

Policyweekly

Out-of-School Children

Using a Gendered Analysis for North-East Nigeria



Policy Recommendations

- 1 State governments to domesticate the Child Rights Act 2003
- 2 There is a need to deepen awareness and advocacy against obnoxious social norms and practices in the North-East.
- 3 The Government should ensure girls' safety in schools.

Introduction

International Women's Day commemoration on 10th March 2022 underscored the need to reflect on the challenges women suffer due to entrenched norms and practices that structure institutions and processes in many developing countries like Nigeria. These setbacks are visible in education, mainly as it affects the girl child. Although quality education is the Sustainable Development Goal ([SDG 4](#)) which Nigeria commits to, many female children are still out of school. A 2021 [report](#) by the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) showed that over ten million children were out of school in Nigeria as of 2018. Of this figure, over three million were female children. Further analysis of the report revealed that the North-East alone accounted for 17.10 per cent of the country's estimated total female out-of-school children.

[Studies](#) have linked the growth of out-of-school children to the years of violent conflict orchestrated by the Boko Haram insurgency in the North East.

A previous study by Nextier SPD revealed that the Nigerian Government's efforts to address the challenge of out-of-school children in the North had not yielded the desired result. Hence, there is a need to examine the root causes of out-of-school female children within the broader perspective of structural violence perpetrated against the girl-child in the North-East. This edition of [Nextier SPD Policy Weekly](#) briefly interrogates how structural violence suffered by women in the North-East contributes to the region's high number of out-of-school female children.

Structural Violence Against the Girl-Child in North-East Nigeria

Johan Galtung's thesis has demonstrated that structural violence is perpetrated when various conditions such as deprivation and discrimination that emerge from particular social structures and processes inhibit the victims from realising their potential and meeting their basic needs (Galtung, 1969). Women and girls in North-East Nigeria experience various forms of structural violence arising from how the system has been structured by entrenched cultural and religious practices that interact with the absence and weak implementation of relevant legal frameworks to undermine the protection of the girl-child. For instance, while some North-East states like Borno and Taraba have [domesticated](#) the Child Rights Act of [2003](#), which provides for detailed protection of all children until the age of 18, others like Adamawa and Bauchi are yet to do so. Thus, the absence of a legal framework for protecting the girl-child and the ineffective implementation of such an Act in states where it has been domesticated meant that the girl child still lacks protection under the law against various practices and norms. This predisposes her to abuse and deprive her of the opportunity for education.

Furthermore, across the North-East, especially states like Borno and Taraba, where the Act has been passed into law, it is still a practice to give out female children for marriages before they reach the age of eighteen. This is a way of transferring responsibilities to their husbands and, in some instances, to settle a financial debt owed by the girls' families to some money lenders (Personal Communication). In addition, some other female children are still used by their immediate families as hawkers to contribute to the household income. In contrast, some are used as house helps by other members of their extended families, thereby denying them opportunities for basic education.

An Alarming Rate of Out-Of-School Female Children in North-East Nigeria

One direct outcome of structural violence and the concomitant direct violence suffered by the girl child in the North-East is the increase in out-of-school female children currently experienced

in the region. Hence, with [2,001,038](#) out-of-school children, the North-East is home to the second-largest number of out-of-school children in Nigeria, accounting for 19.6 per cent of total estimated out-of-school children at the primary school level in the country. Further analysis showed that, of this total estimated number of out-of-school children in the North-East, over 650,000 were female. Hence, the region had the second largest number of out of female school children after the North West, accounting for 17.10 per cent of the estimated total female out-of-school children in Nigeria as of 2018. The situation is worst in Borno State, where an estimated [70 per cent](#) of girls of primary school age are out of school. This figure is likely to worsen despite the interventions by state actors and other non-state actors such as international development partners and civil society organisations (CSOs). Moreover, the obnoxious cultural and religious practices which put the girl-child at risk of not attending or dropping out of school are yet to be addressed (Personal Communication).

Security and Development Implications

- **Girls as Weapons of Insurgency:** Girl-child who does not attend or drops out of school easily becomes a weapon of insurgency. Such a child is easily brainwashed and radicalised by extremists who enlist them as agents of violent extremism (Personal Communication). Some of the young girls are used by insurgents as [spies](#) and agents trained to carry person-borne improvised explosive devices (PBIED). Statistics showed that between 2014 and 2017 alone, at least 106 women, including girls as young as seven years, have been deployed for various terrorist activities such as suicide bombing by the Boko Haram insurgents in the North East (Allotey-Pappoe & Lamptey, 2019). In 2014, [85 per cent](#) of suicide attacks perpetrated by females worldwide happened in Nigeria. In [July 2015](#), at least six of the twelve suicide attacks perpetrated in Nigeria were carried out by girls reported to be as young as ten and thirteen. Out of the 84 bombings by minors in 2017, most were done by girls usually under 15 (United Nations Children's Emergency Fund [UNICEF], cited in Allotey-Pappoe & Lamptey, 2019).
- **A Vicious Cycle of Women Marginalisation and Deprivation:** Not attending or dropping out of school by female children translates to low educational qualification by women, which also translates to low participation of women in governance in the North-East. Women are underrepresented in the public services and appointive positions in the North-East because of the culture of patriarchy in society. This is because many do not have an educational qualification to occupy meaningful positions in civil services. In places like Borno State, women from the Southern part of the state are more educated. They, therefore, occupy more public offices in the state than their counterparts in the northern part of the

state who are less educated because some of these obnoxious practices and norms are more entrenched in the northern parts of the state (Personal Communication). The low participation of women in governance also means that women's voices cannot be heard. They will not be in a position to make input to critical decisions and policies affecting their lives as women. This entrenches a vicious cycle of deprivation and marginalisation where educational deprivation undermines political participation, further undermining the chances of addressing women's educational and other related deprivation.

- **Direct Physical Violence Against the Girl-Child:** The structural violence also exposes the girl-child to direct physical and psychological violence, contributing to her not attending or dropping out from school at an early age. Thus, the neglect and deprivation suffered by the girl child as a result of the entrenched cultural practices and weak protective legal frameworks expose the girl child to abuses such as sexual exploitation and rape, given that the perpetrators of such abuses exploit the weak legal framework and cultural contexts to perpetrate such acts and go unpunished. As a result, the girl-child in the North-East is at a high risk of being abused sexually as a child at home, as a hawker in the streets or market places, as a displaced person seeking refuge in the camps and as a pupil in the school. This sexual abuse, when it leads to pregnancy, usually results in dropping out of school by the girl. Again, [sexual abuse occurring in the schools](#) reinforces the practice of withholding female children from school due to fears by parents and caregivers that the schools are not safe for the girl-child. It also deters the girl-child from educational pursuit given the psychological fears of schooling amid her abusers (Personal communication).

Managing the Girl-Child Challenges

1. **State governments to domesticate the Child Rights Act 2003:** State governments yet to domesticate the Child Rights Act 2003 should do so without further delay. This Act will provide the required legal framework for critical stakeholders to fight against various practices and structures that inhibit the successful education of the girl child in the North East. In addition, states that have domesticated the Act should strengthen institutional mechanisms for adequate implementation of the provisions of the Act.

2. **Deepen awareness and advocacy against obnoxious social norms and practices in the North-East:** Community Based Organisations, Faith-Based organisations and other critical stakeholders should deepen advocacy towards addressing the entrenched social norms and practices such as early marriage and street hawking. These predispose the girl child to drop out of school early in North-East Nigeria, particularly in places like northern Borno.
3. **Government to ensure girls' safety in schools:** Implemented mechanisms should guarantee the safety of the girl-child from perpetrators of sexual abuse in schools by providing whistleblowing channels for reporting by victims and potential victims.

Conclusion

The high rate of female school children is a significant challenge in North-East Nigeria, where over 650,000 girls are out of school. At the root of this high rate of female school children is the prevalence of structural violence arising from the entrenched obnoxious cultural norms and practices that interact with a weak legal framework for protecting the girl child. Therefore, there is an urgent need to address the root cause of out-of-school female children in the North East by domesticating and implementing the relevant Acts and targeting the cultural norms and practices that predispose the girl child from dropping out of school.

References

- Galtung, J. (1969). Violence, peace, and peace research. *Journal of Peace Research*, 6(3), 167 - 191.
- Allotey-Pappoe & Lamptey, (2019). Pawns, puppets or weapons of choice: examining Boko Haram's use of female suicide bombers in Nigeria. *KAIPTC Occasional Paper #42*



Author

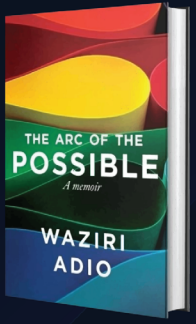
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Nextier SPD Policy Weekly provides an analysis of topical conflict, security, and development issues and proposes recommendations to address them. It is a publication of Nextier SPD.

Nextier SPD (www.nextierspd.com) is an international development consulting firm that uses evidence-based research to develop and build knowledge and skills to enhance human security, peace, and sustainable development as means to achieving stability and prosperity in Nigeria, and in the African region.


Weekly Update



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Getting Things Done in Government



Patrick O. Okigbo III

- Founding Partner, Nextier
- Senior Fellow, Mossavar Rahmani Centre for Business and Government, Harvard Kennedy School

IN CONVERSATION WITH



Waziri Adio

- Former Executive Secretary, Nigeria Extractive Industry Transparency Initiative
- Mason Fellow, Harvard Kennedy School
- Author, The Arc of the Possible (2021)

Sunday, March 27, 2022


Networking and Book Signing
(16:30 - 17:00 WAT) (11:30 - 12:00 EST)

Policy Discourse
(17:00 - 18:00 WAT) (12:00 - 13:00 EST)

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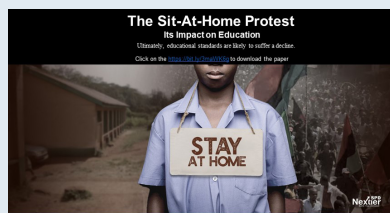
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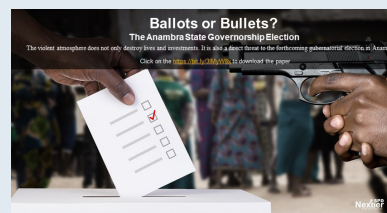
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Nextier Sample Publications



The Sit-at-home Protest: Its Impact on Education

Ultimately, educational standards are likely to suffer a decline.



Ballots or Bullets?

The violent atmosphere does not only destroy lives and investments. It is also a direct threat to the forthcoming gubernatorial election in Anambra state.



Reviving Cattle Grazing Routes

There are several issues President Buhari did not reckon with regarding the planned restoration of the grazing routes.



Ambush as Terrorist Weapon: Living in the Mind of the Enemy

Ambush has been a regular feature in Nigeria's terrorism and banditry landscape.



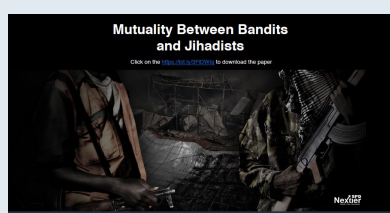
Threats, Fears and Securitised Ballots

Three important spin-offs from the tensions generated before the election include fear, pervasive securitisation, and voter turnout effects.



Where Vultures Continue to Feast: Oil Spills and the Niger Delta Region

The recurrent oil spill has been a significant hallmark in the Nigerian oil and gas sector in the last five decades.



Mutuality between Bandits and Jihadists

The insurgency waged by Boko Haram and its breakaway factions has ravaged much of the Lake Chad Basin for over a decade.



Counting the Costs of Violent Conflicts: Examining Nigeria's South-East Region (Part 1)

The Federal government's resolve to quell self-determination struggles and separatist agitations has led to the deployment of brutal force.