrow (Asemah, Edegoh, and Olumuji, 2013).

### **Review of Empirical Studies**

Research has shown that millions of girls do not have access to education despite the concerted efforts to push the cause forward. It is a known fact that women enrolment in all level of schools in some parts of Nigeria particularly in the north is much lower than that of the males. This disparity is evident by the literacy ratio of only 47% for female and 67% for male. This result in a situation where adult illiteracy is substantially higher for women than for men (Umar, 1997; Maduagwu and Muhammed, 2006 cited in Asemah, Edegoh, and Olumiji).

According to FOS/UNICEF (1999) Collaborative Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey using data on a wide variety of indicators for monitoring progress towards the achievement of the world summit for children revealed that in the domain of education, Nigeria largely fell short of realizing its goal. This is because only one in five children aged 36-59 months were attending organized early childhood education programme, such as kindergarten or community child care with organized learning activities. There were large variations according to areas, with the percentage attending organized programmes ranging from only 4% in north east and North West respectively, to 41% and 48% in the south east and south west respectively. On basic education, only 57% of children of primary school age (6-11) years in Nigeria were attending primary school with wide variations between the urban (74%) and rural areas (50%) and North east 42%, North west 25%, South east 80% and South west 82%.

In the same vein, Okebukukola (2004) did a study on gender stereotype in higher education in Nigeria. He discovered that in terms of enrolment rate in the Nigerian universities over 70% of males gained access to university education between 2001 and 2003 academic session. These statistics evidently portrays the reality about the plight of girl child education in Nigeria. Several reasons have been advanced by scholars on why gender imbalance exists between the boy and girl child in Nigeria. Goode (1982) attributed the low enrolment rate among females in Nigeria educational systems as a result of diminish expectation on the part of the girl child. In a study to determine the attitudes and expectation of girls towards education, work, marriage and the future generally. Findings indicated that compared to boys girls were generally less ambitions. They had lower expectations of education and promotion at work. They also seem not to see success in terms of education, job and career, all they think about is marriage and child bearing after secondary school.

Related to diminished expectation is the value crises attached to education in some part of the country which does not accord high priority to education. This is evident in the eastern part of the country where girl's enrolment rate is higher than that of boy's. Parents tend to value money, business, hawking and apprenticeship more than education. Education is often regarded as time consuming and very expensive coupled with the high rate of unemployment and poverty in the country. Most parents believe that western education is a waste of time. They prefer their children to learn vocational skills instead of western education. Ojobor (2008) further articulate this when he contends that due to economic constraints, many parents consider the education of girls and women in general as a waste of funds. This is because they marry into their husband's family

leaving the boys in their original family to cater for their parents.

Abisabo (2009) citing Doyorougu e tal (1996) reported that early marriage is another factor that leads to low enrolment rate among girls in both primary and secondary school. In their study of Plateau and Bauchi states in Nigeria, they find out that 14.96% of their sampled respondents married under the age of 15 years. They further noted that some of the married girls were forced into marriage relationship by their parents. Similarly, Josephine and Ngozi (1986) observes that the problem of child marriage is a common phenomenon among both Christians and Muslims but with a notable higher prevalence rate among the Hausa Muslims of northern Nigeria. In communities where child marriage is practiced, the end of the childhood coincides with the onset of puberty, which is as early as 10 years. The decisions are often taken on the girl's behalf by the parents or guardian. And in most cases, the husbands to be are usually older than the girls. These and several other factors have contributed to the low enrolment ratio of the girl child in the education system in Nigeria.

Furthermore, the African patriarchic societal view point favors boys over girls because boys maintain the family lineage that is why they are accorded more attention than the women folks. Obiakor (1986) lamented on this when he opines that in most parts of Nigeria as in other parts of Africa and of the world, many aspects of people's culture pose barriers to the full liberation and integration of the women in the scheme of things. After several years of independence, problems of male preference over women still persist in greater degree. Problems of early marriage and female circumcision still abound in most African societies. Despite these alarming statistics, hope is not lost as government is not relaxing to see that the girl child is accorded the opportunity she deserves to be educated.

With the return of democracy in 1999, the situation of girl's enrolment rate has slightly increased overtime. We only hope that government will continue to show more concern and commitment in ensuring that its programmes and policies favor the Nigerian girl child.

### **Promoting Girl- Child Education in Nigeria: The Role of the Mass Media**

The mass media play critical role in the promotion of girl child education in any society. The broadcast media have immense potentials for improving both formal and informal education. From its earliest application in Nigeria, public broadcasting was conceived as a vital tool of education in both formal school settings and the informal sector of general use. The earliest broadcasts incorporate school work and civic education intended to mobilize public opinion in support of the colonial governments and their policies (Ani, 2007).

Communication is critical in achieving the goals of education. The use of the mass media in educating and creating awareness in the society cannot be downplayed. One basic function of the mass media to the society is the provision of education on varieties of issues that concern the public. It is in recognition of this all important responsibility that the Federal Government (2004) has approved as a matter of policy in the national policy on education that the mass media shall form a feature of the educational support service system. In order to achieve this, the government made it compulsory that all states broadcast stations should work in conjunction with ministries of education and other allied agencies to ensure that the public are kept informed or educated on government policies and programmes.

The mass media performs several functions and in the process, affect the public variously. One of such function is the

education of the citizens. Communication scholars such as (Sambe, 2005 and Aina, 2003) submits that whatever society gets from the media serve the function of both information and education. Therefore, many programmes on either television or radio are specially broadcast for educational purposes. The media according to Asemah (2011) are agents of social change that can bring about positive attitudinal change in the audience; they set agenda for public discussion in any given society. Leveraging on this function, the mass media can draw the attention of the public on issues relating to girl child education. Wilson's (1997) captures the nature and influence of the mass media in promoting girl child education. He asserts that the mass media of communication are so persuasive in their socio-cultural influence that there is hardly any field of human endeavor that do not have a specific role to play. They are as the eyes and ears of society (i.e. as watchdogs) and as mobilizers, informers, educators, entertainments and channels. For disseminating information propagating culture, educating and correlating the environment and promoting the general well-being of the society.

Buttressing on Wilson's submission, MacBride, Hubert, Elebe, Gabriel, Sergei, Mochtar, Masmoudi, Nagai, Omu, Oolink, Oteifi, Pronk, Somavia, Verghese, and Zimmerman (1980) argues that the media have the power to promote public awareness and understanding of the culture, the social habits and traditions, the attitudes and hopes of diverse groups in the society. This import is germane considering the fact that issues of girl child education are deeply rooted in the socio-cultural orientation of the people in Nigeria. Since the mass media possesses the power to create awareness on important issues in the society, they can bring issues of girl child education to the front burner. By so doing, the mass media can educate the public on the misconceptions surrounding traditional beliefs

on girl child education. Akpan (2007) contends that the basic goal of the media is fact-finding. Through investigative reporting, the mass media can help clear misperceptions about girl child education, especially among communities that have low enrolment rate of girls in school.

The role of the media in promoting girl child education cannot be over emphasized. Article 17 of the convention on the rights of the child as cited by Olusola (2011) specifies the role the media should play in the promotion of children's rights of which education is a part of the fundamental rights of the child. Therefore, the media are highly important in bringing to reality the principles and standards of the convention. The media can play a pivotal role in monitoring the actual implementation of the rights of the child. For example, the Universal Basic Education programme initiated by the federal government to provide free education at the primary school level needs to be monitored by the media. At Present, the programme does not seem to deliver the desired result. The media can beam their search on the implementation of the programme in order to investigate why the programme is incapable of addressing the poor quality of education at the primary school level (Olusola, 2011).

Olusola (2011) equally notes that the media can bring forth children's issues by allowing children who have been engaged as domestic workers, street children, hawkers and those involved in child labour to participate in media programme so as to educate innocent children who are cut in the web of this problem. He further adds that children being the future of a country must be provided with education as well as be equipped with all the necessities for their personality development. In this respect, the rights of the children like education, health, communication, participation, physical and moral support which form major components for their well-being should be provided by the

government. Therefore, the media need to raise the awareness of children's situation to the government and the public in general.

In Nigeria, the mass media has been used extensively for the purpose of mass education. The broadcast media of radio and television has been deployed to educate the masses on the need to educate the girl child. Several programmes are used to showcase the plight of the girl child in Nigeria. For instance, programmes such as interviews, drama programmes and docudrama are used to address the issue of girl child education in Nigeria. International organizations such as USAID, UNESCO, and UNO have also been sponsoring programmes related to girl child education. Through the airing of these programmes, awareness has been created on the education of the girl child.

However, it has been observed that media efforts at public enlightenment and mobilization in Nigeria are mass media centered. It has been argued that complex attitudinal or behavioral change requires direct contact with the people. In this wise, development agents are suppose to interface modern mass communication channels with traditional media to educate the people especially the rural people on girl child education. Interpersonal communication will be beneficial in this regard. This will enable development agents to communicate their messages more directly to the people whose children are not going to school. In addition, opinion leaders, traditional leaders, market women, and youth associations can help spread the message of girl child education in their respective villages or communities. These leaders are major links to their communities. When these opinion leaders' talk to their people they will easily follow them.

### **Challenges of Using Mass Media in Promoting Girl – child Education**

Several factors serve as impediments in the promotion of girl –child education by the Nigerian mass media. First, is the issue of access to the media of communication. Most media organizations are located in the urban centre's, as such sensitization programmes or media campaign on girl – child education is only limited to people in the major cities and towns. This urban preference in citing media organizations at the detriment of the rural people is a major problem that hinders effective campaign on girl-child education by the Nigerian mass media.

Secondly, lack of sponsorship of educational programmes by non-governmental organizations and other spirited individuals has contributed to the inability of Nigerian media institutions to be successful in championing the course of girl-child education in Nigeria. Promoting girl- child education is a capital intensive venture. It involves the deployment of huge resources in the execution of programmes geared towards promoting of children's rights to education. Only few non-governmental organizations are willing to devote their resources to champion this noble course. At the international level, only few donor agencies are willing to promote children's rights to education in Nigeria. This is coupled with the fact that massive corruption has affected government previous efforts at promoting education in Nigeria.

Lack of massive deployment of mass media for promoting girl-child education in Nigeria is yet another factor that inhabits Nigerian media efforts at promoting children's right in the country. This collaborate Asemah's (2011) finding that the extent to which Nigerian media promote girl child education is poor. They avers that Nigerian media give preference to entertainment programmes more than educational programmes. And this

is grossly affecting the course of promoting girl-child education in the country.

Furthermore, language barrier is another factor that has negatively affected mass media campaign in promoting girl- child education in Nigeria. Nigeria is a country that has so many ethnic nationalities. Most of these tribes constitute 70% of the population of the nation and they reside in the rural areas. For the mass media to design campaign messages base on the language of these ethnic groups is a major problem. Hence, most messages on girl- child education are packaged in the three dominant language of the country (Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba) at the detriment of other minority tribes. This therefore makes media messages limited to a segment of Nigeria population. This problem is further compounded with the fact that English language which is the official language of communication in the Nigerian media industry has posed great problem particularly to the rural people who are mostly not literate or educated. Even though few states broadcast media stations broadcast programmes in the local language of the people, these programmes are grossly inadequate to provide public enlightenment to the local people.

In addition, lack of integrating interpersonal communication and traditional means of communication with the conventional media has limited the Nigerian media in pushing the course of the girl in the country. Policy makers, development agents and the government relied heavily on the modern mass media to carry out campaign on girl child education. There must be an integration of the modern means of communication with the traditional and interpersonal means of communication in order to drive the message home to the people living in the rural communities. In line with this therefore, traditional institutions and rulers, religious bodies and opinion leaders should be integrated in the vanguard of

educating the rural, populace on the issue of girl child education.

Government must stop paying lip service to the issue of girl child education in Nigeria. Lack of commitment and the political will on the part of the government to deal with the issue of girl child education must be adequately addressed. It is time for the people to hold government accountable in refusing to fulfill their primary obligation by providing quality and affordable education to the people. The government must take proactive measures to address this fundamental problem that is affecting the society already. At present, the Boko Haram sect is using innocent girls who are obviously not educated to carry out their dreaded activities. This is one of the negative effects of not educating the girl- child. Closely related to this issue is the security challenge that is confronting the nation. As a result of the Boko Haram menace, more children are out of school especially in the North east part of the country. The insurgency situation has force internally displace children to study in deplorable condition in their respective camps, thus increasing the number of children that are out of school. Government must therefore take drastic steps to arrest the situation before it goes out of hand.

## **CONCLUSION**

The mass media has been acknowledged to be an important tool in the promotion of girl education in Nigeria. This is evident in media's role of information dissemination and education of the people on various aspects of development. Through media campaigns and programmes,

several people have come to appreciate the importance of girl child education in the society. However, many people, communities and villages are still lagging behind in respect to the education of the girl child in Nigeria. The mass media could help enlighten these people by running programmes on television and radio to create awareness on the need for them to send their girls to schools.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

The paper provides the following recommendations;

- I. The mass media should be massively employed to promote the issue of girl child education in Nigeria.
- II. The mass media cannot be successful in promoting girl child education without the collaboration of other organizations like non-governmental organizations and religious groups. These organizations can embark on advocacy visits to communities where this problem exists in order to create awareness and provide some level of education to the people.
- III. Government should stop paying lip service to the issue of girl child education in the country. They should provide available funds to implement policies and programmes that would address the plight of the Nigerian girl.
- IV. There is need for an integration of the modern and traditional media of communication should be used to educate the populace on the benefit of girl child education.

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