

Girls' Education in Nigeria: What can we do?

In 2017, the United Nations (UN) reported that around 61 million girls were out of school. The UN began in 1945, its main purpose to strengthen economies, protect refugee rights, and to support peace worldwide. In 2015, the UN introduced 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs.) The issue of gender inequality falls under SDG number five, which mainly focuses on gender equality. Some countries can lose up to one billion dollars per year by failing to educate girls. In some religious practices, educating girls seems like a waste of time, and some countries even have laws against girls attending school. Many schools are not accessible to families who live in rural areas, making girls up to four times less likely to be in school than boys. Often, girls who are very poor have the lowest chance of attending school, even when education can sometimes be most beneficial to these girls.

Some families in Nigeria do not educate the girls in their family for multiple reasons. According to CultureGrams, about half of Nigeria's population is Muslim, and religious norms stop girls from attending school. Even when 92.3% of Nigerian girls were enrolled in school, only 64.1% regularly attended classes. Researchers at the Malala fund found that the Nigerian government was only using 7% of their budget for education, while the UN recommends using about 20% of it for education. In 2014, Boko Haram (a jihadist terrorist organization) kidnapped over 200 schoolgirls in northern Nigeria, causing parents to fear sending their daughters to school. In 2017, Adamu

Hussani, Nigeria's Secretary of Education, reported that 10.5 million girls were out of school.

There are many ways to support girls' education in Nigeria. We could reason and inform religious organizations to change cultural beliefs about child marriage and early pregnancies. Radio segments could be used for positive ways to support girls' education. Another option is to improve transportation to and from school for girls in rural areas.

In Nigeria, schooling is supposed to be free and accessible to all children. Still, some rural schools charge unofficial fees for families. Even with children working labor-intensive night jobs, some families just cannot afford these fees. I was inspired by Habiba Mohammed, a girl who campaigns to local governments to lower these school fees. Habiba also speaks out to raise and improve learning standards. The Malala organization supports Habiba's advocacy for these basic rights. I believe we could train local schoolgirls to speak out for their rights to go to school. As a UN representative, I would first try to gather teenage schoolgirls who may have witnessed child marriage or girls dropping out of school at a young age. Next, I would teach them about the issue of girls not attending school, and what had been done about it. Then, I would show them physical examples of what happens to girls who do not attend school by going to villages with young mothers. Lastly, I would look for opportunities for them to speak out about what they learned, such as village gathering or government meetings.

I believe every girl should be able to have an education. Some families think girls should stay home, helping with cooking and cleaning. These girls are going to grow up, and they may start families of their own. School educates girls about child marriage and protection against early pregnancy. It also teaches them to make safe decisions for

themselves and their families. School empowers women and girls and prepares them to be leaders in their communities. Women should be able to financially support their families, just as well as men. Together, we can raise the level of girls' education in Nigeria.
