

NORTHERN NIGERIAN FESTIVALS OF THE MAIDENS AND GIRL CHILD EDUCATION AS TOOLS FOR SOCIETAL WELLNESS

**Prince E. Adesipe,
Adesola O. Esuola,
Gloria N. Nnam, Ph.D.,
and
Neville Oritsetimeyin**

Introduction

The Festival of the Maidens is the celebration of the Nigerian girl child. The Northern people of Nigeria have cultural celebrations which promote the innate beauty shrouded in the girl child. The festival seeks to inculcate in the girl child ethical standards but prevents them from having western education, a tool for societal wellness. Maidens drop out of schools to fulfill the age-long traditional rite. This has led to educational backwardness and redundancy in the North.

A maiden is a young woman of a marriageable age but who is not married yet. This may be a damsel aged between twenty (20) and thirty-five (35) years. The girl child on the other hand range from ages zero (0) month to nineteen (19) years. The festival of the maidens favours the traditional form of education and fosters cohesion by strengthening the bond of unity in the Northern region of Nigeria. The festival of the maidens is a contributory factor to the development and promotion of the best of the living arts and cultures of Nigeria with the aim of making the arts and cultures as resources for national integration and unity as well as serving as catalyst for sustainable growth and development (Adesipe and Ariyo 2019).

The girl child education is the process of enlightenment which culminates in physical, spiritual, economic, social, mental and emotional benefits. The mind is

trained, character is reformed and understanding is refined. The girl child education enables the maidens to acquire knowledge and skills for the sake of improving her social status and self-esteem. By and large, the girl child is strengthened to face societal challenges with a view to becoming a responsible mother and wife. Lack of education for the maidens makes her solely dependent on her husband and parents, worse still; she relies on her children in the case where the husband dies. This is against the economic development plan of any nation. In the Northern part of Nigeria, whether it is rural or urban-rural, social and cultural patterns combined with poor education and schooling place maidens, their education and development in a disadvantaged and vulnerable position. The maidens bear the heaviest burden for the household responsibilities which include care of the sick or aged parents, siblings and household chores yet they are the first to drop out of schools.

Ogunba (1978) defined festival as the great artistic institution in traditional Africa. It is a ceremonial rite that has psychosocial and spiritual values. It is a medium whereby individual and societal sentiments are given expression through the medium of music, dance, drama, costume and non-verbal modes of expression. Festivals create occasion for cultural reawakening. Oftentimes, during celebrations, new songs are introduced in each community. The songs usually deal with prevailing issues in the community since the last festival was celebrated.

One perennial problem about the festivals of the maidens and the education of the girl child is that, parents justify the denial of girls of the right to education so as to avert shame of “unwanted or early pregnancy”. The adoption of the festivals of the maidens has hampered the education of the girl child. Most Northern women believe that when maidens are allowed to be at the same level with the men folk it is a disgrace to the community. So, in order to promote traditions and discourage promiscuity among the maidens, women folks prefer that their maidens marry early since she would end up in the kitchen, so why should she need education? At times, in Northern Nigeria, maidens are given out in marriage at tender ages while some are given out in marriage contrary to their wish so as to get bountiful dowry from their husbands. The argument here is that they want to get out of poverty yet, this in most cases had resulted in lamentable setbacks.

Despite the introduction of free education at the primary school level, still, a sizeable number of girls are out of school for the following reasons:

- i. care of the aged parents;
- ii. household chores;
- iii. child marriage;
- iv. care of the young siblings;
- v. death of the mother;
- vi. care of the sick father;
- vii. the notion that the education of maidens ends in the kitchen and the 'other room'.

The Federal Ministry of Education (2006) reported that a moderate bias towards boys' enrolment is evident in the South-West but in the Northern part, there is a strong evidence of bias towards boys' enrolment. Offorma, (2008) confirmed that the disparity is more in the Northern part of Nigeria in favour of the boy child enrolment compared to what obtains in the South-West. The United Nation's International Children Emergency Fund (UNICEF) reported that enrolment of girls in Northern Nigerian schools was put at forty-five (45%) percent (Punch, 2018). The reason for this, it noted were:

- ❖ poverty;
- ❖ early marriage;
- ❖ cultural beliefs.

It further hinted according to its survey data that more than half of school aged girls in the Northern region are out of school. What brought about this were:

- i. poor learning outcomes;
- ii. uncommitted classroom teachers;
- iii. teachers' truancy;
- iv. overcrowded classrooms;
- v. poor learning environment;
- vi. dilapidated structures and infrastructures;
- vii. parents' nonchalance to educational needs of the girl child education.

The purpose of the study therefore is to alert the Government at all levels that while the festival of the maidens is a source of bounteous revenue, a formidable instrument of societal wellness, national and international cohesion yet the effects it has on the education of the maidens are a great setback in nation building. Child marriage via the celebration of Festival of the Maidens puts a stop to the hopes and dreams of the maidens. It hampers Governmental efforts to end poverty and achieve

economic growth and equity. If attention is given to this on time it will turn our girls as powerful agents of socioeconomic change. It is morally right and economically helpful to embrace the girl child education. The relegation of the education of the maidens to the background is a serious phenomenon particularly in the Northern region of Nigeria. The paper is a signal and a clarion call to Government at all levels, individuals and corporate bodies to critically look into the prospects and problems of the festivals of the maidens and the education of the maidens so that either of the two does not outweigh the other.

Adesipe, (2019) posited that festivals in the Nigerian traditional societies are products of moral spiritual insight and experience. The term festivals came from the Latin word, “*festivus*” meaning joyful. All activities are set aside at the time of festivals to make room for pleasure and enjoyment. Festival suggests an event or community gathering on a regular basis for a feast in a local community. This may centre on some theme and sometimes on some unique aspect of the communities in question. Some festivals may showcase a community’s beliefs in deities. For instance, in mythology, festivals are celebrated in honour of a god e.g. *Sango* (pronounced Shango), *Ogun* (O-goön), *Obatala* (Aw-ba-ta-la) of the Yoruba extraction. Festivals are a series of activities organized by a people at a given time and place to showcase their cultural potentials with a view to harnessing them for socio-cultural development. Festivals are geared towards entertainment and as such involve music performances, dance, drama, acrobatics, mime, imitation e.tc. Festivals are social events. They have to do with commemoration of extraordinary events.

Strategically situated in the western region of African continent, Nigeria is blessed with diverse and rich festivals. Nigeria has not less than two hundred (200) festivals and dances across the federation (Adesipe, 2018). The nation has thirty-six (36) states and a Federal Capital Territory, Abuja. Each of these states including the Federal Capital Territory has peculiar dances and festivals it celebrates regularly. This can be annual or biennial, quarterly or monthly. The time depends on locality or deities.

In Ethiopia, some families do not believe in education of girls. The child brides face early pregnancy, responsibilities to their children and in-laws, and reticence of their husbands, who are usually much older, to let them out of the house (Offorma,

2015). In Kenya, education of the girl child is elusive (Offorma, 2015). Mwangi, (2004) wrote that the maidens of Kenya are denied the right to education due to the prevalence of poverty, disease and (as it is in Nigeria), backward cultural practices in so much that the introduction of free primary education could not competently tackle illiteracy among the Kenyan maidens. Although there was an increase in enrolment, a good number of girls are still out of school owing to a number of reasons. These reasons are: demands for their labour in the homes such as assisting in looking after their young siblings; child marriage, doing house chores, death of mother, and looking after the sick member of the family. Some of the girls are given to marriage against their wish and when they refuse, they are threatened with death. Birungi, (2008) hinged illiteracy among the maidens of Uganda on the failure of the Government to implement and empower the girl child educational laws.

Government's failure to tackle the dilapidated schools' structures is an indication that education of children is nothing too serious. Children in Bundibugyo district cannot access schools during the raining season and Government did nothing to alleviate the problem. In Uganda, girls are more often than not faced with long distance treks to primary schools. Some get pregnant and drop out of school. Absence of vocational schools for the sake of training the girls after the completion of primary and lower secondary education discouraged the women thereby seeing it as a waste of resources to educate girls. In Afghanistan, because of the presence of the Taliban regime, children (particularly girls) are being barred from school.

According to Guttman Cynthia, a UNESCO courier Journalist, she argued that customs, poverty, fear and violence are the reasons why girls still account for sixty percent (60%) of the estimated One hundred and thirteen million (113,000,000) out-of-school children, and majority live in the sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia. Adesipe and Esuola, (2017) explained that festivals are days of celebration of certain religious activities. They have to do with programs of cultural events usually held at regular intervals. They are occasions that have to do with societal events which culminate in religious and family benefits. The import of this paper is to survey the Festivals of the Maidens as it relates to moral upbringing, sustenance of piety, good character among our maidens and in the same vein present the girl child education as a formidable tool for societal wellness, national and international cohesion. While the former promotes national cohesion to a great extent, the latter, due to neglect, incapacitates the maidens and makes them mere objects of ridicule

amidst their counterparts at international levels. Education is the process through which individuals are made functional members of their society (Ocho, 2005). It is a process through which the young acquire knowledge and realize her potentials thereby using them for self-actualization for the purpose of her usefulness and others. It is a means of preserving, transmitting and improving the cultural heritage of the society.

Gender Education in Northern Nigeria

The festivals of each state show the costume, instruments and life style peculiar to the people in the land. The *Obitun* of the Ekiti/Yoruba is a matrimonial ceremony signifying the entering in of a maiden into marriage. Marriage institution is highly valued in Nigeria, if one is of marriageable age yet remains single; such a person is looked upon as irresponsible and unworthy of any political office. In the Nigerian societies, maidens are taught by the elderly women to respect and accept masculine supremacy in all affairs, realms and ramification. This is attested to by Patience Mudiare [2013]. She observed that women have come to internalize a low concept of their status. For example, among the *Tiv* of Benue state if someone knocked at the door and asked ‘*who is home?*’ The women would respond, ‘*there is nobody home, only us.*’ This is a major curriculum content of training that Northern women gives to their maidens at the threshold of matrimonial life. Women generally are less involved in decision making processes in the home and community. In an interview with a community leader on women’s role in decision making process, he commented that

“women should be contented with their family responsibilities and their economic activities of groundnut oil and dawadawa (i.e. fermented locust beans seasoning) processing and that if they (women) have anything to say on any issue, they should route them through their husbands”.

According to Ocarina O. et al (2014), the effects of marital status, early marriage, and early pregnancy all contributed to limit our maidens. A crawling eighteen percent (18%) of girls in Borno State, Nigeria enrolled for the primary school education while an alarming forty-six percent (46%) of maidens were out of school (Ocho, 1998). The education of the maidens reduces poverty, lack and want. This goes to say that a nation’s prosperity largely rests on the shoulders of women

education. Nation building thrives on education of the maidens because when you educate a man, you educate an individual but when you educate a girl, you educate a nation. The girl child of today is the future mother of fathers, mothers and children. Every citizen benefit from the results of the education of her fellow citizens therefore; there is need for every generation to reciprocate by educating the generations that comes after it (Ocho, 2005).

Before 1800AD, festivals and dancing are a few of the most common forms by which man expresses emotion, fear, pain, danger or joy. For instance, the *Ekun Iyawo* (bridal tears) is a tribal wedding ceremonial dance in Yoruba land. It is noteworthy here to observe that the Festival of the Maidens in Northern Nigeria is used as an instrument to mirror the society and regulate human behaviours which bears striking analogical comparison to the western concept of drama. The basic role of the Festival of the Maidens therefore is to transmit vital messages and information to the community at large through the multi-dimensional media of the art forms. As a result of the Festival of the Maidens, social mores and ethical standards are controlled and regulated via a shower of public praises for noble deeds by maidens who excelled (i.e. kept their virginity) and a public disgrace for a shameful presentation or outcome (i.e. those who have been deflowered). Amidst myriads of festivals that are celebrated in Northern Nigeria, the festival of the maidens provides the teeming youth populace an avenue for uninhibited self-expression through the art forms thereby communicating societal values through similar avenues. The essence of this, as can be seen is to effect unity and continuity in human thoughts and behavior within acceptable limits of change.

As the paper examines the role of the Festival of the Maidens within the society, its relevance to the institutions of the society, the educational import of the festival coupled with the fact that domestic tutorials are taught before the would-be wife goes into matrimony, the moral import of the festival, the significance of keeping the maidens' virginity till the point of marriage, the long term effect this would have on the nation and the wider world; it is essential to note the timeless import and overall academic blissfulness and total development of the maidens.

The maiden is taught certain lessons drawn from the entire curriculum of the matrimonial life. This may range from:

- i. child bearing/rearing;

- ii. comportment in the home;
- iii. relationship with in-laws and peers in the society;
- iv. sexual relationship with spouses;
- v. table setting and home management;
- vi. kitchen control and food dishing;
- vii. resources management to avoid wastefulness.

Festivals of the Maidens across the Northern Geopolitical Zones

The festivals of the maidens in Northern Nigeria seeks to use culture as a cornerstone in contributing to building a solid nation where the citizens would see its cultural diversity a source of strength.



Plate 1



Plate 2

Plates 1 and 2 above show Yadato young boy and girl beautifully dressed in their traditional regalia as Yadato celebrants. They are transiting as husband and wife after seven years of Golmo marriage contract.

The Northern Nigerian gender related festivals have helped to promote chastity among both maidens and males. Just as we have the Yoruba *Ekun Iyawo* (bridal tears), the *Iria* festival (puberty and marriage ceremony) of the *Kalabari*, the *Mboppo* dance of the Akwa-Ibom people, the *Ekombi* fattening ceremony of the *Efik*, the festivals of the maidens in Northern Nigeria is a time when young girls of marriageable age seek prospective suitors. Bye and large, promiscuity have been greatly curbed in the youth world. Some of the Festivals of the Maidens few maidens' songs in Northern Nigeria are:

- *Aure ceremony*: this is the giving out or send forth of a maiden into holy matrimony (in Kano state);
- *Ki-iba dance*: this is a ceremonial puberty dance among Adamawa maidens and the boys;
- *Koma dance*: this is an initiation right for maidens in Adamawa state;
- *Ovia Osese*: a festival of the maidens in Kogi state;

- *Kwaoi Chara*: a maiden dance for damsels who have reached puberty in Kaduna state;
- *Female circumcision rite*: a regular ceremony across the length and breadth of Nasarawa State among maidens at the approach of puberty. The Clitoris is cut at this point because their belief is that it affects child bearing in females and that its curbs promiscuity among maidens. This act is gradually fading away;
- *Doro play*: a traditional wrestling match aimed at winning the heart of a maiden in Sokoto State;
- *Kengbe Dance of the Maidens in Kwara State*;
- *Uhola festival*: a maiden ceremony among the *Dakarkari* people;
- *Bikin Budar Kai*: the giving or send forth of maidens in marriage in Hausa land;
- *WusheWushe rite*: a marriage rite performed by Kanuri;
- *Yadato dance*: a maiden dance celebrating the preservation of girls' virginity in Kebbi State;
- *Kaulu festival*: a traditional wedding rite in Kanuri land;
- *Sharo dance*: a male festival that is held in conjunction with the festival of the maidens;
- *Kaulu Bul festival*: a marriage ceremony among the Fulani;
- *Nelle*: a marriage celebration in Kanem-Borno.
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OGBENI BA SOWI YANA

Giocososo SCORE: PRINCE ADÉŞİPÈ

O-gbe-ni ba so wi ya na, O-gbo-ra-ye ke je; O-gbo-ra-ye ke je,
A - fọ-fa - ye ke-gu-re O-gbe-ni-ba so wi ya na, O-gbo-ra-ye ke je.

A maidens' song among the Ogori people of Kogi State

Translation:

A child prepared for marriage – receives good things of life
 Receives good things of life – and comes across good things of life
 A child prepared for marriage – receives good things of life.

Ovia Osese festival of the maidens in north central zone:

This is a traditional festival held by the Ogori-Magongo people of Kogi state celebrating the chastity of women and the initiation of adolescent girls into womanhood. The Ovia Osese is one of the numerous festivals among the people of Ogori-Magongo in Kogi State. Ovia Osese is an annual initiation ceremony of young girls to womanhood. The essence of preserving the culture is to encourage chastity among the youths. The culture is an important aspect of the people as it sets them apart. Every maiden strives to keep her virginity in Ogori despite the prevailing culture of immorality. Ovia Osese is a festival of songs. Many songs are being rendered but among the Ovia, exclusive songs are meant to be sung only by the initiates and the already initiated girls when an Ovia (i.e. a young girl) is being dressed or at the kindred square. It is believed that the festival started over a century ago.

It began as a family festival. The daughter of the man who started it was accused of being wayward and her would-be husband almost disowned her. According to oral legends, the man had two wives. The first wife had seven children while the other one had only one daughter. The daughter was kidnapped for days. While the girl was still in captivity, the step-mother taunted her mate, that none of her own children could be kidnapped. Not long, the missing girl returned home and the mother was scared that her daughter might have been defiled.

Priests and oracles were consulted and it was discovered in the long run that the girl was not promiscuous as alleged. The mother went to the market square to announce that her daughter had returned and that she was still a virgin! The mother rejoiced and returned home hosting friends and relations to rejoice over the fact that her daughter was still a virgin. That was how the tradition was passed from one family to another.

The initiation means different things to different people. It is a cultural festival that shows that despite the influence of westernization, the innocent girls of Ogori land still have their virginity and sanctity preserved. Any girl who fails to participate in the programme brings shame to her entire family. In the past, all girls to be initiated would come out naked covering their private sexual organs with beads but now the story has changed. They are dressed in fabric materials (Ofi).

In the past it used to be a three-year long celebration so as to ensure a proper development of all female children who were due for initiation but now it is a matter of one week or even less. The old practice of camping girls has stopped because they have to go to school. The aim is to make the girls responsible future wives and mothers. The festival places emphasis on chastity of young girls equipping them as worthy torch bearers. This is after being tutored on how to take good care of their homes and how to sustain their husbands' love with wonderful food delicacies.

Ogori is a Local Government Area in Kogi State, and shares boundary with Edo State. Ogori people also share some things in common with Edo people and the Yoruba. Yoruba tonal inflections still reflects in Ogori language to a great extent. Ogori town is after Okene, and is one of the smallest Local Government areas in Nigeria. Their noble sons and daughters are however not steady at home rather, they chose to stay out of town and are found in big cities like Federal Capital Territory where in most cases they help to canvass and popularize their town. Indigenes of Ogori have done a lot to ensure that their town is reckoned with in the society at large.

Young girls (also called *Ibusuke*) who would take over from the Ovia in subsequent years are clad in pink shorts, bedecked in beads. They file into the arena with a dance to a haunting song and form a circle. Finally, the Ovia would file out after the *Ibusuke* had done their bit. The young women, with *aso oke* tied around their chests and decorated with beads then would file out in the same fashion as the *Ibusuke*. They wear a seeming mournful looks of expressions and grim postures. Their *oke* dance is in tune with soulful chants. The message here is that they are mourning the loss of their childhood days. They seem determined not to smile even when the best is chosen. One practice that is still debatable is that all Ovias must be circumcised before she is deemed fit to partake in the festival.

ỌYI ỌSESE MAIDEN SỌNG

Allegretto **Score: Prince Adesipè**

Tẹ-da si mo wi ya i- gue, Ti-ya si mo wi ya i- gue; Ma
so gbe Mo wi ya i- gue, I - gu ma ma gba mu ẹ dẹ da.

The song above is transliterated. The English version runs thus:
*My father did marriage for me because I'm matured,
My mother did marriage for me because I'm matured;
I did marriage for my child because she's matured,
Sickness did not hold me down – thanks to the gods.*

Doro play festival of the maidens in North-West zone, Nigeria

Doro is a traditional play that holds during the Festival of the Maidens. Maidens are presented and paraded before their male suitors.



Plate 3

It is common among the Dange/Shuni, Wamakko and Bodinga Local Government Areas in Sokoto state. As the *Ganga* musicians play, the wrestling contest begins and the winner of the leg-kicking goes home with a maiden. The *Sullubawa* ethnic group holds the ceremony in high esteem.

Uhola festival of the maidens in North-West zone, Nigeria

Uhola of the Kebbi state is a cultural festival that celebrates the graduation of suitors (Yadato) who have served their respective fathers in-law in (Golmo) traditional marriage. The maidens are usually virgins and free from sexually transmitted diseases after having been proven by traditional specialists and midwives. The ceremony begins with the dance of the maidens in front of the chief's palace before moving to the village square where maidens sing songs satirizing prostitution, the unmarried pregnant girls and mockery of those who have traded their virginity or women dignity to men. Uhola is a double-edged ceremony celebrating bumper harvest, good rainfall and the maidens.

Wushewushe festival of the maidens in North-East zone, Nigeria

WusheWushe night is a cultural event and a ritual ceremony that takes place on the eve of the wedding at the bride's residence. Dressed with *murzam* corals (traditional beads) and *Gumaji Kanuri* (multi-coloured material), the brides' friends join her in her elegant *lafaya/chi'amai* regalia.



Plate 4



Plate 5



Plate 6

Plate.4 is a typical WusheWushe bride preparing for wedding ready to go to her groom. The bride is dressed in an elegant way as befit a new wife. Plate 5 shows the ceremonial rite of introduction and traditional wedding rite before a bride is

P. E. Adesipe, A. O.Esuola, G. N. Nnam & N.Oritsetimeyin: *Northern Nigerian Festivals...* released for her groom. In Plate 6 the bride is on her way to be shown to her waiting husband.

The bride is fully decked with *lanlei* (traditional make-up/design) in her feet/ankles, fore-arm and a colourful *janbaiki* (lipstick) to match. The environment is charged with the scent of generous use of *turaren wuta* (local incense/perfume).

Sharo festival of the maidens across the Northern Nigeria geopolitical zones

Sharo holds in conjunction with the festival of the maidens. The young suitor is expected to go through severe floggings in public without crying before he is deemed qualified to take a woman in marriage.



Plate 7

When the excitement is at the peak, the challenger raises the whip and flogs his opponent who must not show his pain. If he runs away without completing his number, he is denied by his parents. But if he completes it, a damsel appears to clean up his wounds and blisters whom she eventually marries.

Education of Maidens and the Attendant Effects in Northern Nigeria

The Northern woman's goal in teaching her youth girl aims at morality of high standards. The way the Hausa woman teaches her maidens show that the Northern woman does not hold her family with levity. The teaching portrays the Festival of the Maidens as a moral threshold in Northern Nigeria. It is observed that, apart from the

cultural heritage it seeks to preserve, there is much pleasure, ease and merriment in the festivals; however, the festival of the maidens does preclude serious academic development of the maidens.

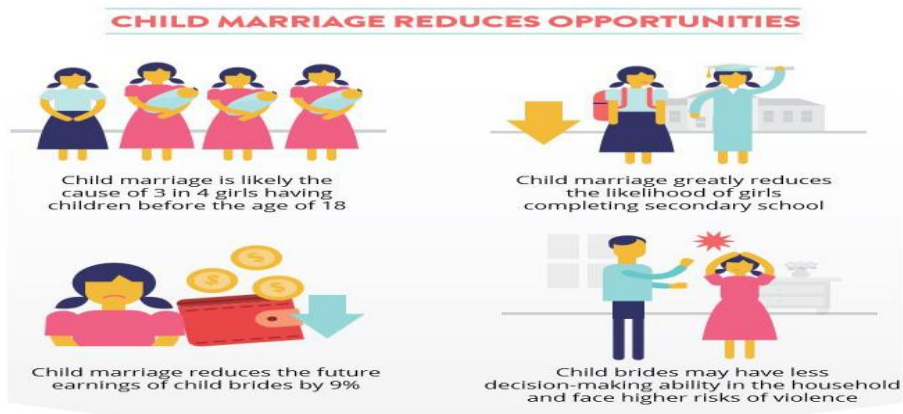


Plate 8

The content of curriculum has to do with the combination of the responsibilities of the man and the woman with the ultimate aim of making the wife a total woman and the home a worthy place to stay. The young maiden is taught, among others things that the man is to:

- i. take care of medical bills;
- ii. provide food, shelter and other needs of the family;
- iii. pay children's school fees;
- iv. take care of all his wife's needs;
- v. be disciplined and be a disciplinarian;
- vi. be the decision maker;
- vii. be seen as the head of the family;
- viii. provide emotional support.

Further still, the woman is taught to:

1. succumb to the husband even if the matter seems not to go down well with her;
2. obey her husband;
3. avoid usurping authority over the husband;

4. cook her husband's food instead of giving excuses or transfer the assignment to her maid;
5. choose her friends discreetly;
6. not to talk back at her husband;
7. hide her family secrets even when beating;
8. be liberal as regards sex;
9. be a good cook and be prompt about it;
10. avoid laziness;
11. shun infidelity;
12. courteously handle interference from in-laws;
13. be prepared for polygamy if need be;
14. be prepared to cope with siblings, step children and mothers-in-law.

The educational curriculum of the maidens based on the aforesaid is culture and tradition based. The curricula are informal, developing the maiden's physical skills, character, intellectual skills, a sense of belonging, respect for elders, specific vocational training and the understanding and appreciation of the community's cultural heritage (Fafunwa, 2004). As can be seen, the maidens in most cases have to stay out of school to partake in the annual celebration of the festival of the maidens. In cases where the maidens have to go for fattening ceremony (i.e. seclusion for a particular period) this is only possible for out of school girls. Where parents ignored the idea of western education of the girl child in a bid to promote traditions and cultural heritage with the aim of curbing promiscuity, the setbacks can be somewhat lamentable and pathetic.

As laudable and promising as it is, the Festival of the Maidens has not helped the overall development of the Northern peoples of Nigeria. Lack of education for the maidens makes her solely dependent on her husband and parents. Worse still, she has to rely on her children in the case where the husband dies. This is against the economic development plan of any nation. What happens if by virtue of the exposure gained through the Festival of the Maidens and the maiden cannot express herself or relate effectively with her counterparts due to educational deficiencies. There are further resultant effects the North stands to suffer if the maidens are not going to become a history in no distant future. Some of them are as follows:

1. there will be no empowerment for the maidens;

2. the maidens and the community will suffer economic growth;
3. poverty will ensue;
4. lack of productivity will be rife;
5. domestic and sexual violence will be prevalent;
6. reduction in family income is inevitable;
7. increase in infant and maternal mortality due to uncontrolled pregnancy especially at a very young age (because they do not know when/how to space children through the use of contraceptives);
8. the natality rate may soar high (because they will be vulnerable to venereal diseases).

Conclusion

The Festival of the Maidens is a formidable factor in building a solid nation where nationals see its cultural diversity as a source of strength. It is an instrument for national integration and unity as well as a catalyst for sustainable growth and development of the nation, Nigeria. The Festival of the Maidens is a laudable celebration and a tool for societal wellness and national cohesion. However, males do not have to undergo strenuous pain and hardship before they go into wedlock with a maiden as in *Sharo* festival. While the Festival of the Maidens favour moral rectitude and sanctity of the immediate environment and society at large thereby making room for societal wellness and cohesion, maidens fear to tarnish their image by messing around with opposite sexes. They have been told and taught that failure to participate in the annual festival is a proof that they have been deflowered coupled with the fact that this would in the long run make them the black sheep of the clan. Armed with this notion, maidens are more watchful thus guarding their virginity jealously. While education about morals is good, maidens need not undergo fattening ceremony before they are given out in marriages. The reason for this is because the time the maiden would spend in the fattening room before she completes the whole processes involved, her school mates would have graduated since the maiden has to remain indoors. Yet, with all the good morals, courtesy, good character, respect for elders/husbands that the maiden has, she is no match for her counterparts in the wider world as regards academic competence. She cannot air her views eloquently and convincingly like her mates do in the outside world.

Recommendations

Government at all levels is hereby implored to encourage the continuity of the festival because of its cultural and tourism benefits (more so as it is a resource for national integration and unity) while giving special attention to the education of the maidens in Northern Nigeria. In respect of their influence on the people, religious leaders should be involved in the teaching of good morals, chastity and sanctity in relationships.

Awareness campaigns against female mutilation in rural areas through radio programs should also be targeted at the rural dwellers since most maidens in *purdah* have access to radios. While social mores are being controlled and ethical standards are being upheld among the maidens, there is need to encourage their education right from kindergarten to tertiary levels. Current situation with the girl child education in Nigeria is far from satisfactory.

Government can introduce laws to protect the girl's interest. This may include laws that punish those who abuse girls as well as laws that punish parents for not sending their daughters to school. Nigerian policy makers need to consider the issue of the girl child education in Nigeria in order to ensure a better future for the whole country. Government at all levels may have to offer varied opportunities for female school dropouts. Even if girls have to leave school prematurely, they should be offered alternative opportunities to finish their education. This might take the form of evening schools, online courses or extramural education.

As regards women's role towards gender equality, more women need to speak up on the importance of girl child education. Girls should not feel lesser because of their gender. Their achievements have to be celebrated as much as those of the boys. Maidens will see a positive example of what education can give them when women who have succeeded in life go to rural areas and villages and schools regularly to give talks to challenge the girls with their own life histories, challenges and how they overcame. People like: Prof. Hadiza Galadanci (gynecologist), Prof. Rukayat Rufai Alkali (former Education Minister), Amina Mohammed (United Nations Deputy Secretary General), Salamatu Hussain (former Foreign Affairs Minister), Fatima Hassan Abbass (Newscaster), Aisha Augie Kuta (award-winning photographer and journalist and a host of others. Similarly, the girl child's rights Act needs to be empowered and monitored to ensure implicit obedience and unflinching

support in the Northern region of Nigeria. Other zones that are not observing the Festival of the Maidens can as well borrow a leaf from those who practice it. Where this is done it will bring about societal wellness, national and international cohesion in the long run.

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