



THE IMPACT OF GIRL CHILD EDUCATION ON COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA AND BEYOND

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Abstract

The educational marginalization of girls represents one of the most significant barriers to sustainable development in Nigeria. This paper proposes a comprehensive, multi-pronged strategy to dismantle the systemic obstacles preventing girls from accessing and completing quality education. The framework is built on five critical pillars: the rigorous enforcement of existing legal and policy instruments; the strategic deployment of economic interventions like cash transfers to alleviate poverty-driven exclusion; sustained community mobilization to shift deep-seated cultural norms; significant investment in safe, girl-friendly school infrastructure; and a fundamental overhaul of educational quality to ensure relevance. This integrated approach moves beyond isolated solutions, advocating instead for a coordinated national effort that addresses the root causes of the crisis. The successful implementation of this holistic strategy is imperative not only for achieving gender parity in education but for unlocking the vast human potential necessary to drive Nigeria's future economic prosperity, social stability, and overall development.

Keywords: Impact, Girl Child Education, Community Development, Nigeria

Introduction

The quest for sustainable community development is a central challenge for nations across the globe, particularly in developing economies like Nigeria. While this pursuit involves complex economic, political, and social infrastructures, a wealth of evidence points to one of the most powerful yet underutilized catalysts: the education of the girl child. An educated female population is not merely a social ideal; it is a fundamental driver of economic growth, public health, and social stability. The "girl child," representing the biological female offspring from birth through adolescence, undergoes a critical period of development where her cognitive, social, and emotional foundations are laid (Sutherland, 2001). It is during this formative stage that education acts as the primary tool for unlocking her inherent potential, transforming her from a dependent individual into an agent of change within her family and community.

Globally, the right to education is recognized as a fundamental human right, enshrined in documents like the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Nationally, Nigeria has affirmed this commitment through policies such as the Universal Basic Education Act of 2004, which mandates free and compulsory education for all children. However, a profound chasm exists between policy and practice. In Nigeria, the promise of education remains a distant reality for millions of girls, who are systematically excluded from the classroom due to a confluence of deep-seated barriers. These obstacles are not merely logistical but are woven into the very fabric of society, including pervasive poverty, regressive socio-cultural norms that privilege the boy-child, the scourge of early marriage, and escalating insecurity that directly targets educational institutions. The consequence is a staggering 7.6 million girls out of school, a figure that represents not just a statistical failure but a catastrophic waste of human capital (UNICEF, 2024).

This widespread exclusion has dire implications. Denying girls an education confines them to a cycle of dependency and vulnerability, increasing their risk of early childbearing, gender-based violence, and lifelong poverty. The community, in turn, is robbed of its full productive capacity. As Ferguson and Dickens (2003) argue, community development is predicated on empowering individuals with the skills needed to effect change in their own environments. When half of its potential human resources are left underdeveloped, a

community's progress becomes inherently stunted and lopsided. The lack of female education directly correlates with poorer health outcomes, lower agricultural productivity, and weaker governance, as the unique perspectives and contributions of women are absent from the decision-making table (Stronquist, 2000).

Therefore, this paper posits that the deliberate and strategic investment in girl child education is the most critical lever for achieving sustainable, holistic community development in Nigeria and similar contexts. It is an investment that yields a "multiplier effect," far exceeding the individual benefits. An educated girl becomes an educated woman who is more likely to invest in her own children's education, participate in the formal economy, advocate for better health practices, and contribute to more resilient and inclusive societies. By examining the transformative impacts on economic, health, and political spheres, this analysis will argue that overcoming the barriers to girls' education is not just a matter of equity, but the most pragmatic and potent strategy for breaking the intergenerational cycle of poverty and propelling national development forward. The future of communities across Nigeria depends on its ability to unlock the potential of its girls.

The Multifaceted Benefits of Educating the Girl Child

The investment in female education yields one of the highest returns of any development initiative, creating a powerful ripple effect that transcends the individual to revitalize entire communities and nations. This transformative power, often termed the "girl effect," can be comprehensively understood by examining its profound and interconnected impact across economic, health, political, and broader societal spheres. The evidence clearly demonstrates that educating girls is not merely a moral imperative but a strategic cornerstone for sustainable development.

1. Economic Empowerment and National Prosperity

The economic argument for educating girls is unequivocal and robust. At its most fundamental level, education equips a girl with the literacy, numeracy, and critical thinking skills necessary to participate effectively in the modern economy. An educated woman is far more likely to secure formal employment, which directly contributes to a nation's Gross National Product (GNP) and expands the tax base (World Bank, 2018). However, the economic benefits extend far beyond formal job acquisition and are felt most acutely at the household and community levels.

In the informal sector, which constitutes a significant portion of many developing economies like Nigeria's, education acts as a catalyst for enhanced productivity and entrepreneurship. For instance, in the agricultural sector, where women constitute a substantial portion of the labor force responsible for up to 60-80% of food production in some regions basic literacy and numeracy can be transformative (Food and Agriculture Organization [FAO], 2021). An educated woman farmer is better equipped to understand and adopt improved agricultural techniques, calculate accurate fertilizer dosages, access real-time market information via mobile technology, and negotiate fairer prices for her produce. This directly increases her income and household food security, while also boosting the sector's overall output. A study by the World Bank (2018) corroborates this, finding that educating girls to a secondary level leads to a significant increase in their agricultural productivity, directly contributing to national food security and economic stability.

Furthermore, education fosters an entrepreneurial mindset and provides the skills necessary for business success. With competencies in business management, financial literacy, and problem-solving, educated women are more likely to start and sustain small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). The cumulative impact on the national economy is staggering. If every girl worldwide received 12 years of quality education, women's lifetime earnings could increase by a range of \$15 trillion to \$30 trillion globally, a figure that underscores the massive economic waste caused by educational disparities (World Bank, 2018).

2. Health, Well-being, and Demographic Transformation

Perhaps the most well-documented and intergenerational benefit of girl child education is its impact on public health. Education serves as a conduit for vital health knowledge, empowering women to make informed decisions about their well-being and that of their families. This is powerfully demonstrated in the robust correlation between a mother's education level and child survival rates. Statistically, each additional year of maternal education reduces under-five mortality by 5-10% (Gakidou et al., 2010). This is because educated

mothers are more likely to understand the importance of prenatal care, skilled birth attendance, immunization schedules, and proper nutrition. They can read dosage instructions on medicine, understand public health warnings, and are more confident in navigating healthcare systems to seek medical help when needed (Akorede et al., 2022).

This health literacy directly translates into improved demographic outcomes, which are critical for national development. Educated women tend to marry later and have children later in life, when they are physically and emotionally more prepared for motherhood. They are also more likely to utilize family planning services, leading to smaller, healthier, and better-spaced families (Akorede et al., 2023). This phenomenon is a key driver of the "demographic dividend," where a decline in fertility rates leads to a larger working-age population relative to dependents, creating a powerful window of opportunity for accelerated economic growth. Nigeria, with its currently high fertility rate, stands to gain immensely from this transition, which is fundamentally dependent on increasing female school enrollment and retention (National Population Commission [NPC], 2018). For instance, during public health crises, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, their literacy allows them to comprehend and adhere to complex health guidelines, protecting not only their own households but also serving as community health advocates (Idris et al., 2022). This creates a healthier, more productive populace, reducing the societal burden of healthcare costs and lost labor.

3. Political Empowerment, Social Capital, and Inclusive Governance

For a community to be truly developed, its governance must be inclusive and representative. Education is the primary vehicle that equips the girl child with the knowledge, confidence, and analytical skills necessary to claim her space in the political and civic arena. Historically, women have been grossly underrepresented in decision-making processes at all levels, from local councils to national parliaments, often confined by patriarchal norms. This exclusion is both a cause and a consequence of low educational attainment. Education shatters these barriers by fostering critical consciousness and a sense of agency. An educated woman is more likely to vote, to question unaccountable leadership, and to participate in community meetings, ensuring that issues critical to her and her family such as clean water, healthcare, and education are prioritized on the public agenda (Akorede et al., 2022). The impact of women in leadership is well-documented. Studies have shown that women legislators often prioritize social spending, health, and education sectors that form the bedrock of human capital development (Chattopadhyay & Duflo, 2004). On a social level, educated women contribute significantly to building social capital the networks of relationships that foster trust and cooperation within a community, as well as empowers them to challenge and change harmful traditional practices such as female genital mutilation (FGM) and so on.

4. Environmental Stewardship and Climate Resilience

An emerging and critical dimension of girl child education is its link to environmental sustainability and climate resilience. As climate change disproportionately affects the world's poorest, who often depend on natural resources for their livelihoods, education becomes a key tool for adaptation. Educated women are better able to understand environmental changes and their causes. They are more likely to adopt sustainable agricultural practices, such as soil conservation and water harvesting, and to support conservation efforts (OECD, 2018).

Furthermore, evidence suggests that educating girls is one of the most effective climate change mitigation strategies available. Project Drawdown, a leading resource for climate solutions, ranks educating girls sixth on its list of the most impactful actions to reduce global greenhouse gas emissions, ahead of more technological solutions like solar farms and electric vehicles. This is because educated women, with greater control over their reproductive health, tend to have smaller families, which over the long term reduces the strain on natural resources. Their enhanced capacity for problem-solving and innovation is also crucial for communities developing strategies to cope with the effects of climate change, such as droughts and floods.

The Challenges in Nigerian Context

Nigeria presents a profound and complex case study in the global crisis of female educational marginalization. Despite its vast human and natural resources, the country is home to one of the largest populations of out-of-school children in the world, with girls disproportionately affected. The challenge is not a monolithic one but a

deeply entrenched problem stemming from a confluence of socio-cultural, economic, political, and security-related factors that create a formidable barrier to the educational advancement of the girl child. Understanding this intricate landscape is crucial for devising effective and sustainable solutions.

1. The Socio-Cultural Quagmire

At the heart of the challenge lie deep-seated socio-cultural norms that systematically devalue the education of girls. In many parts of Nigeria, particularly in the northern regions, a patriarchal mindset prevails, which views the primary role of a woman as that of a wife and mother within the domestic sphere. This perspective fosters a boy-child preference, where families prioritize the education of their sons, seen as future breadwinners and carriers of the family name, over their daughters (Aderinoye, 2007). The concept of "bride price" (or dowry) further complicates this dynamic; in some communities, an uneducated girl is perceived as more likely to accept an early marriage, providing immediate economic relief to her family of origin, whereas an educated woman might marry later, thereby reducing her perceived value in this traditional transaction (Baden, 2000).

The institutionalization of early marriage remains one of the most direct and devastating cultural barriers. In states like Kano, Katsina, and Bauchi, it is not uncommon for girls to be given out in marriage as early as 12 or 13 years old, effectively terminating their formal education (Bolaji, 2007). This practice is often justified by religious and traditional interpretations that seek to ensure morality and reduce the risk of premarital pregnancy. The consequences are dire: early marriage leads to early childbearing, which carries significant health risks for both the mother and child, and traps young women in a cycle of dependency with limited life options (UNICEF, 2021).

Furthermore, the influence of certain interpretations of religious doctrine, particularly in the north, cannot be overlooked. While many Islamic scholars advocate for education for all, some extremist interpretations, propagated by groups like Boko Haram whose name translates to "Western education is forbidden" have actively discouraged or violently opposed the education of girls (HRW, 2017). This creates an environment of fear and legitimizes parental reluctance to send their daughters to co-educational or government-run schools.

2. The Crushing Weight of Poverty and Economic Disincentives

Poverty is the powerful engine that drives many of the other challenges. For millions of Nigerian families living below the poverty line, daily survival takes precedence over long-term investment in education. While the Universal Basic Education (UBE) Act mandates free and compulsory education, the reality is that "hidden costs" such as uniforms, textbooks, levies for examinations, and Parent-Teacher Association (PTA) fees make schooling prohibitively expensive for many (UBEC, 2018).

The economic calculus for a poor household often works against the girl child. Parents perform a cost-benefit analysis where the immediate economic utility of a girl's labor outweighs the deferred and uncertain returns of her education. Girls are often required to engage in income-generating activities like hawking food items, selling wares in markets, or working as domestic servants to contribute to the family income (Abdulbaqi et al., 2024). This economic pressure is compounded by a perceived lack of economic return on investing in a girl's education. A pervasive belief exists that the benefits of educating a daughter will ultimately accrue to her husband's family upon marriage, while the costs are borne by her parents. This perception, though flawed, makes investing in a son's education seem like a more rational choice, as he is expected to remain part of the family and care for his parents in their old age (World Bank, 2018).

3. The Specter of Insecurity and Direct Attacks on Education

In recent years, the escalating security crisis in Northern Nigeria has emerged as a catastrophic and direct threat to girls' education. The most infamous example is the 2014 abduction of 276 Chibok schoolgirls by the insurgent group Boko Haram, which starkly illustrated the perils of being an educated girl in a conflict zone (Akorede et al., 2022). However, this was not an isolated incident. Attacks on schools, the abduction of students, and the killing of teachers have become tragically common, leading to the closure of thousands of schools across the northeast and northwest. This environment of violence has a gendered impact. Girls are specifically targeted to enforce a regressive ideology that denies their right to learn. The fear of abduction, sexual violence, and forced marriage associated with these attacks creates a pervasive climate of terror that

discourages parents from sending their daughters to school (Olojede, 2021). Even when schools remain open, the long and often unsafe distances many girls must travel to reach them become a significant deterrent. The psychological trauma inflicted by this persistent insecurity undermines the very sense of safety and normalcy that effective learning requires.

4. Systemic Failures: Infrastructure, Curriculum, and Policy Gaps

Beyond these external pressures, the Nigerian education system itself is plagued by internal weaknesses that disproportionately affect girls. The lack of adequate Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene (WASH) facilities is a critical issue. Many schools lack functional, sex-segregated toilets and access to clean water. For adolescent girls, the onset of menstruation without these facilities becomes a major reason for school absenteeism and eventual dropout (UNESCO, 2014). The shame and discomfort associated with managing menstruation in an unsupported environment force many girls to miss school for several days each month, causing them to fall behind academically and eventually disengage. While progressive policies like the UBE Act and the National Policy on Gender in Education exist, their implementation is weak and underfunded. A significant gap persists between policy rhetoric on paper and the reality on the ground. Corruption, bureaucratic inefficiency, and a lack of political will to enforce laws, particularly those against early marriage, render many of these well-intentioned policies ineffective (Falola, 2018).

The Consequences of Inaction: A Cycle of Perpetual Underdevelopment

Failing to address the crisis of girls' education in Nigeria is not a state of neutral pause; it is an active choice with severe, compounding, and intergenerational repercussions. The consequences of inaction create a vicious, self-reinforcing cycle that perpetuates poverty, undermines stability, and cripples the nation's potential for sustainable development. The price of neglect is paid not only by the millions of individual girls whose potentials are extinguished but by the entire socio-economic fabric of the nation.

1. Economic Stagnation and the Squandering of Human Capital

The most quantifiable consequence of inaction is the massive loss of economic potential. As previously established, educating girls is one of the most strategic investments a country can make. Conversely, failing to do so results in a catastrophic waste of human capital. The World Bank (2018) has estimated that limitations on educational opportunities for girls cost countries between \$15 trillion and \$30 trillion in lost lifetime productivity and earnings. For Nigeria, with its immense youth population, this represents a significant drag on its Gross Domestic Product (GDP). A less educated workforce, particularly one where half the population is systematically undereducated, is less innovative, less adaptable to a globalized economy, and less productive. This constrains national income, limits the tax base, and ensures the economy remains dependent on the export of raw materials rather than evolving into a knowledge-based, competitive powerhouse.

This economic stagnation is further entrenched by a stalled demographic transition. When girls are uneducated and marry early, they tend to have more children. Nigeria's high fertility rate, fueled in part by low female school attendance, ensures a high youth dependency ratio. This means a smaller working-age population must support a much larger number of young dependents, straining public services and household resources (National Population Commission [NPC], 2018). This prevents the country from harnessing the "demographic dividend" the economic boom that can occur when a larger share of the population is of working age. Inaction on girls' education, therefore, directly locks Nigeria into a cycle of high fertility and low economic growth, forfeiting a pivotal opportunity for national advancement.

2. Public Health Crises and Intergenerational Vulnerability

The health consequences of failing to educate girls are both immediate and intergenerational. As established, a mother's education level is a primary determinant of her children's health outcomes. Inaction perpetuates a cycle of poor health, where uneducated mothers are less likely to immunize their children, recognize danger signs of common illnesses, or practice optimal nutrition and sanitation. This directly contributes to Nigeria's persistently high rates of child mortality and malnutrition (stunting and wasting), which impair cognitive development and future productivity, creating another generation of disadvantaged citizens (Akorede et al., 2022).

Furthermore, the lack of education is a key driver of high adolescent birth rates. Nigeria has one of the highest rates of adolescent pregnancy in the world, with 104 births per 1,000 women aged 15-19 (World Bank, 2022). Early pregnancy carries significant risks, including obstetric fistula, higher maternal mortality, and low birth weight in newborns. These girls, children themselves, are often unable to provide adequate care, thus passing on vulnerabilities to the next generation. The cycle of poor health is further exacerbated by the spread of preventable diseases. Uneducated women have less knowledge about HIV/AIDS transmission and prevention, and their economic dependency often limits their power to negotiate safe sex, increasing their vulnerability to infection (Harande et al., 2025; Solomon et al., 2025). The public health system, already overburdened, must then contend with a higher disease burden that could have been substantially mitigated through female education.

3. Deepened Social Inequalities and Security Threats

Inaction on girls' education actively deepens social and gender inequalities. By denying girls the tools for empowerment, society reinforces their second-class status. This lack of agency manifests in continued acceptance of harmful practices like domestic violence and female genital mutilation, as uneducated women are less aware of their legal rights and have fewer options for escape or economic independence (Akorede et al., 2022). This creates a society where inequality is codified not just in custom but in the lived reality of its female population.

Perhaps one of the most dangerous consequences is the link between educational deprivation and heightened security risks. A large population of uneducated, unemployed, and disenfranchised youth provides a fertile recruiting ground for extremist groups and criminal organizations. Young men with no prospects are easily radicalized, while out-of-school girls are acutely vulnerable to abduction, sexual exploitation, and forced marriage by insurgent groups (Olojede, 2021). The instability in Northern Nigeria is, in part, a testament to this dynamic. By failing to provide education a fundamental source of hope, purpose, and economic alternatives the state effectively cedes its youth to actors who promise purpose, however destructive. This undermines national security, displaces communities, and destroys the social fabric, making the task of development even more formidable.

4. The Irreversible Loss of Potential and a Diminished Future

Beyond the tangible economic and social metrics lies an irreversible, profound loss: the loss of human potential. Every girl denied an education is a potential scientist, entrepreneur, visionary leader, or transformative teacher who never got the chance to fulfill her destiny. The creativity, problem-solving abilities, and unique perspectives of half the population are systematically suppressed. A society that does not educate its girls is one that chooses to navigate the complex challenges of the 21st century with one hand tied behind its back, willfully ignoring the talents and contributions of half its citizens.

Conclusion

The path to securing educational inclusion and empowerment for the Nigerian girl child is clear, though it demands unwavering political will and collaborative action. The multifaceted nature of the barriers spanning policy, economy, culture, and infrastructure necessitates an equally comprehensive and integrated response. The strategic framework presented herein demonstrates that progress is achievable through a synchronized approach: enforcing robust legal protections, dismantling economic barriers with targeted subsidies, transforming cultural narratives from within communities, guaranteeing physical safety and dignity in learning environments, and ensuring that the education provided is of high quality and practical relevance. This is not a short-term endeavor but a fundamental re-investment in the nation's human capital. By systematically implementing these strategies, Nigeria can effectively dismantle the systemic obstacles that have perpetuated inequality. Empowering every girl through quality education is the most critical investment Nigeria can make; it is the definitive catalyst that will transform schools from sites of struggle into engines of national progress, unlocking the full potential of its greatest untapped resource and securing a more equitable, prosperous, and stable future for all.

The Way Forward: Strategies for Inclusion and Empowerment

Addressing the profound challenge of girls' educational marginalization in Nigeria requires a move beyond isolated interventions to a holistic, multi-sectoral, and sustained national commitment. The complexity of the barriers demands a "whole society" approach that simultaneously targets policy, economic, cultural, and infrastructural impediments. The way forward must be characterized by strategic partnerships, community-centric models, and an unwavering focus on both access and quality.

1. Strengthening Policy Implementation and Legal Frameworks

The foundation of progress lies in closing the gap between policy rhetoric and tangible action. Nigeria is not lacking in progressive policies; it is lacking in their consistent enforcement. A critical first step is the full domestication and implementation of the Child Rights Act (2003) across all 36 states. As of 2023, several states in the northeast and northwest have yet to fully adopt this legislation, which sets the legal minimum age of marriage at 18, directly combating one of the primary drivers of school dropout (UNICEF, 2021). Simultaneously, the government must bolster the implementation of the Universal Basic Education (UBE) Act by ensuring that allocated funds, particularly the 2% of the Consolidated Revenue Fund, are not only released but are efficiently and transparently utilized to address the specific needs of marginalized girls, such as providing scholarships and building safe school infrastructure (UBEC, 2018).

Furthermore, policy must be nuanced to address specific sub-populations. This includes the operationalization of national policies for the integration of Almajiri children (Qur'anic students often living in poverty) into the formal education system, and the development of flexible learning pathways for married girls and young mothers. The adoption and funding of re-entry policies, which allow and support girls who have dropped out due to pregnancy to return to school, are essential to providing a second chance and breaking the cycle of deprivation (Federal Ministry of Education, 2021).

2. Economic Interventions and Poverty Alleviation

Given that poverty is a primary driver of educational exclusion, direct economic incentives are a non-negotiable component of the solution. Well-designed, targeted cash transfer programs have demonstrated significant success in increasing girls' enrolment and retention. These programs, which provide regular, conditional or unconditional payments to the poorest families, directly offset the opportunity cost of sending a girl to school instead of engaging her in income-generating activities or domestic labour (World Bank, 2018). The success of such programs, as piloted by organizations like UNICEF and the World Bank in states like Sokoto and Niger, hinges on ensuring that payments are reliable and reach the female caregivers, who are more likely to invest the funds in their children's welfare. Beyond cash transfers, broader poverty alleviation strategies are crucial. This includes promoting women's economic empowerment through microfinance schemes and vocational training for mothers, which improves the overall household income and reduces financial pressure to marry off daughters early. School feeding programs also serve as a powerful incentive, improving nutrition for all children while simultaneously boosting enrolment and attendance, particularly for girls from food-insecure homes (WFP, 2020).

3. Community Mobilization and Shifting Cultural Norms

Legislation and economic programs will fail if they are imposed upon resistant communities. Sustainable change requires a bottom-up approach that engages and persuades the gatekeepers of tradition. This involves sustained, respectful dialogue with traditional rulers, religious leaders, and male community elders. As demonstrated by initiatives like the UNFPA-UNICEF Global Programme to End Child Marriage, when influential leaders champion the cause of girls' education from within their cultural and religious contexts, their advocacy can legitimize new norms and de-legitimize harmful practices like early marriage (UNICEF, 2021). Establishing High-Level Women's Groups and strengthening existing Mother's Associations and School-Based Management Committees (SBMCs) can provide a platform for women's collective voice. These groups can advocate for girls' education, monitor school quality and safety, and provide mentorship to young girls. Peer education clubs for both girls and boys can foster a generation of male allies, challenging regressive gender stereotypes and promoting an environment of mutual respect and support within schools.

4. Ensuring Safety, Security, and Inclusive Infrastructure

No girl can learn in an environment of fear or discomfort. The full and urgent implementation of the National Policy on Safety, Security and Violence-Free Schools is paramount. This includes "hard" security measures like perimeter fencing and security personnel in high-risk areas, coupled with "soft" measures like training teachers and students on safety protocols and conflict resolution (Federal Ministry of Education, 2021). The "Safe Schools Declaration" must be operationalized to protect education from attack. Concurrently, a massive investment in creating girl-friendly school infrastructure is required. This is non-negotiable for retaining adolescent girls. Every school must have functional, sex-segregated toilets with doors that lock, clean water, and facilities for menstrual hygiene management. The provision of sanitary pads and education on menstruation can drastically reduce absenteeism and dropout (UNESCO, 2014). Furthermore, locating schools within safe and walkable distances for girls or providing secure transportation can remove a significant physical barrier to access.

5. Enhancing Educational Quality and Relevance

Getting girls into school is only half the battle; ensuring that the education they receive is of high quality and relevance is what will keep them there and equip them for life. This requires investing in teacher training, particularly the recruitment and deployment of more qualified female teachers who can serve as role models and mentors. The curriculum must be reviewed to eliminate gender bias and to integrate essential life skills, including comprehensive sexuality education, financial literacy, and digital skills, making education directly relevant to the challenges and opportunities girls will face. Pedagogical approaches must move away from rote learning to foster critical thinking and problem-solving. Investing in foundational literacy and numeracy in the early grades is crucial to prevent girls from falling irreversibly behind, which is a primary cause of dropout. By making schools not just accessible, but also stimulating, safe, and relevant, Nigeria can transform them from sites of struggle into engines of empowerment, finally unlocking the immense potential of its girl child for the development of the nation.

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