

**SECURING GIRL-CHILD SECONDARY EDUCATION FOR SUSTAINABLE
NATIONAL SECURITY: FOCUS ON NORTH WESTERN NIGERIA**

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ABSTRACT: *Secondary schools, schools for the adolescents, are often place where intolerance, discrimination and violence exist, and girls are mostly at the receiving end. In this paper the concept of girl-child, security challenge, secondary school and sustainable national security were clarified. The paper also identified the types of security challenges in Nigeria which include bombings and killings, kidnapping and armed robbery attack, political and economic related assassinations. Security challenges identified to be affecting girl-child secondary education in North Western Nigeria include kidnapping and abduction, bullying and intimidations, sexual abuse and harassment, physical threats and insults. Some factors promoting security challenges in secondary schools include distance, poor facilities, lack of community cooperation, and leadership attitude to security issue. The paper identified ways of securing girl-child education to promote sustainable national security as provision of security fence, provision of security outfit, provision of school bus, installation of CCTV cameras, and taking serious legal action against girl-child abuse related cases. The paper suggested that, like financial institutions, secondary schools should be provided with enough security personnel. It also suggested that community should be fully enlighten and involved in providing security for secondary schools especially the girls' schools.*

KEYWORDS: girl-child, secondary school, sustainable national security.

INTRODUCTION

Education today is the determinant for growth and development of any country. It is an important factor of human resource development (Gbenu, 2012). There is no need to emphasize the importance of educating a girl-child. Education of women and girls are equally or more important as the education for men and boys. Educated mothers are more likely to adopt desirable health and nutritional practices than the uneducated ones (UNESCO. 2007). Educated mothers are more likely to train their daughters most efficiently and ensure that they benefit socially and economically from

the education they receive (World Bank, 2008). Therefore, there is need to ensure that every girl finish at least secondary education in her life. The benefits of educating girls are long established. It is pertinent to state here that female-child education is very important for the overall development of the country. The place of women in the overall development of any society is fundamental such that any deliberate neglect of their education could point to danger for the entire society. As it is often said, to teach a man is to teach an individual but to teach a woman is to teach a family and the whole nation (Abbagana, 2013).

However, in spite of the lucrative benefits by the society from the education of girls, females are most disadvantaged in the provision of education. This in turn has an adverse effect on their overall performance in the society (UNESCO, 2005). The level of girl child participation in secondary education is determine by the opportunity provided for the girl-child to be educated. Girls' access to secondary education especially in North Western Nigeria has remained very low partly because states and local governments do not take cognizance of the peculiarities of the girl-child in the provision of education for her citizen (Ada, 2007). It is on record that only 20 percent of women in Nigeria are literate and have attended at least secondary school (UNICEF, 2007).

Another great problem affecting education in Nigeria today, especially Northern part of the country is the level of insecurity. The activities of Boko haram, cow rustlers, armed robbers and kidnappers have led to the closure and destruction of many schools. This affects mostly girl child education in the Northern States. This paper therefore reviews the process of securing secondary schools in order to promote sustainable national security.

Conceptual Clarification

The term girl-child refers to a female human being from birth to 18 years of age. Ponte (2006) sees, girl children as socially constructed category around female persons between 0 and 18 years. It is the age before one becomes young adult (Atama, 2012). The girl-child is a female child born to the family, community, society or nation (Udeozor, 2003). According to Offorma (2009) girl-child is a biological female offspring from birth to 18 years of age who is able to build her physical, mental, social, spiritual and emotional developments start and progress to get to the peak at the young adult stage. In this paper, the term girl-child is used to mean any female child, normal or special, married or single, mother or not, who have the intellectual ability and is participating in secondary education.

The concept of girl-child has been a neglected phenomenon until after the Beijing Conference of 1995 and the rectification of the Child Rights Act (Isaac, 2014). With gender equity being advocated by both International and National Development Partners, the matter concerning girl-child has now come to limelight in the issue of development most especially on the provision of basic human needs such as education and health care services. Whereas girl-child education is any type of education provided in the society that is aimed at promoting the participation of girls and women in secondary schools.

Security has been defined as the condition or feeling of safety from harm or danger, the defence, protection and preservation of core values and the absence of threats to acquire values (David, 2006). The term national security on the other hand is seen as something that is equivalent to national interest which is predicated upon economic, energy, environmental, and food security. National security is the overall protection of a nation's integrity and sovereignty through the use of economic resources, diplomacy, power projection and political power (Nicole & Fayemi, 2004). Sustainable national security is a concept that encompasses the totality of what a nation, its government along with the parliament do in order to safeguard itself as a sovereign entity, as well as ensuring the protection and wellbeing of its citizens, institutions, interest, development plans, economy, and national image, through variety of power projections such as political power, diplomacy, economic power and military might over a very long period of time.

Security challenge is the antithesis of security. It is the state of fear or anxiety stemming from a concrete or alleged lack of protection. It refers to lack of or inadequate freedom from danger (Beland, 2005). It is in this view that we would describe security challenges in this study as: 'not knowing, a lack of control, and inability to take defensive action against forces that portend harm or danger to an individual or group, or what make them vulnerable'. 'Vulnerability' is the situation that we do not know and we cannot face or anticipate. It is also something we may know would happen but we are not able to protect oneself against it.

Security Challenges in Nigeria

Nigeria is a nation that is richly blessed with natural resources and also endowed with different ethnic groups. It is one of the Africa's giants partly because of its big population and large economy. Nigeria is witnessing an unprecedented level of security challenges (Egwalusor, 2020). Chilling nights and torturous days in the north cover the country like a blanket, and Nigerians are getting to a point where safety is all that matters. Security challenges in Nigeria is so serious that girl participation in education particularly in Northern Nigeria become highly discouraged especial for some parents who are looking for the slightest chance to deny their daughters access to school. This is because the horrors of over 234 girls kidnapped from their hostel in Chibok few years ago, and other series of abductions in Katsina, Niger and Zamfara states is still fresh in peoples' memories.

Every second gone confirms similar or worst fears of parents. But no fear can be as real as that of the girls themselves; possibly they could have exchanged their years of learning just to be home with their families. Stuck on the lower rungs of Maslow's hierarchy of needs is safety need, Nigerian children, especially those in the North, are now being forced to choose between school and safety. Due to the level of insecurity in the North today, an average parent could possibly prefer a living but uneducated child than a kidnapped or dead one. This is a serious calamity to the country, as more girls may join the country's estimated 10.5 million children who are out of school, six million of whom are girls (Obahopo & Arenyeka, 2014).

Security Challenges Affecting Girl-child Secondary Education in the North Western Nigeria

Some of the security challenges affecting girls' secondary schools in the North include the following:

Physical Threats and Insult

School girls face lots of physical threats and insults from different categories of men on their way to school and even inside the school environment. Sometimes these threats and insults become so serious that either the girls submit themselves sexually or choose to drop out of school. School prefects and teachers who could not win the love of these innocent girls resort to using physical threats and insult. They find very small excuse to physically punish and insult these children.

Bullying and Intimidation

Intimidation is among the serious gender-based violence in basic school. Many girl students were seriously bullied and intimidated by their male colleagues along school way or even inside the school premises that make school life very difficult for them to bear. These bullying and intimidations are mostly on girls sharing the same class with boys. Since these boys do not have enough money to buy love from these girls, they resort to using bullying and intimidation to get it. Bullying and intimidations are pervasive problems in schools that affects many school girls. In recent times, they are becoming bigger crisis with vicious consequences. Bullying and intimidation are not just children play, but also a terrifying experience many school children face every day (Aluede, 2006; Beran, 2005; Craig, 1998; Thornberg, 2010). Bullying according to Aluede (2011) is a form of aggression, a particular kind of violence to which students are exposed. Bullying does not occur when there is conflict between students of equal or similar strength (Aluede, 2011). This distinction is important because of the effects of being repeatedly attacked or threatened by stronger student or group of students are likely to differ from the effects of being threatened or attacked by someone of equal power. In the former case, one is apt to feel more helpless (Fajoju, 2009).

Sexual Abuse and Harassment

Sexual abuse and harassment have been defined as any sexual act, unwanted sexual comments or advances or acts to traffic girls sexuality, using coercion, threats of harm or physical force by any person regardless of relationship to the survivor in any setting (Krug, Dahlberg & Mercy, 2002). These types of offence occur between school girls their seniors or teachers. The most devastating problem is that the enforcement of laws on sexual offenders is very poor and weak in Nigeria, most especially in the northern part of the country. The legal requirements are made too complicated and the law enforcement agencies usually frustrate the efforts of parents and human right activists, and refuse to take action on the culprits. Sometimes the security agencies even collaborate with the wrong doers especially where the culprits are from the elite classes. This becomes an excuse for the reluctant parents not to send their female children to school (Migosi, Nanok, Ombuki & Metet, 2012).

Rape and Sexual Assault

In some areas, hoodlums and some bad area boys are found in habit of forcefully raping and assaulting school girls on their way to school. This is especial true with girl children who have to travel a very long distance to school. In most cases, these boys do not know the girls but hunt them at random and attack any girl that fall into their trap. These types of incidences traumatized many

girls and their parents, leading to girls unwilling to attend the school and their parent reluctant to compel them to do so.

Kidnapping and Abduction

Kidnapping and abduction are the security challenges affecting secondary education in Northern Nigeria. They have constituted serious threats on girl's education (Saleh, 2011). Kidnapping and abduction can be seen as false imprisonment in the sense that they involve the illegal confinement of individuals against their own will by another individual or group of individuals in such a way as to violate the confined individual's right to be free from the restraint of movement (Ngwama, 2014). This is often done for ransom or in furtherance of another crime such as rape and other forms of sexual offences. No one is free from being kidnapped but easy targets in school are mostly girls. This trend has made it possible for students to be kidnapped and abducted from within and outside the school environment.

Ways of Securing Girl Secondary Schools to Promote Sustainable National Security

The negative impact of insecurity can be reduced by considering the following:

Provision of Security Fence in Schools

Most of schools have no security fence, where it exists, it is either broken, too short or has no secured gate or barbed wires. If concrete and tall security fence can be provided for at least girls' secondary schools, the girls in those schools and their family will feel secured and that will discourage criminals from perpetrating the act of abuse on school girls as has always been the case. Also, these fences should be provided with search lights and security guards at night to be going round the fences.

Provision of Security Outfit at the School Gate

Providing security check points in secondary schools is not traditional in Nigeria. It is only normal to see police guarding government residential quarters, monarch houses, financial institutions, etc. Since the condition of security has reach the level it is now, state and local governments should provide local security or liaise with police and/or army commands to provide security guards to these schools. This will boost the security of schools and build confidence in the school girls, feeling safe and protected.

Provision of School Bus

Girls who travel long distance to attend classes sometimes affected by some security challenges along their ways. This make girls scared of going to school and eventually drop out of school. But if school buses will be provided, such fear will not be there, and girls will continue to attend schools with confidence that nothing will happen to them on their way. The activities of bad boys and some irresponsible community members who usually block girls on their way to school will be drastically reduced. This can promote girls from a long distance participate in schools.

Installation of CCTV Cameras

Information technology has eased the ways schools are supervised nowadays. The use of CCTV cameras is now curbing the rate of crime all over the world. The most unfortunate thing is that educational institutions (especially secondary schools) are not enjoying these facilities. With a good school fence and security gate, government only need to provide CCTV facilities to secondary schools to make these schools completely secured. This will no doubt help in curbing the rate of insecurity threat in secondary schools.

Taking Serious Legal Action Against Girl-Child Abuse Related Cases

Most of the laws protecting the right of school children are complicated and mostly not implemented. Where they are implemented, they are not fully enforced. It is sad to note that these efforts have made marginal or no impact on protecting child from violence or specifically reducing incidence of girls related violence. This is largely because these measures have been uncoordinated, not well implemented and largely un-enforced (ICAI, 2012). If these laws were enforced or implemented, gender-based violence would be minimized and girls will equally enjoy the peaceful school atmosphere, hence competing with their male counterparts

CONCLUSION

Education system is the most vulnerable than any other system when insecurity is the subject matter. The level of insecurity in the Northern part of Nigeria is undermining the activities of education sector. It is so serious that the level of girl-child's participation in secondary schools cannot be easily predicted. To bring secondary school environment to its normal atmosphere as was before now, the current security challenges in Northern Nigeria has to be completely tackled. To do this, so much need to be done not by the government alone but all relevant stakeholders. Since the effort of the security agencies appears fruitless, general society must be up to the task of securing at least their immediate environments – their schools inclusive.

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