

# Gender and Inequalities in Access to Formal Education in Nigeria

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## Abstract

It is on record that the scourge of poverty is more pronounced on the female gender than male in Nigeria. Education which is known worldwide as an instrument of development has not been sufficiently accessed by Nigerian women. Fewer women apply for entry to universities as a result of fewer girls completing secondary education and this problem has its roots in primary school. Men have greater access to high-paying, secure employment than women. This paper therefore attempts to examine the relationship between gender and inequalities in access to formal education in Nigeria. Education for women and girls at all levels, therefore, should aim at reversing the trend of gender discrimination by ensuring full empowerment of women in the true sense of raising their status.

**Keywords: Inequalities, Livelihoods, Education, Poverty, Women, Girl-child, Gender differential, Empowerment**

## Introduction

Following the First World Conference on Women in Mexico in 1975 and that of Beijing in 1995, vibrant agitations for gender balance and equality in all aspects of human activities emerged. These vibrant agitations eventually began to witness some reduction of the gap of gender imbalance. Despite these modest achievements, the role of the state in policies and development issues as well as the dearth of data in traditional setting on the role of women in most human endeavours, still pose serious challenges to equitable gender equation.

Gender inequality, particularly in a patriarchal society like Nigeria is still prevalent. This relates to inequality in education, professions, and employment as well as ownership of the means of production. The structural roles of men and women in the economies and politics of traditional societies are ubiquitous. This brings to the fore the structural linkages between markets and households as well as the inseparable intersections of gender, poverty, and social policy of the state that drastically affect the female gender. This indicates that in most of developing countries, designs of development policies tend to be gender insensitive, characterised by gender blindness and gender deafness. Policies in these countries tend to favour men who have more political influence and capacity than women and these advantages are used to the exclusion of the female gender.

It is estimated that women represent half of the world's population (World Bank, 2018). For example, India has the second-largest population in the world with approximately 49% of the population being female. In the same vein, an estimated 50% of the population of Nigeria is made up of the female gender. However, the earned income of women is reported to be \$532, while the comparable figure for men is \$1,254 (Anyebe, 2017). This indicates that on average, a woman's income is barely 42% of a man's income. Female economic activities as represent only

56% of those of men. Thus, for every woman engaged in economic activities, there are at least two men. This situation largely has its roots in the educational system. The gender gap which begins at the basic education level goes on widening and becomes a gender gulf as we go from lower to higher levels of education and as we match the socially prestigious and rewarding with the not-so-prestigious and not-so-rewarding areas of education at the higher levels. Unfair discriminatory socialisation of male and female gender into unequal gender power relations also puts the female gender into a disadvantaged position that limits their standard of living and contributions to national development. This position is in agreement with the view of Mayahet *al.* (2017) who maintain that results from a combination of restricted access to education, non-farm employment, health services, legal rights, and political participation as well as gender social norms that place women and girls as wives and care-takers while men and boys as breadwinners and decision-makers. Gender inequality, therefore, abounds in public organisations such as education, public service, the legal profession, and political system. The consequences of not enhancing the capacity of male and female gender equally, in a country like Nigeria with about equal male and female population may impair harmonious development.

This paper whose focus is on the female gender will examine the difference between male and female gender in educational attainment and non-farm employment, resulting in social inequality in livelihoods in Nigeria.

### **Research Method**

The data were obtained from the following sources: (a) Universal Basic Education (UBE) Office, Abuja; (b) the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (as amended); and, (c) bulletins of National Educational Research and Development Council (NERDC). Other sources include UNDP's Human Development Report, Joint Admissions and Matriculation Board (JAMB), and National Assembly Statistical Information. Descriptive statistics method was used to analyse the data.

### **Conceptual Clarification**

*Gender inequality* refers to a situation whereby unequal premium is placed on activities, needs, and ambitions of male and female gender resulting in unequal rights and opportunities generally, such as in the accessibility and ownership of resources, participation in economic and decision-making.

*Livelihood* refers to a means of securing the necessities of life. In other words, a means of earning money to live, for example communities in the Niger-Delta region of Nigeria depend on fishing for their livelihoods.

*Girl-child* refers to female below the age of 18 years or female that is of school-age as recognised by the laws of Nigeria.

*Girl-child education* refers to a process of educating females to make them effective and efficient members of society at home and in their daily life activities and responsibilities.

**Results**

Poverty is no respecter of gender. Poverty cuts across both males and females and ages. However, it appears that the scourge of poverty is more pronounced among females than males in Nigeria.

Data sourced from Real-Time, World Poverty Clock suggest that 95.9 million Nigerians (i.e. 48% among Nigeria’s total population of 201.2 million live in extreme poverty while 62.2 million are women (Isamotu, 2020). The annual income of men is approximately US\$1,495 as compared to US\$614 for women. Men have greater access to high-paying, secure employment than women. Table 1 below illustrates gender distribution (%) in some occupations/professions in the country.

Table 1: Gender Distribution in some professions (%) in Nigeria

Profession	Male	Female	Total %
Federal Civil Service	76%	24%	100%
Medical Profession	82.5%	17.5%	100%
Senior Advocate of Nigeria	95.8%	4.2%	100%
8 <sup>th</sup> NASS – Senate	93.6%	6.4%	100%
House of Representatives	94.4%	5.6%	100%
9 <sup>th</sup> NASS – Senate	93.6%	6.4%	100%
House of Representatives	96.9%	3.1%	100%
State Houses of Assembly	95.57%	4.43%	100%
Minister (1999-2015)	85%	15%	100%
CBN Governor (1999-2015)	100%	0%	100%

Source: National Centre for Women and Development, Abuja, 2020

Table 1 reveals that about 76% of federal civil service employees were men. Women occupied less than 24% of the workforce at the federal level and less than 14% of the overall management positions in the federal civil service. Also, about 17.5% of Nigerian medical doctors are women and 82.5% were men (Anyebe, 2017). Out of a total number of 479 Senior Advocates of Nigeria (SAN), 459 (95.8%) were men while 20 (4.2%) were women, as of 2018 (Braithwaite, 2018).

Table 1 further indicates that out of 109 senators, only 7 senators are female accounting for 6.4%. Male senators for both the 8<sup>th</sup> and the 9<sup>th</sup> Assemblies as shown in table 1 are 102 each representing 93.6%. The ratio of female senators to male senators is 1:14. This means that to every 14 male senators in Nigeria there is only 1 female senator.

For example, in some cases, if a married woman wants to aspire to an elective position, she faces a hurricane task especially, if she is married to a man outside her state of origin. Her state of origin treats her as “she no longer belongs why her husband’s state looks at her as a stranger”. This contributes to electoral misfortune for the female gender.

About 20 female honourable members out of a total number of 360 honourable members in the 8<sup>th</sup> Assembly, accounting for 5.6% with male Honourable members accounting for 340 (94.4%) of the members while the 9<sup>th</sup> Assembly consists of only 11 female honourable members accounting for 3.1% with their male counterpart accounting for 349 (96.9%) of the members. This shows a great gender imbalance in the National Assembly. Only 44 legislators (4.43%) of 991 legislators in the state houses of assembly with 947 members (95.57%) being men (Oluga, 2020).

What this means is that women are not well represented in the law-making process at the national and state levels in this country. For non-elective positions only 15% of ministers were women between 1999 and 2015 with men accounting for 85%. There was no female Governor of the Central Bank during this period (National Centre for Women and Development, 2016). In many aspects of our public life the representation of women is paltry and just a token, and this seems to be the rule rather than the exception, despite the Affirmative Action of 35% representation of women in elective and non-elective positions in Nigeria.

These disparities have a significant effect on the capacity of women to contribute to the socio-economic growth of the country and to play an active role in politics. Only a very tiny proportion of women do get into the commanding heights of national life for which higher education and capacity are prerequisites.

#### *Issues of Access and Beyond Access in Educational System*

The previous Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) had a part of the targets the elimination of gender disparity at primary and secondary school levels of education as core to the achievement of its third goal. This aspiration has been replaced by the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Goal 5 of the SDG aims to achieve gender equality and empowering women and girls by 2030. The targets of the SDG 5 include:

- i. End all forms of discrimination against women and girls everywhere.
- ii. Ensure women's full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making in political, economic, and public life.
- iii. Undertake reforms to give women equal rights to economic resources, as well as access to ownership and control over land and other forms of property, financial services, inheritance, and natural resources following national laws.
- iv. Adopt and strengthen sound policies and enforceable legislation for the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls at all levels.

There is a wide disparity in educational attainment and literacy rates between the male and female gender in Nigeria. According to Nigeria Education Indicator (2016), the primary school completion rate for girls in the country is 64.8% while that of boys is 70.8%, meaning more boys who started primary schools are more likely to complete it than girls. The data also reveal that out-of-school children in Nigeria are within 10,648,546 with the majority of them being girls. The United Nations

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International Children Education Fund (UNICEF) has attributed the susceptibility of girls to be out of school to several factors which include poverty, low perceptions of the value of education for girls, and early marriage (UNICEF Report, 2016). In other words, households and families with a high incidence of poverty, societal preference for the male-child, overburdening of the girl-child with household chores and labour contribute to the gender disparity in educational attainment in Nigeria. Furthermore, concern for the security of the girl-child in the case of long distances between home and school in the northern part of Nigeria with the high level of insecurity such as the activities of Boko Haram, incidents of religious riots, armed banditry as well as kidnapping, inter-ethnic conflicts, armed robbery, activities of Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) and Niger-Delta Militancy in the southern parts encourage gender disparity in educational attainment in the country (Anyebe, 2017).

Access, in this context, would refer to:

- i. Getting enrolled in school- fewer girls than boys enroll, except in eight of the thirty-six states of the federation (see table 2)
- ii. Regular attendance in school- a larger proportion of girls are likely to absent themselves from school, especially in rural areas.
- iii. Steady progress through all stages of schooling- girls are at a greater risk of repeating grades.
- iv. Completion of the prescribed number of years of schooling- girls also run a greater risk of not completing primary schooling, i.e., dropping out before the sixth year.
- v. Successful learning achievement- in the present circumstances, girls (especially in rural areas and girls from poor socio-economic backgrounds) tend not to achieve any meaningful learning, even when they have managed to stay on in school (Anyebe, 2017).

Table 2: Proportion of Girls Enrolled in Primary Education, 2015

State	% Girls	State	% Girls	State	% Girls
Abia	50.6	Enugu	50.4	Ogun	48.2
Adamawa	41.8	Gombe	41.7	Ondo	49.8
AkwaiBom	50.8	Imo	50.1	Osun	50.4
Anambra	51.0	Jigawa	36.8	Oyo	51.2
Bauchi	39.6	Kaduna	42.6	Plateau	47.0
Bayelsa	47.3	Kano	40.2	Rivers	50.7
Benue	44.4	Katsina	32.6	Sokoto	20.0
Borno	37.4	Kebbi	33.2	Taraba	28.4
Cross River	48.7	Kogi	48.5	Yobe	34.0
Delta	47.8	Kwara	45.4	Zamfara	26.8
Ebonyi	49.4	Lagos	50.2	FCT	44.4
Edo	48.2	Nasarawa	37.8		
Ekiti	52.7	Niger	33.4		

Source: UBE, Abuja office, 2020.

The term “beyond access” is a way of saying that the poor score of girls on access issues is not biologically determined. The following environmental factors contribute to it:

- i. Households and families: high incidence of poverty, societal preference for the male-child, overburdening of the girl-child with household chores and labour, concern for the security of the girl-child in the case of long distances between home and school. The societal preference for the male-child can be viewed from the fact that a man without a male-child is said to have his wealth given to his strangers after his death and his identity is soon forgotten and merely merged into the collectivity of nameless ancestors, hence, the high premium placed on the male child (Anyebe, 2017: 5).
- ii. Cultural beliefs and practices: early marriages are a good example.
- iii. The school and its environment: often not gender-friendly (that is, not conducive to the needs of the girls), poor gender awareness on the part of teachers.
- iv. The curriculum, didactic materials, and teaching: learning activities- often reflecting the high level of gender insensitivity in the wider society.
- v. The low status of women in the wider society: the environment not providing appropriate role models of the successful, educated woman (Anyebe, 2015).

### **Secondary Education**

The gender gap between males and females that has its roots in primary school becomes even more manifest at the secondary school level. This could be explained this way. A smaller proportion of girls can transit from primary to secondary schooling, and female drop-outs become much more as a result of such adolescent girl’s environmental hazards - early marriages, and unwanted pregnancies. Curricular exclusion practices which tend to push away girls from mathematics, science, and technology become more intense at this level.

Table 3 reveals that there were 2,366,507 pupils in junior secondary schools in Nigeria in 2017 and that some 46% of these were girls. The table also shows that thirteen states: Abia, AkwaIbom, Anambra, Cross Rivers, Delta, Edo, Enugu, Imo, Lagos, Ogun, Ondo, Oyo, and Rivers had achieved gender parity in Junior Secondary school enrolment. Thirteen other states: Adamawa, Bauchi, Borno, Gombe, Jigawa, Katsina, Kebbi, Nassarawa, Niger, Sokoto, Taraba, Yobe, and Zamfara, were still far from attaining gender parity.

Table 3: Junior Secondary Enrolment: 2017

State	Male	Female	Total
Abia	40,030 (44.2%)	50,620 (55.8%)	90,650 (100%)
Adamawa	44,645 (81.9%)	10,290 (18.1%)	54,935 (100%)
AkwaiBom	39,400 (46.2%)	45,853 (53.8%)	85,253 (100%)
Anambra	28,753 (34.2%)	55,200 (65.8%)	83,953 (100%)
Bauchi	21,835 (62.5%)	13,113 (31.5%)	34,948 (100%)
Bayelsa	8,797 (52.5%)	7,956 (47.5%)	16,753 (100%)
Benue	49,987 (59.1%)	34,547 (40.9%)	84,534 (100%)
Borno	26,823 (63.3%)	15,580 (36.7%)	42,403 (100%)
Cross River	19,093 (44.7%)	23,655 (55.3%)	42,748 (100%)
Delta	35,927 (45.2%)	43,545 (54.8%)	79,472 (100%)
Ebonyi	15,860 (52.9%)	14,114 (47.1%)	29,974 (100%)
Edo	34,336 (50.2%)	34,311 (49.8%)	68,647 (100%)
Ekiti	15,156 (51.6%)	14,238 (48.4%)	29,394 (100%)
Enugu	34,282 (45.9%)	42,452 (54.1%)	74,734 (100%)
Gombe	18,956 (68.9%)	8,544 (31.1%)	27,500 (100%)
Imo	26,622 (42%)	36,755 (58%)	63,377 (100%)
Jigawa	9,376 (75.1%)	3,110 (24.9%)	12,486 (100%)
Kaduna	43,581 (54.9%)	35,755 (45.1%)	79,336 (100%)
Kano	38,812 (58.7%)	27,216 (41.3%)	66,028 (100%)
Katsina	22,759 (61.7%)	14,115 (38.3%)	36,874(100%)
Kebbi	12,697 (80.5%)	3,102 (19.5%)	15,799 (100%)
Kogi	35,948 (55.6%)	28,714 (44.4%)	64,662 (100%)
Kwara	34,973 (53.3%)	30,690 (46.7%)	65,663 (100%)
Lagos	118,625 (48.4)	126,617 (51.6%)	245,242 (100%)
Nasarawa	26,473 (65.4%)	14,027 (34.6%)	40,500 (100%)
Niger	25,782 (61%)	16,520 (39%)	42,302 (100%)
Ogun	74,113 (51.8%)	69,042 (48.2%)	143,155 (100%)
Ondo	22,109 (47.1%)	24,795 (52.9%)	46,904 (100%)
Osun (1996)	61,858 (52.3%)	56,368 (47.7%)	118,226 (100%)
Oyo	86,301 (49.1%)	89,399 (50.9%)	175,700 (100%)
Plateau	44,324 (55%)	36,256 (45%)	80,580 (100%)
Rivers	34,867 (48.6%)	34,931 (51.4%)	71,798 (100%)
Sokoto	16,167 (71.5%)	6,450 (28.5%)	22,617 (100%)
Taraba	17,216 (67.1%)	8,429 (32.9%)	25,645 (100%)
Yobe	55,721 (88.1%)	7,520 (11.9%)	63,241 (100%)
Zamfara	11,873 (80.5%)	2,871 (19.5%)	14,744 (100%)
F.C.T	13,117 (53%)	11,613 (47%)	24,730 (100%)
Nigeria	1,267,194 (53.6%)	1,099,313 (46.4%)	2,366,507 (100%)

Source: UBE, Abuja office, 2020.

The figures in table 3 raise one important issue on gender inequality in education in Nigeria- The states that are far from attaining gender parity at the primary school level are also the ones that are yet to do so at the secondary school level.

Table 4: Summary of National SSCE Results: Results: 2015-2018

Subject	Entries-Male	Entries-Female	Credits-Male	Credits-Female
Female				
English Language	3,016,000 (58%)	2,184,000 (42%)	171,912 (5.7%)	78,624 (3.6%)
Mathematics	2,992,800 (58%)	2,167,200 (42%)	236,431 (7.9%)	75,852 (3.5%)
Physics	1,401,600 (73%)	518,400 (27%)	218,650 (15.6%)	33,178 (6.4%)
Chemistry	1,402,380 (63%)	823,620 (37%)	186,517 (13.3%)	46,123 (5.6%)
Biology	1,596,000 (56%)	1,254,000 (44%)	184,428 (9.3%)	67,716 (5.4%)
Agricultural Science	919,800 (63%)	540,200 (37%)	129,692 (14.1%)	39,975 (7.4%)
Economics	1,877,120 (56%)	1,474,880 (44%)	311,602 (16.6%)	138,639 (9.4%)
Government	2,013,760 (58%)	1,458,240 (42%)	465,179 (23.1%)	177,905 (12.2%)
Geography	1,888,600 (71%)	771,400 (29%)	424,935 (22.5%)	47,827 (6.2%)
History	696,000 (58%)	504,000 (42%)	151,032 (21.7%)	73,080 (14.5%)

Source: NERDC Bulletin, 2020.

The situation at the Senior Secondary school level is demonstrated by the data provided in Table 4. The proportion of girls entering for various subjects at the Senior Secondary certificate levels are as follows: English Language; 2,184,000 (42%), Mathematics; 2,167,200 (42%), Physics; 518,400 (27.5%), Chemistry; 823,620 (37%), Biology; 1,254,000 (44%), Agricultural Science; 540,200 (14%), Economics; 1,474,880 (44%), Government; 1,458,240 (42%), Geography; 771,400 (30%) and History; 504,000 (42%).

These figures help to illustrate the 'beyond access' dimension of gender inequality at the Senior Secondary level, a point further emphasised by the examination success rates attained by girls.

According to Ajala (2017), the female gender has had less access to university education than their male counterparts over the years. There have been about 8 women who applied for Unified Tertiary Matriculation Examination (UTME) for every 10 men. There is even higher disparity against female gender for those who were admitted into the Nigerian universities.

Fewer women apply for entry into Nigerian universities is a consequence of fewer girls completing secondary education. This will affect the number of women applicants for available jobs. The high incidence of illiteracy characteristic of women limits their capacity to look for and obtain alternative employment opportunities in the non-farm sector. It also largely prevents them from enhancing their earning power through training and acquisition of new skills. Illiteracy precludes access to decision-makers with whom communication is almost impracticable. It also tends to narrow women's horizons and makes them suspicious of change and innovation.

Section 17 (3) of the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (As Amended) states that:



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*Government shall direct its policy towards ensuring that all citizens without discrimination on any group whatsoever have the opportunity for securing adequate means of livelihood as well as adequate opportunity to secure suitable employment. There shall be equal pay for equal work without discrimination on account of sex, or no other ground whatsoever.*

What happens, in reality, deviates from the principles of the Constitution. There are well-known political and economic determinants of the prevalence of poverty, the case of women is usually attributed to the following factors:

- i. Inappropriateness of education and training, a situation in which knowledge and skills are not at the level that can awaken human potentials.
- ii. A disabling socio-cultural environment which denies women a good number of basic human rights: rights to property, inhuman treatment of widows, succession and inheritance rights, even the rights to be seen and be heard.
- iii. Inadequate access to credits, even when women manage to make concerted efforts despite all odds.
- iv. The low social value placed on the girl-child.
- v. Lack of social recognition for the socio-economic and human welfare roles that women play in all societies.
- vi. The generally low status of women in society.
- vii. The prevalence of women in no-income, low-income, unattractive, low-status, and back-breaking jobs and occupations makes them subsist precariously on the edge of society.

Education for the female gender, when considered from the full empowerment perspective has the following merits:

- i. A woman's self-improvement ensures psychological and political dimensions of full empowerment and the possibility of this leading to an improved personal quality of life is high;
- ii. Education that leads to a woman's self-reformation could positively affect the quality of family and societal life, and
- iii. Lastly, a woman's self-overhaul could ensure the preservation of future generations; improved state of nutrition, health, child care, family welfare which implies laying a solid foundation for life-long learning right from the cradle.

The failure on the part of the nation to ensure full empowerment of the female gender through education could lead to classic cases of:

- i. More and worse forms of illiteracy and ignorance;
- ii. Huge loss of talents and human potentials that could have been developed and harnessed for development;
- iii. Continued socio-cultural and political marginalisation of half of the nation's population, and
- iv. Conscious cursing of the next generation.

These factors should be reversed if the country is to attain the potentials of women.

## **Conclusion and Recommendations**

In sum, the paper submits that the poor handling of gender differential has adversely affected the harmonious development of the country. The country, therefore, should aim at reversing the trend of gender discrimination by ensuring full empowerment of women in the true sense of raising their status in the following essential dimensions:

- i. Psychologically- build and enhance their self-awareness and self-esteem.
- ii. Intellectually- awaken and sustain reasoning and knowledge-acquisition skills.
- iii. Technically- inculcate in women a variety of socially useable and marketable life-skills.
- iv. Socially-ensuring that women use their newly acquired knowledge, services, self-esteem, and technical skills to serve society better, and to push for social equity and social recognition.
- v. Economically- enhance women's productivity in the economic sense, as well as their income-earning capacity.
- vi. Politically- it is necessary to ensure that women can be seen and heard, that their civic rights are recognised as essential human rights, that they also become fully involved in decision-making at all levels. The National Assembly should make a concerted effort in the electoral reform process to promote women's inclusion in governance and politics through gender-specific positions. The empowerment of women will only be real and effective when they are endowed with income and property so that they will be able to stand on their feet and build their identity in society. In addition to the reform, the Affirmative Action which is intended to include the excluded groups to attain equality in all aspects of life should be modified and adapted to suit local peculiarities. Gender mainstreaming to ensure that education and public services are effectively programmed to meet the needs of women is vigorously encouraged and promoted.

Finally, the male gender needs education as much as the female gender. However, the female gender has been the victim of neglect for too long and is in dire need of 'education surgery' to ensure the nation's continued survival. The multiplier effects of educating women and girls are enormous. A much larger proportion of women and girls are being denied educational opportunities. This condition has led to inequalities that are seriously threatening the nation's harmonious development. It has been aptly said that "development becomes endangered if it is not engendered". Nigeria surely needs to engender its development, taking the engendering of education as a starting point because of the centrality of the human person to all meaningful programmes of development. To promote the harmonious development of the country, it is essential that men and women must go hand in hand and shoulder to shoulder as far as empowerment is concerned.

Assisting women to acquire requisite skills through education will enhance the production of female entrepreneurs with the capacity to generate ideas and to turn such ideas into profitable and emotionally satisfying ventures through perseverance and hard work. This could lead to the achievement of gender equality in Nigeria, and by extension, the achievement of the targets of Goal 5 of the SDG for the country.

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