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BRIDGING THE GENDER GAP IN STEM THROUGH GIRLS ASTRONOMY CAMP

Abstract

This paper highlights the role of Girls Astronomy camp in encouraging the participation of more girls in Astronomy. It also addressed the challenge of lopsidedness in the elementary school enrolment. Using the camp as a tool to promote the subject among the school age girls who in turn are playing the role of Astronomy ambassadors in their various communities. Thereby increasing the girl-child school enrolment as other out of school girls are encouraged to get enrolled as well as raising Astronomy awareness among the ones already enrolled. We hosted an astronomy camp for girls because of the issues associated with girl-child education in northern Nigeria. The term 'girl-child' refers to a female between the ages of 6-18 years. National Child Welfare Policy (1989) defines the girl-child as a female below 14 years of age. The gender apartheid places the girl-child in a disadvantaged position, where her potentials are suppressed and self-actualization is not achieved. The girl therefore, becomes a victim of a pre-existing socio-cultural male exaggerated superiority. Furthermore, on the account of gender, girl-children are subjected to all multiple forms of oppression, exploitation and discrimination. Girl-child education has then become a major issue of concern in most developing countries of the world today, especially in sub-Saharan Africa, where large number of young girls do not attend school. According to UNICEF (2007), the global figure for out-of-school children is estimated to be 121 million, out of which 65 million (approximately 53.8% of the total) are girls. The northern Nigeria have the country's worst girl child education, highest female illiteracy, highest adolescent girl marriage, highest under 15 child bearing, and highest risk of maternal death and injury. The report is published by Africa Health, Human and Social Development Information Service (Afri-Dev. Info), in partnership with African Coalition on Maternal Newborn and Child Health, and Pan African Campaign Against Forced Marriage of Under Age Children. Statistics from Federal office of statistics (2004) shows that, literate women constituted only 20