

By Atureta Adeiza

Educate the girl child, educate the nation" Those were words with which United Nations Children Fund (UNICEF), welcomed the choice of the theme for the 2005 Nigeria Children's day, with a primary call to policy makers, local authorities, religious and traditional leaders to accelerate progress on educating girls.

However, because girls are participating (in education) in much fewer numbers and for shorter periods, particular attention to girls is essential, not only for the development of the country, but to fulfill the right of every child to education."

Education, unknown to many is one of the fundamental rights of individuals. Article 26 of the Universal Declaration on Human Rights, which was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in December, 1949 stipulated the following;

1. That everyone has the right to education. This shall be free at least in the elementary and primary stages.
2. Elementary education shall be compulsory while technical and professional education shall be made generally available.
3. Higher education shall be equally accessible to all on the basis of merit.

That every one has the right to education means everyone, inclusive of all (male or female, old or young, regardless of social status) is eligible for education. That the basic form learning is mandatory for all humans, possibly, implies that one cannot even afford to be ignorant of anything. And lastly, that opportunity to education at the advanced level would be attained eventually by aspiration and such would not be denied anyone with proven worth. The preference for merit (based on proven worth) that is, should be encouraged and dislodged from that which pertains to open discrimination.

If education entails an empowerment for life; a scope to self-discipline and preservation, means to wealth, health; defense, social integration, cooperation and understanding, moral and spiritual stability, education therefore, encompasses all of humanity, and humanity of education. Hence, every child aspiring man or woman, weak or strong should have the right to education. According to L. Ocho in the book entitled, Issues and Concerns In Education and Life, the child is born helpless and has to rely entirely on parents and other older members of the society to survive and satisfy her growth needs in all their ramifications. Education thus would provide the needed knowledge of integration and of course, security for sustenance.

Another reason why we need to have education accepted as a basic right Ocho adds, is because; the degree and quality of participation in the life of the society depends to a large extent on the degree and quality of her education. This reasoning inclines toward education as being a principal mechanism for democratization of ideas and popular participation in affairs of the system because the much of active participation a people engage in, the better their grasp of the nitty-gritty of the social, political and economic needs for growth. That tells us there is a realization -based system in place; or rather a form of education is in place. A nation constantly at war over resources for allocation or ownership; or a continent constantly at variance with issues of poverty for years with no goals or end in sight, say a lot of its approach to education. Education however, will enable the enhancement of political and other citizenship duties and

Girl Child Education: Putting the issues into proper perspective (I)

Written by Administrator

Sunday, 19 December 2010 18:23 -

help exercise the rights pertaining thereto effectively.

The third reason is; since every citizen benefits from the result of the education of her fellow citizen and since every generation receives its education from an older generation, every generation has a duty to reciprocate by educating the generation that comes after it.

This is talking about the sustainability attribute embedded in education. Hence, functional education involves the development of physical or cognitive skills, the acquisition of knowledge, and the shaping of values, attitudes, and beliefs such that ideas disputed and gained, become transferable and practicable within capabilities ultimately.

The world over, people continue to emphasise on the need for proper child education, and the clamour for particularly, the girl child, not because of benefits attached to its advocacy, but for reasons as quest to ensure a sustained, credible knowledge life cycle.

After all, there is a saying that if one trains a woman, one trains an entire nation. So, why not train the girl child, this asks? For in every one girl (or woman), lies an entire nation.

So no true independent nation would afford to toy with the education of its children, except of course, there are nations where children are only thought of for future. If they are not prepared for leadership, how on earth would they become leaders eventually? And one way to prepare them (boy, girl) for this challenge is by providing quality education (and equality in it also). This is because education is the bedrock of all facets of development. A system intentionally frustrated to lack in all elements of 'quality', would never find its children qualified to lead in anyway.

A Growing up Global publication by Population Reference Bureau (PRB), suggests that there are still roughly three-quarters of 10-14 year olds in school. The attendance rates according to this report also fall substantially, with gaps between boys' and girls' enrolments widened and regional differences becoming more pronounced. It's this widening in gap that often draws attention to the glowing plight of the girl child, the associated demerits and the problems such portend for the education sector.

Professor Grace Offorma of the University of Nigeria (UNN), Nsukka, in a lecture at the Conference of the Federation of the University Women of Africa in Lagos, raised concern over the 'no attention' given to the peculiarities of the girl-child in decision making with regard to child education. She noted that many governments (not just Nigeria) make provision for the education of their citizens, but the provisions most of the time do not take cognizance of the peculiarities of the girl-child. Without being critical, the 'peculiarities' it's believed here refer to the features of stigmatization over time which have set the female-folk back. For all children are equal, ideally, and should be treated same without attachment to individuality or distinctiveness. So the child or girl-child is as important as the male or man or boy child. The world accepts the issues and shares in their plight. Moreover, this she says, may result into the girl-child not having the much desired access to education, which is a fundamental human right.

Statistics from the 2009 DHS reports for 44 African countries even showed that children born to young uneducated mothers are much more at risk; those born to women with no education had more than twice the risk of death compared to children born to women with secondary education or higher. Despite these growing concerns, some societies still shockingly, battle with the basic understanding that functional knowledge through formal learning, could actually prevail over such damning circumstances.

This is where governments should function as 'government' especially with rural Africa, where primordial beliefs still hold back.

Statistics contained in the UN Human Development Report, 2006, say women and young girls

Girl Child Education: Putting the issues into proper perspective (I)

Written by Administrator

Sunday, 19 December 2010 18:23 -

carry a double burden of disadvantage since they are invariably the ones who sacrifice their time and education to carry water. The risks aside, they are further recruited from poor rural families by relations, even parents, to work as domestic servants in coastal cities or even neighbouring countries, thereby neglecting the importance of self-development for the child, through education. They (girls) are often abused in their final destinations, a sequence that could have been avoided if they had been enrolled into primary or secondary education back home.