

Investigating the Causes of Child Marriages and Its Effects on Economic Growth and Development in Sub-Saharan Africa - Case Study Niger Republic

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Abstract:- This paper shall study the fundamental causes of child marriages in Africa; it shall examine the conceptual reviews of gender, women's empowerment and a review of the effects the practice has on economic development. More so, it shall examine the country with the highest prevalence which it shall take as its special case. Furthermore, the study shall look at the psychological, social and economic detriments of the practice. It shall also look at the conventions held by the African Union as a deliberate attempt to fight this social ill which again has put Africa on the highest pedestal for the wrong reason despite the odds in other regions.

Keywords:- Child Marriages, Gender, Women's Empowerment.

I. INTRODUCTION

The world is evolving at a rapid speed and is taking many countries places. However, while some economic and regional communities are experiencing greater achievements in technology, science, education and economy, others are seriously lagging behind for reasons that could be accused of either the interpretation or misinterpretation of globalization. The phenomenon of child marriages, female genital mutilation, breast ironing, gender issues and the progressive discourse of women's empowerment is a problematic and for the sake of clarity, this study would like to draw a strong conceptual argument that will share light on the meanings of the concepts of gender and child marriages. Though the sensitization and the fight against child marriages is gaining steam across Africa in particular, tribal and customary allegiances are a surety that they will surely not overtly be welcomed by many in the same light. These select few who hanging on traditional history and the obedience they owe to their ancestors who supposedly are watching over them seem to forget that regardless of the benefits of this ancient wicked custom, child marriage is a gangrene that is eating up many communities, separating families, destroying personalities, shattering dreams and enslaving innocent girls and boys who full of potentials and the capacities to bring meaningful changes to their communities, are drowned into forced

marriages with most times, spouses who are about ten times their ages. At a time when many countries are making reforms to promote the education of the girl child who is the most affected, there exists in some regions this depleting belief that the girl child is a baby making liability fit for the bedroom and for the kitchen. Consequently, her psychosocial, educational and economic development is according to these same tribal beliefs brutally dependent on her husband who is lord over all. In spite of the many efforts put in by the African Union, the European Union, the United Nations and many other partner organizations that fight for gender equality, there seems to be a growing trend of the act. Consequently, UNICEF (Girls not brides, 2018 cited UNICEF, 2017) warns that the numbers of girls who are forced into marriages might more than double in Africa by 2050 if nothing is done. It's depressing to note that Africa is home to 15 of the 20 countries with the most child marriages in the world (UNICEF, 2014). And though clearly stipulated by the African Union Protocol for the Human Rights that this practice must end soon, it remains a challenging area where policy makers must face the challenge with tenacity, ingenuity, creativity and resilience regardless of the many tribal and customary potholes they will find in addressing this "honored crime".

II. CONCEPTUAL REVIEW

A. Sex and Gender

This section will start with the basic definitions of gender and the role its explanation plays in the society. This study is of the opinion that the misleading conceptualization of 'gender' either by scholars or by the common man is the fundamental reason why this heinous practice of child marriage has excelled over the years. Furthermore, this study asserts that the sluggish policy follow up of states might be as a result of the failures of academics who struggle to leverage a potential conclusion on the unflinching mistreatment of the girl child in the name of tradition.

The ordinary man on the street and even some educated people when asked what gender is will probably say it refers to women or to some it's the difference of sexes between male and female. For some scholars gender is not something we are born with and not something we have but something we do (Penelope and Sally, 2009 cited Zimmerman, 1987). Moreover, it refers to something we perform (Penelope and Sally, cited Butler, 1990). The differentiation of gender roles corroborates with the society's match up with behaviors considered as socially accepted or denied for different sexes. The entrance of the word sex imposes another twist but carries a different academic meaning as it shall be seen. Thus, cultures usually impose their beliefs on what they consider appropriate for different sexes and what these sexes must do to belong such that any defiance is not only considered abnormal but somewhat a taboo. Johnson (2010) adds that gender can be institutionally designed and controlled by elements such as the media, education, religion and other social and political features which in the long run makes gender a social structure. However, Cornwall and Rivas (2015) firstly, note that even as high as the United Nations there are many high personalities who associated gender to refer only to women. This took place in a High Panel meeting of high profile persons who issued a UN report in 2013 following the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) that were designed in the 2000s to address issues related to poverty, under empowerment and gender segregation or marginalization. The report regardless of its good intents has been a subject of fierce attack by feminists and claim it is flawed due to this misconception of the concept of gender. The attacks span over it not being holistic and pragmatic in its approach to solving gender issues especially over resolutions that were made in earlier reports but never ratified. Nevertheless, the same High Panel met in 2014 and this time included boys and men in the conceptualization of the word. Cornwall and Rivas (2015), continue that the main salvation in understanding gender very well comes from a successful differentiation between gender 'itself' and 'sex'. Firstly, they acknowledge the fact that sex precedes 'gender' and gender is the begotten concept of 'sex'. Secondly, they add that sex is biologically determined, fixed with its evidences constantly apparent except otherwise in the case of hermaphrodites. However, 'gender' on the other hand is a socially constructed relationship between men and women (Cornwall and Rivas, 2015). UNESCO (2013) adds that "sex describes the biological differences between men and women which are universal and determined by birth". Furthermore, sex is a biological categorization based primarily on reproductive potential, whereas gender is the elaboration of biological sex (McDermott and Hatemi, 2011). As a matter of fact, gender is highly subject to nurture that is it succumbs to socially learned behaviour while sex pays its allegiance to nature. Common sense should therefore accentuate that the training we all got from our parents from birth dictates more or less on how we present ourselves in public according to the gender by which we were raised. As such, gender and culture sometimes clash in such a bad way

that people who think they are in the wrong body struggle greatly with themselves because they believe they deserve another kind of gender, identity and sex. Transgender fit well in this category but transsexuals are even an extreme revelation of the internal wars that some people have fought based on the new identities they picked for themselves and by which they feel more comfortable and prefer to be identified. Nevertheless, while expressing one's self in a certain way is socially accepted in some cultures such as the Scottish ceremonial skirt dressing of men, it is considered a taboo in other cultures who will strongly rebuke it as a defamation of the male gender.

Unfortunately, this study understands that feminists in all their arguments strongly hold that people are always misjudged by their roles in society either because of their gender or sex. Some cultures believe it's normal for boys to be friends only with boys and likewise for girls. Hence, any girl who associates more with boys is considered abnormal and may be regarded as a lesbian. The same applies for boys who prefer to be friends with girls and not boys. They might be labeled gay and not straight whereas that may not be the case. Thus, gender issues and their unfathomable wars with culture regardless of the changing times, somewhat impose restrictions of association on people. It's worth adding according to Strud (2014) that sexual orientation is a choice and strictly personal as everyone decides who they choose to be sexually attracted to. From one society to another these terms sometimes overlap and as such naming one as male or female is a social decision of the society in which one finds himself (Penelope and Sally, 2009 cited Fausto-Stearling, 2000). This social difference and construction most probably predates modern civilization where men are thought to belong to a certain order and constraint to perform certain duties and likewise women. On a more traditional thought, men are seen as the custodians and defenders of the family capable of providing the basic needs of the family while women are relegated most times to child bearing, taking care of the house and cooking. This social construct has been a strong target of attack by feminists who strongly question the foundational setting of these roles (Cornwall and Rivas (2015). While there might be nor sociological or scientific proof why gender roles are specific among different societies, its longevity might insist it to be authentic because of how long it has lasted and how holistic it has been among many cultures around the world.

Gender Spectrum (2017a) is of the opinion that the words gender and sex are usually used interchangeably and most times people ascribe their meanings from ones genitals and sex. For example, the birth of a child will get him or her named a boy if he has a penis and so his gender is automatically male or a girl if she has a vagina and as such her gender is female. Such has been the tradition and still is. Nevertheless, there are some further elements that social scientists have used to determine with accuracy what they think could be the reason why people are either considered

male or female. These include body structure, identity and expression (Gender Spectrum (2017b)). Body refers to the biological and physiological make up which consists of genes, chromosomes and a whole lot of hormonal and other endocrinology aspects that defines one as male or female. In fact, it's strongly believed that some people are male or female because they possess a particular physique unique to them. And around this belief societies have built boundaries which are jealously guarded about socially accepted behavior unto males and female. However, using body structure and physique as a premise to determine ones gender comes with many problems according to critics. As a matter of fact, Blackless *et al.* (Penelope and Sally, 2009 cited Blackless *et al.*, 2000) estimates that 1 in 100 babies are born with bodies that differ in some way from standard male or female. Furthermore, holding unto the argument of body structure as the determinant of gender isn't enough and doesn't satisfy reason because there are boys who naturally have girl-like characteristics just like there are girls who have masculine characteristics. Moreover, adhering to this premise means accepting that the hormones of men and women have a great role to play in their gender expression, behavior and which if not remodeled by social and other economic factors, will have them limited to their feminine prison (Risman and Davis, 2012 cited Bell, 1916). While the roles of the endocrine system cannot be overlooked since they produce the biological messengers who have a great veto decision on the day to day lives of humans, it might be wrong to assert that there are just two sexes by which all genders are begotten. Gender Spectrum (2017c) denies the fact that there are just to genders. In fact, they insist that it's needless to say that body structure determines ones gender because sex just like gender can be altered. In addition, an individual at different times might decide to either pick up or drop a gender for personal reasons.

Furthermore, while the debate on body structure persists, identity is another reason for the classification of gender and sex in the society. Gordon (Gordon, 2000 cited Oakley, 1970) thinks that though gender is socially determined rather than biologically determined, limiting gender only to male and female is wrong and erroneous. This is because when that is done it leads to what Gender and Spectrum (2017) termed "gender binary". In a non-binary situation, the child may either identify as both or as none of the genders or may choose another gender. In fact there are also a class of people who prefer to be considered as "Agender" that is they do not identify with any gender at all (Richards, *et. al.*, 2016). More so, gender identities though shaped in all humans from the age four (Gender and Spectrum, 2017) are subject to change with the passing years as people either modify their identities and choose to express themselves in ways that are most particular to them. Mindful of the fact that gender roles differ from place to place (Gordon, 2000), and could be the reason why females are specifically targeted in some cultures, the differentiation mentioned above lavishes a blow on those who impose

certain roles on women and men and insist they are gender specific. Moreover, this study thinks that the bias and the definitional problem that encompasses the broad misunderstanding of the terms gender and sex is surely the reason why patriarchal societies such as Chad, Niger, Afghanistan, India and other countries that practice child marriage at very high rates, see the girl child as a nylon bag fit for shipment to any potential old man in need of a second, third or fourth wife.

Having understood this fact and seeing the importance of stopping the practice of imposing gender specific roles which most times dispossess the girl child of her rights, a group of African specialists from all over Africa took into consideration the Pan African Conference on the Education of the Girl Child that took place in Ouagadougou in 1993 (Gordon, 2000) prepared a solid module which consisted of "Guidance, Counseling, Social Work, Behaviour Modification, Gender Sensitivity, Guidance and Counseling Programme Development, Adolescent Reproductive Health, and Workshop Administration and Conduct Guidelines". By these modules on "Gender Sensitivity", which was held in Zambia, and which provided a careful analysis of the differences between sex and gender, it gave a description of their respective roles and stereotypes, and showed how these are seen by society in general" (Gordon, 2000). It's important to note that the collective work of the African Union on this regard has significantly paid off well as there are changes in minds and perceptions about the girl child in Africa and the importance of sending her to school. Following the education reforms in many countries as early as 2005 the fruits are paying off well. However, much has to be done because patriarchal societies such as Chad, Niger and some parts of South Asia seem to be resisting and not wanting to let go of this practice. If the debate on the girl child and on gender has increasingly raised the awareness of the fact that there is no superior gender, then policy makers are confronted with the argument that considering that gender refers to the roles and responsibilities of men and women that are created in our families, our societies and all our cultures, whereby societies have been strategically stratified with well-defined roles in relation to men's domination and women's subordination, it's important to add that despite the strength of this antique belief, modern gender studies show that though gender can be learned and accepted it can also be rejected (UNESCO, 2013). And this is the reason for the rising calls on policy makers to make policies that empower women so that they can too can step up to the game, measure themselves up with men who are not almighty as patriarchal societies portray them to be. Thanks to the enormous studies done by social scientists on the subject they disprove Aristotle's belief that women are a biological mistake which came as a result of low temperatures during conception (Knutsson and Johannsdottir, 2009 cited Weiz, 2003). Furthermore, the empirical arguments of feminists reveal that though patriarchal societies that hold unto these beliefs claim gender roles are natural and their social origin is the reason for the

impetus which among other things, has helped this antique belief of male dominance and female subordination (Sultana, 2011) to flourish over the ages, mentalities are rapidly changing and the calls for an egalitarian distribution of roles independent to gender are increasing. Thus, overcoming the wrong mentality that women are the weaker vessels and the weaker sex must be abated by empowering women so that the gender gap (Harris, 2017) will reduce in all aspects of human life where women are always seen to earn less than men and sadly are assigned lesser roles of responsibility than men. Furthermore, the ferocity of feminists towards the gender inequalities atones for their tireless fight for the unconditional empowerment of the women so that considering gender analysis, occupations and roles that have traditionally been assigned only to men will be equally shared with women. Under this canopy and with the best principles applied, patriarchal societies meet their well-designed doom.

B. Women's Empowerment

The empowerment of the woman is so vital not only for her but for her community as well such that her backwardness has a direct effect on the development of the nation. However, women have been supporting the world's economy in ways that surpass our description. Sadly, they haven't been given many credits for the work they do and if it must be specified the house chores women do which account for part of their unpaid work (Cornwall and Rivas, 2012). The world has largely benefited from this free service of women without giving them any substantial credit for what they do because of the erroneous thought that it the woman's job. Following this partiality and what feminists consider as the mistreatment of the woman, Cornwall and Rivas, (2012) lament that the United Nations and its partner organizations in addressing gender and women's empowerment through their Millennium Development Goals (MDG's) have largely shifted from its original meaning to something else. As a matter of fact, women's empowerment right was mobilized by feminists in the 1980s and 1990s as a way of getting women's rights unto the international development agenda (Cornwall and Rivas, 2012) and for these rights to elevate the woman to the level of self-sustenance, she has to be endowed with the skills and tools required to keep her competitive and not dependent on a man. On that regard this study thinks that the first tool the woman needs to be empowered with is education which is the reason why women's education has become one of the key development objectives in the nineties. However, achieving this goal comes with many challenges but what is most imperative to consider are the mechanisms adopted by states and other non-state actors to formulate the programs and policies that will make this successfully happen (Medel-Anonuevo, 1995).

Some of the ways of empowering women are improving their social and economic abilities that will help them to become leaders and decision makers in their communities and countries (Project Concern International, 2018).

Rahman (2013) adds that long before 'women empowerment' became a public discourse, women were speaking out and demanding for more and better control of their lives and themselves. Furthermore, women have always and presently suffer the burden of being overburdened by work most of which is unpaid. Secondly, women are very vulnerable to threats like diseases, poverty, homelessness, violence which might otherwise not be the case with men. In some parts of the world, women are considerably uneducated. A good example should be Niger and Chad where the education of the girl child still remains low and consequently, many women are underpowered to stand up for themselves because their first curse is their sex which begot their gender, female and then their society which is very patriarchal (Filipovic, 2017). As a matter of fact, Niger is last among 187 countries in the UN's education index (Filipovic, 2017). Thus, defining the concept of women empowerment for proper understanding to the people of Niger Republic who are already aware of it will not only face some traditional resistance but might not smoothly go through thanks to ancestral beliefs.

As a matter of fact, women still lag behind in economic activities and positions of responsibility, promotion at work, access to loans and financial havens, inheritance and succession rights (Project Concern International, 2018). Despite the ragging arguments of feminists such as Cornwall and Rivas (2012) who are of the opinion that not much has been done to improve the wellbeing of women worldwide, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) (2015) acknowledges that regardless of the huddles that might have been met following the eight goals of the Millennium Development Goals (MDG) that were set in the 2000s, much hasn't been successfully achieved worldwide. A particular area where these goals could be addressed is in alleviating poverty and raising the standards of women through different empowerment programs. Nevertheless, feminists continue to press harder to better reforms that will not only empower women on paper but bring their empowerment to actualization and a meaningful reality. Countries such as Niger Republic and Chad where the education of the girl child is significantly low need to do a lot in alleviating the abuses imposed on women by patriarchal beliefs that succumb the women to a subordinating position. This is because according to Project Concern International (2018) two-thirds of the 960 million adult illiterates in the world are women. And of the 130 million children not enrolled in primary school, 70% of them are girls.

Following this analysis, it's imperative to note that raising the bar of women's education is primordial for their development otherwise the society might be overcrowded with hard working and talented illiterates who are socially and customarily programmed to take orders from their husbands and incubate children for their families. So, empowering women also means focusing on their learning skills, and building capacities, self-esteem, increasing access to information and resources, promoting collective action and community organizing (United Nations People Fund-UNPF, 2016). The World Summit for Social Development (UNPF, 2016 cited World Summit for Social Development, 1995) promoted the idea that women are better managers, so, entrusting economic resources in their hands is an opening that can accelerate development and sustainable development to reduce poverty. As a strong supporting argument therefore, they add that all legal barriers and boundaries that impede the smooth appearance and participation of women in public life must be removed. Secondly, the public should be educated about the importance of empowering women through effective programs of education and mass communication. Lastly, gruesome practices such as female genital mutilation (FGM), breast ironing, and early marriages that are done against women should be abated (UNPF, 2016 cited World Summit for Social Development, 1995). That way, women shall be allowed to exercise their rights, including those relate to reproductive and sexual health.

III. CHILD MARRIAGES

UNICEF (Girls not brides, 2018 cited UNICEF, 2017) defines Child marriage as “the prevalence in the percentage of women between the ages of 20 – 24 years old who were married or in union before they were 18 years old. UNICEF (2018) again defines child marriages as “Child Marriage is defined as a marriage of a girl or boy before the age of 18 and refers to both formal marriages and informal unions in which children under the age of 18 live with a partner as if married. Child marriage affects both girls and boys, but it affects girls disproportionately, especially in South Asia, Africa and some parts of the Middle East”. UNICEF (2013) adds that one in 5 girls is forced into marriage before the age of 15. Moreover, it adds a sadder note that “in Niger, for instance, 77 per cent of women aged 20 to 49 were married before age 18 in contrast to 5 per cent of men in the same age group”. This data caught the attention of this study the reason why it's taken as a special case.

This research is of the opinion that the reason why child marriages prevails in Sub-Saharan Africa is for two principal reasons; firstly because of tradition and this is savagely propagated by people or groups that this study prefers to call “traditional slaves” that is people who indefatigably adhere to their ancestral beliefs and customs regardless of the benefits of modernization. Secondly, the practice prevails certainly for economic reasons and a dummy reason is added which is weak institutions that don't apply much weight as expected

either because they fear not to distillate their society seeing most Sub-Saharan countries are very traditional or because they just don't care or are evangelists who promote the act themselves. It's very important to note and this study insists with the argument that most African countries are polygamous and polygamy itself is respected as an antique practice and defended by many African states (BBC, 2014). This study is of the opinion that most men, usually advanced in age, prefer younger teenagers whom they believe are still innocent and easy to train to fit their needs and desires. From personal observations, older and more mature wives are very experienced, stubborn and difficult to control so having a younger girl 'child' is better and is a strong message to the defiant wife (ves) that they are not almighty and indispensable. Sadly, the torture some young wives receive from the older wives who see them as new, young, beautiful and desired by their husbands cannot be overlooked. Usually, the older wives and their children gang up against the new bride and serve her with bitter treatments. Therefore, the abuse attached to child marriages doesn't only come from the husband or as this study prefers to call then 'father husband' but from his entire household.

It could also be hypothesized that the conceptual argument in the international community forwarded by experts and other government and non-governmental agencies about gender and gender abuse haven't been properly digested because a special case like Niger still practices the act and happens to be one of the highest in Africa.

This study will critically look at the reason why child marriages are prevalent in Niger Republic in particular and will end by trying to propose solutions that might help to reduce the practice.

Humanium (2016) writes that “Niger has the highest rate of child marriage in the world. A shocking 76% of girls are married off before they reach their 18th birthday, whilst 28% become wives before they turn 15” (Humanium, 2016 cited UNICEF, 2016). Humanium (2016) adds that one of the reasons why this child practice prevails is firstly, for sociocultural reasons and this is propagated by those whom this study mentioned above as 'traditional slaves'. Secondly, it's also for economic reasons and it adds that different regions of Niger react differently to child marriages. The reason is those who live in rural regions with limited education and open to limited economic opportunities adhere more to this practice than those in the cities. It can be deduced that though the practice is antique income inequalities also play an important role in fueling it in the rural regions where the people, maybe lacking modern communication apparatus, might be somewhat cut short from the rest of world.

In addition, some families see no reason why they should invest in the education of their girl child who is regarded as good for a wife material and child bearing. This low esteem for the education of the girl child is the reason why many girls find themselves in early marriages though they may not like it. More so, the perceptual structure of the Nigerien society turns to admire and respect girls who were married off early than those who got married late. In addition, child marriages according to their local traditions are ways of conferring upon young girls the status of women who eventually become mothers. Therefore, it's necessary for a girl to marry early so that she can enjoy this social privilege. Furthermore, Niger is dominantly a Muslim country with its traditions matching proportionally to Islam to an extent where it might be said that there is potentially a misinterpretation of either the Islamic texts or simply an exaggeration of their indigenous traditions. Plan International (2019) adds that one of the other reasons why parents are usually on the forefront of these arrangements is because they are believed to be the owners of their children and reserve the right to decide for them regardless of their thoughts and feelings. Humanium (2016) supports that the common reason parent practitioners always give is that what they are doing is for the interest of everyone. Following the economic state of Niger which happens to be one of the poorest countries on earth despite having huge Uranium deposits, many communities and villages lack vocational education where young girls can be trained to be independent and take advantage of their lives (Plan International, 2018). In fact the World Bank Group (2019) adds that some of reasons why Niger is savagely poor is as a result of it being "landlocked, politically unstable, having many food insecurity crisis, having one of the fastest population growth rates (39%), has recurrent natural crises (droughts, floods, and locust infestations), and is heavily reliant on uranium exports".

Unfortunately, under these conditions, some poor, (not to say the least) and short sighted 'traditional slave' families might want to get rid of some children whose mouths to feed are a burden. Thus, the family might see no other option than sending her off to a 'new marriage career', and a very abusive one where she will stay for the rest of her life. This study believes that usually, the young girl is not consulted on her choice of husband by her parents or kin. All arrangements are done without her prior knowledge and concern and once the deal is done, she is wheeled off to the man's house whether she likes it or not. And if she tries to run members of her own family track her to the farthest ends of the earth and mercilessly bring her back her 'father husband's' house. Of a surety the communities practicing this in Niger blinded by tradition, are submerged in ignorance of the ills this practice has on the mental, economic, and psychosocial health of the young girl. Child marriages are so bad and dangerous to the perceptual analysis, self-esteem and the health of women or young girls that it also carries with its impediments sedentary sediments of social and economic regression.

Another possible cause is that parents might be enshrouded by the erroneous thought that it's the best way to keep the child safe from unwanted pregnancies and sexual promiscuity among other ills of wrong companionship and giving her to a man who is more older than her might be a way of exposing her to good education and treatment (Keane, 2014). The irony is if the biological father was unable to train his child is it a husband who will do it better? Sometimes, some families might give out their girl child to an elderly man as a result of the close friendship they share. This patriarchal belief usually comes with the low level of education of the parents who might not do otherwise if they had the right education.

Seeing that Niger is mostly a patriarchal community, most local leaders need to be taught about the constant changing global order which denies this horrendous practice and violence against innocent girls. Plan International (2018) in an attempt to fight against the ill has set up over 77 protection centers over Niger and provides local leaders the tools to fight this practice. The reality of the fight might have become so ferocious that it reached the highest levels of the Nigerien state prompting the president of Niger to take contingent action. The latter might have finally understood the ills of this practice and the debilitating effects it levels on the sociocultural cohesion of the community whose overall reference to the economic performance, development and growth of the Nigerien state cannot be skipped. Without mincing words, he blended both words and action and took steps to stop the 'honoured crime' as this study sees it (Plan International, 2019).

As opposed to the traditional slaves who might defend this practice to the death, there is no advantage this study sees about child marriage and this study lists some of the disadvantages hoping this study will contribute to already existing literature and add steam to the fight against child marriages. First, if Africa must emerge and develop, then educated African boys should be granted the rights to marry educated African women who are currently threatened by child marriage. Secondly, forced child marriages neutralize the interpersonal wellbeing of the women who is advertently relegated to the rear and reduced to the psychological disgrace that makes her to believe that she is some kind of a social liability that can be traded anyhow by parents or kin in order to solve their financial issues or satisfy their 'crazy ancestors and their crazy beliefs'.

➤ *Consequences of Child Marriages*

Following the fact that the age difference in those marriages is usually appalling with the men being either 10 times or more old than their wives, this study considers that the young girls most of whom are usually 15 or if older 20, are practically raped or sexually abused by their 'father husbands'. Selby (2018) writes that child marriage is a violation of the girl's rights and as soon as she is married she is expected to become a wife and do the things wives do for

which she is mentally not ready. This study believes that most times the marriages and unions are abusive to the young girl who learns how to behave as a wife or mother the hard way. There is no way a child under these conditions can see herself as worthy of anything because first, she was owned by her parents who sold her off to marriage and then she became the property of her 'husband father' who dictates over her mercilessly. Therefore, psychologically, she might see herself as a product that is owned and sold to the not the highest bidder but the most preferred bidder following her parent's choice.

Secondly, child marriages provide a lot of social poverty as the child-bride is deprived of any social interaction that is not sanctioned by her husband. This social deprivation impedes her from enjoying the fruits of social life and mixing with the opposite sex that will also help her to develop psychologically. Such public outings are impossible as she is surrounded at all times by her husband and older co-wives who watch over her jealously but not for good in most cases. Unable to decide for herself and make her own decisions that can impart her positively, or mix with those who can bring meaningful changes to her life as she should, the abused child finds herself underpowered and unable to support her family and community as she might have been naturally endowed to. While her friends are developing themselves through education or careers, she is busily making babies for her 'father husband' doing house work and always devising new security measures to protect her vulnerable self and children from her elderly co-wives. Child marriages simply push babies to become wives who end up giving birth to other babies who might remain in that same ecosystem unless someone intervenes or something happens or the young girl "defects". Yes, this study voluntarily used the word "DEFECT!"

In addition, her lack of education which might not even be an option since her 'father husband' might not accept it leaves her powerless when faced with her mates who attended school. Thus, she becomes a burden and a liability to her community and country instead of a meaningful solution to its many problems. With this low education, it's certain that she will not be equipped with the most recent skills and tools to improve herself economically. Consequently, she might not be strong in decision making especially on complex issues that require some advanced brain work and she might probably not be able to provide enough entrepreneurial support to her family, community and country. Furthermore, her natural talents and skills remain latent for an infinite period except if she defects from her 'marriage prison' and finds solace elsewhere where social services and good government policies will help her to die to her old self, germinate to a new being, regenerate from her painful past and grow to become a resource person for her community. So, what ignorant patriarchal communities do thinking is good for their short sighted selves is in the long run a consequential burden to their nations. More so,

"additional savings of 100 billion US dollars could be made by reducing the number of deaths and acute malnutrition among young children. In Niger, the population could have fallen by 5.4% between now and 2030 if child marriage and early pregnancies had been eradicated in 2014" (Save the children, 2018).

Medically, the young girl might not be biologically ready for marriage and most importantly, child birth which brings many changes to the body of women before and after gestation. With the economic situation of the families involved, there are always chances that she might not be properly attended to or properly taken care of before and after having given birth. Infant mortality and mother mortality at birth might catch up with her and this brings another loss not only to her family but also to her community and family. Developing nations must do their best to provide enough training, support and protection to the girl child because she is believed as cited above to be a good manager and very important for nation building.

Child marriages must be stopped and abated forever. However, and on a serious note, "if child marriage is not properly addressed, the UN Millennium Development Goals 4 & 5 – calling for a three-fourths reduction in maternal mortality and a two-thirds reduction in child deaths by 2015 – will not be met (WHO, 2019). Finally, one of the best developmental policies the government of Niger must embark on regardless of the collateral casualties they will face is to holistically abrogate and annihilate this practice. Secondly, recovery programs should be made available for victims of this savagery and ways to help them self-develop should be exposed to them.

IV. CONCLUSION

As it has been discussed above this paper shows that despite the hard work of the UN and its agencies as well as other international organizations and agencies, Child marriages still prevail in some parts of the world such as in South East Asia, Africa, The Middle East and some South American countries. As for the case study of this research, it has been shown that Niger suffers this 'privilege crime' because like many other predominant Muslim countries in Africa, it still has a patriarchal society where the man is the head and lord of all. Secondly, the economic nature of the country, the uneven distribution of wealth, limited jobs, poor educational and other developmental facilities favours the thriving force of this ill which still enjoys a lot of recognition in its hinterlands.

Moving from words to action might sound somewhat implausible, however, for the president of Niger to make a strong impression; his policy makers have a lot to do to codify the Millennium Goals of the African Union as well as the United Nation's Millennium Development Goals with workable action. Regarding that Niger is one of the poorest

countries on earth despite having unthinkable Uranium deposits which makes it one of its fundamental exports, the need to diversify the economy, mount pressure on gender studies and sensitize the country on women's right cannot be under stressed. From the look of things, much as to be done and unless the government opens up new avenues for partnership with local authorities, some of whom are advocates of this ill, coerce the practitioner and impose heavy sanctions on those forcing their daughters to early marriages, the degrees of Niger's president will remain hypocritical sermons only aimed at earning the votes for another mandate in power.

Lastly, the African Union is endorsed very strongly to pass from words to meaningful action. So much has been said in its traditional conferences and yearly meetings and so much is still being said. Sadly, the crisis in the continent continues to escalate and every day, there is almost no hope seen for the younger generations who in their likes, will surely grow to suffer the same ills their fathers are presently suffering. Contingent action must be taken and now is the right time. Africans want to see a proactive African Union that can address these problems while still maintaining its respect for indigenous cultures and traditions. An African Union that is not only made up of gerontocracies and octogenarians hiding behind militarized regimes that are good at oppressing the widow and rubbing the orphan.

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