



NIGERIA

# Every Child Learns

UNICEF Education Strategy 2019–2030

*Education in emergencies; learning assessment*

*Teaching at the right level to improve learning in Borno State, Nigeria*

**Problem.** For more than a decade, Borno State in Nigeria has experienced a tragic insurgency, which has negatively impacted children's access to education and learning. Teachers are in short supply and poorly trained, infrastructure to support learning is inadequate, and teaching methods have been poorly developed to encourage children's learning in their mother tongue. As a result, Borno State has some of the highest rates of children out-of-school in the country (nearly 75 per cent, or just over 1.4 million children), with the northeast region accounting for most children out of school. Even for those who are in school, they have been the lowest performing in acquiring foundational skills of literacy and numeracy.

**Solution.** Through UNICEF's partnership with DFID-North East Transition to Development programme, and in collaboration with Teaching at the Right Level (TaRL) Africa, UNICEF piloted an innovative remedial learning programme together with government and international partners to address some of the learning barriers children face in achieving literacy and numeracy proficiency. The TaRL pilot was launched in Maiduguri, Borno State, as a co-curricular remedial learning intervention using mother tongue instructional approaches to support learning based on children's existing competency levels. Lessons of this pilot are now being used to accelerate learning results for children at scale.

**Insurgent groups attacking education.** Borno State, located in the northeast of Nigeria, borders Niger, Chad and Cameroon. It has been difficult for the state to control due to its rugged terrain, weak infrastructure and porous borders that have facilitated unhindered movement of groups with neighboring countries.

The northeast region of Nigeria has the worst development indicators for children in the areas of health and education, with the population being among the poorest in the country. Even prior to the current insurgency, poor development indicators, poverty and high rates of out-of-school children reflected inequity within the country and contributed to the recruitment of young people into armed groups. Recent estimates for out-of-school children in Nigeria exceed 13 million, of which nearly 70 per cent are in the conflict-affected northeast region. In Borno State alone, the Nigeria Education Data Survey (NEDS) 2015 shows that 52 per cent of children (or 5.2 million children) have never attended school. The extent of learning crisis remains difficult to pinpoint because of weak learning assessment systems and generally poor reliability of assessment data for the northeast region. Nevertheless, available learning data for the region demonstrates that only 27.6 per cent of children are literate and only 28.6 per cent are numerate.



Like other countries ravaged by internal conflict, state managed education institutions have been targeted for attack. Insurgent groups aim to destroy formal education and replace it with forms of education aligned to their views and ideologies. In Borno State, attacks against education have been driven primarily by Boko Haram (meaning, “Western Education is forbidden”), and more recently by a splinter group affiliated with ISIS, who intend on introducing forms education predicated on religious teaching and radical ideologies that are aligned with their worldview.

The deliberate targeting, burning and looting of schools began in 2009, with schools repeatedly attacked over the years. Some children were even used as suicide bombers. During the most acute phases of the conflict, all schools in northeastern states were closed from December 2013 to June 2015. Currently, in Borno State, 824 out of 1,359 government schools (or nearly 61 per cent) remain closed due to insecurity and the ongoing conflict. This has left many children in the area still influenced by Boko Haram and ISIS-affiliated groups, and without opportunity for an education. The cumulative results of the conflict have included:

- An estimated 19,000 teachers displaced since 2009 and 645 killed
- Approximately 1,200 schools damaged or destroyed
- A context in which schools are regularly used for military purposes
- Ongoing intimidation and harassment of teachers targeted by insurgent groups
- Insufficient infrastructure and human resource capacities to respond to educational needs.
- A growing internally displaced person population in government-controlled areas such as Maiduguri
- Increased rates of early marriage, especially for girls, among the most vulnerable in the community
- Abduction of children and community members, the most notorious example being in Borno State during 2014 when 276 Nigerian schoolgirls were abducted by Boko Haram
- Legacies of trauma/psychosocial stress among those exposed to years of violence.

The conflict has thus strained an already weak education system, lowered the quality of learning, overstretched the educational facilities and pushed more children out of school.

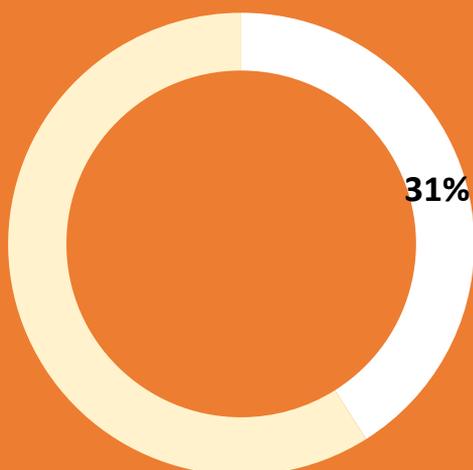
### **Improving learning results in a fragile conflict-affected context.**

Where insecurity and weak government capacity negatively affect education, the TaRL intervention takes a strategic approach to address specific determinants of the learning crisis. At a minimum, the TaRL intervention promises to ensure that those children who are in school will learn foundational skills they need for a better future. At its core, the intervention's theory of change is driven by an understanding that *if* children are supported with remedial co-curricular learning activities based on their levels of literacy and numeracy using mother-tongue as a medium of instruction, *then* children will quickly acquire foundational skills and get back on track with their learning. This, in turn, will help retain many children in the education system by reducing attrition rates, increase how communities value education due to its improved quality, and support children to become more empowered, reduce vulnerability, and mitigate the risks of violence and related issues associated with marginalization and poverty.



**Approaches to improving learning for marginalized and conflict-affected children.** The TaRL intervention was piloted for three months in seven formal education and five Integrated Quranic Schools, reaching over 9,000 students across grades 4 to 6. It included the training of teachers to support children using appropriate pedagogic materials and instruction using the local mother-tongue of learners. The programme also focused on mentoring teachers for improved motivation and engagement, enhancing teachers' skills in assessing learning, re-grouping children by their learning levels to teach at the appropriate learning stage and facilitating active group-based learning and peer-to-peer student learning. This includes dedicating two hours per day with a focus on basic reading (Hausa) and numeracy skills over a six-month period. Monthly review meetings were also organised with mentors and master trainers to discuss feedback from the school visits and adapt strategies based on progress made. To provide reliable learning data, the TaRL pilot also conducted a baseline assessment of learners, which was also used to group children correctly according to learning levels, a mid-term review to support iterative programme learning, and an endline assessment to identify the results achieved by the pilot.

**Results achieved to improve children's learning.** The pilot achieved impressive results over three months: in reading, 68 per cent of students who could not read letters was reduced by 51 percentage points, to 17 per cent. The baseline of 14 per cent of children grades 4-6 could read a paragraph of 4 lines in the Hausa local language increased by 31 percentage points to 45 per cent. In arithmetic, the baseline of 11 per cent who were proficient in subtraction increased by 48 percentage points to 59 per cent.



31% increase in proportion of children able to read a 4-line paragraph in local language

**Key factors supporting improved learning outcomes.** The TaRL endline evaluation identified several factors that contributed to the programme’s success at improving children’s learning literacy and numeracy achievements. These included:



- Keeping children’s need at the forefront by building strong foundational skills – ability to read, write, express and do basic math; Implementation in the language(s) teachers can deliver and children are comfortable with and engaging children with simple activities that are fun.
- Improvement in teacher capacity and motivation through practical training of teachers by master trainers who themselves conducted practice classes first, and regular mentoring to provide instructional support and build rapport with the teachers.
- Creation of classroom environments conducive for learning through leveraging existing resources to make the pupil-teacher ratio manageable, designing spaces that children can participate in and promoting easy-to-use, simple and contextualized teaching/learning materials.
- Outcome-focused monitoring and management through periodic tracking of children’s learning progress and regular reviews feeding into iterative programme learning based on data and evidence.

### Cost effectiveness

For US\$478,856, the TaRL pilot programme reaches 9,207 children in Maiduguri (roughly \$52 per child).

The impact on children’s learning:

**51%**  
increase

Reading letters

**31%**  
increase

Reading paragraphs

**48%**  
increase

Proficiency in subtraction

The results achieved during the pilot of the TaRL programme in Borno State contributed to the government’s buy-in to scale up the intervention, including in neighboring states in the northeast of Nigeria such as Adamawa, Yobe Kaduna, Kano and Jigawa States. Key partnerships have also been strengthened with donors such as DFID-UK and the German Government-owned Bank (KfW) who have expressed interest in building on the results achieved and contributing to UNICEF’s work in tackling Nigeria’s deep-rooted learning crisis – so that “**Every Child Learns**”.

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