

Investing in girls' education makes good economic sense

Raimah Amevor examines the uncomfortable truth of the low value placed on the education of females in Nigeria.

Nigeria recently demonstrated its dominance as a leading African nation through **re-basing its GDP**, overtaking South Africa for the first time in decades. While the populous African nation continues to reach new economic heights, lack of basic social services counteracts its efforts, in particular, the low rates of primary education. One in seven school children globally live in Nigeria, therefore this is as much a worldwide problem as it is a national one. Young girls are disproportionately affected by the lack of primary school education in Nigeria who, while having incredible potential, are often the most marginalised.



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Education for young girls was the theme of the second annual Business Forum hosted by **The Foundation for Corporate Social Responsibility and Children Rights** (CSR Children). The event, held in conjunction with The African Development Bank and KPMG, sought to tackle the issue of the **girl dividend** in Nigeria and provide solutions on how leaders in the private sector can support this effort.

As a key area requiring development, private sector and civil society organisations have worked to provide vital educational resources. However, with personal safety still an issue and with many lacking access to basic materials such as electricity and water, these organisations often seem to be fighting a losing battle. The interconnected nature of public services becomes ever more apparent when examining the Nigerian educational system. Primary education cannot be tackled unless other equally important issues are dealt with simultaneously and coherently.

This idea is replicated at the higher level, when we consider how strongly Nigeria can dominate at a global level, especially with its newly-rebased GDP. When economic success does not translate into societal development, infrastructure and increased security, citizens undoubtedly suffer, with a knock-on effect internationally. By 2050, the UN predicts that Nigeria's population will more than double from 174 million to 440 million, replacing USA as the third most populous nation in the world. Therefore, it is quite clear that societal development cannot be ignored.



Nigeria's GDP spend on education stands at only 1.5%. This, alongside negative experiences of poor governmental co-operation experienced by multiple organisations at the Forum when seeking to establish or provide educational resources in the country, gives the impression that education is not the government's top priority. State completion rates range from 2% to 99%, reflecting the disparity in learning environments and low teaching standards. It is no wonder then that Nigerians spend over N80 Billion on education in the United Kingdom. However, the majority do not have the luxury of being able to send their children abroad to study. The majority, therefore, live in state of vulnerability exposed to the insecurity that already plagues the country and continuously threatens to undo the shaky but nonetheless gradual development of the country in the last 50 years.

The forum shed light on an uncomfortable truth in Nigeria which is that young girls and their access to education features low on society's value chain. This was most recently demonstrated by the government's slow response to the 276 Chibok female students abducted by Boko Haram. Contrasted with Nigeria's impressive response to the Ebola outbreak, one wonders when the education and lives of young girls will also be seen as a national threat. Not only because there is a good PR case for it but because it is a recognised universal truth with paradigm shifting consequences. On average, an extra year of schooling increases a female student's income by at least 25% and research shows that women reinvest 90% of their income into their household. Surely, there is no doubt that financing female education makes good economic sense.

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