

**RURAL FARM FAMILIES' INVESTMENT IN GIRL CHILD EDUCATION: IMPLICATION FOR RURAL DEVELOPMENT IN EKEREMOR LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA OF BAYELSA STATE, NIGERIA.**

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### Abstract

*In recent times, serious controversies have surrounded the choice for girl-child education in many rural farm families in Nigeria. This study examined the rural farm families' investment in girl child education in Ekeremor area of Bayelsa State, Nigeria. With the aid of a structured and validated interview schedule, data were collected from a sample size of 129 respondents randomly selected from 10 communities within the study area using a multistage sampling procedure. The statistical tools used in data analysis included mean, frequency and percentage. Results show that the mean-age of the respondents was 48.99 years and 61.1% were married with a monthly income of ₦20,000-29,999. Majority of the respondents were highly aware of the benefits of girl child education and regard girl child education very important and as a fundamental human right. It was recommended that peer education be included in the curriculum of secondary schools in addition to proper parental guidance and the development of radio and television programs on sex education to educate teenage girls as a way reducing teenage pregnancy.*

**Keywords:** Rural farm families, Girl-child education, rural development.

### 1.0 Introduction

Education is widely recognized as a key factor in human capital development. According to Olaniyan (2011), it serves as an avenue for escaping poverty and reducing income inequality in an economy. Education to a large extent determines the future of a child. It is the fundamental right of everyone irrespective of gender. Education bestows on a woman a disposition for a life-long acquisition of knowledge, values, attitudes, competence and skills. The quality of education a woman acquires determines how responsible and educated her children will be. According to the international center for research, the education a girl receives is the strongest predictor of the age she will marry and it is a critical factor in reducing the prevalence of child marriages. Patil (2009) noted that education and literacy confer a wide range of benefits not only on individuals and families but also on the community as a whole. According to Abu-saeed *et al.* (2012), the relationship between education and

development is well established such that education is a key index of development.

In recognition of the above benefits, the international community and government all over the world have made commitments for citizens to have access to education. Meanwhile, it has been documented that across the globe, there are inequalities in educational access and achievements as well as high levels of absolute educational deprivation especially in children (Abu-saeed *et al.*, 2012). Despite the collaborated efforts by various governments and other agencies and organizations such as the UNICEF and UNESCO to make sure each individual has the right to education, the girl child continue to suffer severe disadvantage and exclusion in education systems throughout their lives. The 1948 universal declaration of human right stated that everyone has a right to education. In 1990, the world conference on education for all which took place in jomtien, Thailand, declared among others that every person shall be able to benefit from educational opportunities designed to meet their basic learning needs. In realization of the importance of the girl child, efforts are being mounted by governments at various levels to improve female participation in education and re-address the gender inequality in education and retention.

The global outlook shows that in 1990, 20% of the world's primary school aged children were out of school, two-third of them were girls; about 25% of the world's girls are not in school as at 1999 (Abu-saeed *et al.*, 2012). Estimates in 2002 indicated that the number of children out of school had been brought down to about 115 million worldwide; 62 million were girls. While there were more children than ever in the world's primary schools, far too many remain absent; the majority is girls (Abu-saeed *et al.*, 2012). Estimate's in 2012 indicated that 31 million girls of primary school age and 32 million girls of lower secondary school age were out of school in 2012. Sub-Saharan Africa has the lowest proportion of countries with gender parity; only two out of 35 countries. And South and West Asia has the widest gap in its out-of-school population with 80 percent of its out-of-school girls unlikely to start school compared to 16 percent of its out-of-school boys. Furthermore, many countries will still not have reached gender parity (UNICEF, 2012). Many developing nations face severe economic pressures and this usually gives little room for designing and

initiating programs to improve girl-child education. It has been observed that some measures could be adopted even within tight financial limits to redress gender inequality in educational enrolment and retention.

Nigeria has had a national policy on education since 1981 that addresses the issue of imbalance in the provision of education in different parts of the country. But this policy has not been implemented effectively due to rapid population growth, insufficient political will and long period of undemocratic governance and poor management of scarce resources. The national literacy rate for female is only 56%, compared to 72% for male. This might find explanation in the Nigerian culture which places value on the male than the female. Education is a luxury to many Nigerians especially those in the rural areas owing to the fact that most families in rural areas engage in subsistence agriculture which results in low output, ultimately leading to less income generation and low standard of living. For such families it is difficult for the parents to invest in the education of their children and in cases where they are able to send their children to schools it is more likely the male child than the female. This is because most Nigerian parents are known to invest in child education based on sex, birth order or natural endowments. This corroborates a study conducted in University of Ibadan, which linked the preference of families to invest in boy's education rather than girl's education to be due to the long-held belief in male superiority and female subordination. Against the above background, the study attempts to identify the socio-economic characteristics of the rural farm families in Ekeremor Local Government Area, ascertain the awareness level on the benefits of girl child education by the rural farm families, examine the rural farm families' perception on the relevance of girl child education, ascertain the rural farm families training their girl child and those not doing so and discuss the reasons behind the nonchalant attitude of rural farm families towards girl-child education in the study area.

### 3.0 Results and Discussion

#### 3.1 Socio Economic Characteristics of the Respondents

### 2.0 Materials and Methods

The study was conducted in Ekeremor Local Government Area of Bayelsa State, Nigeria. Ekeremor Local Government Area is bounded in the north by Patani Local Government Area of Delta State, Sagbama Local Government Area in the east, Burutu Local Government Area of Delta State in the west and Southern Ijaw Local Government Area in the south. The population of the study comprised of 712 rural farm family heads generated with the help of key informants in the study area. The sample size of 129 respondents was selected from the population using a 5-stage random sampling procedure. The stages involved the random selection 10 communities out of thirty five communities using the names in the hat method; 2 streets were selected from each of the 10 communities; 3 farm families selected from each of the selected street using purposive sampling procedure. Purposive sampling procedure was used here because not all households/families in the street were farmers and not all of them had female children of school age and so only families that engages in farming were purposively selected and in situations where there were more than three farm families in a street, they were all listed and a random sampling technique was used to select three families out of the list of farm families using the balloting technique; the head of each family (male parent) was interviewed; stage 3 and 4 were repeated for female parents as equal number of male and female parents was used for this study. Data were collected with the aid of an interview schedule which was structured and validated by the researchers. The responses were measured on a 4-point likert-type summated rating scale of agreement (strongly agree, agree, disagree and strongly disagree). The values of the scale (4, 3, 2 and 1) were summed up to obtain 10. The mean value of the sum gave 2.50, which served as the cut-off mean. This became the benchmark for accepting any item in the study area. Data analysis was carried out using descriptive statistical tools namely: frequency and mean.

Results on the socio-economic characteristics of the farm families were presented on Table 1.

**Table 1: Socio-economic Characteristics of the Farm Families.**

Variable	Frequency	Percentages
<b>Gender</b>		
Male	63	48.8
Female	66	51.2
<b>Marital status</b>		
Single	12	9.5
Married	77	61.1
Divorced	18	14.3
Widowed	19	15.1
Undecided	3	2.3
<b>Religion</b>		

Christians	103	79.8
Pagans	15	11.6
Traditionalists	2	1.6
Undecided	9	7.0
<b>Educational level</b>		
No formal education	37	28.7
Primary education	30	23.3
Secondary education	31	24.0
Tertiary education	31	24.0
<b>Farm enterprise</b>		
Cultivation of crops	60	46.5
Fishing	52	40.3
Hunting	12	9.3
Palm wine tapping	5	3.9
<b>Income (₦)</b>		
Less than 20,000	21	16.4
20,000-29,999	51	39.8
30,000-35,000	25	19.5
Above 35,000	31	24.5
Undecided	1	0.8

Source: Field Survey, 2015

The average number of female children per respondents from table 4.2 was 3.80 with a range of 8 and a mode of 2.

**Table 1: Age and number of female children of respondents.**

Variable	Mean
Age of respondents	48.99
Number of female children.	3.80

Source: Field Survey, 2015.

The result shows that majority of the farm family heads in the study area (51.2%) are female. This result corroborates the predominant matriarchal culture in practice in the study area. The age distribution of the respondents from Table 1 shows that the average age of the respondents was 48.99. This is an indication that family heads are young people in their middle ages to be able to appreciate the current awareness on girl-child education. The marital status of the respondents as indicated in Table 1 showed that the majority (61.1%) of the respondents were married. This is indicative of the fact that they are currently saddle with the family responsibility and choice of training their girl-child. Also Table 1 showed that majority of the respondents (79.8%) are Christians. On the level of education of respondents, the result showed that those that had no formal education 28.7% are slightly higher than those that had acquired primary, secondary and tertiary education and as such the level of education acquired by the respondents may not have influenced their attitude toward the

education of their girl-child. Also majority of the respondents (46.5%) are into crop production/cultivation 40.3% are fish farmers. This indicates that farming and fishing dominates the economy of the population in the study area, especially since it is riverine area. It might be likely that members of the farm-family diversify into the two dominant livelihood activities. The result also showed that the majority of the respondents (39.8%) receive a monthly income of ₦20,000-29,999. This indicates that income accruable from their livelihood activities keeps the family below the poverty line. This may have serious implication on their choice of investing their meager income on the girl-child education.

### 3.2 Awareness level on the benefits of girl child education

The results on the awareness level of the respondents on the benefits of girl child education in the study area are presented on Table 2.

**Table 2: Awareness level on the benefits of girl child education.**

Items	SA	A	D	SD	Mean
I believe that educating a girl child is a waste of scarce family resources.	5(3.9)	16(12.4)	57(44.2)	51(39.5)	3.19
I believe that girls are better off at home rather than going to school.	8(6.2)	24(18.6)	80(62.0)	17(13.2)	2.82
I will rather send my male child to school than	22(17.1)	74(57.4)	28(21.7)	5(3.9)	2.88

my female child if the resources i have is not enough to send Them all to school.					
I believe that a woman has no voice, rights, or place in the society even if she is educated.	4(3.1)	24(18.6)	67(51.9)	34(26.4)	3.02
I believe that an educated woman can be a better mother than an uneducated one.	11(8.6)	55(43.0)	55(43.0)	7(5.5)	2.55
I believe that an educated Woman with some sort of Livelihood is capable of contributing and taking Care of her family welfare.	31(24.0)	83(64.3)	14(10.9)	1(0.8)	3.12
I believe that a woman with Some sort of formal education is more likely to seek medical care and ensure that her children are immunized avoiding diseases and child death.	24(18.6)	83(64.3)	20(15.5)	2(1.6)	3.00
I believe that a woman with some sort of formal education is more likely to be better informed about her children's nutritional requirement and adopt improved sanitation practices.	34(26.4)	70(54.3)	24(54.3)	1(1.8)	3.06
I believe that 2teenage girls that are educated are at lower risk of carrying unwanted pregnancy.	12(9.4)	81(63.3)	32(25.0)	3(2.3)	2.80
I believe that the level of education a girl acquires is a strong determinate of the age at which she will get married.	10(7.8)	74(57.8)	41(32.0)	3(2.3)	2.71
if I find any man ready to marry my female child at a teen or adolescent age, I would gladly marry her off rather than sending her to school.	14(10.9)	30(23.3)	59(45.7)	26(20.2)	2.75
I believe that2 an educated and well established woman will be able to take care of family in as much as man of the same level.	23(17.8)	79(61.2)	22(17.1)	5(3.9)	2.93
I believe that our society will move forward if all girls are educated.	43(33.3)	67(51.9)	17(13.2)	2(1.6)	3.17

Source: Field Survey, 2015

Note: Mean mid-point  $\geq 2.50$  is significant

Results on Table 2 showed that the respondents disagrees that educating a girl child is a waste of scare family resources (mean=3.19). This indicates that the farm-family heads in the study area in principle supports the practice of girl-child education. The result also revealed that the respondents disagrees that girls are better off at home rather than going to school (mean=2.82). This implies that age long belief that has marginalized the girl-child is been dropped by members of the society in the study area. It is further revealed that the respondents are of the opinion that they will rather send their male child to school than their female child if the resources they have are not enough to send them all to school (mean=2.88). From this finding, the priority of choice for children education still places the male child over the girl-child especially in poor families. The result is in line with the findings of UNICEF (2007) which revealed that most Nigerian parents especially in large families with limited resources enroll their boys in school rather than girls. This is also in support of the assertion in Wikipedia (n.d) that most Nigerian

parents are known to invest in child education according to sex, birth order or natural endowments and also with the findings of the study carried out at the University of Ibadan according to Wikipedia (n.d) which holds that families prefers to invest in boy's education rather than girl's education due to age-long belief in male superiority over female.

Results on Table 2 indicate, that the respondents disagrees that a woman has no voice, rights or place in the society even if she is educated (mean=3.02). This is an indication that women right issues are gaining popularity in the study area. The awareness is likely to portend better future in girl-child education. It is found that the respondents are of the opinion that an educated woman can be a better mother than an uneducated one (mean=2.55). Given this awareness, it is obvious that families will give necessary backing to girl-child education if they have the resources. The finding is in line with the view contained in Wikipedia (n.d) which holds that an educated woman can be a better mother than an uneducated one. Also the result showed that the respondents agrees that an educated woman with

some sort of livelihood is capable of contributing and taking care of the welfare of her family (mean=3.12). With the potential of education to equip an individual with the skills, knowledge and values for a better means of livelihood, the girl-child stand the chance if given opportunity for education. This is in line with the benefits of girl child education observed by Abu-Saeed *et al* (2012), Wikipedia (n.d), UNICEF (2007) and Orji (2013). The result on Table 2 showed that the respondents are of the opinion that a woman with some level of formal education is more likely to seek medical care and ensure that her children are immunized, avoiding diseases and child death (mean=3.00). This finding is in line with the studies which revealed that girl child education promotes healthier children/family and a reduction in maternal death (UNICEF, 2007; Orji, 2011).

It is revealed in the result on Table 2 that a woman with some sort of formal education is more likely to be better informed about her children's nutritional requirement and adopt improve sanitation practices (mean=3.06). This indicates that the awareness on the benefits of girl-child education is high in the study area. The finding further corroborates earlier finding by Orji (2011) that a woman with formal education, her infants and children have higher survival rates and tends to be healthier and better nourished. The result also shows that the respondents agrees that teenage girls that are educated are at lower risk of unwanted pregnancies (mean=2.80). The finding validates since education creates opportunity for awareness and information

sharing. Results in Table 2 further indicate that the respondents are of the opinion that the level of education a girl attains is a strong determinant of the age at which she will get married (mean=2.71). The Nigerian educational structure incidentally delays the Nigerian child from engaging in adult roles until the end of the teenage years. This is likely to enhance maturity, accountability, sense of judgment and choice of individuals. It was also found that the respondents disagrees that if they find any man ready to marry their female child at a teen or adolescent age, they would gladly marry her off rather than sending her to school (mean=2.75). This stance may have resulted from the negative incidents and misery associated with early marriages in various Nigerian communities over the years. The result further revealed that an educated and established woman is capable of taking care of her immediate family and close relatives in as much as a man with the same qualities (mean=2.93). This is because education provides equal opportunity for employment, income and other privileges in the modern society irrespective of gender. The result also shows that the respondents are of the opinion that society will move forward if all girls are educated (mean=3.17).

### 3.3 Perception on the Relevance of Girl Child Education

Table 3 present results on perception on the relevance of girl-child education among farm-families in the study area.

**Table 3: Perception on the importance of Girl-child education**

Items	Yes	No
I believe that it is very Important that girls are educated.	108(83.7)	21(16.3)
I will do anything in my power to ensure that all my female children are educated.	106(81.1)	23(18.1)
I will encourage all my friends and neighbors to educate their female children.	100(78.1)	29(21.9)
I believe that education is a fundamental human right and it is compulsory for all to be educated weather male or female	107(82.9)	22(17.1)

Source: Field Survey, 2015.

Note: Figures in parenthesis are percentages.

The result revealed that the respondents believe that it is very important that girls are educated (83.7%). This finding may be as result of the recent trend in which women are making immense contribution in community and national development. The result further indicated that the respondents will do anything in their power to ensure that their female children are educated (81.1%). This finding is indicative of the resolve and renaissance of the new movement for the girl-child education in many rural farm-families, perhaps due to the inherent benefit associated with the practice. Also, the result shows that majority of the respondents (78.1%) agreed to encourage their friends to educate their female children as well. This commitment is likely to have

positive development implication not only at the individual and family level but the national in general. The result revealed that majority of the respondents are of the opinion that education is a fundamental human right and that it is compulsory for all to be educated weather male or female (82.9%). This result may have evolved out of the recent campaign on education for all by various agencies and governments using various mass media. It was also found that a vast majority of the respondents acknowledges the importance or relevance of girl child education (83.7%) and will do anything in their power to ensure that their female children are educated and will go as far as encouraging those around them to educate their

female children as well. This result is in line with that carried by Abu-saeed et al (2012) in which 96.8% of the respondents agreed that educating a female child is important.

### 3.4 Farm Families educating their Girl-child and those not doing so.

Table 3 present results on the farm families educating their girl-child and those not doing so.

**Table 4: Farm-Families Educating their girl-child and those not doing so.**

Item	Yes	No
All my female children are educated.	45(34.9)	84(65.1)

Source: Field Survey, 2015.

Note: Figures in parenthesis are percentages.

Table 4 indicates that majority of the respondents (65.1%) did not affirm that all their female children are educated. This implies that though majority of the respondents are aware of the need and also of the importance of girl child education, in practical terms, they are not educating all their female children.

### 3.5 Reasons behind the nonchalant Attitude towards Girl Child Education

Table 5 present results on the reasons behind nonchalant attitude towards girl-child education in the study area.

**Table 5: Reasons for nonchalant Attitude towards girl-child education.**

Items	Yes	No
My female child is not educated because I do not have enough money to send her to school.	46(35.7)	83(64.3)
I did not send my female child to school as a result of lack of educational facilities (schools) in my community.	9(7.0)	120(93.0)
I did not send my female child to school because it is against my tradition, norms, values and belief.	120(93.0)	9(7.0)
I tried sending my daughter to school but she had refused to go.	56 (43.4)	73(56.6)
School dropout out due to unwanted pregnancy.	83(64.3)	46(35.7)
Family challenges and poor sustainable source of livelihood.	91(71.1)	37(28.9)

Source: Field Survey, 2015.

Note: Figures in parenthesis are percentage weights.

It is revealed that 64.3% of the respondents showed negative stance to the opinion that inability to educate all their female children is due to the fact that they do not have enough money to send them to school. This implies that there could be other reasons other than poor finances. Also the result showed that inadequate educational facilities in the communities are not the reason for not sending their girl-child to school (93.0%). This indicates that even with available schools to accommodate enrolment demands in the community, farm-families may still not send their entire girl child to school. On the opinion that farm-families did not send their female child to school because it is against my tradition, norms, values and belief, greater percentage of the respondents (93.0%) showed a positive stance. The implication is that culture and traditions that forbid girl-child education still persist in the social fabrics of the society notwithstanding the awareness expressed on the girl-child education in the study area. Further result indicated that on the opinion that families tried sending their female children to school but they had refused to go out of their will was rejected by the respondents (56.6%). This implies that the girl-child has the willingness to go to school.

Result further showed that 64.3 % of the respondents affirmed to the opinion that school dropout out due to unwanted pregnancy is the reason behind the nonchalant attitude towards girl-child education. This might be as a result of the social stigmatization and psychological effect it places on the girl-child and her family. Also 71.1% of the respondents are of the opinion that family challenges and poor sustainable source of livelihood. It is obvious that families shelve their responsibilities in the face of shocks and uncertainty in their means of income. The above results is in conformity with UNICEF (2007) that early marriages among females, poverty among households, pregnancy among girls of school age as well as culture, tradition and religion are some of leading factors that prevents girl child education.

### Conclusion and Recommendations

The findings of this research revealed that although girl child education has been regarded as very important amongst farm families, their investments tend to be low due to some factors beyond their control and reach. It is therefore recommended that:

- Proper parenting by ensuring proper guidance and monitoring of the activities of teens and providing moral support for them in such a way that the chances of them carrying unwanted pregnancies are reduced to the nearest minimum.
- The establishment of programmes by the government and private agencies aimed at educating mothers on how to guide their female child against teen pregnancy and also creating avenues such as seminars, workshops, radio and television programs geared toward educating the girl child about how their body system functions and on sex education with help of doctors and certain extension personnel thereby reducing the frequency of occurrence of the phenomenon of teenage pregnancy.
- The provision of effective and efficient extension services by the government and other agencies aimed at increasing their productivity such as the introduction of improved farming methods/ techniques, the provision/ supply of improved varieties of crops, farm machineries and the introduction of other agribusiness such as aquaculture, poultry production, snail farming etc. that will increase productivity among households thus reducing poverty among them.
- Provision of funds, loans/ credit facilities by the government and non- governmental organizations/ agencies that will enable families to go into the aforementioned agribusinesses and the expansion of farms/business of those already involved in such businesses for increase productivity.

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