



**EDUCATION: KEY TO EMPOWERING
AFRICAN GIRL CHILD FOR LEADERSHIP**

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Introduction

The development of any nation depends to a large extent on the quality of education it provides its citizens. Great nations of the world do not toy with the education of their citizens. United States of America for instance has placed so much premium on education matters, such that she has devoted a commensurate percentage of its budget to the education sector. All succeeding administrations strive to maintain this high premium. The former British Prime Minister, Tony Blair during his political campaigns told the world: "...we are starting with education because education was, is and will remain our number one priority". When he assumed office his main policy thrust was, "Education, Education and Education".

In Nigeria, education is similarly regarded as an instrument "par excellence" for effecting national development. It is the right of every child irrespective of sex or culture. I will like to approach this topic by expatiating on the key concepts in this discourse, and these are:

- Education
- Empowerment
- Leadership

Education as a concept is quite elusive and difficult to pin down to a single definition. The concept comes from two Latin words – "educere", meaning to lead out and "educare" which means "to form". Education of the girl children is a partnership enterprise. Every girl child should be jointly trained by her parents, school and the government. Perhaps the most effective way to define education is to view it in relation to one's culture and society. Education is one known tool in history that has empowered achievers. It is the mechanism through which human transformation is realized.

Education is the sum total of processes involved in developing human ability and behaviour. It involves a social process in which an individual achieves social progress, competence and growth. It is a systematic process of impacting or acquiring knowledge. Composite view of education is therefore more than the systematized training received in schools, for it is the sum total of man's activities.

Empowerment

Quite a number of progressive governments have continued to use access to education as a weapon to empower girls. Girl children need socio-economic and political empowerment as well. It is knowledge that empowers an individual and liberates the mind. A mind that is stretched by a new idea can never return to the original shape. Access to education alone will result in schooling but education that empowers an individual must be one where the teacher acts as facilitator of learning and not a custodian of knowledge. As a facilitator of learning, an effective teacher will direct the learners to sources of information and guide to acquire knowledge.

The African Girl child and the Concept of Leadership

The commonwealth plan of action for Gender Equality 2005 – 2015 set the year 2015 as the deadline to have all women occupy a third of decision making posts as the global partnership for development. On top of the priority challenge to the attainment of this goal is the education of girl children today. If girls are educated today, then the hands of wise women will rock the cradle of persons to rule the world tomorrow.

Girl Child: Her Make and Worth

African girls are regarded as "gap fillers" and buds of womanhood. They constitute very important component of the society. Biblically a woman was created from the strong component of man – a man's rib. There is therefore an ingrained resilient power in every woman irrespective of

age. The girl child is a budding man with a womb. The presence of the womb makes her an incubator of ideas and tenderness. These are qualities needed in leadership.

A girl child is a carrier of great potentials but highly vulnerable to under utilization or non utilization because of lack of empowerment for proper positioning. The Girl Child has worn different faces because of the different religions, traditions, cultures, socio-political and economic practices of different countries of the world. In all and in Africa, three types of girl child may be identified due to the existing discriminatory conditions;

- girl child conditioned by religious discriminations,
- girl child conditioned by traditional/cultural discriminations,
- Girl child conditioned by socio-political as well as economic discriminations.

In each of these conditions, one common factor persists, that is, the fact that education has always remained the way forward for the total liberation of the girl child. A critical look at these different discriminatory conditions will expose the present status or position of the girl child.

The Girl child Conditioned By Religious Discriminations

Islamic religious doctrine and practices do not permit the girl child to be seen nor heard beyond the boarder of the home where the woman performs her household chores; and as a female, she is physically veiled during outings. The same doctrine allows the practice of polygamy whereby a girl child can be married at a tender age and could be the 4th or 5th wife to the man old enough to be her father. The girl child has no chance to consider what her fate will be under such circumstances. Can she truly be fulfilled as a woman in later years? Opinions differ widely!

The Christian religion on the other hand appears to be more liberal concerning the girl child issues. Although, in some denominations this stigma of adhering to admonition of the “woman of Corinth” who was not to be heard in the church is still present. The application of this doctrine in some churches has limited those talented women of God who would have excelled in their different endeavors or calling and who would have subsequently become a positive influence on other women.

In some other traditional beliefs where superstition and ignorance have sway, some children, including the girl children are tagged witches and forced out of their homes into streets, becoming a public nuisance. Some girl children can also be maltreated for being born twins or carrying a sign of doom from the ancestors, (*“Essienemana or EkaAbasi”* in Ibibio) major language in Akwa Ibom State South South Nigeria.

The Girl child Conditioned By Traditional and Cultural Practices

The Nigerian society and some other similar societies have relegated the girl child to the background thereby preventing her from becoming her best. She is expected to perform household chores diligently and submissively without complaining no matter the condition or circumstance she finds herself in. She is trained by the mother to produce food through farm work and trading on locally produced food materials. These virtues of hard work and diligence make the girl child to stand out for exploitation. (Ekpo et al, 2003)

In most communities, the girl child has no shares in family inheritance and as such family property is shared on the basis of the number of boys in the family and not girls. Only few communities give due recognition to the girl child’s inheritance notably, the first daughter (the Adiaha) of the family among the Efik people of Cross River State. Depending on the society, the girl child could be married out any time even at birth before she could even come of age. For some parents, the girl child is for wealth

creation through marriage and in which case the consent of the girl may or may not be sought as long as the suitor is a rich person. The girl children are occasionally used in establishing political, social and economic relations with renowned and well placed people in the society.

In some communities socially, renowned and well placed people use the girl children as house helps to show off their wealth and affluence in the society. The number of maidens a man could hire for his wife/wives is regarded as a symbol of his strength and status in the society.

The girl child is a member of an age-group who may be called upon to perform traditional dance at functions or ceremonies irrespective of time and season. She could be withdrawn from the classroom to entertain dignitaries at any time. Their age group would usually form a workforce that take turn in helping each other out in farm work, palm oil production and other tedious tasks.

The Girl child Conditioned by Socio-Political and Economic Discriminations

In some societies, sons are valued more highly than daughters, (Udofot, 2006). The foetus baby-girl still growing in her mother's womb may already be in a great danger because her parents may chose to end the pregnancy when they find out the sex, (UNICEF, 2009). The value placed on the girl child influences the expenses the family invests in her education because she will be married out. The first financial consideration is therefore given to the male child even in situations where the girl child shows greater potentials. She has to help produce money to train the boy-child. She can even be given in marriage or sent out as a house help so that with the proceeds she can help train the boy. The opinion of the girl child is hardly sought regarding any important issue in the family.

Thus, the girl child has to liberate herself from ignorance placed by religious bodies, social and cultural restrictions before she can utilize her potentials to lead. The only key to this liberation is education. The girl child needs to be informed of her right and this should start from her immediate family. If the mother's routine is around the farm and labour, education will disentangle the girl child from such work schedule.

Schooling will provide a break into habits and culture that stultifies the growth of the girl child. It opens up options, possibilities and dreams for a new future. When in school, they are no longer exploited or work for people. Schooling will give them opportunity to discover themselves, build self esteem and confidence. These are qualities for leadership.

Empowering African Child to Lead

Africa is a highly patriarchal society where men dominate nearly all spheres of women's life. Culturally therefore, girl- children are in subordinate position. They need to know their rights and be properly educated on how to assert these rights. Our girls need qualitative education that can empower them to negotiate intelligently for their rights with all due respect to elders and society.

They need to know that leadership is all about excelling in one's role. Leadership lifts people from the life they have to the life they could have. It involves the ability to contribute meaningfully and creative ideas that can move any organization or group of people from one level to other higher levels. Such abilities must be sustained with durable leadership qualities. The girl child should be assisted in the following ways:

- **Identify One's Interest and Career Aspirations:** God has endowed everyone with some special interest, talent and skill which will lead to one's career in life. In order not to be jack of all trade and master of none, such area of interest should be identified,

pursued and developed. The career women must mentor the girl children.

- **A Display of Self Actualization Characteristics:** The girl child must discover the requirements for such a career and work towards providing those requirements before the need to utilize them arises. She should overcome the various yardsticks that will frustrate one's ability to become self actualized.
- **Reject Self Pity and Accept Hardwork and Dignity:** The girl child must have a positive mindset of working hard to attain respect and dignity rather than dropping the head for self pity.
- **Work Toward the Advancement of Other People's Lives:** The nomination to leadership is a direct consequence of life's impacted by those who have benefited from one's advancements. No leader is made on the throne, be a determined and effective team player show casing your potentials.
- **Stay Current and Updated to Remain Focused:** The world is a dynamic environment that changes by the second. As such the girl child needs to identify authentic information about the environment she finds herself to be able to make meaningful contribution. She should have a trainable spirit.
- **Submit to Good Mentorship** under a well tested and renowned mentor or personality in the society. The girl child must be made to understand that it is not everyone that made it to the top is a good model. A mentor must be a model with high qualities and standards. Girl children should be encouraged to have a dream and ensure that nobody kills her dream.

- **Set One Priorities Right:** Based on one's aspirations and status in life, there is always a beginning. Setting a goal and how to achieve that goal creates a chance for improvement and ability to excel. Without priorities, one is bound to be satisfied with any form or level in life. Leadership is all about excelling in ones abilities.
- **Taking Stock of Ones Strengths and Weaknesses:** This involves self examination of ones performance. It creates an opportunity for one to develop confidence in ones ability. Working hard to improve ones weakness has ensures that the loose ends of one's effort are taken care of.
- **One's inner mind and strength** as a woman should make the girl child to generally develop independent living.
- The girl child should develop relative managerial skills as this will reduce her dependence on others for financial strength. This will foster her independence in taking vital decisions without being influenced or biased.
- The girl child should be taught to develop and display leadership qualities from whatever point she finds herself. This means from childhood, a child should be trained to become a leader. Let every mother treat her children equitably in preparation for leadership. Thus, girl children will be empowered to develop their influence from wherever they are in the society- Leading up, leading accross among peers and leading down to carry the subordinates along.

Conclusion

Finally, to be a good leader, one needs to be a good follower, a good team player, stay loyal and contribute ones quota in any given task. She

needs to stay focused on assigned task and appreciate the value of her role as a woman. She is a unique leader by displaying of talents and skills not necessarily by position but by activity and character.

Let our little light shine in our little corners and later it shall become large and beaming in a greater and greater sphere over time prompted by providence.

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