

INFORMATION SHEET

Girls' Education

Nigeria Country Office, September 2007

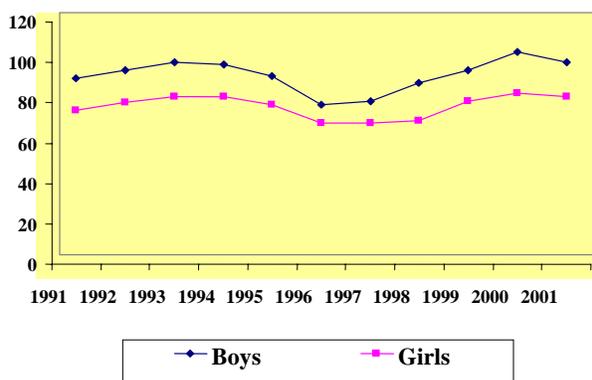
Background

Known to be the best investment in development, girls' education has become a major issue in most developing countries. Especially in sub-Saharan Africa a large number of young girls still do not attend school. The global figure for out-of-school children is estimated at 121 million, 65 million being girls. Over 80 per cent of these girls live in Sub Saharan Africa.

In Nigeria, girls' access to basic education, especially in northern states, has remained low. As few as 20 per cent of women in the North West and North East of the country are literate and have attended school. The 2006 National School Census (NSC) revealed a net enrollment ratio (NER) of 80.6% suggesting that a substantial proportion (19%) of primary school age population (6-11 years) is not enrolled in primary schools nationwide. This represents about 5 million Nigerian children aged 6-11 years old that do not access primary education.

In the Northern part of the country, the number of children out of school is particularly high and the proportion of girls to boys in school ranges from 1 girl to 2 boys and even 1 to 3 in two states. Although the gender gap has narrowed from 12 to 10 points, there exist wide variations across the States and zones, with the North Central and North West presenting worst scenarios.

Primary school Gross Enrolment Rate over last decade



The Net Attendance Ratio is at 60.10%, translating to about 40% level of non attendance among primary school age children. In the Northern part of Nigeria, where girls' enrollment rates are already low, it is likely that those who do not participate in education are girls.

Benefits of Girls' Education

Girls' education does not only bring the immediate benefit of empowering girls, but is seen as the best investment in a country's development.

Educated girls develop essential life skills, including: self confidence, the ability to participate effectively in society, and protect themselves from HIV/AIDS, sexual exploitation. Girl's education also helps cutting children and maternal mortality rates, contributing to national wealth and controlling disease and health status. Children of educated women are more likely to go to school and, consequently, this has exponential positive effects on education and poverty reduction for generations to come.

Barriers to Girls' Education

Why are girls in Nigeria not attending school? Poverty and economic issues, early marriage and teenage pregnancy, inadequate school infrastructure and cultural and religious misinterpretation are the main issues that prevent girls from going to school.

With almost 70 per cent of the Nigerian population living below the poverty line, girls are often sent to work in the markets or hawk wares on the streets. Early marriage and teenage pregnancy also prevent girls from going to school. A lot of girls drop out of school before reaching primary class six.

Most schools lack adequate classroom space, furniture and equipment, and are often too remotely located. Water, health and sanitation facilities are usually inadequate while pupil-teacher ratios could be as high as 1:100 in urban slums. Many Nigerian parents, especially in large families with limited resources, enroll their boys in school rather than girls. Some parents also keep their daughters out of school due to misinterpretation of Islamic religion.

Boys are generally known to be given more opportunities to ask and answer questions, to use learning materials, and to lead groups. Research shows that girls are often given less time on task than boys in primary and secondary school science classes. Many Nigerian teachers still use corporal punishment and create an intimidating classroom environment.

By 2005, only 29 per cent of all primary school teachers held the minimum certificate of education qualification mandated by the government. Thus, quality of teaching remains low.

UNICEF's Response to Accelerating Girls' Education in Nigeria

UNICEF Nigeria has made girls' education a priority again in its' strategic plan for 2005-2007 because of its' tremendous impact on other aspects of human development. In Nigeria, the 'Strategy for Acceleration of Girls' Education in Nigeria (SAGEN) was launched by UNICEF and the Federal Ministry of Education in July 2003.

The initiative has been imbued by other development partners who have jointly refined the strategy into 'SAGEN Plus' linking girls' education also to health requirements. It has also resulted in the important Girls' Education Project (GEP) launched in December 2004 and currently under implementation.

The Girls' Education Project (GEP) is a joint initiative between the Federal Government of Nigeria, DFID and UNICEF. The main goal is to achieve significant progress in Nigeria towards Millennium Development Goal 3: "to eliminate gender disparity in primary and secondary education preferably by 2005 and to all levels of education no later than 2015". The project will achieve this through improving the quality of life of girls in Nigeria by a collaborative approach to girls' education.

The project takes an inter-sectoral approach, including interventions in the fields of health, water and sanitation and income generation activities. It focuses on six Northern states where many girls do not go to school at all and many drop out at an early age.

The first Output to Purpose review (evaluation) of GEP in March 2006 was very encouraging, noting that: 'Girls' school enrolments are up by, 15% or more... and "in the GEP schools actual girls' attendance is up by over 25% (with about 12,000 more girls regularly attending school than before) and gender gaps are about two thirds of their previous levels." The second review in March 2007 was equally positive.

The following interventions are undertaken under GEP:

- ✓ Raising national awareness in girl-child education and increase political and financial commitment through advocacy and sensitization of policy makers at all levels, as well as parents, school authorities, other leaders and girls' themselves.
- ✓ Developing schools' technical capacity and pedagogical skills to create a girl-friendly environment that enhances the participation of girls and improves learning outcomes.

- ✓ Establishing child-friendly school principles as minimum benchmarks for effective schools linked to community empowerment
- ✓ Creating school management committees with community involvement and participation.
- ✓ Collaborating with Government and other stakeholders in reviewing existing curricula and teaching materials for gender sensitivity.
- ✓ Promoting the employment of more female teachers to serve as role models and mentoring out-of-school girls
- ✓ Monitoring and evaluating of girls' education programmes and strengthening inspectorate
- ✓ Promoting synergy between girls' education programme and poverty alleviation programmes.
- ✓ Service delivery – on a partnership basis with all stakeholders providing more girls' only schools, improved facilities (instructional materials, water and girls' only toilets, libraries, etc.) for the promotion of quality education.
- ✓ Developing School Based Teacher Development Programme to help build Teachers capacities and skills so that the learning outcomes of the pupils will improve.
- ✓ Students' Tutoring, Mentoring and Counseling Programme (STUMEC) has been rolled out and is being implemented in the project States to help reduce the failure and drop out rates of girls and also of disadvantaged boys.
- ✓ Women Economic Empowerment initiative is being tried with some registered women groups so that they could start some income generating activities to be able to release daughters to school.

To date, over 900 schools in Nigeria are getting direct support from UNICEF.

UNICEF Nigeria has also been involved in the African Girls' Education Initiative (AGEI), which is a multi-country project sponsored by the Norwegian Government to promote the schooling of girls in Africa. Participation in this project has been yielding enormous dividends in terms of increased enrolment (about 28 per cent) and participation of girls in 22 pilot schools covered by the project.

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