

Strengthening the Capacity of Stakeholders in Promoting Girls' Education in Two Disadvantaged Communities in Nigeria: Some Lessons in Community Participation

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Abstract: In the study, an intervention programme was designed to strengthen the capacity of stakeholders in promoting girls' education in two disadvantaged communities in Oyo State, Nigeria. A participatory approach was adopted in implementing the model. A cross section of the stakeholders namely, parents, household heads, religious leaders, community leaders and teachers were involved. The model training programme and the Information Education, Communication and Technology (IECT). Materials for the sensitization programmes used were evaluated. The results revealed that there was an increase in awareness of the benefits of girls' education and increase in collaboration among stakeholders which culminates into bridging disparity gap between boys' and girls' enrolment. A core mobilization group emerged which is expected to metamorphose into a community based organization which will sustain the promotion of Girls' education. However, the study revealed that there are still many challenges facing girls' education in the State. These challenges still borders on culture and poverty and some recommendations were made on how to tackle them.

Key words: Stakeholders, education, mobilization group, organization, capacity, girl's enrolment

INTRODUCTION

Globally, education has been regarded as a fundamental right of every person. Education performs a major role in equipping the individuals with the skills and knowledge which would help to cope successfully with life survival. In Nigeria, education is regarded as the cornerstone for development. It is adopted as "an instrument per excellence" for effective national development (NPE, 2004). For decades, the world governments have affirmed a commitment to the principle of Education for All (EFA). Ever since, all countries have been involved in education reform processes in collaboration with agencies and organizations, in terms of loans and technical advice. Education at all levels yields important benefits. It has the power to fight poverty and other social menace. The millennium development goals drawn from the United Nations Millennium Declaration constituted an unprecedented promise by World leaders to address world problems (Treasure, 2006). The Millennium Development Goals agreed to a series of targets to be reached by 2015. The goals among others include-achievement of universal primary education and promotion of gender equality and empowerment of women (Barbara Brains *et al.*, 2003). Education is central to the realization of these goals.

The pressing educational issue for many developing countries today is the basic education especially for girls.

The issue of girls' education is part and parcel of the general issue of women and development. Okeke (2001) asserts that the issue of women and development came into the forefront as a result of a survey finding that in the world today, tens of millions of girls are not getting a basic education. Out of the 115 million children age 6-11 that are not in school 65 million are girls (UNESCO, 2002), that in sub-Saharan Africa, only 55% of girls attend primary school and only 17% of girls are enrolled in secondary school (UNESCO, 2002). Obanya (2002) opines that the reasons for this "state of affairs" include

- Cultural conservation-many girls are given out in marriage too early. Early marriage is the start for many harmful practices such as lack of education, poor health, poverty etc (Radha, 2001).
- Poverty-girls are still over burdened with household chores and family sustenance obligations. Girls have more and often exhausting responsibility for domestic chores such as cooking, cleaning, watching younger children and caring for animals or crops (World Vision, 2001).
- Dead-end nature of many literacy programmes. Many of them are not sufficiently functional in that they fail to empower the girls among others. For these reasons, gender gap begins at the primary level, widens at secondary level to become a gulf at the higher level.

The advantages of education are clearly seen in the education of girls. The benefits of girls' education to include

- Economic empowerment (Dollar *et al.*, 1999; Klasen, 2002) A few years of basic education empowers women to earn their own living.
- Raise smaller, healthier, better educated families. Preventing unwanted pregnancies (Schultz, 1993, Gage *et al.*, 1997).
- Educating women helps educate the next generation (Filmer, 2000, Behrman *et al.*, 1999).
- Protection against diseases, violence etc (Vandemoortle and Delna Monica, 2000; Ross, 2003).
- Women knowing their rights (Sadik, 2003).

In Nigeria, Maduewesi (2005) observes that, there are obviously gender gaps in access to and control of resources, in economic opportunities, in power and politics. There are significant disparities that cut across the different levels of education structure and that disparities persist both in enrolment rates and in average years of schooling. This trend has significant impact on the girl child.

The Federal Government of Nigeria participated actively in all the international conferences conveyed to tackle the issues of girls' education. The resultant outcome was the comprehensive programme of Universal Basic Education (UBE) of 1999. Nigeria endorsed both the Jomtien Declaration and the Dakar Framework for Action towards the delivery of Education for All by 2015. The Dakar framework for Action calls on national governments to take full responsibility for ensuring that EFA goals and strategies are implemented. It urges government to establish broad-based partnerships with civil society and to give the ensuring National Action Plans the strongest political support (UNESCO, 2000).

Statement of the problem: Although with these government's efforts, gender equality in enrolment rate has increased. Over 60% of children aged 6-11 attend primary school. 35% of youth aged 12-17 (38% of males and 33% of females) attend secondary school (National Population Commission, 2004). Trends at the geographical zonal level diverge sharply with progress registered in some zones such as South West, South-South and South East. However, sharp disparities exist in zones such as North West and North East. Moreover, stagnations exist within zones even where progress is made. This is prominent in rural and disadvantaged communities. The reasons for this are the fact that government's campaign efforts centered primarily in urban and the cities and the

activities consist of jingles and radio campaigns only. These national strategies could not make up for the absence of grassroots sensitization programmes for improving the stakeholders' commitment to girls' education. There are no specific activities focusing and directly involving the stakeholders either equipping them or involving them to proffer solutions where serious gender disparities are evident. It is on this premise, that this study was based. It involved the designing of sensitization programme, implementation of the programme and evaluation of the impact of the programme on stakeholders in promoting girls' education.

Objectives of the study: The main objectives of the study are;

- To develop, implement and evaluate the impact of a community-based girls' education promotion sensitization programme in two communities (Oorelope and Oriire) in Oyo North area of Oyo State:
- To develop a model training that would serve as a guideline in girls' education promotion in other parts of disadvantage communities in Nigeria. This community dimension is considered primary in strengthening the capacity of stakeholders in promoting girls' education.
- Developing appropriate Information, Education, Communication and Technology (IECT) materials for the sensitization and promotion of girls' education.
- Increase awareness of the benefits of girls' education.
- Increase collaboration among parents, religious leaders, household heads and community leaders to work towards bridging the disparity gap between boys' and girls' education.

Choice of study location: Oyo North is made up of 13 local government areas in Oyo State, Nigeria. Two Local Government headquarters of Oriire and Oorelope, respectively were chosen for the study. This part of Oyo State is located within the boundaries of Nigeria and Benin Republic on one side and Nigeria and the Republic of Cameroon on the other. Generally, the area is an agrarian setting and it is poverty ridden. There are 91 primary schools in Oriire and 20 in Oorelope LGAs respectively. However, the schools have low enrolment compared with other LGAs in the State. There is no single tertiary institution in the area. It is the least developed area in Oyo State. There is no single industry in the area. The area therefore is predominantly a hub of trans-border trade. Children and youths in this part are exposed early to cheap money consequently, the issue of schooling and

education particularly for female is considered secondary.

A Preliminary survey was carried out in these areas. The survey revealed that 1/3 of children between 6 and 12 years did not attend or complete basic education in the area. The investigator inquired into the reasons for girls not attending school and completing basic education. About 34% of the respondents involved in the survey revealed that girls are needed for labour to help support the household. The girls work on the farm alongside with their parents, some work in the family business usually petty trading (hawking) and others for employers. They are usually sent out to neighbouring cities like Oyo, Ibadan and Lagos as housemaids for domestic work. Also about 34% of the parents revealed that sending girls to school is sacrificing the children's contribution they would make to the household income or the economic well-being of the family. Similarly, about 23% of the respondents also expressed the view that there is not enough money to pay for monetary costs of schooling particularly for girls at the expense of boys. Monetary costs of schooling involve paying school fees and PTA levy, buying uniform, books and other supplies. The prevalence of gender inequality in this area could be said to be due to economic, cultural and religious factors.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Design: This involved a one-group time series design. The design enabled investigator obtain information on a repetitive basis of the same group. A participatory approach was used.

Sample: First, two predominant communities were selected for the study. From these two communities, 50 households were purposively selected from among the already identified as "critical" during the preliminary household survey already carried out. These critical families are those found to have endemic negative perceptions on the need for girls' education. From each of the selected households all the men and women constituted the sample. Apart from the selected households other prominent personalities in the communities including religious leaders (Christians, Moslem and traditional), opinion leaders (political and traditional) were sampled.

Instruments: Two major instruments were designed to guide the Investigator to develop Information, Education, Communication and Technology (IECT) tools used for the programme. These include:

Focus group discussion guide: The guide consisted of questions that focused on concept of girls' education, benefits and barriers. A number of steps were taken to

design and develop the questions. They were generated by consulting relevant literature. Efforts were made to avoid ambiguous questions. Statements and questions were brief, clear and relevant to the study. A pre-test of the data collection instrument was conducted to determine whether the questions were clear and meaningful to the participants and if the questions elicited and measured the information required to achieve the study objectives.

- What constitute girls' education?
- What are the benefits of girls' education?
- What are the barriers to girls' education?
- What are the strategies that can be employed to promote girls' education?
- What challenges do you envisage to affect the promotion of girls' education?

Interview schedule questions were the same as the Focus Group Discussion guide questions.

Research procedure: The study was carried out in four stages as follows:

- Focus Group Discussions
- In-depth interviews
- Intervention and
- Evaluation with appropriate instruments.

Focus Group Discussions (FGD): Homogenous Focus Group Discussions were held with these identified stakeholders

- Parents
- Religious leaders
- Household heads and
- Community leaders in turn.

During the discussions, the investigator verbally gathered information about the existing knowledge of the participants regarding girls' education, their belief about the benefits and the problems. The participants were led through discussions to suggest appropriate strategies or activities that could be effective in educating their peers during the FGDs. The discussions were conducted in local language (Yoruba) using the extended family compound setting. The discussions were tape recorded with each homogenous group.

The in-depth interviews: This was considered necessary to obtain some information that are very personal and which were not divulged during the Focus Group Discussions. The interviews were conducted using household questionnaire designed by the Investigator. Local language (Yoruba) was used and the interviews

were also tape recorded. The information/data gathered during the FGDs and the In-depth Interviews were later processed. The tape recorded data were also transcribed and assessed for accuracy.

The intervention: The intervention began with sensitization and public campaigns for girls' education using 'local town criers' within the targeted communities. This was followed by specific activities designed by the investigator. The activities include:

Drama: A play-let was sketched in collaboration with an expert in drama. The central theme of the drama focused on the benefits of girls' education. The playlet was titled "Gbogbo lomo" meaning "children are equal, either boy or girl". The playlet was performed by popular local drama group in the communities. The playlet was staged from community to community.

Drama music: Dance music in local dialects was organized and was performed by a professional dance troupe consisting both boys and girls. This was to reinforce the theme of the drama. The boys dance troupe is locally called "Areseja bata" and the girls dance troupe called "Arapa re gangan", meaning boys show forth their dancing prowess with their dancing steps while girls show theirs with their shoulders. The troupe performed to the admiration of all the stakeholders.

Talk: Women achievers, from the communities were invited and they delivered public lecture on the benefits of educating girls and also shared their success stories in local dialects with the stakeholders and the girls. The lecture took place in community squares and in the schools.

Debate: Primary school boys and girls were also selected to debate on the issue of girls' education. This was organized on school basis. The investigator solicited for the head teachers' and teachers' assistance in organizing the debate. It was organized as competition among the school children. The grand finale took place in the town hall of each of the two communities. Prizes were given out for brilliant discussion in the notion that girls' education is as important as boys' education. Participants included the primary school pupils, the teachers, parents and all other stakeholders.

Individual counseling: Participants and stakeholders who needed counseling were attended to and where need be were referred to appropriate quarters, particularly those who needed financial support.

Evaluation: Knowledge and attitude scales designed by the investigator to evaluate participants' knowledge and

attitude to girls' education were administered. This was carried out before and after intervention. Two years after the intervention programme, three years school enrolment statistics was taken.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1 shows the total number of participants was 670. This large number covered the cross-section of the communities involved in the study. This enhanced rapid data collection and emphasized the importance of local knowledge about the issue involved. The use of extensive samples provided a broad picture of the population.

Age range	(%)
Less than 18 years	2
Between 18 and 25	13
Between 26 and 35	38
Between 36 and 45	35
Above 45	12

Participants between ages 18 and 45 forms the bulk of the participants (86%). These are the active members of the communities. They are the stakeholders (the parents, household heads, teachers, head teachers, community and religious leaders.

Religion	(%)
Islam	47
Christianity	45
African Traditional Religion	8

Religious beliefs had impact on the participants' reactions to girls' education. There were more Muslims (47%) than Christians (45%) involved in the study. These reactions are clearly evident in the participants' responses to question 2.

Educational Attainment	Percentage
No formal education	18
Primary education	36
Secondary/technical/teacher training	32
Some form of higher Education	14

About 18% of the participants had no formal education, 36% had primary education, 32% had secondary/technical/teacher training education fourteen.

Table 1: Demographic data of participants in the Focus Group Discussions (FGD)

Sex	Male No	Female No	Total
Household Heads	44	6	50
Parents	116	134	250
Religious leaders	10	-	10
Head teachers	45	65	110
Teachers	104	146	250

percent only had some form of higher education. The reason for this could not be far fetched; there was no industry and no tertiary institution in the communities. The majority of the sampled participants were lower class and signs of poverty were very evident amongst them.

Occupation	(%)
Teaching	13
Farming	42
Trading	37
Others	8

The study locations are both agrarian and a predominantly a hub of Trans boarder trade. About 42% were farmers while 37% were traders. Also, 13% were teachers and 8% were involved in other occupations. Children in these areas are exposed to cheap money very early because of the location of the communities and the level of poverty in the land.

Participants' responses to the questions raised: One way to evaluate this kind of study is to have post-experience feedback from those who have been exposed

to the intervention. The stakeholders, who participated in the Focus Group Discussions, interview and the other activities are in an excellent position to indicate the degree of effectiveness of the intervention. Their responses to the discussion themes and interview questions are presented below.

Tables 2: Participants responses to questions 2 and 3 in percentage

Questions	Pre-Intervention responses		Post-Intervention responses	
	Agree	Disagree	Agree	Disagree
2. What are the benefits of girls' education?				
a. Economic empowerment	32	68	73	27
b. Raising smaller, healthier, better educated families	25	75	60	40
c. Preventing unwanted pregnancies	37	63	72	28
d. Helps to educate the next generation	20	80	82	18
e. Protection against diseases, violence	48	52	65	35
f. knowing their rights	15	85	58	42
3. What are the barriers to girls' education?				
i. Early marriage	46	54	72	28
ii. Differential treatment of girls	52	48	48	52
iii. Preference of boys to girls	45	55	68	32
iv. Lack of knowledge of the benefits of schooling	32	68	74	26
v. Cost of schooling	70	30	40	60
vi. Domestic work (care of siblings income generating activities)	42	58	73	27
vii. inadequate basic service in schools latrine, water etc.	26	74	52	48
viii. Dead-end nature of literacy programmes.	70	30	45	55

What is girls' education?: The intervention had an impact on participants' concept of what girls' education is. 53.9% of the pre-intervention sample for example gave narrow definitions of what they perceived as girls' education while only 42.1% described correctly what constitutes girls' education. However, there was an improvement after the intervention because 72% of the participants were able to give correct definition of girls' education after the intervention.

As to the benefits of girls' education, Table 2 shows the responses of the participants.

The findings of the study revealed an improvement in the knowledge of the benefits of girls' education and the barriers that militate against it as shown in the above Table.

Table 3 shows three years pupils' enrolments were taken after the study; there was no increase in the number of schools in the communities. However there is increase in enrolment and also an appreciable increase in the number of female enrolment in the last three years. It is only in Oriire Local government that girls' enrolment dropped but it is still higher than the pre-intervention period.

This study also revealed the unequivocal affirmation by the community members that the information received via the information, education and communication and technology tools used during the intervention has in the light of girls' education actually affected their thinking and attitude to girls' education. It seems as if the success of the study was due to the participatory approach and going to the grassroots using the tools they are familiar with and actually involving them to proffer solutions to the problem. The intervention sort of equipped participants with skills to sustain and muster commitment and solidarity to the issue of girls' education. The group of the participants is obviously emerging as Community Organization that will champion the course of girls' education in the area.

Table 3: Pupils' Enrolment Statistics in Oorelope and Oriire Local Government Areas of Oyo State

Year	Name of LGEA	Name of School	Grand total		
			Male	Female	Total
2001/2002	Oorelope	20	13327 (55%)	10900 (45%)	24227
	Oriire	91	13119 (54%)	11129 (46%)	24248
2002/2003	Oorelope	20	12965 (53%)	11368 (47%)	24333
	Oriire	91	8961 (52%)	8165 (48%)	17126
2003/2004	Oorelope	20	18462 (52%)	16954 (48%)	35416
	Oriire	91	10018 (54%)	8556 (46%)	18574

Source: Oyo State Primary Education Board. Planning, Research and Statistics Department. 2005

CONCLUSION

This study has provided evidence-based data and information that would encourage the development of partnerships in girls' education among the stakeholders. This would in turn ensure completion of basic education for most girls and may facilitate proceeding to the next level of education.

It is generally agreed that education gives people choices regarding the kind of lives they wish to lead. Gender equality is a human right. It is a prerequisite to aid making right choices, overcoming hunger, poverty and disease. Girls' education is critical as it enables them to express with confidence in their personal relationships in the community and the society at large. The study has fostered a positive shift in beliefs and knowledge of the grassroots people concerning girls' education.

The Nigeria's progress report towards the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals revealed that poverty has persisted despite a series of government's intervention to address the issue. Poverty has been identified in this study as one of the major factors militating against girls' education. Government should therefore fashion out realistic poverty alleviation programme which the down trodden people can benefit from. This will reduce the burden on girls to allow them to attend and complete basic education instead of being major contributors to the family welfare as the case is in most homes.

Above all, this study supports the fact that community participation is a sure key to increasing effectiveness of strategies to increase girls' enrolment, retention and completion of basic education.

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