Looking beyond Human Rights and Culture Debates: The Girls Accounts of Main Obstacles Against Girls Access to Education in Northern Nigeria

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Contents

Acknowledgement

List of Acronyms

CRC	Convention of the Right of Child
GCE	Global Campaign for Education
HIV	Human immunodeficiency Virus
JSS	Junior Secondary School
MDGs	Millennium Development Goals
NGOs	Non-Governmental Organizations
OMCT	Organisation Mondial Conte la Torture
CLEEN	Centre for Law Enforcement Education Nigeria
UDHR	Universal Declaration of Human Right
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund

Abstract

The debate about the universality and cultural relativity of human rights with respect to the education of the girl child first emerged more than five decades ago and is still on-going. When one considers the fact that the percentages of girls that have never been to school or that have left school midway are on the increase, particularly in the developing countries, it would seems that these debates have yielded no significant positive outcome. I argue that there is a need to look beyond the debate of cultural hindrances to the realization of the education of girls and investigate the real obstacles to the actualization of the world 2015 Millenium Development Goals (MDGs) target on girl's education. Rather than joining these debates of cultural barriers to girl's education in Nigeria, this study position itself in the process of unpacking the militating factors against girl child education in Nigeria which are boxed together under socio-cultural norms that creates resistance to realizing the rights of the girl child. Through a participatory approach that gives credence to the girls voices, engagement with parents, government, and non-state actors coupled with an indepth analysis of the literature about the matter, the study has uncovered "chameleonic" barriers to girl' child's rights to an education. A concept that shows that in most cases, more than one factor contributes to a girl's inability to get an education in northern Nigeria. The study concludes that the dominant underlying factors contributing to the lack of education of the girls child in northern Nigeria is neither cultural nor societal norms. The problem lies in the lack of other fundamental human rights such as, but not limited to the right to a dignified standard of living, healthcare, and information. I contend that human rights are interdependent; all human rights have equal eminence, and cannot be situated in an order of hierarchy, regardless of their relationship to political, civil, economic, social or cultural issues.

Relevance to Development Study

The findings of this study will encourage concerned government and civil society to critically assess and adjust policies on how to address the realisation of a girl's right to education in Nigeria. The recommendation from this research shall contribute to how government should engage with parents, working together to realize the MDGs of gender equality in education. While pointing out some policy gaps, it will generate more data which will be useful for further research. These are to establish whether traditional and cultural practices are truly the major factor that has led to the abuse of girl right to education. It will be interesting to see if social class/ status and the literacy level of parents also play a major role. The target audience of this research is governmental bodies, parents, children, and civil society organisations in the field of the research.

Keywords

Girls Child, Human Right, Cultural Barriers, Education, Universalism, Cultural Relativity, Government, Parents

Chapter 1: A Shift from Human Right and Culture Debates

1.1. Unpacking the boxes

The unending polarized debate for many decades about the universality or cultural relativity of human rights in relations to girl's child education appears to have yielded lesser significant outcomes in addressing the topic of discourse. Considering the fact that the percentage of girls that have never been to school or that dropped-out of school are on the increase, most especially in the developing countries. Global Campaign for Education (GCE) report and results of 2011 show that millions of girls are being forced out of school in DRC, Egypt, India, Iraq, Nigeria and Pakistan among others. Also, the Education for all Global monitoring 2012 Report show a shocking statistics of girls that have never been to school in 75 countries where the top 20 are from developing countries. To be precise, Sub-Sahara Africa, only Pakistan and Yemen are non-African countries that make the list of top 20. The statistics show that in Somalia 95%, Mali 75%, Pakistan 62% and Nigeria 51% of girls between age 7 - 17 has never been to school[1] . These call for a rethink on how stakeholders and policies makers are addressing or responding to gender disparity in the educational sector. There is a need to look beyond the debate of cultural hindrances to the realization of rights of the education of the girl child and investigate the real challenges to the actualization of the world 2015 MDGs target on the education of girls. Looking beyond the debates means asking questions. What is wrong with the plethora of international treaties and legal framework that emphasized on the obligation of state parties to ensure gender equality in access to education? Why is it that girl's access to education in developing countries most especially the Sub-Sahara Africa (Nigeria inclusive) remains a herculean task? Despite the laws and policies established or enacted to address the inequality in girl's access to education. Is culture really the problem or are there other factors that carry with it a cultural coloration but not really culture?

Unarguably, there are reasonable number of scholarships that discussed the barriers to girl child access to education in general and Nigeria in particular. Various underlying forces as obstacles to girl child education are identified: lack of educational facilities; girls too old for class; ill health; parent's withdrawal; distance from school; and safety just to mention a few (Unterhalter & Heslop, 2011: Unterhalter et al, 2014). It is important to note that some scholars have also argued that the most prevailing causes are embedded in religious fallacy and socio-cultural arrangements (Para-Mallam, 2010), teenage pregnancy and early marriage (Braimah, 2013: Oleribe, 2007), and financial constrain and poverty (Adebowale et al, 2012: Unterhalter & Heslop, 2011, Otoo-Oyortey & Pobi, 2003). All the same, the scholarships about cultural hindrance negating girls rights to education continue to dominate the sphere of academic discourse. Unfortunately policy makers and international actors de-

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[1] http://efareport.wordpress.com/2012/11/09/the-bottom-ten-countries-for-female-education/

sign their programs based on the ideas generated from these debates. Rather than joining the debates, this study position itself in the process of unpacking the militating factors against girl child education in Nigeria that are boxed together under socio-cultural norms resistance to realizing rights of girl child.

I was more convinced that this study took the right approach based on the data collected from the field. It was evident that all the factors militating against the girl child right to education are interrelated together. Therefore, it will be inappropriate to draw conclusion that girl child education in Northern Nigeria and other countries suffered setbacks as a result of socio-cultural and traditional practices. While I am going to discuss in details in chapter four and five of this study, I find it imperative to explain why scholars should be cautious when drawing their assumptions on the reasons why girl's access to education is still low. For example, the reasons for not sending girl child to school according to one of the parents I interviewed when I visited Sokoto is multi-faceted. Even though it is deeply embedded in poverty with cultural practice, when asked why he did not enrol his daughters in school since schools in Sokoto state are tuition free. He replied with a smile, and he said that not only the daughters were not in school but also the boys. Though the boys dropped-out of school. In our conversation, his three daughters and two sons are helping him on the farm because he is not financial buoyant enough to be paying labourers to work on the farm. His hope of getting out of poverty depends on the dowry that will be paid on the girls when getting married.

> "I can't wait for the day somebody will come to ask the hand of my daughters in marriage, at least the burden of me taking care of them will be relieved off my shoulder. I will have enough money to expand my farm business. My oldest daughter is 11 years, even though most of my friends asked me to look for a man that will marry her. I decided that she should wait till she is 13 years old" (Danjuma Balarabe, 40 years old, farmer).

In addition, Mariam a 16 years old girl that participated in the focus group corroborated Danjuma views. Her story is touching, because she got married at the age of nine years old. Although she claimed that her husband was not having sexual intercourse until she was 14 years because she was too young. During this period of waiting for maturity, she was staying with her husband doing some house chores while her husband continues to take some of the responsibilities of her family. She said to me:

> "My father was very poor and used to work as a labourer in my husband's farm. One day my father approached me and said that this is your husband=, and that he had paid for your bride price. Although, I was not happy that I have to leave my siblings, but I am also glad that my father status has changed. And he now has a small business that takes care of the family".

The lessons I drawn from my encounter with Danjuma and Mariam is poverty and societal norms and pressure plays vital roles although, it is arguable that the cultural norms were reinforced by poverty. Danjuma or Mariam's father would not have had any reason for thinking of getting their daughters married at early age. Certainly, child marriage can be considered as a cultural barrier to the realization of girl's rights to education. This practice is common within the Muslims dominant regions and countries. It is common also in India caste system. For example, child marriage is prevalent in Nigeria, to be precise, among the Hausa and Fulani's ethnic group in the northern part. It is deep-rooted in their culture to give out their daughters as a very early age between ten and

twelve years for marriage based on cultural values and norms. Braimah (2013) argued that, although, the excuses were attached to traditional belief, the core rationale behind such practice is poverty. The money attached to the bride price is so huge that it can take out a poor farmer out of penury. On the other hand, the household habitually resort to giving their daughters away to wed a mercantile, therefore, becoming liable for the financial support of the paucity inundated household according to the custom. The foremost reason for engaging female child in marriage is concealed in the ark of cultural norms. It's intended to supplement the vacuum of penury in the agrarian household (Braimah, 2013: 2).

Among many other so call cultural barriers; there is a need for critical assessment before joining the wagon of socio-cultural hindrances to the fundamental principles of human rights on the education of girls' debates. In order to critically understand the underlying factors responsible for the thorny situation of girl child rights to education in Northern Nigeria and to ascertain if such factors are reinforced by cultural practices. This study focus on the girl child voice, how they feel about their situation, and most importantly what they considered as a barrier to their education. While investigating why parents decided not to or to send their daughters to school, government and NGOs officials' perspective on the topic of discourse and in particular their efforts to address the problem was critically analysed. Although, the term education is very broad with various interpretation and definitions, this study adopts the definition of formal education as the type of education that the study was based upon focusing on cultural barriers and human rights debates might be misleading.

1.2. The need to reconsider the debate:

There are years of robust research on the challenges that girl child faced in actualizing their rights to education, and the dominant conclusion followed the same path of cultural hindrances. In many ways, it is true that in Northern Nigeria the impact of traditional and cultural practices on the girl child is enormous. According to Opaluwah (2007:5), communal socio-cultural acceptance of women consigned roles and unfair amount of work within the family. These have deprived them equal opportunity to education and it is a threat to the actualization to the MDGs of gender equality and women empowerment. In addition, scholarship has shown that illiteracy among women and girls were deeply embedded in the cultural beliefs that considered girls child as property to their parents and husbands (Ajayi and Olotua, 2005), and sending them to school is a bad investment (Tuwor and Souso, 2008). Most importantly, when circumstances forced a choice to be made on whom to send to school, boys are undeniably given primacy because the society regarded boys as a prospective household main source of income (Leach, 1998: 13-14).

Nobody can argue with the fact that there are no cultural barriers to girl child education.. However, it is disturbing to see how much energy and resources put in place in advocating for the promotion of girls rights as a counter measures to cultural hindrances with less significant results. It shows that something is wrong with the approach or the various actors did not understand the underlying factors responsible for girlchild low access to education in Nigeria. What makes it more worrisome is that NGOs closer to the grassroots that

supposed to investigate the real threat and dominant factors continue to follow the same trend of the debates between human rights and culture hindrances. For instance, OMCT and CLEEN reports of 2004, emphasized on the unacceptability of people appealing to culture or religion as a justification to violate the rights of child to basic education among other basic needs (OMCT & CLEEN, 2004: 5-9).

Where the problem lies is that, little has been done to unpack all the identified militating factors that are comprised together into the cultural hindrances boxes. As I was able to show earlier, the poverty factor against girl child education that appeared to be culturally induced. When we look critically with a complex lens, one might discover that the supposed cultural barrier factor might be another factor such as poverty, peer group pressure, home distance to school or quality of education. According to Monshipourit (2001:26), an effective spread of human rights from the standpoint of globalization encompasses a bottomless understanding of its impacts on the most vulnerable individuals. The campaign of Universal human rights is unlikely to be successful if it ignores the complexity of local situations and circumstances. The deconstruction of human rights and cultural debate through robust research to identify the dominant factors that inhibit the girl's rights to education is long overdue. Therefore this study aimed at achieving that through a wide participatory approach that includes the girls (those in school, drop-outs, and those that have never been to school), parents, government, and NGOs officials

1.3. Contextualizing the Problem

Girl child in Nigeria in general and Northern Nigeria in particular have had immeasurable challenges in relation to education. The Nigeria 1999 Constitution recognized the rights of women and girls. However, the practice indicates that the legislation is not effectively executed. Despite the laws, many scholars maintained that, in practice, the girl child and in some cases the boys so often experience problems in accessing basic education on account of customary practice (Adeniran, 2008: Para Mallam, 2010: Braimah, 2013). Beyond doubt, it has been established that sending girls to schools is considered as bad venture, propagation of ignorant minds, susceptibility of the girl-child, deprived womenfolk in the labor market, and habitually poverty-stricken female world (Ojo, 2002; Kainuwa et al, 2013). In Nigeria, this view about girl child has contributed to the unfriendly gender discrepancy that occurs between boys and girls education (Omolewa, 2002: 118). There are scholars who have argued that poverty is the main factor against children education most especially the girl child. Antoninis (2014) and Kazeem et al (2010) for example, argued that the decision to send a child to formal or secular school in northern Nigeria depends on the valuation of the related costs and profits been attached . Even though Lincove (2009) argued that, such argument did not really hold water in the Nigeria context, *"what is likely to be a more important but neglected parameter is the perceived benefit of sending the child to school. A key factor determining earning opportunities is whether households perceive that schooling helps develop necessary skills"* (Antoninis, 2014: 87). It is not as if scholarship has not yet been produced on militating factors, but the gap between education of girls and that of boys is so wide in Nigeria.

Overall numbers of children that registered at the primary school level in Nigeria in 2003 shows that 67.7% for boys and 59.1% for girls. While the enrolment at high school for boys are 67% and 33% for girls (Tuwo and Sossuo, 2008: 365). Gender equality in enrolment and completion has increased by 15% to near parity overall since 2008 in primary and junior secondary schools. A slight improvement from 0.88 in 2008 to 0.93 occurred in 2012 (Actionaid, 2012:12). It is imperative to emphasize that these figures are not giving clarity about the wide gap in literacy level that exists between Northern and Southern Nigeria, particularly on enrolment of girls in school.

However Actionaid report (2012:8) showed the adults' literacy level in the North West is to be 22% for females and 58% for males. In the North East, at the time the literacy level stood at 23% for females to 51% males. These statistics contrast drastically with the southern zones, where there was an average literacy rate of 80% for women and 90% for men. The report emphasized "over two-thirds of girls in the Northern Nigeria aged 15-19 years were unable to read compared to less than 10% in the South" (ibid). Adeniran (2008) noted that, regardless of the importance of gender parity in an international conversation, there are vast inequalities between the educational level of boys and girls. Notwithstanding the Nigerian Government's Universal Basic Education policy that was kicked off in the last decade. The numbers of the girls in schools still remain appalling in Northern states of the country because of the age-long religious and cultural beliefs as well as poverty among many other factors. It has been established, "poverty and traditionalism remain two serious obstacles to achieve equal rights for women in Nigeria" (Ibrahim et al., 2014: 153). There is a need to start looking beyond the debate of cultural hindrances to the actualization of girl's right to education because the debates did not really address the problem of girl's education in Nigeria, probably we should be talking about many other child right now and just on education.

1.4. Research question:

•   In realising the girls Right to education in Northern Nigeria, what are the main obstacles identified by the girls and how could they be tackled?

1.4.1. Sub questions:

•   What are the relationships between these challenges and how did they overlapped and reinforced each other

•   What interventions (law, policy, and projects) have been undertaken by the government, civil society Organisations and what were the results?

•   What is the level of awareness of human rights principles among the parents and does it affect their decisions on their daughters' education

1.5. Structure of the Paper

This paper is divided into six chapters that range from the objectives, literature review, findings and data analysis, conclusion and recommendations. While the first chapter has already lay the template and give an in-depth back-

ground of the study, chapter two give a detailed analysis on the methodological approach that was adopted to collect data for this study. In this chapter, my emphases on the relevance of data collection are focus group and interviews. Also, the limitation and challenges encountered in the process. The study area, sampling methods and characteristics of respondents, were presented. Chapter three is on the literature review and theoretical approach on human rights universality and cultural relativity debates, in particular on girls' education. In this chapter, we examine the pros and cons of this two world views and how interpretation and implementation of human rights principles have created a serious challenge to education of girls in Nigeria as a result of cultural perception. While engaging the debate, I also use the medium to engage the literature so as to have a clear understanding of the challenges that hindered the actualization of girls right to education in Northern Nigeria. In next two chapters that follows the focus on the discussion on the underlying factors that inhibit the realization of girls' education in Nigeria. In chapter four, the voice and the perspectives of the girls in three categories, those currently in school, the dropouts and the ones that have never been in the classroom are visible in the discussion. While chapter five accommodated the views of the parents on various issues that range from their decisions to send their daughters to school or not to the level of their awareness of the fundamental principles of human rights. In this chapter, the response and intervention of government and that of NGOs are also critically engaged and examined. Conclusion and recommendation which is the last chapter give a comprehensive summary of the study

Chapter 2 : Study Approach

2.1. Getting it right from the start

According to Graham et al (2013:5), conducting research that involves children require crucial elements to be in place. These elements include consideration of whether the research is necessary and should be conducted, the capacity and the readiness of the researcher to carry out the research; What are the assumptions of the researcher about children involved and childhood and what will be the impact of the researcher experience between the researcher and the child research participants? All these features that were outlined by both Graham et al.; (2013) and O' Leary (2010) have been adequately considered before embarking on this research. There is a need to conduct the research because of the wild gap between girls access to education in comparison to the boys in Nigeria, in particular the Northern part of the country. While a very low percentage of girls access education in the Northern part of Nigeria, they were still subjected to all forms of challenges. These make many of them drop out of school or decided against going further to the university.

My assumption was that, this problem persists because the children involved are from low income family and are subjected to the abuse because of harmful cultural practice. These necessitated the need to have suitable methodology that will answer the research questions and goals. When a researcher is considering to put up a research design, O'Leary (2010: 92-98) noted that the researcher must choose a methodology that will address the research question, doable and practicable. Most especially it must be able to accommodate the method of data collection with emphasizes on who, where, when, how and what. O' Learys(2010) argument buttressed Graham et al' s(2013) argument that the research must be within the researchers capacity, which emphasies on the readiness and capacity of the researcher to carry out the research. I was involved in advocacy for child rights for the past five years as a voluntary with various NGOs and as a professional. Apart from been a Muslim before my marriage, I had lived in the Northern part for three years which exposed me to some of their cultural and religious perspectives. These are used to justify the denial of girls to education in the northern Nigeria. It is important to stress that my training as a Lawyer and work experience with human rights organization. This makes me aware of the debate that surround human rights, universalism principle and cultural relativism discourse on girl's right and access to education in the Northern part of Nigeria. This experience placed me in a better position with a greater chance of conducting an original and unique research to previous research

2.2. Research location

In order to find out underlying factors responsible for low girls participation in education and to ascertain the validity of the debate between human and cultural challenges in realizing girls right to education in Northern Nigeria. The Research was conducted in Sokoto, the capital city of Sokoto state due to the level of Insecurity and Boko-Haram insurgency in the North Eastern and

North Central Nigeria. The study area were selected because I have contacts in Sokoto states; I lived there for three years, and I can speak and understand Hausa language to a reasonable extent. Apart from Insecurity in other Northern states and my familiarity with Sokoto state, there are other factors that contributed to my choice of Sokoto State above other states in the Northern Nigeria.

Sokoto State is located in the northwest of Nigeria with a predominantly Muslim population estimated to be over 4.2 million. It is the seat of the f Sokoto Caliphate, a significant base of Islamic scholarship and jurisprudence in Nigeria. Headed by the Sultan, the spiritual leader of Nigerian Muslims, the main ethnic population of Sokoto is the Hausa people with Sunni Muslims majority and Shia Minority. Nevertheless, realizing both Islamic and western educations are critical elements for socioeconomic growth, successive governments in the state strive towards the realization of extraordinary standard in both systems of education. As a result, on the priority of scale, education ranks the highest among other sectors in the state by the government[2]. Nevertheless, the 40% gender gap is among the highest level in the country. "Only about 184,000 among 369,000 of the girls in primary school age in the State were enrolled; 426,000 of eligible 732,000 boys are registered for school" (UNICEF, 2009). Sokoto State is an agricultural state engaged with subsistence farming with more than 90% of their population and mode of production. Sokoto state is among the 10 states in the Northern Nigeria Geo-political zone, with the highest number of girls not in secondary school and female between the age of 15 and 24 who cannot read or write (Premium Times, October 13th 2013)[3].

2.3. Sample techniques: Non random sampling

In articulating my sample, I make use of handpicked[4]/purposive sampling methods with the aim of getting adequate information across board of the germane section of the study area. A handpicked / purposive sampling procedure encompasses 'selection of the key, sample with a specific purpose in mind and improves knowledge by exploring the boundaries or limitations of a situation or phenomenon' (O'Leary 2010: 170). I selected key informants that will help in acquiring necessary data that are relevant to this research. These include NGOs who are working on gender equality in access to education. Girl child between the age of 7 and 18 which were considered by Nigeria standard of schooling age for primary and secondary education, parents, and local government officials. While the sampling method is unlikely to be considered representative, it allows me to have access to respondents that have information useful for the data needed for this study. Bearing in mind that, this study targeted girls of three categories (those in school, drop-out, those that have never been to school), parents of all the three categories, NGOs and government

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[2] http://www.sokotostate.gov.ng/aboutsokoto.php
[3] https://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/146560-northern-states-nigerias-worst-girl-child-education-report.html#sthash.1ftxjyuN.dpuf
[4] http://www.unicef.org/wcaro/2009_5468.html

officials. The merit of using this method over random technique is that, one can be sure of all the respondents having useful information that will benefit the study.

2.4. Data collection

Done with my sample selection, I proceeded to data collection. The methods of getting data for this study are Interview, as well as focus group and reviewing of literature and texts. I choose interview and focus groups methods because it gives the prospect of playing a dynamic role with more curiosity in the complexity of the data instead of the extensiveness (Wimmer and Dominick 1997:84). While it is often problematic to draw absolute conclusions from the outcomes, generalize them to larger clusters because of unrepresentative samples that were frequently used. The main strong point of the two qualitative research methodologies is that, it gives room for flexibility, and I can modify my field research design at any time in case of emergence of unforeseen circumstances. Also, the methods provide understanding and narrative of people's individual experiences of occurrences with rich detail as they are positioned and rooted in local circumstances.

For the purpose of this research; I approached the interview with semistructured interviewing panache with the purpose of giving enough space for respondents to give comprehensive answers to the questions. Interviews are a valuable approach to research that can eventually lead to further study using other methodologies, for example, experiment and observation methods (Jensen and Jankowski 1991:101). In particular, it is suitable for study when looking for open ended responses associated to a number of queries, topic areas, or subjects' (O'Leary 2010:194). I interviewed two people in the community based organizations working in girl's rights advocacies and also two people from the department of education and women development in the local government. Also, I interviewed six parents (all men) to ascertain the main reason behind their decisions to or not to allow their daughters to attend schools despite the fact that primary education is free in the state. I wanted to know if their literacy level contributed to their decisions or not to send their daughter to school because there is a general assumption in Nigeria that educated parents are likely to encourage their children to go to school. Most importantly, to test the level of their awareness of the Human rights principles that protects the rights of girls in accessing quality education. All these were done to understand the validity of the debate of human rights and cultural norms, incompatibility in advancing the girl's rights to education. It is important to investigate if they even know about principles at all.

Although, I captured the views of the girls from a focus groups discussion, I also conducted interviews for six girls that I met in the city market hawking when they were supposed to be in school. I wanted to know why they are not in school at that particular hour of the day, if they are schooling before or if they are still in school but just decided not to go that day. My main aim for interviewing the girls that dropped out of school is to understand the reasons and factors behind their dropping out of school and if giving another opportunity, are they ready to return to school? These will help me to dig deep into the details of the information I need to answer my research question because they will have relevant information in regard to the study.

The other methodology explored during the study was focus group research method. I was able to organize three different focus group discussions with 7 participants each. I choose to limit the participants of each discussion group to 8 in order to allow proper coordination and to give a chance to participant interaction. The participants were asked series of questions so as to give them the opportunity to be free and share their opinions, ideas and reactions. Even though it is possible for researchers using focus groups to deliberately or inadvertently inject personal biases into the participants' exchange of ideas that might affect the credibility of the research. Nevertheless, Focus group discussions are valuable in the process of obtaining in depth information about individual and group state of mind, views and view. In addition, it saves more time and money on the contrary to personal interviews. While providing a wider variety of data, focus groups provide an opening to seek elucidation.

The first group focused on girls that are presently in school, and the second group comprises of girls that have never been in school, and the third focus groups discussion brought participants from the previous 2 groups together to discuss the possible solution. These were done to examine if there is going to be changes in their response when they are together. The questions for the focus groups discussions addressed the issue of intentionality (religion, class, age and ethnic or tribe). For girls that are presently in school, they were asked to express their opinions on the challenges they are facing in coming to school. And those that have never been in school were asked to share the reasons that they considered as an obstacle to their access to education. We want to know if it was their decision or parent or any other factors that this study might not have considered. Against the backdrop of the sensitivity of the topic, this might have a cultural and religion backlash on the children that participated in the focus group discussion or interviews. I adhere strictly to the principle of maleficence and do no harm through the act of commission or omission and seek for beneficence principles that promote the well-being of the children. The focus groups were conducted through my local contacts in a safe and secured place and making the identity of the participants anonymous in the study findings. This remains an essential component for the success of the research (Graham et al, 2013: 16-17).

2.5. Problems encountered

The first problem I encountered during this study was access and identification of the sample. It is difficult to ascertain the age of the girls by their appearance; it might be misleading to assume that a girl is 14 or 15 years old and in reality she is 22 and vice visa. For example, I met a girl that is fully developed for a 25 years old girl but after my conversation with her, I discovered she is really 16 years of age and she is not in school and have never been to school before. Also, access to the children that dropped out of school posed a serious problem. During the field study in Sokoto, it is very hard to identify girls that dropped out was a herculean task. Most of the girls that I met were either still in school with low attendance or have never been to school. This made me adjust my design to interviewing girls that dropped out of school as an alternative to my planned fourth focus group discussion. Even at that, getting them for an interview is as difficult as the organizing focus group discussion.

Even though, getting the girls to talk to me might appear to be easy because I am a woman, speak the language, and with a Muslim background. It was a difficult task in the first three days when I got to Sokoto; the girls are not willing to corporate because they are scared of kidnapers and child traffickers. In order to have a smooth data collection, I approach the community leaders to announce my presence and let them know the reason I came to their communities. In all the communities, I conducted my focus group discussions and interviews; the leaders assigned me two people each to help me in my research. This helped a lot because some of the girls that were sceptical in responding to me also agreed to be part of the focus groups after they saw known faces from the community with me. Although, they only agree at the long run with the condition that whatever they say to me will be confidential and the people assigned to me by the community leaders will not be present during both the interview and focus group sessions. Clearly, the people assigned to me by the community leaders are only useful for me in gaining the trust of the girls to cooperate with me.

However, the coordination of the focus group is not very easy as I thought; some of the girls brought their personal differences into the group discussion. This happened with the focus group organized for girls that are still in school, it almost derails the group discussion, and I have to come in to settle the differences between the two girls in question. I made them understand that, irrespective of the personal grievances they have between Each other, they should realize their actions will affect other girls in the group who were eager to voice their concerns about the challenges they face in going to school. On the contrary, the focus group for the girls that have never been to school was successful without any incident. However, the discussion was initially dominated by two outspoken girls, others kept quiet and occasionally they will nod their head in agreement to what the two vocal girls are saying. This was a great challenge because the purpose of the study was about to be defeated, so I insisted that everybody must respond to the question individually. The result was amazing; the views of the girls that were silent before my change in approach eventually form a considerable part of this study.

Availability of Government officials targeted for Interviews is another challenge encountered during the field study. It took me one month before I could get access to the respondents. Is either they were having meeting in which I will have to wait for the whole day or giving me some excuses to come back the following day or you get to the office and not meet them. It was frustrating to the point of giving up on the interviews, but fortunately I was able to get two of them, even though, they will not want their identity and portfolio to be mention. In addition, finance and time did not allow me to cover enough local government areas in order to produce enough data. Although, Sokoto state is one of the biggest states in Nigeria, I only conducted the research in the city of Sokoto due to financial and other constraints, travelling to rural areas will cost me some money and time. The most challenging aspect of the data collection is the inability to get the views of the girls' mothers. All the women that I approached told me that they cannot say anything pertaining to the girl's decision to go to school or not, they all lay emphasis on the fathers. Statements such as: *"you need to talk to my husband", "only the father can tell you what you want to know", "I have no say in my daughter education" were common in their responses.* This is not unconnected with the socio-cultural norms that are deeply in the patriarchal society.

The field study would have been more difficult if not of the assistance that I got from an NGO called Teenage girl's empowerment centre that assisted in the research. The organization mobilized support for abused teenage girls, offer free legal service to seek redress and justice, and most especially get them back to school when they are out of school. They helped me in getting some girls that are drop-out and secure an appointment with one of my government respondents because they do have working relationship together. By and large, the field study was successful and all the needed data to answer the research questions was acquired, this, I will discuss in Chapter 4 and 5

Chapter 3 : Analysing Girls Rights and Access to Education through the lenses of Universalism and Cultural Relativism debates

3.1. Introduction

The debate about the effect of human rights universalism and cultural relativism on realization of girls' right to education in Nigeria has drawn a significant attention of stakeholders in the recent years. Quite a number of scholars have argued for the necessity to implement the Universal declaration of human rights among other legal framework to protect the rights of girls on the one hand, on the other hand there are those who believed that there are flaws in the universal framework on the right of girl child which in some cases ignored the cultural context of different society. These two schools of thought are embedded in the theory of universalism and cultural relativism. In this chapter, we examine the pros and cons of this two world views and how interpretation and implementation of human rights principles have created a serious challenge to girl's education in Nigeria as a result of cultural perception. The first and second part will briefly engage the concept of universalism and cultural relativism while the third part will focus on the debates on the effect of universalism in the implementation of human rights principles on girl's education in a country that the social structure has a strong connection to traditional and customary principles.

3.2. Universalism of Rights

The philosophy of universal rights is based on the idea that all human are equally worthy of respect. According to Hellum (1998: 91), universalism is a concept that emphasized on the similarities between human being, groups and situation regardless of their different social and cultural context. The proponents of this idea believed that International human rights like gender equality, self-determination and freedom are and must be the same everywhere. As Lund (1998:2-3) described, the universalist argue that humanity need a set of fundamental moral standards in order to distinguished between good and evil true and false and validity and power. This concept is deeply entrenched in the liberalism ideology that emanated from the West, and forms the bedrock of resistance from developing countries to accept universal principles of human rights as a moral principle to be accepted by all. Liberalism is the ideology of the "industrialized West" (Heywood 2002:43), and is perceived by a majority of contemporary social thinkers as the ideal institutional design that ought to foster economic and social development. Its core principle is individualism, and institutions are designed to promote individual rights over collective rights which most developing countries still valued. In practice as done by USA and many western countries, the institutions are designed to accommodate individuals' freedom of religion and the press, equality, tolerance to opposition, free and fair elections, private property and free trade. According to Lund (1998:3),

the proponents of individual natural rights argues that these principles are universal and superior to culturally embedded rights which are neither culture-bound, nor is their genesis fixed in history.

3.3. Cultural Relativism

The Proponents of this concept believes that any utopian notions of global uniformity need to be discarded as there can be no 'one size fits all' approach to Human rights principles universally, and success is better in sight if human rights principles implementation mechanisms are designed with bespoke contextual approaches. According to Renteln (1988), the core of the theory is not just recognition of cultural differences in thought, actions and value; it is a theory about how judgements are made. Renteln maintained that " culture is so powerful in the way it shapes individuals perception that understanding the way of life in other societies depend on gaining insight into what might be called the inner cultural logic" (Renteln,1988 : 57). Since the inner cultural logic of human right principles are understood by many developing countries as a western culture, it make it more difficult for such societies to accept the idea because it will be tantamount to imposition of other cultural values on them. In the main, the most valuable features of cultural relativism was and still is, its ability to challenge the presume universality of standards, that actually belong to only one culture.

> " it is aimed at getting people to admit that although it may seem to them that their moral principles are self-evidently true, and hence seem to be grounds for passing judgement on other peoples, in fact, the self-evidence of these principles is a kind of illusion" (Cook,1978 cited in Renteln,1988: 58).

Renteln maintained that this concept implies that abnormality and morality are culturally defined in categories because morality differs in every society which is a convenient terms for society approved habits. The advocates of cultural relativism critique scholars that endorse a universalistic human rights principles implementation design for all countries without accommodating its cultural heritage. The implication of their argument is that implementation of human right principles should be made-to-order to suit the varying histories, cultures and developmental stages of countries in order to foster sustainable economic and social development.

3.4. The Debates

Many governments have failed to protect the rights of the minority and vulnerable groups from harmful cultural practice as designated by international human right principles not because they lack the political will but because they face the challenges of integrating such principles with their customary and traditional norms of the society. It is true that universal human rights principles have empowered a lot of people that are marginalized from the social structure of their communities. Nyamu (2000) and Monshipourit (2001) contend that, even if the advocacy of human rights values has eradicated some certain cultural practices in the developing countries in regard to women rights. They maintained that human rights have made negligible contributions to creating a conversation that will ensure harmonizing the goals of gender equality and cul-

tural identity. According to Nyamu, "In a plural legal setting, normative orders, including human rights regimes and local customary institutions, present both opportunities and setbacks in the struggle for gender equality. Proponents of gender equality must appropriate positive openings presented by cultural and religious traditions, instead of dismissing culture as a negative influence" (Nyamu, 2000:382).

On the other hand, Ayton-Shenker (1995:4) disagree with Nyamu, he opined that universal human rights is a legal standard that offer a minimum protection for human dignity without imposing on a specific cultural standard. He maintained that, universal human right that was adopted by the international community through the United Nations symbolize the hard-won treaty of the International community devoid of the cultural domination of any particular customs or region. Universal human rights echo the vibrant, synchronized efforts of the International community with appropriate flexibility that reverence and safeguard cultural multiplicity and integrity. The relevance of human rights flexibility to various cultures is enabled by setting up of least possible standards and the integration of cultural rights. Most directly, Ayton-Shenker (1995) argued that human rights expedite respect for and fortification of cultural multiplicity and honor, through the institution of cultural rights exemplified in human rights tools.

Extensively, the transnational and International laws related to child rights continue to evolve over the time. There are several key international and regional legal mechanisms that prioritized children's rights to education, in addition to specific noteworthy provisions in all-inclusive International agreement on well-being of children and other human rights related legal tools. The discourse around child rights law is not a new trend, it has been in existence for decades, to be precise, since 1924 during the era of League of Nations. However, there is still a problem of interpretation in order to integrate Human Rights principles and Culture. Regardless of the provisions and frameworks that safeguard the right of a child, in particular the right to education established in the International and National laws. There are other provisions that appear to support violations of a child which the advocates of cultural relativism can hold on to. For instance, CRC Article 14(2) states that:

"State Parties shall respect the rights and duties of the parents and when applicable legal guardians to provide direction to the child in the exercise of his or her right"

Along the lines of Braimah (2013:5) argument, the above provision implies that as a signatory to the Child Right Convention, Nigerian government have to respect the decision of the parents that have the rights to determine the type of education they wanted for their children. To put it correctly, the provision give a Hausa-Fulani Muslim parents or guardian in Northern part of Nigeria the right to impose the teaching of Quran on their children. This is evident in the prevalence high level of poverty and illiteracy that can be witnessed among the Hausa-Fulani girls and women. The UDHR provide for child Rights in article 26 (3) "Parents have a prior right to choose the kind of education that shall be given to their children", which is backed by article 27 "everyone has the right freely to participate in the cultural life of the community", is with no reservation hinder any significant implementation without contradicting with cultural rights that give parents the priority to decide if they prefer their chil-

dren to attend a formal school or preferably Islamic or homeschooling in consonant with their cultural and religious beliefs.

Braimah noted that it is conflicting to set up all these international legal tools and framework with emphasis on non-discrimination, obligatory and free accessible primary education while accentuating the parents' rights to decide form of schooling they belief is the best for their children. It is noteworthy that there is no one-size fit all thinking of cultural believes, these are diverse in interpretation and meanings. This gives explanation to why some elites in the society with awareness and understanding of International law on the principles of child rights violate the law, and still uphold the argument that they are within the boundaries and provision of international law. A clear example is the Senator Yerima, the ex-Zamfara state governor and some other Northern senators in the National assembly.

It is evident that a particular culture or religion might forbid female children to access formal education but encourage women to learn how to satisfy their husband as a virtuous housewife. The two articles (26 (3) and 27) of UDHR underpin the argument of cultural rights, while Article 28(1) of CRC and section 18 (1 &3) of the Nigeria clearly considered such limitations on girl's education as a violation of fundamental human right and international law. Nyamu argued that, to comprehend both the disparity and flexibility of culture and custom arguments as a rationalization for gender discriminations and the methods used by the advocates of gender parity, there is a pressing necessity for a decisive realistic engagement with the politics of culture (Nyamu, 2000: 382). For instance, the Islamic countries or regions in most developing countries strong resistance to human rights laws is habitually provoked by what is considered as western and imperial egotism (Hilsdon et al cited in Manderson, 2004:289). Hilsdon and associate suggest it is imperative to realize that in Islam, individual freedom is based on heavenly judgment and not by secular law, "construction of law and the authority of different institutions, within different nations and internationally, affect how rights might be codified and protected, and what kinds of action might be taken where rights are not recognized or are revoked" (ibid)

Nonetheless, interpretation still remains a serious concern about the balancing of human rights and culture, which have put girl child under pressure and uncertainty in accessing education in Nigeria. According to Merry (2006: 39-40) the inability to "indigenize" human rights makes it problematic to universalize / spread human rights, "yet to do so would undermine their potential for change". Consequently, human rights translation should be done in a cultural context. The theoretical approach to this study help to outlined the possible explanation why it is difficult to implement Universal human rights principles in a society that governance and morals are deeply embedded in culture, tradition and religion principles.

Chapter 4 : The Girls' Voices

4.1. Introduction

These chapters focus on the discussion and analysis of the data collected from the field based on a topic of discourse derived from data exploration. These topics include the opinions of thirty (30) girl child from age 7 -18 years on the factors that are inhibitors to educational accomplishment. In order to capture a broad range of views, the girls are divided into three different categories. The categories are girls that dropped out of school, those that are not schooling and have never been to school and the ones in school presently. This chapter discussed the challenges girls that are presently in school are facing, reasons for girls dropping out of school, and why many of them have never been to school.

4.2. Why I Dropped-outs of School

In Sokoto state and many other parts of Northern Nigeria, parents cultural conducts and practices towards the schooling of their daughters. These are factors among many others responsible for girl child access to education, low attendance, withdrawal and dropping out of   from schools. Other prominent factors are, "early marriage, pregnancy, insecurity, harassment, employment in domestic markets, personal engagement, parental services and other traditions practiced by the parents; and also the female students' own decisions to drop-out of schools" (Kanuiwa and Yussuf, 2013: 4). From my findings, four major factors are responsible for girls dropping out of school. The girls that I interviewed cited pregnancy, poverty, over-age for class and early marriage as the reason for dropping out of school. Hauwa, a 17 years old girl dropped out of school to get married when she was in junior secondary. The two stories reflect a complex underlying factor that is responsible for girls to drop-out of school. During our discussion, she told me how much she loves to go back to school if her husband permits her to do so. She emphasized on her love for school so much because she learn new things and make more friends but now there is nothing she can do because she has to take care of her two children. She gives further details on how she drop-out of school:

> "I dropped out of school because I got pregnant when I was in JSS2. In my family, it is a taboo for any girl child to give birth out of wedlock. So after I got pregnant, my parents organized a marriage ceremony with the man that got me pregnant. Since I am married, the decision to go back to school depends on my husband and not mine or my parents anymore" (Hauwa, 17 years).

The story of Hauwa is what I call a "Chameleon" barrier to girl's child education in Nigeria. Chameleon doesn't have a specific colour; she changes colour to suit the environment she finds itself. In Hauwa case, we can identify various barriers such as teenage pregnancy, early marriage, cultural and traditional barriers. Any angle you view it from is valid. However, it might be misleading if one is not cautious. This is where it became chameleonic in nature. A

family taboo not to give birth outside wedlock cannot be considered as a bad culture. It is a simple rule, that if Hauwa has followed she will still be in school. On the other hand, the case can still be argued as cultural hindrances because the decision to go back to school depends on her husband. Culturally, women have no say in decision making in the house, and she is expected to be submissive. There are numerous examples where girls got pregnant and go back to school after delivery of their child, most especially in southern Nigeria. In agreement with Ijeoma et al (2013), a man expects his wife to follow custom and traditions, stay at home, take care of the children and undertake household duties, most especially in a situation of child marriage. "The thought of continuing schooling is often lost. Schools often have a policy of refusing to allow married or pregnant girl or girls to return. Even if they do not permit girls with babies to return, the school environment rules, time tables and physical conditions can make it difficult for a girl to attend school and perform her duties as wife and mother at the same time" (Ijeoma et al,2013:76).

While Hauwa dropped out of school as a result of pregnancy, there are those that dropped out because they felt their age was not suitable for the class in which they were considered themselves as over-age. For example Fatima, 18 years old girl said that she dropped out of school to become an apprentice with one hairdresser in the city. She was convinced that she took the right decision to drop-out of school to work and make some money to help her parents. In addition, she said:

> "I dropped out of school because I can't cope with the stress, and I considered it as a waste of time because most of my age mates are happily married with kids and I was still in primary 3 at the age of 13"

Once again, just like Hauwa, it is hard to pinpoint a particular factor responsible because they are all interlinked. In Fatimah case, one can identify own decision, peer group pressure, future benefit of education, poverty, and social norms factors that catalysed the process of her dropping out of school. While High rates of over-age enrolment are common in Nigeria, especially in primary school and have potential implications related to timely progression and completion of basic education. There is a high risk that these girls will dropout, "as they are over-age and enrolled in a level that is low for their age" (Mercy Corps, 2013:7). To a large extent, trying to understand dominant factors that restrict girl's access to education is very thorny. My conversation with Amina, a 14 years old girl got me thinking on why the discourse of cultural hindrances against girl child education remains in mainstream debate. The challenges in the real sense are "chameleonic" in nature. From our discussion, she explains that her father is not rich enough to employ labourers that will work on the farm. Therefore, she and her sister couldn't attend school anymore because of their commitment to their father farm. She said:

> "I used to go to school twice a week and work on my father farm in the remaining days. I finally dropped out of school because it was difficult to cope with study and my work on the farm. The farm is the only source of income in which my family depends on, and I have no other choice than to help my parents in the farm."

When I asked her if she will like to go back to school if given an opportunity, the expression on her face was marvellous and filled with hope. She said that she would be happy to go back to school if the government can support her father financially to manage his farm. While she and her sister will not have

to work in the farm when they are supposed to be in school. "Our contribution to the farm work will be limited to weekends or during the holidays instead of working fulltime" she concluded. Similar to Hauwa and Fatimah, Amina story is not different. Poverty and irregular attendance are crucial to Amina dropping out of school. In view of response given by Amina, children (particularly girls) who are supposed to be in school have no other option than support their parents to alleviate their burden on their parents. They help their parents in various ways such as helping them on the farm doing laborious tasks in the rural areas, such as fetching water, firewood, washing, or in some cases looking after the young babies at home (Egunyomi, 2006: 432). Without a doubt, pregnancy, early marriage, own decision and over-aged for classed remain a crucial factor that are responsible for the withdrawal of girls from schools. However, my finding shows otherwise. It shows that, poverty is the dominant factor responsible for high rates of drop-out of schools among girl child. Even though, all other factors I mentioned earlier might be interwoven to poverty, majority of the girls interviewed are not married and not pregnant and yet they dropped out of school. For example, the case of Kadijaht (not real name), a 16-year-old girl has both poverty and cultural barrier colouration, She give her reasons for dropping out of school:

> "My parents are poor and cannot afford the cost attached to send me and my brother to school at the same time and since I am the oldest I was asked to drop out for him so that he can continue. Moreover, I am old enough for marriage and anytime from now I will be getting married but he is a boy that is believed to be the hope of the family".

In Nigeria, "Sokoto state is seen as the second home for dropout students with about 66% in the North West zone. These junior secondary schools (JSS) dropout students age 13 - 15 engaged in different activities (Inuwa et al, 2013:89). While in the metropolitan areas, school-age children support their parents by engaging in hawking. In such circumstances, the wide-ranging penchant for boys typically entices parents, who hold the crucial decision to enrolment, into giving precedence to the boys instead of the girls. This is because "it is believed that investing in girls' education will benefit only the family into which the girl will eventually marry" (Egunyomi, 2006: 432). Therefore, educating of boys is much more considered significant than that of girls. This is the reason while boys are likely to be favourites in the provision of substantial backing and extrinsic incentive to achieve education. In contrast, by supplementing parents' efforts to earn more income through various income-earning activities, Egunyomi (2006) argued that girls are made to aid in the financing of boys' education. Girls' encumbrance at home restricts their opportunities and as a consequence their accomplishments are limited because they "have little or no time to do their homework, to read, or to attend extra lessons…too tired to concentrate during their classes at school" (ibid). In the main, it is evident that advancing the debate of cultural barriers as a resistance to girls' rights to education in Nigeria and another similar context is rather unfortunate. The in-depth engagement of the girls in question demonstrates that the cultural hindrances are what I called chameleonic hindrances to girls' rights to education.

4.3. Going to school depends on the Father Disposition towards Education

It is a general believe or rather from the public policy standpoint; primary education is available and free to daughters and sons of families. However, the availability of options for free education does not guarantee that it will be utilized. Despite the effort of the Sokoto State government in making education a priority in the state, in particular that of girls, there are many factors that stand as an obstacle against girl child education in Sokoto state. One the obstacles are the decision of the father to determined which child go to school or not. Some of the participants in the focus group express concerns about this problem. According to Balikis, 14:

> "My father did not allow me to go to school because he believes that since I will be getting married soon, it is a waste of money and time because my husband can decide to stop or allow me to continue going to school. My father prefers that I attend madrassa to study the Quran because he wants me to understand the principle of being a good Muslim wife and mother.

Although, not dominantly expressed views by the girls, Balikis situation give credence to the argument of cultural barriers to girls rights to education that need to be addressed. Even with the provision of quality education that is in line with international standard and human rights principles, parents still insisted that their daughters are not allow to attend schools provided by the government. According to Bowman and Anderson (1980), there is a big difference between provision and utilization because families can be reluctant or refuse to make use of available schools. For example the Masai in Kenya. This implies that, irrespective of all the effort put in place by governments to ensure the realization of girl's education, it will remain a futile exercise if the parents refuse to send their children to school. "Children have little to say about whether they avail themselves of opportunities for education; it is not a child but parent, kinfolk, or neighbours who decide about primary schools. But for a girl whose parents dread the classroom give-and-take with boys, the free school across the road can be inaccessible" (Bowman and Anderson, 1980:14). While some of the participants in the focus groups emphasized on their father decisions not to send them to school for reasons that are embedded in cultural or religion perception. Quite a number of girls cited reasons of poverty overlapping with a cultural belief and traditional assigned roles to women. According to one participant:

> "My parents are very poor and they could not afford to pay for the expenses related to my schooling and my brothers. So they decided that the boys should be sent to school and my sisters, and I should get married. In order not to be wasting my time playing around the street, we decided to make ourselves useful at the farm of our parent by assisting them to work and sell the proceeds of the farm" (Kabira, Age 13)

The main source of girl child non-education is attributed to parent economic paucity. Agreeing with Oleribe (2007:33), "nowadays, poverty and HIV pandemic – the greatest crisis in the world – and its inadequate global response have their greatest impact on children, especially girls". Oleribe elucidates further that, though, poverty is a key factor in girl child access to education; one can easily argue that non-girl child schooling is also the origin of poverty. As a result, they are interwoven in a profane circle producing and

perpetuating each other (ibid). By and large, the focus group discussion generated various reasons for not going to school, among them is girls own decision not to go to school. This decision is influenced by the unemployment of their elder's sisters and in some cases brothers that have ventured into the journey of acquiring formal education. One of the participants was critical in her response: Waliat, 16 years old girl believes that going to school is a waste of time. She prefers working in the farm and learning how to weave as an apprentice, a venture she considered more valuable than going to school. She was very vocal about her opinion in the group discussion.

> "Why should I go to school when all my sisters that have college of education degree certificates couldn't find a job after they finish schooling? If I go to school, is it not because I want make money so that I can take care of myself? I believed that it was not compulsory to go to school before you become something in life. In fact, there are many rich people in this community that have never stepped into the class room"(Abibat, Age 17).

Considerably, the behaviour, actions, failure and success stories of the older siblings influence the future decisions of younger ones (although expressed by very few respondents of this study). They see them as a role model that can be emulated, but their failure and that of others have made them consider other alternatives to achieve a better lifestyle. According to Nwadigwe (2007), the failure of several female Nigerian graduates of tertiary institutions to fit the job market is a cause for anxiety. "It has been observed that many female students graduate with lower classes of degrees, making it difficult for them to gain employment in a competitive market, whereas many of those with excellent certificates cannot really perform in the field" (Nwadigwe,2007:353). It is not a surprise that the younger girls don't want to venture into the path of their older siblings that were jobless after many years of graduation from the University. They have a sense of self-actualization by learning to trade and are more active in the farm.

4.4 I am in School because I want to get Educated.

The findings show that most of those that are in school have parents that are educated and that are not in serious abject poverty. Although, as shown earlier there are educated parents that refused to educate their daughters to school based on economic reasons, social cultural and religion beliefs. Most of the participants in the focus group discussion cited the support of their father as the main reason they are in school. According to Medina, a ten years old girl

> "I am in school because I want to get educated so that I can stand tall among my peers. There is nothing good to be educated; I will be able to get a job and relieve my parents by assisting my younger ones. My parents are educated; my daddy is a civil servant in the local government council, and my mother is a businesswoman. But she used to be a teacher and only resign from teaching so that she can have time to take care of us when my dad is working full time."

However, the zeal to go to school sometimes depend on the choice of the child, the child may choose not to go even if the parents are ready to allow her.

Alipha, a 11 years old girl said she had a choice not go because some of her friends decided that they would rather learn how to trade and make some money. Alipha said that

> "I can choose not to come to school because of the financial capacity of my parents. However, I choose to be educated because everybody in my family goes to school at least to the senior secondary level. My parents are very supportive, and they made me realised that there is little or no hope without being educated. To make sure that I came out as the best in my class, they also organized volunteer lesson teacher that comes every Saturdays and Sundays to give us extra lessons for free to compliment what we were taught in school".

All the girls that are in school are so excited to be coming to school but it all come with challenges that can make them drop out if the challenges are not address. Unlike many other states in the region where students walk long distance before getting to school coupled with insecurity and bullying, Sokoto state girls are faced with another type of challenges. The dominant challenges that faced the girls coming to school are poverty and over-age for classes. Hassana a 9 years that have been quiet since the discussion started was the first person to break her silence. She said:

> "Coming to school is very challenging because my parents are poor. I am supposed to resume at school by 8am, but I always resume by 10am because I will have to go and sell donkwa and fura early in the morning starting from 6am. Without selling, there is no way I can come to school with money for my lunch and moreover there will be nothing for me to eat when I get back home in the evening. And sometimes I will have to leave the school early so as to go and pick my junior brother in school because they have a different closing hour to mine. Many times, the teachers will punish me for coming late, and I struggle to cover the classes that I missed" (Hassana, Age 9).

The feelings of Hassana were shared unanimously because it was like speaking for them. Almost all of them engaged in hawking goods in the marker either before or after school hours. It is not unusual for the studies of young girls to be disrupted because in some cases they are come to school with their younger siblings. It is noteworthy that, this did not only disrupt their studies but also those of other children in the school.

Furthermore, scholarships have shown that because girls are responsible for multiple household chores, they are unlikely to have enough time available after school for schoolwork. Quite the opposite, boys are practically under no circumstances expected to take up household chores responsibilities. In Kanuiwa and Yussuf (2013) words, "competing demands on girls' time had translated into relatively poorer academic performance than their male counterparts, often leading to high repetition and, ultimately, higher dropout rates" (Kanuiwa and Yussuf, 2013 :3). Another dominant factor that majority of them shared is that 5 of the girls out of the 8 participants on the focus groups are over-age for the classes they presently occupied going by the National standard of class and age of students. If a student feels out of place in circumstances that she supposed to be mentally balance, it can affect her overall performance that will lead to repetition of classes and ultimate withdrawal from school. Iyawa a primary five students said that she is not always happy because she is very old for the class she is presently,

"I am the oldest in my class with at least five years older than my classmates. My mates are already working or married with kids. I always find it difficult to interact with my classmates and those that are in an upper class like primary 6 or JSS1and 2" (Iyawa, Age 15).

Peer groups have a strong influence on the decision of children to act in certain ways, Iyawa felt that she has been left behind by her colleagues and that make sad which will definitely affect her performance in school. "Adolescents who fall behind, due to late entry into primary school or grade repetition (or a combination of the two), are at a significant risk of dropping out of school, often to be married or to work to support the household" (Mercy corps,2013: 7). Students that manage not to drop out of school are successful to do so because of the social and moral support they get from their parents (Inuwa et al, 2013:94). Significantly, there is a strong connection between factors that undermine the actualization of girls' rights to education of the three categories of girls that are the focus of this study. Even though, various factors appear across the three categories, but the dominant factor that is omnipresence in all the girls that were interviewed or that participated in the focus group discussion is poverty. Where it did not appear to be a key factor, it remains a reinforcing factor for other obstacles that appear to the surface. Despite the fact that this study has shown that poverty is the main factor militating against girl child education in Nigeria. It is too early to draw such conclusion without getting the views of the parents that hold the aces that determines if a girl child will go to school or now. In the next chapter, I shall present their views and see if it corroborates the children arguments

Chapter 5 Analysing the roles of Actors (Parents, NGOs and Government)

5.1. Introduction

This chapter is based on the discussion around the findings that includes the views of the parents, local government officials and that of an NGO that is working to actualize the right of girl's child to quality education. In this chapter, I critically engaged the motivating factors that influenced the parents, which are mainly men, decisions not to or to send their daughters to school. While this chapter presents the views of the parents, the awareness of the principles of human rights on girl's education was put to test from the parent's perspective. In the last part of this chapter, the type of intervention and roles played by government and NGOs in terms of law, policy, and projects were examined through the responses from the respondent. This was done to investigate if government and NGOs intervention conform to the reality of the challenges faced by girls in attending school and the parent decisions not to send their daughters to school.

5.2. Quality matters

Evidence gathered from the field study indicated that majority of the girls that are now in school attributed the decision not go to school to their fathers and those in school attributed their continuous stay to the moral and social support of their parents. In order to ascertain the main reason behind parent's decision not to send the girls to school, we ask questions that are related to the quality of the state education to see if parents choose not to send their daughters to schools because of quality because as I discussed earlier, parents do evaluate the future benefit of education before the send their children to school. Mr Bako Danjuma, a technician has a mixed feeling about the school quality. He said:

> "I think the quality is good in some areas and needs improvement in other areas. But I am disappointed with the quality of the classrooms and other learning infrastructures, some of this buildings look as if it will collapse tomorrow. The government needs to do something about providing adequate and quality learning environment"

Another respondent has this to say about the quality of education:

> "It is total nonsense if you have good teachers with bad facilities. Yes, the safety of the children and the performance of the teachers are not in question but my main concern is that it will amount to total nonsense if the schools are not well equipped with necessary facilities and meet the national standard of 30 students per class". I might withdraw my daughters from the schools because the conditions are not suitable for females" (Muhammed Bala, Age 52)

Baba Mohammed, 45 years, expressed his dissatisfaction on the state of education in the state by supporting Mr Bala view about the facilities that are not

"What type of quality are we talking about if the classrooms are overcrowded, poor building quality, and we still need to pay for tuition even though the government says that the education is free? I have to make extra provision for a good chair and table for my daughter to use in school because she complained that she used to sit on the floor in school. How can a child be motivated to study in this type of condition and please tell me why she will not repeat a class twice even thrice? I don't blame parents that don't allow their daughters to go to school because the environment for study is not conducive."

Over the years, lack of skilled teachers, scarcity of learning materials, and lack of standard education centers have denied the small number of fortunate girls, permitted to obtain formal education from attaining the best. Oleribe (2007) noted that the majority of the girls leave school worse than when they entered. Similarly, the gender prejudiced learning procedures, as well as teachers' attitudes, syllabuses, learning materials, and practices underpin gender disparities. Besides, the lack of female teachers as mentors may perhaps hinder the enrolment of girls in schools (Oleribe, 2007: 33). It is imperative to emphasize that, instructional materials and text books, admission procedures, and school policies are gender-biased. There is no conducive environment for learn, most especially the one that is girl-friendly, "over congested classrooms are not girl-friendly; boys by nature may be able to bear some physical hardships, while girls may not be" (Egunyomi, 2006: 433). Egunyomi suggest that while the forceful nature of boys over girls may discourage girls to settle down in coeducational settings. Religious orientation likewise inhibits girls from attending the same schools as boys in the Northern part of Nigeria (ibid).

5.3. Cultural or Chameleonic Barrier?

In the northern part of Nigeria, girl child is considered more valuable in terms of the immediate monetary benefit that comes with dowry payment to the father of the child. Although, it has it root entrenched deeply in the customary practice but also poverty in most cases are responsible for such thinking. My discussion with some parents explains why such practice hindered the education of girls. According to Danlandi Musa, a businessman has this to say:

"I have six beautiful daughters and three sons, and my wife is presently pregnant in which I pray the baby come out as a girl. My girls bring fortune for me, and they change the life of this family. I used to work as a bus conductor even though I inherited huge plots of land from my father, but I couldn't make use of it because I have no money. I started working on the land after I received the bride price for three of my daughters that got married in the space of two years when they clock the age of 14. I can tell you that, I now have enough money to train the boys so that they can continue my lineage after I die".

Correspondingly, the girls views discussed in chapter four is consistent with the reason Danlandi gave for not sending her daughters to school. Once again, poverty in the cloak of cultural barriers has hindered the chances of his six daughters to attain quality education. In Northern Nigeria, there are lesser demand for girl child education by parents, as a result of traditional customs

and perceived girls' responsibilities in the household. Aggravated by traditional views of girls as bridal material, child guardians, and an encumbrance to the family. A number of parents decided in various cultures that, education of a girl child is not "worthwhile for their daughters…..the gains in productivity or income due to education will accrue to the families of the sons-in-law rather than to them" (Kanuiwa and Yussuf, 2013 : 3). Above all, educating a girl child is considered less beneficial and a bad investment, girls are only educated due to high bride price attached to educated girls because the level of education of a girl determines the bride price payable.

> "Why should I send the girl child to school and spend so much money to train her for the benefit of another man. Investing such money and time on a girl child is a waste because it brings little or no benefit to the family. Her husband can decide that he want her to be Eleha as dictates with the principle and tenet of Islam. So whatever decision needs to be taken will be that of her husband" (Bako Girma, 50 years old farmer)

While marriage and continuous school attendance are not believed to be compatible with continued school attendance, teenage marriage is every so often understood as a means of upholding chastity. Tuwor and Sousso (2008) argued that, as girl child approach puberty, they are more likely to be withdrawn from school by their families. However, in some cases, parents out rightly refuse to enrol them because of their believed that, the more a girl child stay in school, the more the problems they might face. The reasons given by Mr Bako Gima for not sending his daughter to school are not uncommon in the Northern Nigeria. Strict adherence to the Islamic practice of purdah is one of the factors that parents refuse to send or withdraw their daughter from school. "This practice refers to the seclusion of women from the sight of men and interaction with strangers inside and outside the home; the practice generally applies to married women and girls who have reached puberty" (Tuwor and Sousso, 2008:368). Even though the practice is in decline, yet many families still engage in such practice as it was re-established under Sharia law in several states in Northern Nigeria.

5.4. Human Rights Awareness

As I have discussed in previous chapters, various factors are responsible for the limitation of girls and women access to education. But in some cases, denial to education was justified in terms of its apparent insignificance to the lives, and above all the future work based on the gender assigned role of women. Without a doubt, this perception is a fundamental abuse of Human Right of the girls. I asked the parents I interviewed if they are aware of the decision not to allow their daughters to attend formal school are against human right. One of the parents named Abubakar reacted swiftly saying:

> "What did human rights have to do with the way I run my family, did human right put food on my table, feed and clothing my children, pay for their school fees or when they fall sick, it is human rights that will take them to hospital and treat them right?. When you get to the clinic, and they ask you to go and buy drugs or pay some certain fees, I should refer them to human right"

It is not only Abubakar that have resentment toward the world human rights; his view was supported by Bako Girma. Even though he is not educated as Abubakar, he is aware of the principle of human rights on girl's child education but just don't believe that respecting the human rights principle has anything to do with the girl future. He said that, he will rather have them to come and help him in his farm or shop to learn how to become successful businesswomen so that they can support their husband when they get married. He believes that with that kind of quality imbibed in them, their husband will treat them with respect and like a queen. In his words

> "The clamour about rights of girl's education has nothing to do with their future. You see I did not go to school for one day but I am very comfortable than most of you that claim to be learned I have two houses and cars with a booming business; I eat what I like anytime I want it, so why will I do otherwise in training my children" (Barko Girma, 55 years old, Businessman)

My experience from this study shows that, the Hausa system of house trade is more dependent on the assistance of girls because the boys have been spared to go to school. While it was a general belief that education will increase boys' chance for employment as the future head of the household. "Education for girls was seen more as a temporary diversion before entering into marriage, child-bearing, and home- and farm-based subsistence production" (Pittin, 1990 :14). Although some parents are aware of Human rights principles, majority of the people that I interviewed are not aware because they are not educated. The Literacy level of the parents is crucial in the decision of educating their daughters in Sokoto state. It is expected that parents in most cases will want to train their children based on their beliefs, understanding and exposure. My encounter with many parents during the interview and the children focus group session shows that most educated parents will be eager to send their daughter to school while most of the illiterates will do otherwise. For example "literate and academically trained parents are more likely than illiterate and traditionally trained parents to enrol their daughters in school" (Kanuiwa and Yussuf, 2013: 3).

5.5. Government and NGOs Interventions

It is a fact that girls access to education in Northern Nigeria remain the lowest in the country, and Sokoto state is right there on the top of the pyramid. However, each administration that has come to power has always emphasized on her readiness to prioritize education especially that of girls in the state. Remarkably, the impacts of the reforms remain unfelt and Sokoto state remains the highest in relations to inability of girls to access education. Series of question pop up in mind, and this led to my curiosity to interview two local government officials in the Ministry of Women and education development. My intention is to ascertain the reality of the so call reform in the state educational sector and if it is true what are the factors militating against its success. One of the respondents I interviewed said that, there is no possible solution that the government has not adopted, but parents just refused to send their children to school. In his words, he said that:

> "The government have done all what it can to make provision of schools with good facilities for all children, reduced the cut-off marks for girls entrance exams, abolished school and examination fees, build more classrooms and employed more teachers. The standard of our schools are better than most of those you will see in the South-West or South-South, the problem here is that we have facilities but no students"

When I asked further about what the government are doing to attract students to schools in the state if the government has provided facilities only to be ignored by the students and their parents for reasons best known to them. He replied,

> "The governor mandated all the local government councils to embark on a sensitization programs, a house to house campaign and visitation to educates the parents on the needs to release their children most especially the girls. Although, after the campaign the number of enrolment increases but the gap is the wide because majority of parents still don't want to send their daughters to school"

Another government official respondent expressed her frustration towards the actions of the parents that refused to send their daughter to schools despite all the effort of the government in providing education for all.

> "What can the government do if the parents refused to send their daughters to school; we can't force them because they will tell you unless you want to take the responsibility of being her father. A man told me one day that if you insist that she should follow you to school, and then she should not come back home, just take her to your house".

Noticeably, Governor Wamakko's administration declared a state emergency in the educational sector and committed 22% of the state's budget to the sector. While poverty is the excuse often given by parents as the reason why they keep their children most especially the girl child out of school, the administration abolished all fees from the school system in Sokoto including examination fees, for all students' non indigenes inclusive. It also increased the feeding allowance of its students by 100%. Also because many women have married without completing their secondary education, prompted the creation of women education centres within the state and one in each of the 3 senatorial districts in the state, for women to enrolled for their secondary education that will qualify them for tertiary education. This policy has given married women a renewed opportunity to acquire western education. But can we say that the government lack the capacity to put in place programs that will attract the parents to send their children to schools? I eventually talked to two NGOs official from the Teenage girl's empowerment Center, an organization that encourages girl child education in the region. According to Khadijah, one of the program officers for the NGO said:

> "We are working day and nights to engage and our parents on the need to see to the fact that the only legacy parents can leave behind for their children is sound education. We are also working tirelessly to prevent our parents from giving out their children in early marriage," she said.

Another respondent from the NGO, Biliatu, the program support officer of Teenage girls Empowerment Center have this to say,

> "I think civil societies are working hard in collaboration with UNICEF to engage with parents on the need to send their daughters to schools on the one

hand. On the other hand, making sure that government doesn't mismanage the funds that are meant for provision of facilities that will make studying conducive for the girls when they go to school".

Comparing the responses of the children and parents with the programs and approach from the government and NGOs, it should not be surprising anymore why Sokoto state remain the highest in the number of girls that are not in school and the second highest in the numbers of drop-outs. Clearly, the government and NGOs are attracted to the debates of cultural barriers as a great obstacle to girls' rights to education in Nigeria. Efforts and programs are tailored towards addressing their own identified challenges, whereas this study has been able to show that such postulation is not correct. The governments need to critically look inward and beyond the mainstream debate and design programs that are all encompassing in order to resolve this problem to address girls education.

Chapter 6 Final Reflection

Juxtaposing the findings of this study with the dominant debates of human rights universalism and cultural relativism impact on girl child access to education in Nigeria, it is crystal clear that the dominant underlying factors militating against girls child education in northern Nigeria is not cultural or societal norms. Rather the problem lies with the inadequacies of plethora of other fundamental human rights such as but not limited to rights to dignify standard of living, health, and information just to mention a few. For me, human rights are inseparable; all human rights have equal eminence, and cannot be situated in an order of hierarchy, regardless of their relationship to political, civil, economic, social or cultural issues. Human rights are essential to the pride of every human being; denial of one right unvaryingly obstructs the satisfaction and actualization of other rights. For example, the right of each person to a suitable standard of living cannot be negotiated at the expense and detriment of other rights, such as the right to education, health among others. Human Rights are interrelated and interdependent with each one playing a significant role in the realization of individual's human dignity and needs. The actualization of one right every so often rest on, exclusively or in part, upon the satisfaction and actualization of others. For instance, realization and actualization of the right to individual health may be subject to, in certain situations, on fulfilment of the right to education, information, and or development

In this study, I tagged the barriers to girl child rights to education as a "chameleon" barrier. I came up with this concept because all the girls and parents that were engaged during this study expressed multiple factors as obstacles to girl child education in northern Nigeria. Even though in most cases, it might first appears to be culturally motivated, a second look at the factors from another perspective demonstrates other underlying factors. The in-depth analysis of data collected from the field shows that various barriers such as poverty, teenage pregnancy, early marriage, peer pressure, cultural and traditional barriers are in most cases interrelated and more than one factors are always responsible for girls to drop out of school or never been to school. I argued that, it might be misleading if one is not cautious to quickly attribute the failure of girl's realization of their rights to education to cultural barriers. Even though, various factors appear across the three categories of girls that participated in this study, the prevailing factor that is omnipresence in all the girls that were interviewed or that participated in the focus group discussion is poverty. Where it did not appear to be a key factor, it remains a reinforcing factor for other obstacles that appear to the surface.

The girls sentiments were also shared by most parents that participated in this study, although there are some that did not see any benefit in educating their daughters because of the quality or the high level of unemployment in the region and the country as a whole. Therefore, they prefer to train their daughters in trades so that they can be accustomed to businesses: this they believed will make them to become a virtue woman and respected by their husbands. To say that cultural barrier did not exist or play no part in restricting girls access to education in northern Nigeria is an understatement. However, in most cases such cultural barriers have a strong link to other underlying factors. Significantly, there is a strong connection between factors that undermine the ac-

tualization of girls' rights to education of the three categories of girls that are the focus of this study.

In the main, I was able to show in this study that the literacy of the parents play a significant role in the actualization of girls' rights to education in Sokoto State, most of the girls that are presently in school stressed the importance of their father to their academic success. Yet they identified that factors that might also lead to them to discontinue their educational journey. Most of these challenges were also identified by girls that dropped out of school as the dominant factors. One would have expected the influence of the long-time debates of human rights universalism and cultural relativism to have a significant influence on the thinking of the parents in deciding whether they will send their daughter to school or not. The study shows that, although majority of the parents are not aware of the human rights principles, those that are aware careless of any significance of the debate. Neither the human rights argument nor cultural argument takes the lead in their decision; their decisions are influenced by other factors, for example poverty.

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