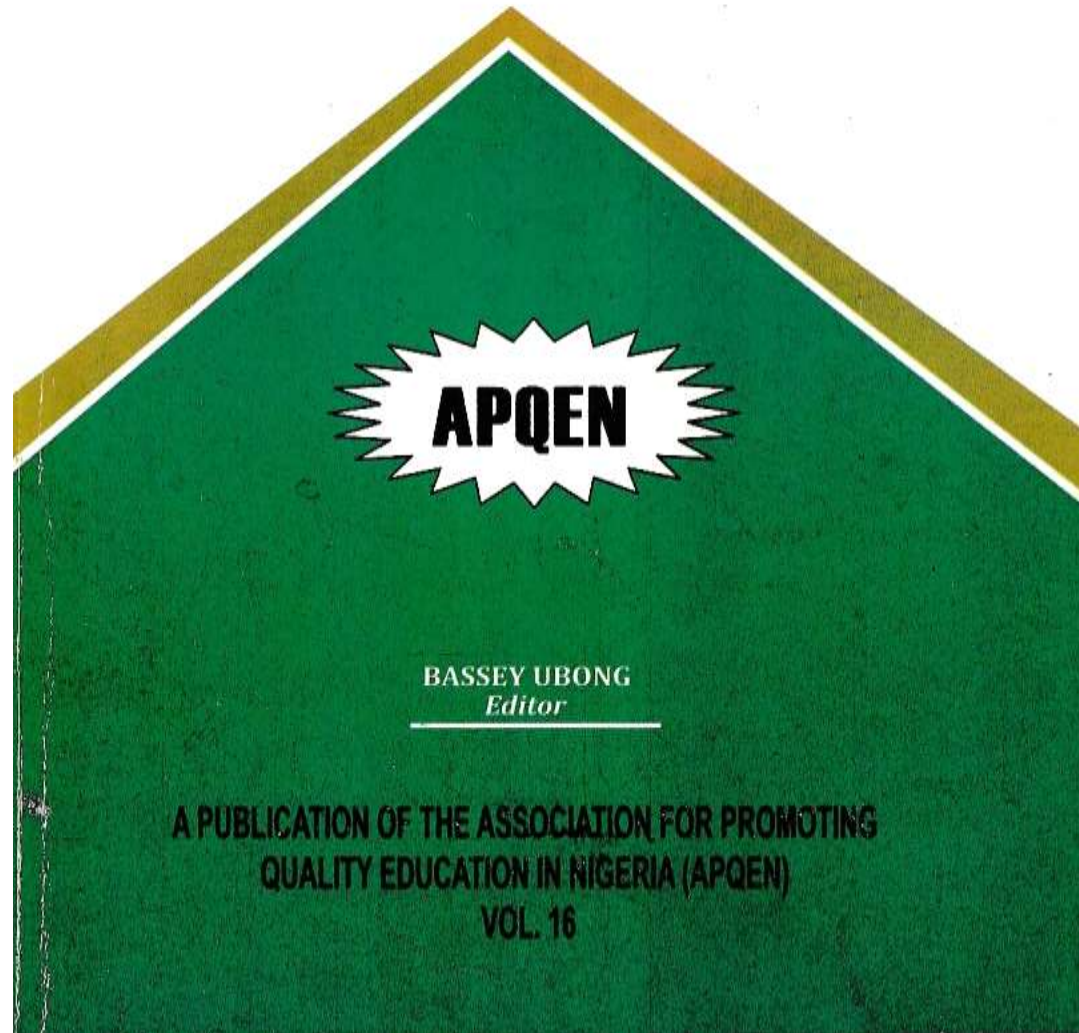


# QUALITY, EDUCATION FOR ALL & MILLENNIUM DEVELOPMENT GOALS

*(A Collectanea of Review Papers on Quality Education)*



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## CHAPTER 1

### PATRIARCHY AND CHILD DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA

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#### Introduction

Patriarchy depicts a form of social organization in which the father or the eldest male is recognized as the head of the family, tribe, descent, and kinship. This system presupposes a government or rule which is dominated by men. In patriarchy, kinship is essentially traced through the inheritance male line. All substances of importance are first attributed to the male such that in issues of, males are considered first.

Nigeria is basically a patriarchal society where men dominate virtually all spheres of life. It is the father who is the head of the family and basic decisions are expected to be taken by him. If he desires, he can solicit the opinion of his wife and daughters.

Women are in a subordinate position (particularly at the household and community levels) and male children are preferred to female children. The influence of the mother and the father is particularly significant in shaping and perpetrating patriarchy. The mother provides the role model for daughters while the father demonstrates to sons what it means to 'be a man' (National Gender Policy, 2007). In this context, therefore, a woman is limited in several respects.

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Culturally, the role of the girl-child in the Nigerian society is stereotyped such that in adulthood, she is expected to be a home-keeper and wife who does not need any formal education to acquire home making skills (Idris, 1996). The girl child likely loses out to the boy-child when a decision is to be taken on who should be educated in the family. Discussing some of the impediments to women (girl-child) education, Igwe (1994) states that in several cultures in Nigeria, women are second-rated, only suitable for keeping the home and children, going out of their way to make the man happy even when they have to give up their rights and pleasures.

Early or forced marriage is one of the factors that has contributed to making women 60% of the illiterates in Nigeria (Idris, 1996). Oloko (1998) holds that some parents perceive their daughters as economic assets who may be forced to leave school for marriage. This disrupts the education of such girls and limits their chances to participate in the formal sector employment. Consequently, a high percentage of women's employments concentrate within the lower levels of the unregulated, informal sector. Meanwhile, the disparity between some young bride and their much older husbands increase the probability that they will become widows at a relatively young age (Obinaju, 2003).

Gender has become an issue of serious concern particularly as it concerns women in Nigeria. In spite of the fact that women constitute approximately 50% of the total population in the Nigerian society (FRN, 2006) the political climate does not create conducive enabling environments for women to participate in politics and governance. It is generally accepted that success should be achieved through hard work and competition but as Umoh (2004) points out, patriarchy has made it impossible for the 'other sex' to compete favourably with men. The percentage of women in high contestable political offices in Nigeria is still very low.

The Nigerian constitution of 1999 (FRN, 1999) permits both male and female Nigerians to own and acquire movable and immovable assets. In spite of this, many women in Nigeria are not allowed to own land by customary laws of inheritance. Historically, land which is considered the highest asset in Ibibio culture and several other cultures in the southern part of Nigeria may not pass to a woman through inheritance. This issue has the potential of introducing superiority-inferiority situation between the genders. It subjugates the female gender and dictates a role that is comparably inferior to that of the male gender in the society.

Education and religion, particularly Christianity have considerably reduced the tendency to keep women down. However, since it is not easy to do away with tradition completely, fathers and mothers appear to have sustained the differing approaches to rearing boys and girls in some communities. Boys are raised to position them to head families and sustain the name of their fathers; girls are raised to be good housewives and supporters of their husbands.

### **Implications of Patriarchy on Child Development and Achievement**

Gender inequalities within the overall Nigerian society, and across all sectors, reflect the wide disparities between women and men, which in turn, contribute to uneven development and feminization of poverty. Among the 70% of the Nigerian population estimated to be living below poverty line, over 60% are projected to be woman (National Gender Policy, 2007). Men have greater access to high paying, secure employment. This disparity has a significant impact on the capacity of women and men to contribute to national growth.

Available statistics in the Canadian International Development Agency in Nigeria as cited in the National Gender Policy (2007) reveals that in the Federal Civil Service which is the largest single-entity employer in the country, 70% of civil servants are men while 30% are woman; women hold less than 14% of total management level positions. Women represent 17.5% and men 82.5% of those employed within the medical field, which generally involves highly skilled and relatively well remunerated work.

Nigeria possesses a body of laws which regulate and govern various aspects of both public and private life. However, the manner in which these laws are interpreted and applied is often inconsistent and frequently varies based on subjective and cultural opinions. This is further compounded by unwritten family laws and traditions which discriminate against women especially in cases related to divorce, inheritance etc. The most common norms and practices concern widowhood rites, the land tenure system, female genital mutilation and early marriage. These practices have devastating effects on the health and well being of Nigerian women and girls and further undermine their progress and development.

Gender-based violence has become a major issue in recent times in Nigeria. This x-rays the extent to which women's human rights are threatened, leading to the voicelessness of women. Domestic violence (wife beating) and rape are widespread and have increased the risk of women contracting HIV/AIDS. The major reason behind wife beating is the wrong belief that women are inferior and are supposed to be treated as second-class citizens in the society. Gender inequalities substantially limit women's access to, control over, and use of services and productive resources.

With the above implication of patriarchy on women's development, children are also involved because where women are found children are also found. What concerns women also concerns children. In Nigeria, there is a slogan that "if you

educate a woman you educate a nation but if you educate a man you educate an individual". This implies that children are basically trained by their mothers (women).

Patriarchy directly inhibits the girl child in the sense that she does not participate in inheritance, decision-making and wealth control (Obinaju, 2003). Besides, her esteem is comparably lower and she is made to know this from birth yet she must be successful in life. This indirectly demands comparatively harder work from her. In trying to acquire education, she combines house chores with learning, which is often not the case with her male counterpart. If she must excel, the effort needed is twice as that needed by the boy child.

She realizes that she does not inherit any landed asset yet she needs to acquire some for her children especially males. She therefore works hard to acquire the finance, subjects herself to denials and pleading to be able to purchase where possible such asset, which she necessarily must contribute towards the stabilization of her male children.

On the contrary, the boy child, from childhood knows that he inherits all the assets of the family. He enjoys higher status in terms of self esteem than girls and therefore has a blotted ego. He therefore does not see the need to aspire and work selflessly towards great achievement. In fact, those who exert themselves in honest work do so from a point of deprivation.

In all these, the nation cannot gain as much productivity from the male child even though he has the assets at his disposal. The nation loses further because patriarchy removes assets, which could have been used by the girl child who is ready, willing, disposed to creativity and productivity. Nigeria as a nation striving to maintain a high standard of living and gain cultural upliftment needs to develop talents of every type, irrespective of gender and social status. In fact, examples abound in Nigeria were girl children who through dint of hard work have become very successful in their endeavours. Their

testimony always falls back to having to work twice as hard as their male counterparts. Patriarchy has been at the base of the under development of Nigeria.

### Recommendations

Patriarchy must be fought by all; government; non-governmental organizations, (NGO) individuals etc such that children irrespective of gender, would be treated equally in all respects. Government should initiate and implement appropriate gender-sensitive policies that will dismantle every form of discrimination against girl-children and women.

Parents in whatever socio-economic class should reorder their priorities and see the education of their children as an investment. There should be no gender preference. It is further recommended that there should be appropriate legislation against all traditional and cultural practices such as widowhood rites, inheritance rights, land tenure system, female genital mutilation/ circumcision and early marriage.

The attitude of according the male child the right of fixed assets which consequently blots his ego and the denial of the girl child the right to such assets which subjugates her should be checked such that both boy and girl children would grow with comparable self image and esteem. In so doing, both would work and benefit from their work in commensurate proportion.

There should be increased awareness and public education on what Nigeria and the world stand to gain if patriarchy looses grip on our contemporary society.

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