



**THE AFRICAN CENTRE FOR LEADERSHIP,  
STRATEGY & DEVELOPMENT**

**(Centre LSD)**

# **POLICY BRIEF**

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***GIRL CHILD EDUCATION IN NIGERIA:  
CHALLENGES & PROSPECTS***

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**CENTRE LSD POLICY BRIEF SERIES NO. 25**



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*Policy brief: GIRL CHILD EDUCATION IN NIGERIA:  
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### **Executive Summary**

Historically, girls' education in Nigeria has faced numerous challenges. Deep-seated cultural norms, economic disparities, and security issues have been barriers to access to quality education for girls. These challenges have resulted in a significant gender gap in literacy and school enrollment rates.

The global figure for out-of-school children is estimated at 121 million, 65 million being girls. 7.6 million girls are Out of School (OOS) in Nigeria: 3.9 million at the primary and 3.7 million at the junior secondary level.

More than 50% of girls are not attending school at the basic education level. In each cohort, 1 million girls drop out between the first and last year of primary school, and 0.6 million between Primary six (6) and JSS1.

Pervasive poverty, peer pressure, early marriage, unwanted pregnancy, negligence, rape, ignorance, being their family's burden bearers, and lack of parental care are identified as the major challenges hindering girl child education in Nigeria. Many girls do not have access to adequate education past a certain age, those girls that have access, drop out of the school as a result of early marriage compared to the male child.

In 2010, the female adult literacy rate (ages 15 and above) for Nigeria was 59.4% in comparison to the male adult literacy rate of 74.4%.

While over the years the Federal government of Nigeria has formulated several policies to tackle this issue of improving girl child education. The challenges are still very prevalent.

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The study shows that the major factors hampering girl child are interrelated and that the Federal Government working in synergy with State and Local Governments must adopt an integrated and holistic strategic framework that would address this issue. The Federal government must also provide the Strategic and visionary Leadership that is required to bring a lasting impact on the narrative of girl child education in Nigeria.

### **1. Background**

Education is regarded as one of the fundamental requirements that a person requires to be able to develop oneself and contribute to the society.

Broadly speaking Education refers to the process of acquiring knowledge, skills, values, and beliefs through various forms of teaching, training, and research. It helps individuals develop their cognitive, emotional, and social abilities, enabling them to participate in the world around them.

The girl child is a biological female offspring from birth to eighteen (18) years of age. This period is made up of infancy, childhood, and late adolescence state of development (Offoma, 2009).

Girl child education is a process by which the girl child who transform to women are equipped with the skills, knowledge, habit, and expectations that will enable them to be functional to themselves and members of the society.

The conceptual framework for the girl child typically includes the following key concepts:

- a) **Gender:** The social and cultural constructs associated with being female.
- b) **Childhood:** The stage of life from birth to adolescence, characterized by vulnerability and dependence.
- c) **Rights:** The entitlements and protections afforded to children, including the right to education, healthcare, and protection from harm.

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- d) Empowerment:** The process of enabling girls to gain control over their lives, make informed decisions, and exercise their rights.
- e) Equality:** The principle of equal opportunities, treatment, and outcomes for girls and boys.
- f) Inclusion:** The provision of accessible and supportive environments for girls from diverse backgrounds and abilities.
- g) Protection:** The safeguarding of girls from violence, abuse, and exploitation.
- h) Participation:** The involvement of girls in decision-making processes and activities that affect their lives.
- i) Education:** The provision of quality education that addresses the specific needs and interests of girls.
- j) Health:** The promotion of physical, mental, and reproductive health and well-being for girls.
- k) Socialization:** The process of shaping girls' beliefs, values, and attitudes, and preparing them for their roles in society.
- l) Economic empowerment:** The provision of resources and opportunities for girls to achieve economic independence and security.

These concepts are interconnected and influence one another, forming a comprehensive framework for understanding the complex issues surrounding the girl child.

According to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), education is a fundamental human right and a key driver of sustainable development. It encompasses various levels including:

1. Primary education (basic education)
2. Secondary education (high school)
3. Tertiary education (college, university)

4. Vocational education (training for specific skills)
5. Lifelong learning (continuous learning throughout life)

The goal of education is to empower individuals to reach their full potential, contribute to their communities, and lead fulfilling lives. Girl child education helps women to take advantage of opportunities that could benefit them and their families, preparing them for the labor force and helping them understand their legal rights as well as their reproductive rights.

This Policy Brief examines the current state of Girl Child Education in Nigeria highlighting challenges, prospects and making recommendations.

### **2. State of Girl Child Education**

In Nigeria, the challenge of addressing issues of Girl child education has continued to be on the front burner of Government efforts to improve the state of overall access to Education by all Nigerians. Historically before 1920, primary and secondary education in Nigeria was within the scope of voluntary Christian organizations. Out of a total of 25 secondary schools established by 1920, three were girls only and the remainder were exclusively for boys. In 1920, the colonial government started giving out subvention to voluntary associations involved in education, the grant giving lasted till the early 1950s and at that point, education was placed under the control of regions. In 1949, only eight out of a total of 57 secondary schools were exclusively for girls. These schools are Methodist Girls' High School, Lagos (1879), St Anne's School, Molete, Ibadan (1896), St. Theresa's College, Ibadan (1932), Queens College, Lagos, (1927) Holy Rosary College, Enugu (1935), Anglican Girls Grammar School, Lagos, (1945), Queen Amina College and Alhuda College, Kano. From 1950 up till 1960, six more notable schools were established and by 1960, there were fourteen notable girl's schools, ten mixed and sixty-one boys only. In the 1960s, when most African states began to gain their political independence, there was considerable gender disparity in education. Girls' enrollment

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figures were very low throughout the continent. In May 1961, the United Nation's Universal Declaration of Human Rights and UNESCO's educational plans for Nigeria were announced in a conference held in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. A target was set: to achieve 100% universal primary education in Nigeria by the year 1980. The implementation in the 1970s of the free and compulsory Universal Primary Education (UPE) was in line with this UN Plan. Ever since, UNICEF and UNESCO and many other organizations have sponsored, research and conferences within Nigeria regarding the education of girls. Up until the 1970s, considerably more boys than girls participated in education in Nigeria. According to one Nigerian Historian Kitetu, the native traditions' philosophy was that a woman's place is at home, and this kept many girls away from education. However, with the government's intervention and public awakening, parents began to send and keep their girl children in school. Consequently, women's involvement became more visible. By the 1990s, it can be noted that purposeful plans of action led to an increase in females in schools after 1990. While more boys than girls were enrolled in 1991, a difference of 138,000, by 1998 the difference was only 69,400. At the pan-African Conference held at Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso, in March and April 1993 (three decades after the UN Declaration of the 1960s) it was observed that Nigeria was still lagging other regions of the world in female access to education. It was also noted that gender disparity existed in education and that there was need to identify and eliminate all policies that hindered girls' full participation in Education.

### **3. Importance of Girl Child Education**

The most current views on girl child education emphasize its critical importance for achieving gender equality, promoting economic growth, and reducing poverty. Some of the key perspectives include:

- a) **Empowerment:** Educating girls empowers them to make informed decisions, challenge gender stereotypes, and participate in economic and political spheres.
- b) **Health and Wellbeing:** Education is linked to better health outcomes, lower child marriage rates, and reduced maternal



mortality.

- c) **Economic Growth:** Educated girls are more likely to contribute to their families' economic well-being and break the cycle of poverty.
- d) **Breaking Cycles of Violence:** Education helps girls recognize and resist gender-based violence and discrimination.
- e) **Climate Change Mitigation:** Educated girls are better equipped to adapt to climate change and develop sustainable solutions.
- f) **Political Participation:** Education increases girls' political engagement, leadership, and decision-making capabilities.
- g) **Challenging Patriarchal Norms:** Girl child education helps dismantle patriarchal structures and promotes gender-sensitive policies.
- h) **Addressing Intersectionality:** Educators recognize the need to address intersecting identities (race, class, disability, etc.) to ensure inclusive education for all girls.
- i) **Leveraging Technology:** Technology is seen as a tool to increase access to education, particularly for marginalized girls.
- j) **Community Engagement:** Community involvement and support are crucial for promoting and sustaining girl child education initiatives.

These views highlight the transformative power of girl child education, acknowledging its far-reaching impact on individuals, communities, and societies.

### **4. Efforts at Promoting Girl Child Education**

Towards achieving its aspiration on girl child Education, the Nigerian government has implemented several policies and initiatives to promote girl child education in recent years. Some of the latest policies and initiatives include:

- a. **The Girls' Education Policy (2016):** This policy aims to increase access to quality education for girls,

particularly in northern Nigeria, where girls' enrollment rates are lowest.

- b. The Education for Change (E4C) initiative (2020):** This initiative aims to increase access to quality education for marginalized children, including girls, in 17 states across Nigeria.
- c. The Girls' Education Project (GEP) (2019):** This project, implemented in collaboration with the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), aims to increase enrollment and retention rates for girls in basic education in six states in northern Nigeria.
- d. The Not Too Young To Run Act (2018):** While not exclusively focused on education, this act reduces the age limit for political office, potentially increasing opportunities for young women to participate in politics and advocate for girls' education.
- e. The National Strategy to End Child Marriage (2016):** This strategy aims to reduce child marriage, a significant barrier to girls' education, by increasing access to education and economic opportunities for girls.
- f. The Safe Schools Declaration (2015):** Nigeria has endorsed this international commitment to protect schools from attack and support the continuation of education during conflict.
- g. The Girls' Education and Gender Equality Initiative (2022):** This initiative, launched by the Nigerian government and international partners, aims to address the gender gap in education and promote gender equality in the education sector.

These policies and initiatives demonstrate the Nigerian government's commitment to improving access to quality education for girls and promoting gender equality in the education sector.

### **5. Challenges of Girl Child Education**

A UNICEF 2022 report reveals that 7.6 million girls are out of school in Nigeria, with 3.9 million at the primary level and 3.7 million at the junior secondary level. The data from the report also shows that more than 50% of girls are not attending school at the basic education level. It also affirms that in each cohort, 1 million girls drop out between the first and last year of primary school, and 0.6 million drop out between the first and last year of junior secondary school.

According to the most recent available data from 2022, Nigeria's total population was approximately 216,783,381, with females accounting for 108,432,971, or roughly 50% of the population. Although the total population for 2023 was reported to be 229,152,217, a breakdown by gender was not provided. The major challenges facing the girl child education are:

**Pervasive Poverty:** Nigeria was recently rated as the poverty capital of the world. The concomitant effect is that most families under financial pressure are sometimes susceptible to yielding to non-prioritization of the girl child's education.

**Practice of early marriages:** In communities where early marriages are practiced and accepted as a social norm. It is observed that girls are usually the gender that is subjected to such practice.

### **6. Conclusion**

Without doubt, the education of the girl child holds great importance for the growth of any Nation and indeed the society at large. It is therefore important that any factors that would impact this happening should be given priority attention. Nations that have accorded significant attention to ensuring that the girl child is educated have reaped the benefits. The case of Nigeria would not be different.

### **Recommendations:**

1. The Federal Government should put in place an effective enforcement mechanism to ensure that the girl child is not denied access to all forms and levels of Education.

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2. The Federal, State & Local Governments should embark on a well planned and coordinated sensitization campaign for citizens awareness on the importance of girl child education showcasing the value to the girl child, the family, Nation, and the society at large.
3. For (2) above, traditional and faith-based leaders, community and grassroots influencers, should be coopted to join in the campaign.
4. The National Assembly should enact a legislation that expressly stipulate that the girl child should not be denied access to all appropriate and levels of education with clear and enforceable penalties prescribed for defaulters.
5. The issues and challenges of the girl child education has certain correlation to the level of poverty in the Nigerian society. The Federal, State & Local Government should put in place policies and measures to reduce the level of poverty in the society. This would have a concomitant effect on family and reduce the financial pressure that sometimes predisposes such family to terminating the girl child education amongst other options for family survival.

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