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GIRL-CHILD EDUCATION IN AFRICA: MISCONCEPTIONS AND CHALLENGES

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines girl-child education in Africa. In so doing, it addressed (1) what are the misconceptions regarding girl-child education in Africa. (2) What are the challenges facing girl-child education in Africa? In addition (3), which methods could be applied to solve the misconceptions and challenges facing girl-child education? Based on the research problem, the researchers chose the qualitative approach because discrimination against the girl-child takes place in a natural setting (not an experiment done in a laboratory but in societies). Eight (8) respondents were used for interacting with the participants. All the interviews were recorded to ensure reliability of the study.The findings that was supported with case studies of five Africa countries such as; Nigeria, Uganda, Ethiopia, Kenya and South Africa revealed that access to quality education, child abuse and gender inequality play a central role in transformation in framing misconceptions, challenges and methods of addressing child abuse. Without education, girls are denied the opportunity to develop their full potential and to play a productive and equal role in their families, their societies, their countries and the world.

INTRODUCTION

Children are future leaders of tomorrow and mothers are guardians of the future. The first aim of every family and society should be to raise healthy and productive individuals who are physically, psychologically, socially, and mentally well developed. These can be achieved through the education of the girl-child who is the mother of tomorrow. The paper looked at the misconceptions in some Africa countries like Nigeria, Kenya, South Africa, Uganda and Ethiopia, just to mention a few. Critical issues in girl-child education such as access to education, quality, child abuse, and gender inequality were discussed. The status of women in Africa is a series of absurdities. Women have an exalted role as mothers and nurturers of their families. On the other hand, they are not accorded many of the economic rights women have in other parts of the world and are still forced into marriages and subject to female circumcisions. Women and their children are the main victims of the various wars and civil conflicts in Africa, but they are historic peace makers, leading efforts to end these conflicts.

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In African countries with the most diamonds, oil, gold and other mineral resources, such as Angola, Congo-Brazzaville, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Liberia, Sierra Leone, Sudan and others, women are at their most vulnerable. Women comprise an estimated 70% of economic activity in Africa countries, but they only own an estimated two percent of the land. (Gregory, 2010). There are prominent women in Africa, such as Liberian President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf and Malawian President Joyce Banda, as well as numerous female ministers. There is World Bank Managing Director Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala from Nigeria. There is Kenyan Nobel prize winning environmentalist Wangari Maathai. One might think from their examples that the status of Africa women has taken a great leap forward. Unfortunately, these women are the exceptions to the rule for most women in Africa, who live busy lives building their families and their societies with little of the help one would expect for the glue that holds Africa together. There is a saying: "The hand that rocks the cradle rules the world." True though it has always been, even in the developed world, women had to struggle to achieve equal rights to men. Actually, it took the suffrage movement and the factories that were needed to feed the war effort in the 1940s to open the door that allowed women to break free from limited life choices. Still, that liberation did not spread to women in African countries, which for the most part remained as

European colonies. While their sisters in Europe and North America had a choice as to the direction in which their lives would flow, African women continued to toil on with no discern able difference in how they could shape their futures. Thomas Sankara, the late Pan-African theorist and military President of Burkina Faso, once said, "I can hear the roar of women's silence." Without being prompted by women demonstrating or boycotting, Sankara made adult education mandatory for rural women in his country. He was the first African leader to appoint women to government positions, including cabinet posts. He banned forced female circumcision, forced marriage and polygamy. Unfortunately, his Marxist ideology discredited his views generally among the Western governments who should have supported his enlightened position on equality for women. When he was assassinated in a coup, his policies were almost all reversed, including the status of women. Today, Burkinabe women are ruled by tradition and unprotected by constitutional law. (Gregory, 2010).

In early 2010, according to Gregory, Amnesty International reported that discrimination against women in Burkina Faso was responsible for a high rate of maternal death during pregnancy and childbirth because they were unable to access adequate health care. This situation is not confined to Burkina Faso, though. A thousand women in the world die each day from pregnancy-related causes, and 570 of them are African. While these deaths are preventable, they are not prevented. Reducing maternal mortality was one of the Millennium Development Goals, yet the level of African maternal mortality is actually rising. African women more than carry their share of society's burden and should be assisted far more than they usually are. The light of hope in this situation stems from those women who have broken through to become leaders in their countries and internationally. It also lies in the young men who have been educated to see beyond the boundaries of the culture in which they and their ancestors were reared. We are entering the second decade of the 21st century, and communications technology allows us all to see how life is lived throughout our world. Even rural women in Africa are seeing past the limits placed on them by societies holding desperately onto the past. Young women on the continent will not be held back by the conventions of the past, and young African men are increasing less willing to try to hold them back. There was a time in many societies on the continent before the colonial powers took control that African women and men had an equitable distribution of responsibility and walked side by side in partnership. Perhaps history is about to repeat itself – albeit in a more modern way.

Educational and Behavioural Theories: To ensure students leave classes with the basic skills they need, education trains teachers to use interactive and learner-centered approaches. Some out-of-school, or non-formal, programs serve as a bridge to the formal school system allowing students to enrol in the formal school system at age-appropriate levels (Offorma, 2008). Education is also building new alliances between communities, employers, teachers and learners to ensure students leave with the skills and resources they need for productive employment. Education has a long history of successfully working with local partners to design, execute, manage and evaluate participatory, community-based initiatives to advance the conditions of girls and women (Ocho, 2005). Education programs help girls enrol and stay in school and help women gain access to/or create new

educational, financial and social resources in their communities. Education takes lessons learned from non-formal and out-of-school education programs and applies them to formal education activities to improve the quality and relevance of education. Some parents justify the denial of girls of their right to education to prevent them from bringing shame to the family through early pregnancy (Ocho, 2005). Yet others believe that women who are at the same level of education as the men are a disgrace to the community because more often than not, they will not get married and if they do, it will be to a foreigner. For such parents, early marriage is the best way to prevent this and at the same time preserve traditions. 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 – 18years). During this period, the young child is totally under the care of the adult who may be her parents, guardians or older siblings. It is made up of infancy, childhood, early and late adolescence stages of development. During this period, the girl-child is malleable, builds and develops her personality and character. She is very dependent on the significant others, those on whom she models her behaviour, through observation, repetition and imitation. Her physical, mental, social, spiritual and emotional developments start and progress to get to the peak at the young adult stage (Offorma, 2009).

Discrimination Against the Girl Child: While children around the world continue to face various forms of adversity in the 21st century, girl children in particular are subjected to multiple forms of oppression, exploitation, and discrimination due to their gender. United Nations statistics, national reports and studies initiated by non-governmental organizations repeatedly show that girls, as a group, have lower literacy rates, receive less health care, and are more often impoverished than boys.[United Nation Children's Fund 2008] It is also important to note these conditions, more often than not, do not improve as girls grow to become women. Forms of discrimination against girl children are numerous and vary depending on the traditions, history, and culture of a particular society. In our work to improve the condition of girls, Youth Advocate Program (YAP) International focuses on three life-threatening practices that impact the lives of millions of girl children – female infanticide, female genital cutting, and honour killing. The Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) defines a child as a person under the age of 18 unless national laws recognize the age of majority earlier. The age of 18 is now accepted as the world standard, since every country has ratified the CRC except Somalia and the United States. Although YAP International specifically advocates for ending discrimination against girls, we realize efforts to curtail gender discrimination must include strategies that continue to support women when they reach and pass age 18.

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 the result of neglect. Selective abortion – also called gender-selective abortion, sex-selective abortion, or female feticide – is the abortion of a foetus because it is female. Medical technology has made it possible for parents to discover the sex of a foetus at earlier and earlier stages of pregnancy, so many women from communities with a preference for boys practice selective abortion. These practices occur most frequently in

societies where a girl child is viewed as culturally and economically less advantageous than a boy child does. Female infanticide has been reported in China, North Korea, South Asia (Bangladesh, India, Nepal, and Pakistan), the Middle East (Algeria, Egypt, Jordan, Libya, Morocco, Syria, Tunisia, Turkey) and parts of Africa (Cameroon, Liberia, Madagascar, Senegal, Nigeria). Female infanticide and feticide are predominantly practiced in regions of significant poverty and overpopulation. One-reason boys are more valued than girls is preserving lineage, as only males in most societies carry family lineage and family name. Also, children are expected to care for parents in their old age in many countries, so raising a son becomes a better investment because once a girl marries, she becomes the property of her husband and of virtually no value to her parents. Some women resort to female infanticide and feticide in order to protect their daughters from a life of objectification and subjugation in a society dominated by men, where there is a prevalent anti-girl attitude. Economically, girls often have a lower earning potential than boys do, as boys are more likely to find work and receive higher pay. This is significant in poor communities where each family member is expected to add to the household income. A girl can no longer contribute to her family's income after marriage when she must turn all of her wages over to her husband. In many situations, it is much more of an economic burden to raise a girl, as many cultures require religious and social ceremonies for girls but not boys. Holding a "proper" ceremony for maintaining respectable social stature can be very expensive, often leaving poor families with nothing. Mothers are not the only perpetrators of female infanticide and feticide, as more dominant members of the immediate family, such as the husband or mother-in-law, often encourage or carry out the deed. In addition, women may experience pressure from members of their community, possibly facing physical abuse, disownment from their husband or parents, and homelessness if they choose to keep a child against the direction of others.

Female Genital Cutting: Female Genital Cutting (FGC) refers to any practice that involves the removal or the alteration of the female genitalia. It is a centuries-old cultural practice found in many countries among people following various religions and beliefs, but is most prevalent in Africa. Other terms for FGC include female genital mutilation, female genital circumcision or female genital operations. According to the United Nations Population Fund, "it is estimated that over 130 million girls and women have undergone some form of genital cutting and at least two million girls are at risk of undergoing the practice every year."[United Nation Population Fund, 2004] FGC is reportedly practiced in 28 of Africa's 43 countries, most pervasive in Egypt, Eritrea, Mali, Sudan, and the Central African Republic. Custom and tradition are the most frequently cited reasons behind FGC. Other factors include the role of FGC in confirming femininity in some cultures, controlling the sexual behaviour of a woman, and preserving aesthetics and cleanliness in cultures that view parts of the female genitalia as dirty or dangerous. Mostly Muslims who practice FGC sometimes cite religious justifications. However, the practice outdates Islam, the majority of Muslims do not practice FGC, and some Islamic leaders deny any link between their religion and FGC. Most other FGC practicing communities adhere to traditional Animist religions.
Among the obstacles to eradicating, the practice of female genital cutting is the fact that many women, often the victims of the procedure, consider FGC a valuable cultural tradition, and in some cases necessary to be eligible for marriage.

Fortunately, progress has been made though education, legislation, and campaigns to raise awareness. Research has shown a positive correlation between the number of people attending secondary school and the number of people opposed to FGC. Consequently, with more educational opportunities for girls in many countries, there will be more female opposition to the procedure. Several African countries have legislated against FGC, and other national governments support the eradication. Human rights organizations, like the World Health Organization (WHO), oppose the medicalization of FGC in any form and favour complete elimination. However, in some communities, milder forms of FGC remain legal, and thus legitimate.

Honour Killing: Honour killing is the practice of killing girls and women who are perceived to have defiled a family's honour by allegedly engaging in sexual activity or other improprieties before marriage or outside of marriage. "Improper" behaviour justifies grounds for killing, however, has expanded to include transgressions that are not initiated by the girl, including rape, incest, sexual abuse, or sexual rumour. A girl is killed most often by male kin – father, husband, brother, uncle, or cousin - to restore honour to her family. Criminal penalties for honour killing are lenient in countries where this practice is most prevalent. Because many cases go unreported, it is difficult to determine the number of women who are the victims of honour killing. The United Nations Population Fund (UNPF) estimates as many as 5,000 females are being killed each year because of honour killings. Honour killing occurs most frequently in Muslim countries, although neither Islamic religion nor law sanctions the practice. Other countries where such killings have been reported include Bangladesh, Britain, Brazil, Ecuador, Egypt, India, Israel, Italy, Norway, Jordan, Pakistan, Peru, Morocco, Sweden, Turkey, Uganda, and Venezuela. Violations of honour include engaging in an illicit sexual relationship, eloping, being raped, being sexually abused by a family member and then running away, seeking divorce, and being seen alone with a man or boy even if the interaction is innocent. Some children are killed for being born to a mother who is accused of violating a family's honour. Allegations of these activities or other improprieties are enough to instigate honour killings, often little or no proof is necessary. Depending on the country, community, and specific situation, girls can be strangled, shot, beaten to death, stabbed, hacked to death, or in some cases, burned. In communalistic societies, actions committed by any family member affect the social stature of the entire family. The family's reputation comes before an individual's interests or safety. Men in many societies consider their family's honour to be inextricably tied to their own honour, and thus perform honour killings to cleanse the family's name from the improper deeds of girls or women. Particularly in Arab and Islamic communities, a family's honour is often determined by the actions of its girls and women. In addition, patriarchal traditions force women to face the odd duality of being perceived as both fragile beings who need male protection, and evil persons who threaten to taint society.

Misconception and challenges facing girl-child education in Africa: In a region where many are struggling to get enough food and to care for those stricken with various diseases, a basic education, especially for girl children, is low on the list of priorities. Okeke, Nzewi and Njoku (2008) identified child labour, poverty and lack of sponsorship, quest for wealth, bereavement, truancy, broken home, and engagement of

children as house helps, as factors or the clog in the wheel of children's access to education. According to Offorma (2009), more than 350 million people, over half Africa's population, live below the poverty line of one dollar a day. This implies that poverty also excludes children, including the girl-child, from school. Education is the process of providing information to an inexperienced person to help him/her develop physically, mentally, socially, emotionally, spiritually, politically and economically.That is why at graduation ceremonies one hears the Vice-Chancellors pronounce these words while awarding degrees to their institutions' graduates: "You have been found worthy in character and learning…" In education parlance, it means that the individual has acquired adequate and appropriate knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values, known as cognitive, psychomotor and affective behaviours, to be able to function optimally as a citizen. According to Offorma (2009), these behaviours are the focus of training individuals in institutions of learning. The planned and systematic training given in an institution of learning is formal education. The programme is organized, planned and systematically implemented. In an informal education, there is no plan and the training is haphazard and incidental. Education is the process through which individuals are made functional members of their society (Ocho, 2005). It is a process through which the young acquire knowledge and realizes their potentialities and uses them for self-actualization, to be useful to themselves and others. It is a means of preserving, transmitting and improving the culture of the society. In every society, education connotes acquisition of something good, something worthwhile. Education is one of the fundamental rights of individuals. Article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in December, 1949 stipulated that:

- Everyone has the right to education. This shall be free at least in the elementary and primary stages.
- Elementary education shall be compulsory while technical and professional education shall be made generally available.
- Higher education shall be equally accessible to all based on merit.
- ☐ Parents have a prior right to choose the kind of education that shall be given to their children (Nwangwu, 1976:45).

Some countries have promulgated laws to improve access to education of the girl-child. Of significance also is the fact that a number of NGOs have been allowed to operate in areas where early marriage is prevalent. They are now educating the people on the importance of taking girls to school rather than marrying them off to older men. The government of Nigeria, in collaboration with NGOs, has also established centres where girls rescued from early marriage are accommodated and counselled, before being sent back to school. Based on the misconceptions regarding girl-child education in Africa, the challenges facing girl-child education in Africa and the methods applied to solve the misconceptions and challenges facing girl-child education, the current research seeks to explore the research questions noted below.

Research Questions

1. What are the misconceptions regarding girl-child education in Africa?

2. What are the challenges facing girl-child education in Africa?
3. Which methods could be applied to solve the misconceptions and challenges facing girl-   child education?

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This paper employed a qualitative approach. When we study people qualitatively, we get to know them personally and experience what they experience in their daily struggle in society. White (2005) points out that qualitative research usually involves fieldwork and the researcher must physically go to the people, site or institution in order to observe behaviour in the natural setting. A qualitative study is carried out in a real life situation in an attempt to understand the phenomenon in context (Maree, 2007). In this study, the qualitative research allowed the researchers to understand the participants' knowledge, attitudes and personal experiences regarding girl-child education. Through the qualitative approach, the researchers attempted to understand the participants' experiences of girl-child education where it is being practised. This was necessary in the context of this study where the inclusion policy, as stipulated by Universal Declaration of Human rights, that everyone has rights. Based on the research problem and objectives, the researcher chose the qualitative approach because discrimination against the girl-child takes place in a natural setting (not an experiment done in a laboratory but in societies) where the exclusion takes place. Case study design of eight (8) respondents was used for interacting with the participants (Leedy & Ormrod, 2005). The qualitative method was preferred because the actual findings of the study would be beyond anticipation of the researchers. This means there were latent experiences from participants that the researchers might have not thought of. Hence, this research was exploratory and inductive in nature. All the interviews were recorded to ensure reliability of the study.

Ethical and validity consideration: The researchers endeavoured to ensure that the research team has the necessary professional expertise and support. We also endeavoured to ensure that the research process does not involve any unwarranted material gain or loss for any participant. Additionally, we endeavoured to ensure factual accuracy and avoid falsification, fabrication, suppression or misinterpretation of data by assigning an independent colleague to verify content validity.

Results of the Study: The interview schedule used for this study consisted of three themes, which were based on the aforementioned research questions. The following are the verbatim reports from the participants:

What are some of the misconceptions labelled against girl-child education in Africa?

One of the common misconceptions is that it is the responsibility of a male to get educated so that they can become the providers for their families, therefore it is not expected that a girl-child take on this responsibility. Another misconception noted by participant P1 was that:

Especially in struggling families, sending a boy child rather than a girl child to school to be educated is more worthwhile as boys are viewed as being more intelligent than girls and do

better academically therefore will make better use of the opportunities given (participant P1).

In addition participant P5 :

Old traditions also affect the views of girl child education as in some traditions; the main aim of a girl-child is to become a good wife and mother therefore an education is not needed for this, only time spent in the kitchen can be seen as their education to eventually take up the role, which is expected of them.

Comments on challenges faced by girl-child education such as: Access to quality education ranged from the fact that girls from wealthier homes might have an opportunity to attend good schools and receive a quality education, but girls from poorer households who cannot afford to attend these schools will receive an inferior education which in Africa will be the majority of our girl-children.

In terms of Child abuse, participant P8 lamented that:

Girls are at a higher risk of being abused than boys, namely, sexually abused. Research proves that even though it might be argued that males are less likely to report sexual abuse, the reports show that girls are at a greater risk based on the number of reported incidents (participant P8).

In support of the aforementioned, P3 noted:

This could also be one of the reasons why girl-children are reluctant to go to school or decide to drop out.

The right to education, which is a fundamental human right, is frequently denied to girls in some African countries. The then United Nations Secretary General, Kofi Annan, stated that in Africa, when families have to make a choice, due to limited resources, of educating either a girl or a boy child, it is always the boy that is chosen to attend school.

For Gender inequality, P7 argued that the expectations of girl-children are less than that of boy-children. Girls are not expected to do better than boys do therefore even though they have the potential to do better, they are not as challenged as boys and less pressure is put on them to perform.

For Solutions related to girl-child education for development and transformation, it is important to note that "...bursary schemes could help some of struggling young girls receive quality education by attending schools where they can receive this but only so many girls will receive these bursaries because there are only so many schools," said P2. While P6 suggested that government needs to "build more schools in disadvantaged areas where majority of our girls are found and ensure that they have qualified educators and strong school management team" that can ensure that learners will receive a good education. Participants also noted that schools should be made safer for all girls and the laws of abusing girl-children should be tightened (P4 and P8). Examples need to be made of sexual offenders so that this behaviour is not repeated in the future (P5). Girls should also receive education about how to deal with the effects of being abused so that they can overcome this, make it a stepping-stone to making something of their lives, and be an example to other girls who have experienced the same challenges they have (P8, P3 and P3).

All learners, regardless of their appearance or sexuality, should be treated the same. This should not only be on paper as the vision of the school but all educators at schools should practice it. Expectations of both girls and boys should be equal and it should be the aim of the teacher to develop learners to their full potential instead of what they think learners should be able to achieve. P5 concluded that:

It is important that girl-children receive the same quality of education as boys; they should be seen as being equal, with an equal chance of enhancing their lives and the lives of their families by educating themselves and being an asset not only to their society but their country at large (P1).

Without education, girls are denied the opportunity to develop their full potential and to play a productive and equal role in their families, their societies, their countries and the world. Finally, that schools in Africa are often substandard, especially in rural and isolated areas, means that even the few girls lucky enough to get access to an education often receive one of poor quality and limited duration. Many schools in Africa are nearly destitute, with classes being held in crowded, poorly constructed structures, in which there is very limited access to paper and pencils, and even less access to textbooks and computers.

DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

Crucial Issues in Girl-Child Education: In this section, we shall discuss major and crucial issues in girl-child education. The issues to be discussed include: access to education; quality; child abuse; and gender inequality

Access to Education: Access simply means the right to education. It is also the opportunity provided for the girl-child to be educated. Access deals with the availability, convenience and ability to be educated. As noted by participant P8, it is true that many governments make provision for the education of their citizens, but most of the time the provisions do not take cognizance of the peculiarities of the girl-child. In that case, the girl-child may not have access to education, which is a fundamental human right. In support of P8's argument, research has shown that millions of girls do not have access to school despite the concerted efforts to push the cause forward (Okeke, Nzewi and Njoku, 2008). In South Africa, a recent report by Human Rights Watch warns that sexual violence and abuse are hampering girls' access to education. In Afghanistan, they have simply been barred from school under the Taleban regime. According to Cynthia (2011) customs, poverty, fear and violence are the reasons why girls still account for 60% of the estimated 113 million out-of-school children, and majority live in sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia. This observation is consistent with respondents P1, P 4 and P6. P7 suggested that most of the factors that militate against the girl-child's access to education are socio-cultural. Many countries on the African continent rank among the poorest in the world. The on-going HIV/AIDS epidemics, over-crowding in cities, tribal warfare and despotic governments have contributed to the degeneration of the beautiful African land into a human rights catastrophe. At the centre of the devastating situation is the girl-child. The girl-children appear to be the most vulnerable and most undervalued members of the world society (P5).

In Africa, many girls are prevented from getting the education entitled to them because families often send their daughters out

to work at a young age, so that they can get the additional income they may need to exist beyond subsistence level, and finance the education of sons. It has been reported on BBC News (2006) that African patriarchical societal viewpoint favours boys over girls because boys maintain the family lineage. Additional reasons why girls do not have adequate access to education in Africa include the fact that many have to stay home to nurse relatives with HIV/AIDS. That their mothers were not educated is another reason that makes them feel that their daughters do not need education. Furthermore, some families just do not believe in education of girls at all; for it could be 'a waste'. However, this is, and has been proven wrong. It is interesting to observe that the girl-child does well in school when given the opportunity, which, however, should be a right. Data from the 2003 Universal Basic Education Commission (UBEC) on Southeastern Nigeria showed that more boys than girls drop out of school. The dropout here is a result of some factors that distract the boys from schools. Factors such as preferring trade, quest for money, parental decision, and lack of employment opportunities, hawking/street trading, perceived too long process of education and lack of counselling. In Ethiopia child brides face early pregnancy, responsibilities to their children and in-laws, and reticence of their husbands, who are usually much older, to let them out of the house. In Uganda, Birungi (2008) cited the rampant fire in schools as examples of the gaps in implementation of the girl-child education. She noted that the previous year's floods in eastern Uganda left many schools in disrepair and these were seen as forms of exclusion. Children in Bundibugyo district cannot access schools during the raining season and "Government has done nothing to alleviate the problem".

In Kenya, girl–child education is elusive. Mwangi (2004) wrote that a combination of poverty, disease and backward cultural practices continue to deny the girl-child her right to education. Even with the introduction of free primary education, access to education still remaining a wide dream to many Kenyan children. Despite the introduction of free primary education in the country, which accounted for an increase in enrolment, a sizeable number of children, especially girls, still find themselves out of school owing to a number of reasons. These reasons are demands for their labour in the homes such as house chores and assisting in looking after their young siblings; child marriage, death of mother, and looking after a sick member of the family. Some of the girls are given in marriage against their wish and when they refuse, they are threatened with death. The children are given in marriage at a tender age in quest of dowry from the husbands. However, how much is the amount and for how long does it last? The girls lament that because of the setbacks they still did not escape from poverty and their parents had nothing to show for the dowry received.

Quality of Education: The Jomtien Conference of 1990 launched the Education For All (EFA) initiatives, which aimed at getting children into school within ten years and stressed that the urgent priority was to ensure access to and improve the quality of education for girls and women. Many countries mapped out programmes to facilitate the implementation of the initiatives. Nigeria embarked on Universal Basic Education. All these countries are in a bid to meet the Millennium Development Goal number two, which is to achieve Universal Basic Education. The question is what is the quality of education given to the girl-child that will help her to adapt to

the knowledge-based economy of the 21st century? The answer to this question can be attempted by investigating what happens in schools today. Demotivated teachers, examination malpractice, gender biased curriculum, lack of school facilities and instructional materials, and incessant strike actions are some of the variables in the quality of education of children. According to the view of P4, quality education was not about how well a child was performing in school, but a number of factors that enrich the wellbeing of a child in school. She cited the issues of administration of discipline, corporal punishment, sexual harassment, child abuse and child labour as some of the things that lead to exclusion of groups of students from accessing quality education. United Nation statistics, national reports and studies initiated by non-governmental organizations in 2005 repeatedly showed that girls, as a group, had lower literacy rates, received less health care, and were more impoverished than boys were. Today we are in a revolution and this will be reflected in teaching, research and community work, which will help the girl-child to fit into the global society.

Child Abuse: In Ethiopia, girls of school age are sometimes abducted for marriage when they are no more than eight years. In West Africa, they are recruited from poor rural families to work as domestic servants in coastal cities or even neighbouring countries. This was common in Nigeria in the 1980s through the 90s with the influx of young girls with their aides from Togo and Benin Republic. Today, it is not easy to find a house help because there is awareness of the values of education, and so parents do not give out their children any longer as house helps. A former minister of education while serving as state governor, once prescribed some punishment for parents that gave out their children for house help duties, especially the girl-child. In the article 'When girls go missing from the school', (2009), UNESCO courier journalist, Cynthia Guttman, reports that poverty, fear and violence are the reasons why girls still account for 60% of the estimated 113 million out-of-school children, and majority live in sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia. P8 as well and P5 note that millions of girls do not have access to school despite the concerted efforts to push the cause forward. Tracking School Age Children's Education Status in UNICEFA-Field States identified child labour, poverty and lack of sponsorship as some of the factors militating against access to child education in states like Abia, Akwa-Ibom, Anambra, Bayelsa, Benue, Cross River, Ebonyi, Enugu, Imo and River states of Nigeria. If the World Bank's opinion that more than 350 million people (over half of Africa's population) live below the poverty line of one dollar a day is anything to go by, it then implies that poverty, also affects children, including the talked-about girl-child from school. Beside the relative poverty in the South, the primordial challenges of tradition in northern Nigeria for instance, which confronts the rights of the girl child to access to education, are socio-cultural related. Therefore, the battle toward access to education for the girl child is still enormous despite the growing transition into advanced levels of education with technology.

Gender inequality: The gender gap favouring boys has remained consistently wide over the last ten years. To address this issue, UNICEF supported the "25 by 2005" global initiative for the acceleration of girls' education in order to achieve gender parity in 25 countries by 2005. Nigeria was one of the 25 countries selected for this fast track action. In 2003, the Ministry of Education adopted the Strategy for

Accelerating Girls Education in Nigeria. In 2004, the Ministry also launched the Girls' Education Project, supported by UNICEF and DFID, in order to focus interventions on States with lowest enrolment rate for girls. In West Africa and some parts of the north and south of Nigeria where ironically families struggle to get food to stay alive and even keep out of the various violent crimes, basic education especially for the girl, is least of the worries or priorities. Although in today's South Africa, as noted by P6, girls and boys stand a better chance to develop and prosper. Since the birth of the new democracy in 1994, the country's economy has grown significantly at an average of 4.5% and individual freedom and liberties have been vastly expanded. South Africa is now a middle-income economy with a strong emerging market, an abundant supply of natural resources, well-developed financial, legal, communications, energy and transport sectors and a stock exchange that ranks among the ten largest in the world. The South African Constitution, built on an acute awareness of the injustices of the past, is widely regarded as the most progressive in the world.

Solutions to the girl-child education Issues: Since liberation from the Apartheid, South Africa has changed their curriculum to be responsive to the demands of the nation. Their curriculum is child-centred, no more the talk and chalk approach. This idea could be borrowed by other African countries. In Kenya, not all hope is lost. The government has, however, taken some initiatives in the promotion of children's education by enshrining this right in the Children's Act, 2001 (P6, P3 and P7). The Act also created a department for children to deal with their rights and welfare. Through strict intervention of the government, there is hope for the children who have been out of school to pursue their lifelong dreams. Braun, Swaminathan, and Rosegrant (2004:11) observed, "feeding children in school has paid significant educational dividends. A school feeding programme in Bangladesh, for instance, has resulted in a 35% overall increase in enrolment and a remarkable increase 44% increase for girls." It is recommended that governments should emulate Bangladesh to achieve the Millennium Development Goal number two, which is attaining Universal Basic Education. Most of these are to be found in the urban areas, leaving very few teachers in the rural areas. Teachers should be equitably distributed and social amenities put in place in the rural areas to retain teachers. Most countries of Africa are multi-cultural, multi-linguistic and multi-religious. The diversity and value system must be the focus of education to ensure that quality education is given to the children.

Girl child Education for National Transformation and Development: There is an adage that 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 educable human being, and so calls for special attention to be focused on education of the girl-child. P1 notes that 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. As acknowledged by P4, by improving educational opportunities for girls and women, education helps women develop skills that allow them to make decisions and influence community change in key areas. In turn, these programs have a positive impact on some of the most profound issues of our time: population growth, HIV and AIDS, peace and security, and the widening gap between the rich and poor. Education programmes help girls and women improve their own lives, the lives of their families and the conditions in their communities. For parents - and especially mothers - this means creating conditions that ensure their daughters have equal access to basic education, are able to make informed decisions about their futures, and are able to protect themselves from trafficking, sexual exploitation, HIV and AIDS.

Conclusion

The findings revealed that access to quality education, child abuse and gender inequality play a central role in transformation in framing misconceptions, challenges and methods of addressing child abuse. Without education, girls are denied the opportunity to develop their full potential and to play a productive and equal role in their families, their societies, their countries and the world. Education is the right of every girl everywhere and key to transforming her life and the life of her community.

Recommendations

Although much has been done to improve the calibre and existence of girls' education in African countries, there is still much that needs to be done. The largest hurdle that needs to be overcome before all African girls can all get the education they deserve is the prevailing social thought that discourages or minimizes the importance of education for girls. To stop this, countries in Africa need to pass laws banning the early marriage practices that keep girls out of school. Finally, African governments must pass legislation that makes the education of girls mandatory for primary school, and then enforce these laws stringently in the rural communities

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