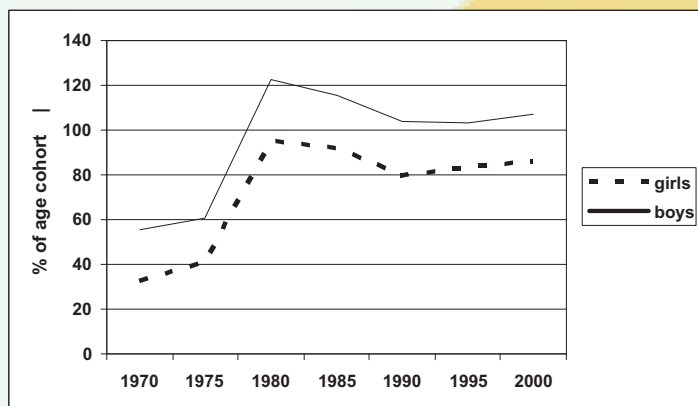


Fact Sheet on Islam and Girl-Child Education

Introduction

Worldwide, over 130 million children aged 6-11 are out of school, of which 70% are girls. Over 80% of these girls live in Sub Saharan Africa¹. In Nigeria, the national literacy rate for females is only 56%, compared to 72% for males. Girls' access to basic education, especially in northern states, has remained low. Only 20% of women in the North West and North East of Nigeria are literate and have attended school². Figure 1 illustrates the trend of primary gross enrollment by gender between 1970 and 2000 in Northern Nigeria.



Source: World Development Indicators (World Bank, 2005)

The gender parity target of the Millennium Development Goals (MDG 3) was set to be achieved ten years earlier (2005) than the others, an acknowledgement that equal access to education is the foundation for all other development goals³. Until all boys and girls of school age are in school, it will be impossible to eradicate poverty and hunger, combat disease, and ensure environmental sustainability; millions of children and women will continue to die needlessly, placing the rest of the development agenda at risk⁴.

Barriers to Girl-Child Education

Some of the reasons why girls do not attend or complete school are:

- **Gender Inequality**

In large families with limited resources, boys are enrolled in school instead of, or before girls. As women traditionally join their husband's household after marriage, it is considered more economically viable to spend money educating a son who will remain at home, than on girls who will eventually leave⁵.

- **Poverty and Economic Issues**

With almost 70 per cent of the Nigerian population living below poverty line, girls are often sent to do menial jobs like selling in the market and hawking wares on the streets⁶.

- **Early Marriage and Teenage Pregnancy**

A lot of girls are withdrawn from school to be married off, and those who get pregnant whilst in school often times drop out of school before reaching primary six⁷.

- **Cultural Beliefs**

Deep rooted cultural beliefs impede girls' access to educational opportunities in undeveloped countries around the world. Many parents believe that the education of a girl child ends in the kitchen⁸.

- **Religious Misinterpretations**

Some parents keep their daughters out of school due to misinterpretation of the position of Islam on girls' education, claiming that girls are not supposed to acquire education⁹.

Islam's Position on Girl-Child Education

The Qur'an and Hadiths of the Prophet obligate Muslim men and women to acquire knowledge and education¹⁰ as cited in the verses quoted below:

"And that those on whom knowledge has been bestowed may learn"
Q: 22:54

"Those who truly fear Allah, among His Servants, have knowledge".
(Qur'an Sura 35 v 28)

Are those equal, those who know and those who do not know?
Q: 39:9:9

According to a Hadith attributed to Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), he praised the women of Medina because of their desire for religious knowledge¹¹.

Notable Islamic faithfuls have also made various statements in support of girl-child education. Some of these are quoted below:

*"Seeking knowledge is a duty of every Muslim, man or woman."*¹²

*"Seek knowledge from the cradle to the grave."*¹³
This means that one should live his life seeking knowledge.

*"He who pursues a path seeking knowledge, Allah will facilitate for him a path to Jannah"*¹⁴

Benefits of Girl-Child Education

Educating girls is associated with numerous benefits, some of which are discussed below:

- **Increased Economic Productivity**

Educated girls are more likely to earn higher wages and therefore contribute to family income.¹⁵ Women's wages rise by 10 to 20 percent for each year of schooling.¹⁶

- **Improved Health**

Women's education is associated with longer life expectancy, lower infant and maternal mortality, as well as increased chance of having healthier and well-nourished children. One to three years of maternal schooling decreases child mortality by approximately 15 percent; the same level of paternal education results in only a 6 percent decrease.¹⁷

- **Increased Political Participation**

Educated women are better informed about their rights, more likely to exercise them, and more likely to participate in the formal political system.¹⁸

- **More Effective Investments In The Next Generation**

Children of educated mothers, especially daughters, are more likely to receive education.¹⁹ Mothers' education is the single strongest determinant of schooling for their children.

- **Increased Age of Marriage**

In Africa, women with seven or more years of schooling marry five years later than women with no education.²⁰ Educated women also have higher economic opportunities and choices including access to sexual and reproductive health information and services.

- **Improved Quality of Family Life**

Educated women are much more likely to use family planning services and have longer intervals between births, hence having the opportunity of giving better care to their children. Among married couples, the wife's education has a much stronger effect on family life than the husband's.²¹

Way Forward

The Qur'an says:

"O you who believe, save yourselves and your families from a fire whose fuel is men and stones, over which are set angels strong and severe, who do not disobey Allah in what He commands them, but as they are commanded"

Q: 17:23:24"

One of Allah's injunctions as seen in the verses quoted above is that males and females seek education. Thus, failure to educate the girl-child is regarded as a sin against Allah. Thus, a clarion call goes to all Islamic faithfuls to:

- *support efforts by non-governmental organizations to promote education for the girl child*
- *eliminate cultural limitations and obstacles regarding girls' education*
- *provide scholarship opportunities for less-privileged girls*
- *join in the sensitization of parents to ensure they understand the advantages and benefits of educating the girl child*

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