

Role of Girls Education Empowerment on Poverty Reduction and Gender Imbalance in Rural Areas of Katsina State, Nigeria.

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ABSTRACT: Girls education empowerment is a tool used to transform rural girls from being powerless to the powerful, from uninformed to informed and from being socially backwards to the socially improved. The rural regions and communities could move through such tool from the state of underdeveloped to the state of socially and economically improved. This is because, illiteracy is recognized as the bare hindrance to social and economic development. Therefore, the education empowerment is the true transformation tool, which can bring rural northern Nigeria to its golden age. The education empowerment as in the theory and practice, is the most important tool for increasing awareness among individual especially the rural poor. In the human capital approach, skills and knowledge are important ingredients in fighting poverty. The rural girls' empowerment through education may offer a series of opportunities, such as the acquisition of knowledge and skills, improvement in social status, information and economic resources among others. In Katsina State, the rural girls' education empowerment considers empowering rural young women and girls as poverty eradication strategy which aim at improving access of rural girls to tertiary education. This is because, before this program, getting access to participate in tertiary education program was a serious challenge for rural girls and young women. This study was quantitative and empirical in nature with its population as the trained rural girls; the major stakeholders of the in Girls Education Empowerment program (GEEP) in Katsina state. Three rural Local Government Areas (LGAs) from three senatorial zones were randomly selected from each zone. The data collection was carried out using the structured questionnaire by the research team members. Paired-sample *t*-test statistical analysis were used to compare the economic wellbeing of the respondents before and after attendance of GEEP. The overall economic wellbeing was found with significant difference ($p < 0.05$) between before and after completing the program. The result obtain from overall wellbeing shows a mean score of 145.2 ($S.D = 13.4$) and significant in *t*-test ($p > 0.05$). This study concluded that, the respondents have gained knowledge, increase awareness and access to infrastructural assets that lead life satisfaction.

KEYWORDS: Girls Education, Empowerment, Poverty Reduction, Gender Imbalance Rural Areas,

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I. INTRODUCTION

Education serve as a mirror for any given society, it is also the seed and flower of society's socioeconomic development. It transforms human beings from ignorance to enlightenment and from darks of social backwardness to light of social betterment (Altman, 2001). The nations could through education move from the state of underdevelopment to the state of rapidly social and economic development. The general conference of UNSCEO since 1964 recognized that "illiteracy is a severe hindrance to social and economic development. Therefore, the education empowerment is the true transformation tool (Asee, 2010), that can bring northern Nigeria to its next golden age. The education empowerment as in the theory and practice, is the most important tool for increasing awareness among individual especially the rural poor (Akpan, 2012). The importance of education for rural areas is to help them acquire information, enlightenment, about their resourcefulness and skills that could be taped and utilized to develop other resources for their better living standard and development. To improve the situation of rural poor, the understanding of gender issues and dynamisms is crucial (Astorino, 2008 and Jariah, 2012). As education is also a dynamic process that starts from birth, a born child is surrounded by parents, other relatives and experiences from his or her environment. The surrounding social and physical environments imparts information that children learn and respond to. From these responses the socioeconomic status and development process of children could be assess using gender

vitality. Gender difference among children lead to different responses within the same biological parents and in the same environment. The issue of gender disparity in education among rural populace is certainly complex and impact on their income generation, standard of living and general wellbeing. Rural development generally refers to the process of improving the quality of life and economic well-being of rural people those living in relatively isolated and sparsely populated areas. Rural development actions are mostly aim at the social and economic development in the rural areas. This is not limited to the developing countries as many of the developed countries have active rural development programs.

Girls-child Education in Northern Nigeria

Most rural communities in northern Nigeria view girl-child education as a waste of resources and a gateway to immorality. This belief, according to Hussain (1992), dictates the role of women as mothers and house wives that militates against their educational progress and economic prosperity. Some of these societies believe that, the best place for females is home where they have to cook, nurture children, and look after the elderly and other family members (Mahuta, 2007). This may be reason for Konna (2010) to recommend a national policy related to rural education for girls and women, because it is key to poverty eradication, gender equality and national development. According to Aseey (2010), there is a serious need in Kenya to give priority to rural girl's education in order to assist the country to achieve its Vision 2020. There are many common barriers for the education of girls in many African countries, which include poverty that leading to early marriage and pregnancy at a young age. Other barriers include gender favoritism, girl-child unfriendly facilities as well as a lack of female teacher counsellors. These are almost similar in all African countries. Therefore, to improve this situation, there should be alternative efforts toward girls' education empowerment for rural girls and women to creatively earn and attend their standard of living.

Gender Issue and Education in Rural Areas of Katsina State

With the 19 northern states of Nigeria, where most of them having combination of issues related to gender, that constraining the rural young women and girls from having access to educational services and assets. Zumilah (2010) suggested rural microenterprises as a vital tool in process of reducing rural poverty, especially when it involves women. This is because women do vital contribution toward the household's sustainability. Although the societal conservative views on gender roles remain natural and unchangeable phenomenon, particularly in rural settings. However, Katsina State is chosen for this study because of it is being the first area in which Western education was introduced in the whole of the north of Nigeria. Paradoxically, the NBS reports from 2012 show the incidence of poverty in Katsina State as severe at 74.5%. The surprising parts was that, the poorer families are located in the rural areas, and comprise more women and children (Haruna & Saifullahi, 2012). The majority of the people of Katsina (78.7%) are in the rural areas. In the rural areas of Katsina, there is a unique gender issue that has become very persistent and unresolved for a long period of time (Kabir, 2012). This includes the issue of the preference for sons over daughters (Abdullahi, 2014) and considering girls as property transferred from the fathers to the husband's house. These make considering her education as less valuable and less important to the development of the society. Feminine poverty in rural areas is affecting many young women morally (Zumilah, 2010).

Girl Education Empowerment Program (GEEP) In Katsina State,

Katsina State government in collaboration with other development partners such as UNICEF has considered this situation and aims to empower rural girls and young women through education. The girls' empowerment program through education may offer a series of opportunities, such as the acquisition of knowledge and skills, improvement in social status, information resources, and economic resources among others (Girls Education Empowerment Program [GEEP], 2011). In Katsina State, this effort further considers empowering rural young women and girls through education as poverty eradication strategy which aim at improving access of rural girls to tertiary education. This is because before this program, getting access to participate in education program was a serious challenge for rural girls and young women. However, GEEP assisted many girls from rural areas of Katsina state to attend tertiary level of education to acquire the National Certificate in Education (NCE) as the minimum primary teaching qualification in Nigeria. The GEEP offers new hope for rural girls and young women in Katsina State to acquire knowledge and skills. The girls that are empowered can also empower their family members to increase their economic wellbeing.

The main aim of the GEEP is empowering rural girls' through participation in education program and at the end of the program the government would employ all the trained girls and young women as female schoolteachers in their villages. Therefore, the educated girls are assumed to be an important social agent to increase awareness of the rural families concerning the importance of education (especially for girls) in order to combat poverty. The educationally empowered young women and girls may increase the economic wellbeing of their households as well as their society at large (Sultana, 2006). The GEEP is improving the provision of female teachers in the rural schools. As the process of empowering girls through education sustained, in the long

run, the rural poor would be educated, and be able to manage their own economic problems (Akpan, 2012). This is because education promotes acquisition of skills and capacity building of the person to generate income and alleviate poverty. Sultana (2006) found that a higher level of education was strongly associated with a positive outcome and good achievement in life.

The GEEP empowered young rural girls and women have acquired NCE, as the minimum teaching qualification in Nigeria. They are expected to serve as female teachers in various primary and junior secondary schools in their various localities. They are also expected to serve as mentors to parents as well as the school children for curtailing frequent girl-child dropout of schools, and encourage high enrolment, retention and completion of school in rural areas of Katsina state. Furthermore, in Katsina State the GEEP as a long-term effort improve rural girls' access to tertiary education which that improve the wellbeing of the rural family. The GEEP is not just empowering the rural girls, but, indirectly, is targeting rural communities. For example, the mentoring effort of the empowered girls has increased the enrolment of girl-children into schools (GEEP, 2011; and Akunga, 2010). The United Nations Girls' Education Initiative (UNGEI, 2012) reported that the enrolment and retention of girls in schools have increased by 28% and the dropout rate decreased by 64% in the 22 pilot primary schools supported by the GEEP. The gender gap in the enrolment reduced from 41% to 38%, between males and females, respectively. The earlier mentioned the GEEP aims at curtailing problems of inadequate female teachers in the rural schools as barriers to education of girl-children among rural families.

This may improve co-existing relationship between education empowerment for girls and young women and poverty alleviation program. The effective tool for poverty eradication is education. Therefore, under this statement, both girls and boys in any society are expected to have equal access to education at all levels. The girls in northern Nigeria are always to disadvantaged in education, especially at the tertiary level Mai-Unguwa, (2006) where less than 15% of females are recorded annually (Rabi,2007). Hence improving the admission intake of girls at the primary, secondary and tertiary levels of education will help in reducing poverty among many rural families in future. Although there is so called government support to social inclusion and gender equality on paper in the Nigerian education system, the implementation is however, very weak due to cultural adherence. Samantha (2008) proposed ways to close the gap of the education imbalance between men and women, boys and girls as well as the rich and poor.

Educational empowerment needs to be correctly introduced (Sharifah, 2011). For example, Akunga (2010) explained that, the qualified female teachers in the GEEP should be employ in their rural hometown schools. No doubt this will make rural schools safer for girls and may promote the awareness of parents to send their daughters to school. The participation of women in education also could make them more informed, enlightened and have resources that may increase their social capital (Dauda et al., 2009) as well as lead to economic benefits (Blench and Ingawa, 2004). Asee (2010) also proposes the initiative of income generating activities through microenterprises for the rural poor. This could be used to support school needs; for example, the incidence of school dropout among girls is due to economic problems. When girls were engaged in some income generating activities after school time, it may increase their opportunity to complete school because they are able to pay the school fee or school related expenses. In the human capital approach, skills are important ingredient in fighting poverty (Zumilah, 2010). For Kabir (2012), stressed that, the issue is not only about the female teachers but poverty due to poor education opportunities for women. The issue of gender disparity in education is certainly complex and impact on the family income and economic wellbeing (Ryan & Cassie 2012). Therefore, Educational empowerment in the rural areas requires a combination of efforts from government, non-governmental organizations, teachers, parents and all stakeholders.

This is because women's participation in Nigerian education system has been facing different types of challenge, as identified by Rabi, Mohammed and Wammako (2009) as comprising poor conceptual awareness, socio-cultural status, poverty, teacher issues, curricular issues and sexual harassment. Rabi et al. (2009) added that poor conceptual awareness appeared in terms of the ignorance among rural parents on the importance of education, which appeared up to now in the twenty-first century in some rural societies of Nigeria. They view western education as a gateway to immorality. However, the principal function of education is character building, which is yet to be understood by many rural societies in Nigerian. This is because some parents in northern Nigeria have refused to send their female children to school, just to avoid the so-called Western values. This phenomenon negatively affects rural children more than those born and brought up in the cities of northern Nigeria.

The literature suggests that empowerment through education expand the relationships within and outside the community (Sharifah,2011). This increases the awareness and networks as well as the ability to make decisions over the resources. The knowledge and skill acquired by women will strengthen their strategies, goals, motives, networking and orientation towards good performance in decision-making and the control of resources (Maimunah, 1996). The Empowerment Theory by Solomon (1976) discussed the knowledge and skills as necessary for managing and. This theory was used many times in the field of education empowerment in many parts of the world (Hedayat, 2010; Lyons, Smuts, & Stephens, 2001; Simon, 1994; Hussain, 1992). Researches on educational empowerment found that education is important in order to gain employment.

Though the effects vary from one individual to another (Gennetian et al., 2002), but it is generally essential for poverty eradication (Hedayat, 2010)

This study therefore was based on the educational empowerment theory as used in Hedayat, (2010), as tool that is increasingly used to understand what is needed to change the situation of the rural poor through education (Lawson & Garrod, 2001 and Simon, 1994). This is particularly relevant in Katsina State where the gap in education between males and females is very wide (GEEP, 2011). Hence the literature suggests that girls' educational empowerment be widely used to expand individual relationships within and outside their community as well (Sharifah, 2011). The cognitive capacity expansion, as a result of knowledge and skills acquired by the individual, known as the intellectual levels, increases ability to gain experience and more knowledge through various methods. The cognitive, is an element in empowerment, it increases working experience, participation and individual's involvement in acquiring knowledge for development (Hedayat, 2010). The intellectual capacity of an individual determines his or her level of development. The level of an individual and societal development (Sharifah, 2011) is measured according to the level of skills gained or acquired. The skills and knowledge have a strong influence in building sustainable economic growth (World Bank, 2002).

II. METHODOLOGY

The population of this study are the trained rural girls as the major stakeholders of the GEEP. They were stakeholders of the GEEP in two way; they were participated in the program and taking part in teaching the rural children in their respective communities. The involving the stakeholders in study, as explained by Fine, Torre, Boudin, Bowen, Clark, Hylton, Martinez, Roberts, Smart and Upegui (2003), is important for good impact measurement. Therefore, all the certified trained girls were identified from the graduation register in Girls Education Program (GEP) office of their college. They were all contacted through various means at their residences either employed as teachers or not. Three rural LGAs from were randomly selected from each zone. The process of random selection of the LGAs was through randomly picking up three pieces of paper with the name of aLGA on each. The second sampling procedure was purposive, were only those who successfully graduated with the certificates are selected as the respondents of this study. They are directly benefited stakeholders from GEEP. Fine et al. (2003) encouraged involving direct stakeholders in the research as an appropriate method for measuring impact. The sampling procedure used was to ensure that, all the certified graduate had an equal chance of being selected in the sample (Ary, Jacobs, Razavieh, & Sorensen, 2006).

A pilot study was conducted with 50 respondents as a trial of the proposed instruments with the aim of detecting any challenges that can be remedied, before the actual data collection be carried out (Fraenkel & Wallen 2003). One of the purposes of pre-testing the instruments is to identify any ambiguity or inadequacy in the instruments (Ary et al., 2006). The instruments were confirmed as having good Cronbach's Alpha values of .943. Therefore, based on the feedback from the pilot study, some items in the instrument were reworded, while others were combined or deleted where necessary to improve the quality and reliability of the instruments. The instruments were adopted and adapted from the existing instruments. They were used in various research works by the founders and other researchers. To suit the cultural setting of Katsina some items of the instruments were changed, transformed or replaced to suit the nature of the respondents in the Katsina rural area. The data collection was carried out by team of researchers. The data were collected within 30 days in which at the end, the questionnaires were screened, inspected, arranged, and coded, and finally key in into SPSS software for analysis. There were 115 completed and screened questionnaires that were subsequently use in carrying out the SPSS analysis. The process of data clearing and entry in SPSS took 14 days. The statistical tests used were the paired-sample t-test to compare the economic wellbeing of the respondents before and after attendance of GEEP. There were two level of economic wellbeing derived from the data. The difference between the minimum and maximum economic wellbeing sum score was used to develop the two group of economic wellbeing from the sum scores that is the low economic wellbeing and high economic wellbeing groups.

III. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The level of economic wellbeing among respondents before their entry in, and after the completing GEEP was computed. The paired sample t-test was used to conduct the analyses. In order to determine the impact of the GEEP on the economic wellbeing of the respondents, the scores of the respondents on economic wellbeing before and after years of the GEEP were analyzed. The overall economic wellbeing was analyzed and then followed by other element of economic wellbeing. The findings show that, there was a significant difference ($p < 0.05$) in the overall economic wellbeing of the respondents before and after the GEEP. Therefore, H_0 , which stated, there is no difference in the economic wellbeing of the respondents before and after the GEEP was rejected (Table 1.0) these findings revealed that, there was a significant difference ($p < 0.05$) between before and after the GEEP in the life satisfaction, infrastructural assets and general economic wellbeing of the respondents.

Table 1.0: Respondents' Economic Wellbeing Before and After the GEEP

Variables	Period Measured						
		n	MEAN	SD	Df	t	p
Overall wellbeing	Before empowerment	115	145.2	13.4	354	14.4	0.00
	After empowerment	115	165.5	30.6			
Life satisfaction *	Before empowerment	115	38.1	8.6	354	22.3	0.02
	After empowerment	115	39.2	8.7			
Infrastructural asset**	Before empowerment	115	34.1	9.1	177	19.1	0.05
	After empowerment	115	35.4	10.5			

Then, two categories of economic wellbeing of the respondents were derived from the data. The responses of the respondents for each scale were given on a 5-point Likert scale, and the sum of the scores for each scale was then calculated. The result from overall wellbeing (Table 1.0) obtained shows a mean score of 145.2 (S.D =13.4) and significant difference in the t-test ($p>0.05$). In the percentage analysis of the respondents in the low and high economic wellbeing. The findings show reduction by 10.7% (Table 2.0) in the low economic wellbeing group from 42.7% before the entry in GEEP to 32.0% after the completion of the GEEP. This finding was in line with studies of Kaldi (2006); and Mahdavi and Saburi (2003) that confirmed that educational empowerment led to increasing economic wellbeing for all the members of the household regardless of their gender group.

Table 2.0 Percentage of the Respondents in Low- and High-Level Wellbeing Before and After the GEE

Period Measured	Low level of wellbeing	High level wellbeing	Significant
Before GEEP	42.7%	57.3%	$p= 0.000$
After GEEP	32.0%	68.0%	$p= 0.000$

Furthermore, in the high economic wellbeing group, the percentage of respondents increased by 10.7%, from 57.3% before the commencement of the GEEP to 68% after the completion of the GEEP to date (Table 2.0). These finding was used to make a conclusion that, the GEEP had a positive impact on the economic wellbeing of the respondents. This is also related and may be the reason for Edalati (2010) to conclude that the educational empowerment increased the general wellbeing of the society and curtailed violence. Edalati (2010) further confirmed good educational empowerment at the grassroots had a strong relationship with the high value of the family and the society. Thus, regardless of gender, the educational empowerment benefited everyone in the family as well as the society. Therefore, continuity in the GEEP in Katsina state may have the potential to increase the economic wellbeing of the respondents in Katsina rural communities. Akunga (2010) already found that an increase in the girls' schooling was associated with an increase in women's participation in the labour force that will contribute to the household wellbeing. In addition, this was also supported by Hedayat (2010) who ascertained that a rise in female education decreased infant mortality and improved family wellbeing.

IV. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the traditions of the society should not override the fact that women's education is a backbone for societal development. This is because the mother is the first teacher for every person in this world. Thus, by educating girls is a preparing for educated mothers who produce and develop of high-quality manpower in human capital development. This also was in line with the saying "Educating a girl is educating the family and educating the family is educating the society". For the young females who were able to further their education to tertiary level, they have potential for sustainable development via employment. Such a success in the reducing women poverty through education in Katsina State may be a motivating factor for other governments, NGOs and other development agencies to redesign the policies in the fight against poverty. Since the GEEP was targeted at girls, therefore, the program may benefit females more than males. Furthermore, the empowerment theory by Batliwala (1995), states that empowered individuals and communities improve the intellectual and social levels, which, in long run lead to increase in economic wellbeing and life satisfaction. Indeed, psychological reimbursements do elevates the level of literacy and high level of literacy may lead to improvement in sustainable development. This study concluded that, the respondents have gained knowledge, increase awareness and access to infrastructural assets that lead life satisfaction. Many studies support that the education empowerment through acquiring skills and knowledge by the individual to increase their socio-economic wellbeing (Ryan & Cassie 2012; Kabir 2012; Sharifah Norazizan 2011; Akunga, 2010, Konna, 2010; Zumilah, 2010; Dauda et al., 2009; Samantha, 2008; Blench &Ingawa, 2004). In line with the overall study of Sultana (2006), it suggests that improvement in female access to education may improve their economic wellbeing. Therefore, in educating the community for sustainable economic development, both men and women should be considered equally. In this way, education can assist members of the rural community, particularly

women, to combat poverty (Jariah, 2012, Ryan & Cassie, 2012, Zumilah, 2010, Akunga, 2010, Hedayat 2010, Sultana, 2006, and Batliwala, 1995).

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