

# Historical X-Ray on Barrier to Girls Right to Education in Northern Nigeria

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## Abstract

*This paper focuses on exploring the barrier to girls right to education in northern Nigeria. The paper analyzed that girls are discriminated in many aspects of life; it is belief that the girls are second-class citizen or mere infidel. These bring tremendous misrepresentation of girls and women from both family, schools, institution and the society in general. The paper used secondary sources of data and suggested that educational barrier, socio-economic, traditional and socio-cultural barrier are among the problems preventing girl's education in the northern Nigeria. The paper also compares the educational ratio of northern and southern girls' in Nigeria. The paper concluded that the dilemma of the girl-child in the north was distorted by lack of effective and efficient education, general female-led training in all aspect of life, poverty and overall discrimination against female citizens and recommended that government and international communities most support the United Nation Convention of the Right of the Child (UNCRC) and the Nigerian Child Right Act (CRA, 2003) guidelines and all the necessary rights, protection and justice for girls to eliminate the menace of patriarchy. And the traditional norms, religious and other annoying beliefs in the northern Nigeria must be dismissed. It also underlined the need to eradicate patriarchy and advance gender equality in northern Nigeria by doing away with customs, religious doctrine, and other forms of discrimination.*

**Keywords:** Discrimination, educational barriers, girl child education, gender equality, right to education, socio-cultural barriers.

## INTRODUCTION

United Nation Convention of the Right of the Child (UNCRC) came into existence around 1989 and came into regulation after the confirmation of the government of United Kingdom in 1999 (Smith R. 2010) [1]. UNCRC has 54 articles which include all aspects of child life and make provision, social, political, economic, cultural and civil rights that all children irrespective of tribe, culture, sex, religion, and race, etc. (Polonko KA, Lombardo LX. 2015) [2]. UNCRC is one of the most famous human right instruments which is generally accepted in all countries worldwide, but excluding South Sudan and United Kingdom.

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UNCRC believes that respecting and recognising all human being with respect and to implement right to everyone provide foundation for justice, freedom and peace across the world. According to Article 3 of UNCRC which focuses on all the issues concerning children under public or private institution, legislative bodies, the court of law, child interest is the best and matter most, and most be count into consideration. Therefore, addressing the rights of children, UNCRC is the best institution in the world which provides the human rights to children irrespective of tribe, culture, sex, religion, and race.

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Nigeria changes all the children's laws in line with the provision of UNCRC regulation. Furthermore, it accepted and organized policies and principles for development and protection of all children, and all the child right agreed in line with the recommendation of UNCRC. Nigerian President Olusegun Obasanjo implemented the Child Right Act in 2003. The main objective of this Act was to ensure all the child rights is given the priority as per guidelines of the UNCRC (Alston et al., 2005) [3].

## **REVIEW LITERATURE**

Cohen argues that CRC provides a "rights-based" set of guidelines which serves against the inequalities among girls and women in the family, schools, institutions, and society (Cohen CP. 2002) [4]. In Nigeria, the rights of girls are neglected, and Child Right Acts is no longer considered for they believed that girls belong to the kitchen'. Women make about half of Nigeria's population, and they are vital contributors to their communities as mothers. They make significant contributions to the social and economic advancement of societies. Their participation in the formal and informal systems of structure, with respect to the utilization of resources in society, is still minimal.

According to the BBC World Services, on 14 October 2016, the Nigerian President Muhammadu Buhari portrayed inequality while addressing to the society he delivered that his wife does not have an affair with his government for she belongs to the "Kitchen and other room" (Ashindorbe K, Chinaguh EC. 2021) [5]. Nigerian society, particularly that of Northern Nigeria, has always been patriarchal, which is a fundamental aspect of traditional culture. A patriarchal social structure is one in which men have complete control over women. In the North, boys have an unquestionable advantage over girls in terms of social standing and education; many girls are only allowed to attend primary school before being forced into marriage. Even though "primary education" is legally free and required, 10.5 million children in Nigeria lack access to an education.

## **WHO IS A CHILD?**

United Nation Convention of the Right of the Child (UNCRC) described the child as anyone below the age of eighteen (18) years of age (Alston, 2007). In Nigeria, different children and young people enactment view 'child' as any person who is not more than 14 years of age, and 'young person' as someone who reaches the age of 14 years, but has not reached 17 years. Children right are specific compared to adult and are classified as unable to decide for themselves, but legally must be under the supervision of an adult. At the time the child right differs even among various laws within the country. Example in southern Nigeria, girls has the right to freedom of expression, education, privacy, information and right to be consider when making decision. While in Northern Nigeria girls have no access to the rights, but on the contrary, both have all the reasons; thus, gender discrimination is present.

## **MEANING OF CHILD RIGHT, PROTECTION AND JUSTICE**

The concept of child right is incomplete without protection and justice, as they are always going hand to hand. Child right recognized since 1924 after the first world war along with the declaration of Geneva. Child right approved in 1989 after the implementation of the International Convention on the Right of the Child, which provide a guaranteed to all human being in respective of sex, culture, religion or race (UNICEF, 2004) [6]. UNCRC has 54 articles which cover the whole aspect of children's life both socially, politically, economically and socially for a child to enjoy and become a successful member of society. Protection means protecting children against violence, abuse and exploitation or anything that will be harmful to the child. While child justice means treating children and young people with fair who are below the age of criminal responsibility, and these children are given special protection by law according to the UNCRC.

## **HOW GIRLS' RIGHTS DENIED IN NORTHERN NIGERIA?**

With the introduction of the colonial system in Africa, girls and women are known to witness several issues of discrimination, because of their gender (Afisi OT. 2010) [7]. Most African countries do not have specific policies for the rights of the children and gender disparity. In Nigeria, there are two

dominant religion Christianity and Islam among which 40% of the population are Christians living in the Southern part of the country. Whereas 50% of the Muslims are residing in the North and 10% following local religion living across the country (Klugman J. 2011) [8].

The Muslim politicians in the North used Islam to introduce sharia law to divert public attention and achieve their political agenda (ibid). Sharia is a religious law which restricts the freedom of girls and women, dependents in their supposed interest and socio-political arrangement of the society. Girl's rights violation such as rape, physical abuse, sexual harassment, and verbal abuse, emotional and sexual injury happened every day in the North. Unfortunately, police and media can only listing to significant problems which result in severe disability and death.

At the United Nations Convention's 19th session in 1998, Mrs. Hajjo Sani, the Nigerian Minister for "Women and Social Development," made a statement on behalf of the girls in Northern Nigeria who are denied their rights. There is no documentation indicating that violence against women, particularly in the household, is common. These are caused by the fact that women rarely disclose assault to the police due to fear of retaliation from their husbands and other family members. Furthermore, reports of domestic abuse are not easily taken seriously by law enforcement officials. They dismiss such complaints as the petty dispute between "two people" or treat them as a husband-and-wife issue (Imhabekhai CI. 2004) [9].

UNICEF suggests that concrete foundation needs to be laid to safeguard the children's rights and useful framework. This framework will ensure actions in protecting specific rights of the children, efficient measure which provides effective right irrespective of age, tribe, culture, sex, religion, and race. Aina (2003) argues that in Northern Nigeria, girls are discriminated in all forms, especially when it comes to formal education, girls are misrepresented and consider as house assistant. Most northern girl is seen as an available object for street hawking, prostitution, trafficking and second class in society. Salam (2003) presented the concept that Nigeria (especially North) is a patriarchal society provoking inequality between girls and boys enforcing gender-differential on inheritance rights and legal adulthood, implementing domestic violence, etc. Cultural norms and values, religious dictated boys over girls in social structure and institutes in all level of leadership.

Furthermore, the culture of patriarchy is very active in Northern Nigeria, as male-dominated female, because of which men enjoy all the family goodwill and carried out female. Therefore, boys trained for the future leadership role, and girls are taught to be the housekeeper. Social influence affects their life. The UNCRC plays an important role and commitment concerning the equal right among children's and bridging the gender gap in all aspect of life. The Beijing Platform of Action and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW)" are two further initiatives working to guarantee girls' rights in all spheres of life.

Nigeria ratified global mutual means in 1991 and 2000, agreed to abide by the recommendation and guideline of UNCRC toward the proper protection and justice of all the child rights and agreed upon full implementation. Today most of the UNCRC guidelines concerning child rights especially girls are no longer followed with many Articles of UNCRC. Girl's right is mostly denied and ignored especially in the Northern part of Nigeria. They do not have access to fundamental rights to education, freedom of expression, privacy, protected from abuse, etc. (O'Flaherty M. 2012) [10].

#### **RIGHT TO EDUCATION (ARTICLE 28)**

Durajoye (2016) argues that education is a combination of all process and procedure through which a child develops attitude, belief, abilities, skills, behaviour, norms and value to become a successful member of the society. Education was declared as the primary human rights for every person by the Convention of the Right of the Child (CRC), African Women Protocol 2003, are among other regional and international human rights bodies in supporting CRC.

Article 13 and 14 of the ICESCR makes it a necessary provision for the right to education; similarly, section 28 of CRC considers the power of the child to knowledge. Based on these articles, countries are expected to provide primary education available and free for every child. To motivate the development of various secondary school education gives financial assistance to those in need, and to take measures for children to attend school and avoiding school dropout rate. Article 29 of the CRC focuses on the aims of education of the child in providing effective and efficient life in a free society.

### **THE BARRIER TO GIRL'S RIGHT TO EDUCATION IN NORTHERN NIGERIA**

Girl's child education is believed to be a priority that breaks the shackles of poverty thereby providing skills acquisition and self-actualisation for the achievement of national development (Ikoni. 2009) [11]. In 2005, Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) first deadline of presenting facts about girl's education and gender parity. The ability of the girls to participate in school to acquire knowledge, skills acquisition, and self-actualisation to become socially and economically responsible by going to school stopped by the daily activities in the household division of labour.

### **WHY GIRLS IN NORTHERN NIGERIA DON'T GO TO SCHOOL COMPARED TO THE SOUTH?**

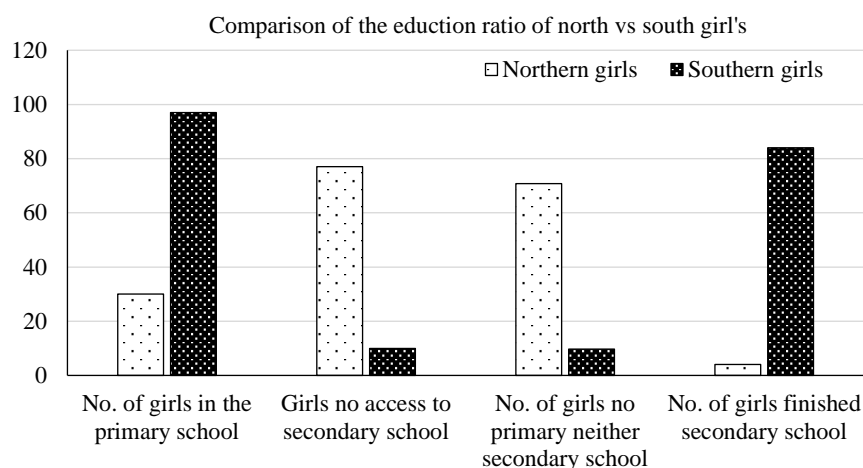
Salam (2003) argues that religious misinterpretation, economic and poverty issues, teenage pregnancy, forced marriage, lack of guidance and counselling, cultural norms are among the problems preventing girl's education. About 70% of the northerners are living under poverty line, most parent usually extended families have limited wealth thereby do not send their children to school instead, boys are enrolled and keep girls out of school thereby putting them out of the family at the tender age for marriage. This violates Article 28 of the UNCRC and Article 15 of the CRA in making sure that equal rights be given to everyone irrespective of tribe, gender, religion, and race.

According to the National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA) stated that in Southern Nigeria, girls are given more rights to education compared to the Northern Nigeria. Introduction of Christian missionaries in 1841-1960 to the southern part of Nigeria is the main reason behind civilisation in that area. Its main objectives were to convert people into Christianity through education, thereby allowing them to have 90% literacy rate against North with 54%, as they are not opportune to have Christian Missionaries during the 19th century.

According to Adamu, the following are the facts which focus on the education gap in between Northern and Southern Nigerian girls' education:

- Over  $\frac{2}{3}$  of 15-19 year of ages, girls in the North cannot read and write as compared to less than 10% in the Southern part of Nigeria.
- Only 4% of female finished secondary school in the North compared to 84% in the South.
- About 9 in 10 women with higher education, and  $\frac{2}{3}$  women with secondary school give birth in a health care centres, but only 1 in 10 uneducated women do so in the north.
- Compared to less than 50% of children whose mothers are uneducated, nearly 80% of children whose mothers have attended school.

Figure 1 shows the educational gap between girls in the southern and northern Nigeria. It stated that only 30% of girls in the North from 2-12 years of age attend primary school, but 90% of their mate in the south enrolled into primary schools in the south (Akunga A, Attfield I. 2010) [12]. Almost 70.8% of the girls within 2-19 years are not enrolled either in primary either secondary school education in the north, but only 9.7% of the southern girls with the same age range have a similar experience. Also, almost 92% of the Northern girls from 12-19 years have no access to secondary school education, but only 10% of their mate in the south experienced the same situation. Only 4% of 2-19 years girls are suitable to finish secondary school in the North, but 95% of their mate in the south finished their secondary education. This demonstrates how most Northern girls are not keeping up with Southern girls in terms of schooling and this takes place as a result of Northern Nigerian cultural and religious customs.



**Figure 1.** Comparison of education ratio of north and south girl's

**Table 1.** Barriers to education.

Educational barrier	Accessibility, infrastructure, safety, security, teaching, and learning.
Socioeconomic	School fees, cost, poverty, child labour, employment
Traditional/socio-cultural	Gender norms, stereotype, early marriage, early pregnancy, religion

Most parents were dissuaded from sending their children to school because to Boko-haram's massacres and kidnappings of females, and they were pressured to marry their children when they were still in the early stages of puberty (Ekhomu O. 2019) [13].

British Council argues that there are many forces from both within and outside the school system that prevents girls from going to school in Northern Nigeria. Security challenges for the abduction of girls from various school in North-Eastern Nigeria. For instance, on April 14, 2014, terrorists from Boko-haram abducted 276 girls from the government secondary school in Chibok, Borno State, and on April 14, 2014, they seized 110 students from the government secondary school in Dapchi. Due to safety precautions, this made the majority of parents—especially those who were raising girls—disagree to take their kids to school and violated their fundamental rights (Mbaeze NC, Eneasato B. 2019) [14]. It seems to me that northern girls are no longer safe.

Most of the parents cannot afford the high fee structure of education; therefore, they either enroll their girls in Quranic schools or get them married. Demand and supply are also one of the barriers which involve problems heard from the experiences by the parent sending their children to school. While amount serves to the question of gender inequalities within the educational system which priorities boys than girls. Therefore, three dominant class of demand and supply barriers have shortened girls schooling among which are: (a) Educational barrier (b) Socio-economic barrier (c) Traditional and socio-cultural barrier, as shown in Table 1.

### Educational Barrier

The accessibility of the school enrolment is one of the significant problems to girls in the North especially those living in the rural areas. Research shows that 14% of the girls walk for over 6 kilometers to school every day. Thus, distance contributes as the primary problem preventing them from going to school thereby, preventing them from achieving the desired goal of education. It is revealed that the security challenges between homes to school is one of the problems in discouraging parent from sending their children to school especially girls, and government is not adequately protecting them (Ibid). Thus, violates Article 11 of the UNCRC which stated that the children must be protected against kidnapping and abuse. Also, (Article 16) of the CRA 2003 said that children have the rights to be given special protection measure.

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For the girls who are suitable to go to school, lack of conducive atmosphere for effective and efficient teaching and the learning process becomes the primary problem. Children have to sit on the floor due to lack of chairs; improper toilet conveniences put girls and boys to share the same toilet, unsuitable water sanitation facilities, etc. "Girl's Education Project Intervention" suggests that the degree of girl's presence can be increased to 30% if these issues are addressed. Whereas, discrimination, mistreatment, corporal penalty in and around the school have affected girl's education in the North (Badri AY. 2014) [15]. Physical punishment, sexual and psychological harassment from both teachers and boys becomes other of the day. Lack of infrastructures facilities such as school fence may increase the risk of violence to girls. Research conducted by Action Aid suggests that:

Nigerian girls were the ones who talked about corporal punishment the most since it is ingrained in school systems. It is frequently linked to poverty; for instance, parents and girls have complained about this happening but haven't seemed to be able to stop it in reaction to non-payment of fees, absence of uniforms, or books.

Lack of professional teaching skills by the teachers in providing effective and efficient teaching and learning process in ensuring girls full participation in school is one of the girl's poor enrolments into schools. The total number of 287,000 primary and secondary school teachers are added between 1999 and 2009, less than half of the primary schools' teachers are females (48% and 46%). These courses major barriers in girl's enrolment into primary schools. The ratio of female teachers is the same since 1999 but had amplified to 10% in secondary schools.

Nonetheless, there is a need for female teachers in elementary and secondary education. Additionally, the curriculum covers gender issues and the needs of girls in terms of learning. In addition to sponsoring females clubs and supporting girls in their academic and personal aspirations, the female teacher will uplift girls' spirits, reassure them, and serve as a positive role model and mentor in the classroom. Studies indicate that schools with high gender parity in attendance should expect high levels of achievement and advancement.

### **Socioeconomic Barrier**

Although Universal Basic Education (UBE) provides free primary education for all children, who are UNCRC-compliant (Article 28). This article states that training stipulates that every child has the right to high-quality education and should be encouraged to go to school. CRA 2003 (Article 15) provides free, compulsory and universal primary education to the children. Pieces of evidence show that parents face many problems when sending their children to school because formal and informal accusations vary from school to school. These consist of registered cash or in-kind fees, support for Parent Teacher Associations (PTAs), exam fees, sports club fees, and supplementary teacher salaries. Any child who refuses to pay these fees will result in him or her being unable to write the exam and send back home. This has led many children not to go to school but to find tuition instead of school, while most girls have no choice but to drop out of school.

More than 60% of Nigerians lives in a state of severe poverty of less than \$1 a day. Girls are forced to work on the street or in the market, in violation of UNCRC (Article 20), which provides that children have the right to special care and assistance. Also, article 14 of (CRA 2003) provides for the power of the child and gets parental care, protection, and maintenance. According to UNICEF, approximately 15 million children are working full-time in northern Nigeria, most of whom are out-of-school girls. Most of them have low incomes, mothers treat their girls as domestic assistants, and nannies give young children or small traders an extra income for the family.

Most educated females living in urban parts employ female students from rural areas as nannies or domestic workers, although their daughters remain in school. In immigrant communities, many girls are out of school due to grazing. For girls who are suitable for completing their studies, obtaining employment from a government or organization is a significant problem and they are still unemployed

and responsible for the family. This concern has led some parents to believe that education is a waste of time. About 54% of young people are in northern Nigeria and are currently unemployed. According to the “National Women's Population and Health Survey,” 77% of the 15-49-year-old northerners do not work (NDHs, 2008). In northern Nigeria, women benefit less from the systemic discrimination in the labour market, indicating that they earn less than men, the same level of education and work (ibid).

Therefore, most parents believe that sending girls to school is a waste of time (Mohammad, 2010a). There is evidence that in the context of poverty, motivation will be an option to help children stay in school. Free tuition, free study materials, subsidized school transportation, and employment after completing primary school education.

### **Traditional Barrier**

Social and cultural factors have affected most parents bringing their girls to school. Gender customs and pigeonholes prevent women from making decisions, community involvement and control or hold on their lives in Northern Nigeria (Mohammad, 2010b). These violate Articles 2 and 12 of the UNCRC, which means that all children must be treated equally regardless of their tribe, gender, culture, religion, and ethnicity. Children have the right to be involved in decision making for an adult to listen and take Article 12 seriously. Also, according to CRA 2003, children are entitled to freedom from any form of discrimination according to Article 10. Children's dignity should be maintained in all aspects of life as per the guidelines of Article 11.

Most parents in northern Nigeria prepare boys to go to school instead of girls because one of the girls of the north says: Some parents prefer their male children to go school because only their sons inherit and carry their family surnames.

Most parents in the north-eastern Nigeria believe that girls schooling is Westernization (UBE, 2010). It has been argued that the main problems and contradictions which hinder girls' going to school are carried out in certain parts of the North—originating from the ideology of knowledge and the formation of appropriate knowledge benefiting from the safety of the school. Quality and cost may affect the decision of the parents on the age of marriage in the North. Although the quality of education is poor, the cost is high, and insecurity may lead to girls being out of school, but their function defines girls' gender norms as mothers and family wives, and fear of pregnancy after puberty may still cause girls to marry early (British Cultural Association). According to the Children's Rights Act (2003), the Nigerian government prohibits marriages under the age of 18.

Islam is believed to be the dominant religion in the northern Nigeria which dominates over 90% of the population, and the religious leader is the significant influence of the girl's right to education (UNDP, 2005). People use religion as an instrument in denying girls the right to school in the north of Nigeria. According to the culture and religion belief in the north, girls are expected to marry at the early stage of adolescents. This caused mostly 80% of girls to attend primary school education after which marriage is the next agenda. These factors majorly affect girls in achieving their dream of knowledge in the north (Jacob ON. 2020) [16].

When it comes to education, boys in Nigeria—especially those in the North—have an unmatched advantage, whereas the majority of girls are only allowed to attend basic school before being forced into marriage (Eme, 2019). The conflict in North-Eastern Nigeria, where 110 Dapchi and 276 Chibok girls were kidnapped from schools on March 21, 2018, and April 14, 2014, respectively, prevented most parents from taking their kids to school.

### **CONCLUSION**

The right to education for girls in northern Nigeria has been a stock of “public debate” and is therefore of great concern to individuals and the entire international communal. The dilemma of girls in the North

is the same as that of girls in other countries. It is characterized by distorted facts, lack of effective and efficient education, general female-led training in all aspects of life, poverty, overall discrimination against female citizens. This factor denies the mutual interests of fundamental human rights and the rights of girls in society, equality, freedom and personal dignity. This emerging trend violates the UNCRC on the Rights of the Child on the Inalienable Right and the 2003 Nigerian Child Rights Act (CRA). This tradition poses a threat to the path of democratic consolidation and sustainable development in Nigeria. Therefore, to address this setback, patriarchy needs to be resolved by UNCRC and CRA 2003 guidelines and all necessary rights, protection and justice for girls and children. Also, this paper proposes an effective method for promoting girls' right to education which will help in overcoming the low status of girls and thus achieve human development especially in the North and throughout Nigeria.

### Recommendations

Without the contributions of girls and women on earth, no society in the world can survive. Therefore, governance behavior should be diversified to evoke the need of girls through full representation in culture, which would be particularly beneficial. The government and the international community must ensure the elimination of patriarchal divisions and discrimination against girls' education. UNHCR should confirm its resolution on eliminating all the factors contributing to violation and perception of the Rights of the Child. Anyone who violates this convention will result in severe sanctions. In addition to this, the appropriate provisions of the Beijing Conference should be reaffirmed to empower girls and women by making the decision that the women of all the society shall be valued and respected irrespective of all the factors. Finally, the traditional norms of northern Nigeria, religions and other annoying beliefs must be dismissed. Girls should not be housebroken, educational rights, decision-making power, privacy rights, and protection should be provided to girls for sustainable social development.

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