

## Review Article

## Determinants of Girl Child Education among the Nomads in Nigeria

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**Abstract:** The paper discusses the concept of girl-child education, right of child education, history of Nomads in Nigeria, cultural and religious practices of Nomads and attitude of nomadic parents towards girl-child education. The girl-child education is to make a girl-child understand herself and her capacity to exploit her environment, and involves training in literacy and vocational skills to enable her become functional in the society. The rights to education of a girl-child is free and compulsory primary education and freedom from all types of discrimination at all levels of education. Cultural practice of nomadic parents towards the education of their daughters could lead to early marriage, pregnancy, insecurity, harassment and drop-out of school. Girls education touches on fundamental issues of gender disparity. Nomadic parents believe a girl-child does not need to be educated like a male child. Their plan is for their girl-child to be married off and start procreation as early as early adolescents. In conclusion, cultural practice of nomadic parents influences their attitude in not having desire to educate a girl-child. Moreover, withdrawal from primary school for marriage is often practised by those who allow their daughters to attend primary school. It is recommended that school counsellors are to organise parents' conferences and use such media to discuss with parents of relevance of girl-child education to the pupils themselves, their families and the society at large.

**Keywords:** Girl-child education; attitude of nomadic parents; cultural and religious practices; early marriage and drop-out.

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### THE CONCEPT OF GIRL-CHILD EDUCATION

Offorma [1] defines girl-child as a biological female offspring from birth to eighteen years of age. This period is made up of infancy, childhood, early and late adolescence stage of development. The girl-child is seen as a young female person, who would eventually grow into a woman and marry. She is conditional to look after the young ones, the home and kitchen. Girl-child education is a catch-all term for a complexity of issues and debates surrounding education (primary, secondary, tertiary and health education for females [2]. Girl-child education also includes areas of gender equality, access to education and its connection to the alleviation of poverty, good governance, which are major ingredients in averting crime against women. Today's girl-child education is for her tomorrow's living. Afebendeugne in Ugwu [3] defines girl-child education as the education that would make a girl-child become aware of herself and her capacity to exploit her environment, and involves training in literacy and vocational skills to enable her become functional in the society.

When maternal care is adequately provided for the girl-child the aims and objectives of education will be achieved. It is however, discovered that girl-child education is not easy to come by as it is usually proclaimed as many impediments stand in the way of the girl-child. The rights of the girl-children are always being denied and this denial leads to lack of access to education. Inaccessibility to education thus results in child labor, which deprives the girl-child of her childhood potentials, dignity and joy. The resultant effect is poverty and the only key to ending poverty among women-folk, as a whole is education of the girl-child because as the saying goes "catch them young" for the young girl-child will grow to full woman in later years.

Hanafi [4] sees girl-child education as the education geared towards the development of the total personality of the female gender in any society or nation. It also promotes the development of women and makes them active participating members of economic development of the nation. Education also helps girls to realize their potentials, thus enabling them to elevate

their social status. Bukoye [5] observed that girl-child education as a right, because of the role women plays within the family and the society. Commenting on girl-child education as a right, Mivanyi [6] pointed out that one of the basic principles of child's right of the United Nation on the right of the child in 1990 together with the charter on the right and welfare of the child in 1991. However, current efforts, including national and global programs, have been to target increased enrollment of the girl-child into the different levels of education in Nigeria.

The Federal Government introduced the Universal Basic Education Program to provide cheap and affordable education to all and sundry. Most, if not all, the State Governments in Nigeria have also introduced free and compulsory primary and secondary education for both male and female children in their States. Again, most State Governments have passed the Child Rights and Protection Acts that will eliminate (or at least reduce) the withdrawal of the girl-child from school and to prevent parents or guardians from using their school age children to hawk or do endless labour activities. This is so important because it promotes girl-child education which enhances nation building [7].

The World Education Forum in Dakar Senegal noted that in Nigeria, the percentage of girls who did not complete elementary education in rural areas was 32.1% and in the urban centers was 14.6% as compared to boys with 20% in rural and 7.4% in urban centers. The forum also reported that the number of girls who complete elementary school in rural areas was 57.5% in the urban centers [8]. According to a study by UNICEF [10] measuring exclusion from primary education, more than 4 million girls aged 6-11 years in Nigeria. In the northern part of Nigeria, the proportion of girls to boys in school ranges from 1 girl 2 boys and even 1 is to 3 in the rural areas. Commenting on the importance of the girl-child from Islamic point of view, as revealed that Islam has enjoin the pursuit of knowledge on Muslim man and woman alike in spiritual, religion and education matters. The Islamic religion treats man and woman as equal, making no distinction between them in education and learning. The prophet (SAW) said the pursuit of learning is a duty for every Muslim man and woman, without distinction between them, since learning is venerated in Islam and its pursuit obligatory.

Focusing on the traditional perspective of girl-child education, Hanafi [4] observed that girls, have only one function in life and that is to be a wife and mother. Here education plays little or no role in the brightening the prospect of girls in marriage. His study also revealed that the higher a girls' level of education, the lower her chances of getting married in some cultures especially in the rural areas. This is why one finds more cases of spinsterhood among educated women especially the highly educated among their less educated counterparts. Owolabi [9] reveals that most

girls in their traditional culture are given out to husbands of the parent's choice without the consent of the girl. Unfortunately, she added that, these men to whom the girls of 8-14 years were betrothed were often between 50-60 years. Omede and Agahiu [7] points out the following factors as hindrances to girl-child education:

- Economic Factors: Nigeria as an independent entity is undoubtedly characterized by very harsh economic conditions. This has resulted into scarce resources. As a result of this, choice has to be made between whom to send to school. Most often, it is the girl-child that remains at home. Due to poverty, girls get withdrawn from schools so as to help to supplement family income through hawking, trading or even working on the farm so as to support the family. In some cases, the girls are given out as house helps or even sent into early marriage because of a huge bride price [10].
- Sexual Violence and Abuse: This also hampers the girls from going to school due to this fear of sexual violence, most parents deny their girl-children access to school.
- Political Factors: Despite the fact that Nigeria is signatory to various international conventions on the right of children, so far very little has been achieved in respecting children rights. The situation remains pathetic and serious. For instance, at the formation of the United Nations which is almost six decades old, the precarious situation of the children worldwide became so obvious that it became necessary to establish UNICEF with special focus on the needs of the children around the world.
- The School Environmental Factors: Often most parents are scared of sending their female children to school in distance places and would rather keep them at home. According to Obinaju [11] Curricular, textbooks and other materials are usually gender-biased. She opines that right from childhood, girls are channeled into stereotyped traditional carrier in form of textbooks illustrations and stories, consequently leading to the development of poor self-image at a tender age. Also, sexual harassment during educational pursuit create serious emotional and psychological strain on the girl-child.
- Socio-Cultural and Religious Factors: In most African societies, especially in Nigeria, the role of the girl as a wife and mother is conceived as the utmost priority not only by her parents, but also by the girl child herself. However, in the Nigeria context, gender discrepancy in education is sustained by cultural factors. The wrong notion that her place is in the kitchen, to be seen and not to be heard, have had very serious implications on the girl-child's ability at self-actualization. Obinaju [11], notes that out of the 130 million children in LCDs without access to education, 81 million are girls.

Also certain cultural and traditional practices like female circumcision, early marriages etc. are to say the least unprogressive because they lead not only to absenteeism distraction, but also to eventual dropout of girls. More so, ethnic values and some religions do not help matters, as they are often perceived with tremendous suspicions. Elaborating on the cultural factors that prevent the girl-child from going to school, in the nomadic communities, Ezeomah, [12] observed that the labour intensive demand for nomadic girls in the livestock economy compete with the demand of formal education which made it difficult to attend school.

Tahir, Muhammad and Ahmed [13] noted that there are various domestic duties associated with the emancipating of educated girls which include the workloads. From the early age a nomadic girl's sibling (while their mothers will go for hawking milk product) share in the arduous day to day tasks of running the house. Lantana [14] states that even if the girls enrolled in school, they may not have enough hours in the day to complete their domestic asks and attend class. Even if they manage to do both, their physical and mental strength is not conducive for learning. The weight of socio-cultural beliefs on attitude to girl child education remains very strong and play an important role in preventing girls from going to school Soumano [15]. With regard to factors responsible for girl-child education, Bukoye [5] conducted a study on factors militating against girl-child education in Nigeria. She sampled 60 respondents (30 literates and 30 illiterates) from one state in each of the 6 geopolitical zones in the country. Frequency counts and simple percentage was used for demographic information while t-test and ANOVA for testing the research hypothesis. The result revealed that, a lot of factors were found militating against girl-child education in Nigeria which include, families low socio-economic status, the concept that male child is supreme over a female child and poor performance of female gender in the state.

#### **Rights of Girl-Child to Education**

According to Adedokun and Olufunke [16], every individual in the society is entitled to same rights as citizens of that particular society. The same is true of the girl-child. She is entitled to a lot of human rights but because she is regarded as being weak she is vulnerable to the violations of these rights. Like any other person in the society, she likewise requires the right to enjoy and exercise these rights. Some of the rights of the girl-child as stated by The People's Movement for Human Rights Education include the following:

- Right to freedom from discrimination based on gender, age, race, color, language, ethnicity or the status of the girl-child's parents.
- Right to equal access to food and nutrition.
- Right to freedom from cultural practices, customs and traditions harmful to the girl-child including female genital mutilation.

- Right to education- free and compulsory primary education and freedom from all types of discrimination at all levels of education. Linked with the above rights is the right to information about health, sexuality and reproduction, protection from physical and mental abuse.

#### **Barriers to Girl Child Education**

Adamawa state is culture enveloped and tradition friendly especially when it pertains to the female sex "women should see not heard" which gives them a perpetual position in the kitchen. The world belongs to the men folk. These are some of the humiliating traditional sayings directed to females. Right from the onset the tradition placed girls and females in a domestic servant status where they perform such duties such as farm works, fetch firewood, cook for the family and do petty trading to sustain their families and given out early in marriage, while the boy child goes to school just because of the cultural traditions and practice of the parents.

In agreement with the above observation, Obeg- Denteh and Amedeker [17] reported that rightly or wrongly impoverished parents often feel they need their girl-child" labor for additional income, just to help with the grueling requirements of life. Records have it that two thirds out of 13 million children around the globe poorest nations who don't have access to school are girls [10]. Obeg- Denteh and Amedeker [17] also went further that 60% of girls in an estimated population of 110 million children in the developing world including Nigeria would not have the opportunity of entering school while the few girls enrolled would drop-out. This emerging scene is a thing of concern and worry to the

#### **History of Nomads in Nigeria**

A nomad is a person who lives his life moving or traveling from one location to another in search of a livelihood. What this means is that nomadism is not an exclusive characteristics of cattle rearers, migrant farmers, fishermen and those who possess overt nomadic qualities. Anybody who engages in a kind of work that warrants traveling from one place to another either locally or internationally can be referred to as living a nomadic lifestyle [18]. If a child changes school severally as a result of the parents' kind of job, that child can be said to be involved in nomadic heuristics. Children of soldiers, customs officials, diplomats, policemen, even teachers can engage in nomadic education depending on how often their parents or guardians are being transferred or reposted [19].

Nomadism is as old as humanity. It is a common characteristic of human reaction against hostile or unfavourable conditions on their lives or source of their livelihood [20]. Nomadism is not a peculiar Nigerian phenomenon. Nomads are found in other parts of the world such as Europe, Asia, Tanzania,

Canada, Australia, North and South America. In Nigeria, nomads are found around Cross River, Rivers, Akwa Ibom, Ondo, Edo, Delta, Lagos, Abia and Imo States. The Fulani nomads (Mbororo) wander along Borno State, Benue, Taraba, Zaria, Jos, Niger, and Gongola. They are present in almost all the Northern states of Nigeria Edo, Delta, Cross River and Akwa Ibom States.

### **Cultural Practice of Nomadic Parents'**

In Adamawa State like many other part of the world inaccessibility, low participation, withdrawal and dropping out of girl children's from schools is attributed to many factors of cultural traditions and practices of the parents towards the education of their daughters, prominent among these factors are: socio-cultural beliefs, customs, early marriage, pregnancy, insecurity, harassment, employment in domestic markets, personal engagement, parental services and other traditions practiced by the parents; and also the female students' own decisions to drop-out of schools [21]. Another contributing factor influencing cultural traditions and practices of the parents on girl-child education is the initiation ceremonies which still mark the transition from childhood to adulthood among communities in Sub-Saharan Africa, Adamawa State inclusive. Evidently lot of confusion and dilemmas faced by girl-children were created by attending ceremonies more especially when the schedules of such ceremonies overlap with the school calendar and that leads to absenteeism and dropouts. Although, communities accept the girls as adults, teachers or schools continue to consider them as children. Sometimes they may be punished for not participating in some activities which adults do not normally participate in. Traditionally, initiated girls may also feel it difficult to continue schooling after passage to adult hood as the next step is expected to be marriage [21].

Among the other cultural constrains on girl-child education that creates similar dilemmas to those who pass-through initiation ceremonies are Circumcision. Normally Circumcised girl- children become negative influences on their uncircumcised peers and perceive themselves as adults and as a result of this become rude to teachers and often reject schools as institutions for "children" by exhibiting abnormal behaviors of frequent absenteeism and reduced performance which leads them to drop out from schools and eventually to marry [22]. According to Njau and Wamahu [23] circumcision functions to enhance the social status of teenagers and acts as a mechanism for curbing female sexuality and premarital pregnancy, with the help of payment of bride price and early marriage which emphasized female virginity before marriage, these practices were perceived to increase economic returns to the family through bride wealth. Security and the needs for physical safety or protection are traditions that often demand special concern for girls' privacy and social reputation [24, 23].

In cultures and traditions where female seclusion is practiced, the impact of that Low Participation of girl-child in school's tradition on girl's enrolment after puberty is substantial. Odaga [25] indicate that in some rural areas of Mozambique families keep daughters out of schools after their first menstruation and initiation of rituals. In some of the nomadic communities, distance from home to school gives rise to issues of special concern for security. Adolescent girls may be victims not only of sexual harassment but also of abduction, after which they are forced to marry their abductors. A relationship has been found in many countries between late entry of girls to schools, frequent absenteeism and finally dropping out of school. Girls may start school at the age of 10, since the distance from school may be too great to allow small children without older siblings to walk on their own. At the age of 11 or 12 they are forced to leave school as their parents may be afraid of sexual harassment and abduction [21].

Girl-child pregnancy and the incidence of dropout are closely related throughout Africa [23]. Usually unwanted, these pregnancies end the schooling of girl-child both through self-withdrawal and national pregnancy policies that ensures the expulsion of girl children from the education system with little or no chance of re-entry. They argue that it is the societal responses to pregnancy rather than pregnancy per se that push girl-children out of school and hamper their opportunities for educational and career development. They note that in most African countries, school policies and practices are based on the mistaken assumption that the problem of premarital girl-children pregnancy is caused by the pregnant them, and to a lesser extent, by their parents. The tendency has been to portray them as easily susceptible to becoming pregnant while still in school and eventually dropping out. Odaga [25] indicate that fear of pregnancy is another factor for parents to remove their children from schools.

They refer to a study in Cameroon where Christian parents were found to marry off their daughters at puberty even if they have not finished primary school for fear of pregnancy. The health implications of teenage pregnancy are another reason for early dropouts. A study in Kenya showed that female students from secondary school who had been pregnant were twice as likely to report poor health as those with no pregnancy history [26]. In rural and poor families, the education of girls is often seen as worthy of consideration only up to marriageable levels. One study from Kenya found that, compared with boys, more girls are made to repeat o that they are at least educated enough to find a husband [27]. Surveys of parents of dropouts in India indicate that they withdraw daughters from school when they see education as conflicting with marriage [28]. Similar practices have been reported in Papua New Guinea: In the province of West Sepik, some girls as young as 9 or 10 are

promised in marriage and then taken out of school to "insure their protection and to prepare for the event. Others leave their families to live with the family of their betrothed, until they are of marriageable age and this may lead the girl-child to indulge in sexual activities which will eventually course diseases like HIV/AIDS" [29]. It is therefore, pertinent for the girl-child to be educated to be liberated from the hold of child-labor as well as the scourge of HIV/AIDS and other social ills as faced by the girl-child.

Cultural practices serve as hindrance to girl-child education and that inaccessibility of the girl-child to education makes her vulnerable to diseases such as HIV/AIDS, early marriage, denial of rights and child labor. In his message to, the United Nations International Literacy Day the Secretary-General Banki-Moon [30] explained with a warning that illiteracy undermines efforts to eliminate a host of social ills such as poverty and sickness and threatens the very stability of nations. He said "Illiteracy exacerbates cycles of poverty, ill-health and deprivation. It weakens communities and undermines democratic processes through marginalization and exclusion. These and other impacts can combine to destabilize societies." The Global Campaign for Education states that seven million cases of HIV could be prevented in the next decade if every child receives an education [31].

The international community has made numerous commitments to women's literacy, getting more girls into school, and to ensuring that schools are providing empowering quality education. Yet concrete action to match these commitments and to address the linkage between access to quality education and HIV prevention has been lacking. It is clear that strengthening girls' education is inextricably linked to effective HIV prevention. Indeed, growing evidence points to the fact that education levels are often correlated with factors that substantially lower HIV risk, such as delayed sexual debut, greater HIV awareness and knowledge, and higher rates of condom use.

The Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) has highlighted these links. The agreed conclusions of the 53rd session concluded that there is a clear need to 'strengthen education.....to achieve gender equality and the empowerment of women and ensure women' and girls' rights to education at all levels and the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health, including sexual and reproductive health as well as sex education based on full and accurate information in a manner consistent with the evolving capacities of girls and boys, and with appropriate direction and guidance'. Keeping girls, notably the most vulnerable and marginalized, in school, beyond primary, into secondary is therefore critical as well as ensuring that schools remain safe and

empowering spaces for girls and women, where they can learn free from all forms of violence and discrimination. In order to reach the millions of women and girls that are out of school or have never received any formal schooling, it is equally important to diversify women's and girls' educational opportunities throughout life by ensuring their access to quality technical, vocational, literacy and life skills education and training. To help address these gaps, UNAIDS Accelerated Agenda for Women, Girls Gender Equality and HIV supports access to comprehensive sexuality education for young people, both in school and out of school, that promotes gender equality and human rights and that equips youth with evidence-based knowledge, skills and resources necessary to enable them to make responsible choices about their social and sexual relationships.

### **Attitudes of Nomadic Parents on Girl-Child Education**

According to Ellis [32], the term attitude is used to refer to how favourable or unfavourable in general one views the same object's judgement. Kings [33] defined attitude as "mental and neural representations organized through experience, exerting a directive or dynamic influence on a behaviour". Attitude according to Oskamp [34] is a general and enduring positive or negative feeling about some persons, object or issue. Attitude to girl-child education is the reaction or response of parents to the education of the female child. This reaction could be positive or negative. The girl-child often faces discrimination from the earliest stages of life, the attitude of parents as preference for sons, early marriage and domestic tasks. Girls and women education touches on fundamental issues of gender disparity which is both ancient and global. Hanafi [4] posits that woman ought to share as far as possible in education in other way with man, when women do not have the same education as men, the state instead of being a whole, is reduced to half.

Commenting on parents' attitude to girl child education, Ogbede [35] stated that girls tend to drop out of school earlier than boys. Boys are also given precedence over girls when parents have the male choice if education is not free. He also observed that, some parents refused to send their female children to school because they felt that, no matter what they achieved in life, they still depend on their husbands. The right of a girl to education has often been violated in the North especially in the rural areas, the parents completely refuse to send their daughters to school or by sending them into the streets to hawk. They prevent them from attending classes. Responsibility for sending a child to school lies with the parents. But mothers are generally blamed for their daughter's absenteeism from schools Schidkroun [36]. He also notes that mothers support girls in going out hawking because of the benefit they received from the proceeds. The proceeds can be used to buy marriage trousseaus for the girl and

other preparations for the girl's marriage. Commenting on early marriage, Umar [37] observed that it is a common phenomenon in the north and involves girls of between 9-13 years married off to men old enough to be their fathers or more matured rich adults. She also revealed that early marriage has played and still plays an important role in hampering girl-child education in the north. Sohietti [38] observed that girls especially in the rural areas are frequently married at an early age, when they are not mature enough to take up the responsibility of being a house wife or effective mothers.

In most cases, Sohietti [38] observed that the girls are not physically, psychologically or normally mature enough to shoulder such responsibilities. It is sad to note that the practice is still common in the rural areas, related to force marriage, participated by adult members of the family. In most cases a girl is forcibly married to a man enough to be her father. It is mostly for the financial benefit of the parents. Hiko [39] observed that forced early marriage is another cause of drop-out. Some ethnic groups have entranced child marriage in their culture by subjecting small girls to motherhood when they are still physically and psychologically ill equipped for the responsibilities of motherhood.

Furthermore, when parents are faced with the choice of sending a girl or a boy to school, 80% chances are in favour of boys to continued education to that of girls. Bukoye [5] revealed that some of the myths and negative attitude of parents to discourage the education of females in Nigeria include educated women make bad wives and are not respected by their husband; educated women are irreligious and do not encourage the children to be religious; educated women do not dress up to reflect the culture in the north; educated women cause psychological instability in homes; and educated women tend to be morally corrupt.

The implication of the above myths also results to the parents and society no justification in providing equal access to education with their male counterparts [12]. In the north, especially in the Muslim areas where this study is centred, Fafunwa [40] cited in Hanafi [4] reported that most of the Muslim parents refused to send their daughters to the western type of education. They fear that there was the tendency of their children to be Christianised, since Western education was being propagated by Christians along with Christianity. Umar [37] observed that these are the major factors in the north that most parents denied sending their daughters to schools due to the fear of female chastity; the delay in marriage; the fear of their daughter being converted to Christianity; and educated girls may not be good and dedicated wives.

Contrary to this, Yusuf and Dahiru [19] reported that there was no substantiated historical

against the females in terms of their educational pursuit. Schidkroun [36] also reported that in Islam, male parents are responsible for providing education and training to their children. Preventing the girl-child from going to school is against the principle of Islamic law, which command all Muslims to seek knowledge irrespective of their sex. Commenting of the importance of women's education, Mivanyi [6] pointed out that an educated mother will know the following that at the tender and pre-primary ages a child should get protection from physical danger; adequate nutrition and heal care; appropriate immunization; gets opportunities to explore the world; language simulation; opportunities to begging to learn to care for himself; daily opportunities to play with varieties of objects; and opportunities to experiment, corporate and self-expression.

The negative attitude to girl-child education, more especially in the traditional community, where parents believed that the place of the girl-child and subsequently women is the kitchen. According to them, a woman is socialized into accepting her traditional roles and rearing children; and maintaining the welfare of the family. Educating her therefore need not go beyond preparing her for such roles of mother and wife [41].

#### Difference in Attitude of Parents to Girl-Child Education

Parent attitude to girl-child usually varies due to their location. Generally, the right of girl to education has often been violated in the north. Either parent completely refuse to send their daughters to school or by sending them into streets to hawk which prevents them from attending classes [4]. Areas of residence are predictive of enrolment and attainment at all levels of education. Girl-child in the urban centres has more access to education than their rural counterparts. These differences are due to parents' attitude which is influenced by location. Girls who live in rural areas or belong to nomadic groups are educationally handicapped by their gender and place of residence.

Their enrolment rate in school is consistently lower than those of urban population due to variation in the attitudes of their parents. Obidigho [42] as cited in Hanafi [4] revealed that some parents believe that it is of no use sending their girl-child to school. Another person will eventually marry her and she will be another person's family. Odibgho [42] also observed that, some parent's believed that if they send a girl/woman to school she will be more exposed and civilized and cannot be under a man any longer. Which means a woman's job is in the home and she does not need to go to school. Some parent, especially in pastoralist's areas, might decide to have one child-often their elder's son educated, all the rest will be engaged in herding, without even considering the female children [43].

## CONCLUSION

Cultural practice of the nomads encourages early marriage of the Fulani girl, and this act inhibits the education of the girl-child. A girl-child is given out to marriage as early as she reaches the age of ten or twelve. This practice influences negatively the attitude of nomadic parents in education of the girl-child. Moreover, the nomadic girl-child is withdrawn or dropout of school due to her early marriage; and also the belief of nomadic parents that the girl-child should always be in the kitchen and also to giving birth to children alone. The ignorance of nomadic parents as a result of illiteracy and the influence of culture on their attitude should be addressed in order to foster the education of nomadic girl-child.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Counselling strategies should be employed to enlighten the nomadic parents on the importance of education of the girl-child to the family, community, and society at large.
2. Awareness campaign should be organized for the nomadic community to sensitize them on the needs for education of the girl-child.
3. Governments should also make a promulgation by rising the age of marriage for girls to at least 20 years of age or above.

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