



For Every Nigerian Child: A Future

Education for marginalized girls and boys

An investment opportunity for the public and private sectors

The opportunity

In recent decades, Nigeria has made significant progress in improving education access and learning opportunities for children. Primary school attendance has risen from 61 per cent in 2016 to 68 per cent in 2021.¹ And gender parity in secondary school attendance has increased from 0.68 in 2016 to 1.03 in 2021 for the poorest children.¹

This progress is underpinned by tireless action from the government, UNICEF, communities and other partners. Now, redoubled investments are needed to expand on what we know works – to give every child a quality education and to secure the promise of a brighter future for generations to come.

With more than 10.2 million children out of school at the primary level and another 8.1 million at the junior secondary level,² Nigeria already accounts for more than 15 per cent of the global out-of-school population.³ And the population is set to grow further, creating a risk of even more children being left without an education. In fact, by 2050, 1 in 13 births will occur in Nigeria.⁴

With the right investments, we can turn this population challenge into an opportunity. By improving access to equitable, quality, and inclusive education for children in Nigeria, we can deliver on the right to education that is owed to every child. And we can also unlock positive economic and security impacts that will be felt the world over. But we need your support to achieve this.

The challenges

Multiple challenges face Nigeria's education sector. If we don't confront these challenges, we risk stalling progress and losing the gains we have already made for children.

High number of out of school children

10.2 million children of primary age and 8.1 million of junior secondary age are out of school in Nigeria.² Around 2 million are Almajiri children⁵, boys who are sent to distant locations to acquire Qur'anic education.⁶

Low retention and transition

Each year, 5.9 million children enter primary school, but only 2.4 million remain by the end of junior secondary⁵.

Poverty, gender inequality and strong social norms

Despite free basic education, 'school fees' create barriers for the poorest families. And, for girls, education is often undervalued. Only 15 per cent of the poorest girls attend junior secondary school.¹

Limited resources and capacity

Only 1.9 per cent of Nigeria's GDP is spent on education. Due to this underinvestment, there is only one junior secondary school for every five primary schools and a shortfall of 175,000 teachers.⁷

A learning crisis for Nigerian children

70 per cent of 10-year-olds in Nigeria cannot read a simple sentence.¹ Poor learning fuels school dropout.

Protracted conflict and insecurity in the north

The north of Nigeria is vulnerable to humanitarian crises and conflict. In 2021, 1,446 children were directly affected by school attacks, and learning was disrupted for 1.3 million children due to precautionary school closures.

UNICEF's sustainable response

The core of our education work is partnering with the government. UNICEF's experts help to develop national education strategies and ensure they have sufficient budgets. We promote stronger laws to make schools safer. And we help improve children's learning outcomes with better school curricula.

We also have a strong focus on children who are not in school. We offer alternative learning opportunities, such as catch-up classes for children who have missed long periods of schooling. And we develop programmes to help them return to formal schooling and complete their education.

Our education work covers all of Nigeria, but we have a key focus on the north, where conflict and humanitarian crises are threatening education.



The Girls Education Project Phase 3 (GEP3)

From 2012 to 2021, UNICEF, with generous support from the UK government, managed GEP3, a comprehensive programme to address barriers to education for girls in six states of northern Nigeria. Key programme components included:

- cash transfers to help families struggling with the costs of education
- community campaigns to encourage families to enroll their children in school
- engaging with female leaders to promote the value of girls' education in their communities
- teacher training to improve quality of education and sensitivity to the inclusion of girls.

Through GEP3, UNICEF provided **23,580 girls with cash transfers**, and **enrolled an additional 1.5 million girls in school**. An independent evaluation showed GEP3 to be highly effective in increasing girls' enrollment and retention, raising English and Hausa literacy levels, and positively shifting mindsets in support of girls' education.

The project had a cost-benefit ratio of 14.2 and an internal rate of return (IRR) of 10 per cent. Cash transfers had the highest IRR at 16 per cent followed by early learning interventions at 10 per cent IRR.

Low educational attainment, poor learning outcomes, and high fertility rates are undermining young women's social and economic development, sustaining cycles of intergenerational poverty and perpetuating inequalities in opportunities and outcomes. The silver lining is that we have effective models to overcome these challenges. We know what works.

UNICEF's priorities moving forward

UNICEF's work so far has proven effective in enabling pathways to education for marginalized children, including girls and children in the Almajiri system.

We ask you to **join us in our continued efforts** to:

- Work with the government to improve **planning, financing and delivery of education**, including in emergency contexts.
- Expand the use of **safe school minimum standards** and establish **early warning systems** for school attacks.
- Expand our **cash transfer programme** to reach more of the poorest families, especially in the north of Nigeria, to offset the financial and opportunity costs associated with schooling.
- Embed an effective model within the national education system to help **bring children who have never attended school into the classroom**.
- Provide cash support to **rehabilitate school infrastructure** and increase the number of **classrooms** as demand for education grows.
- Build on our experience and success with primary education to expand a replicable model to **retain and transition students**, especially girls, at the junior secondary level.
- Improve learning outcomes through **foundational literacy and numeracy programmes** in children's first languages, including local languages.
- Establish **alternative pathways to learning**, including **digital learning**, to facilitate learning continuity, mainstreaming and re-entry to formal school.

How you can invest

Private and public partners can invest in UNICEF's education programme in Nigeria in three sustainable ways:

Core Resources for Results is funding without restrictions to be used flexibly wherever the need is greatest. These vital funds can trial and scale up effective programmes, respond rapidly to crises, and implement innovative solutions.

Thematic funds for UNICEF's education programme enable you to precisely target your investments to UNICEF's education work in Nigeria while still providing the flexibility needed to deliver a strong return on investment.

Specific programmes enable donors to target funding toward specific results based on strategic priorities or philanthropic and corporate goals.

UNICEF is well positioned to build on the gains of getting girls into primary school to ensure retention and transition to secondary education. But we need your support to make it possible.

Why partner with UNICEF in Nigeria?

UNICEF is the partner of choice for private and public donors looking to achieve the greatest impact for children at the greatest scale, ensuring that no child is left behind. Our position within the United Nations gives us a unique convening power with the Government of Nigeria, along with non-governmental, civil society and private sector partners to influence change at the highest levels.

UNICEF plays a central role in national education planning at the highest levels through our work with the Government of Nigeria. But we also complement this with a strong field presence, reaching children, families and communities directly. We work in areas affected by humanitarian crisis, and we work for children of all ages – ensuring no one is left behind. In addition, our expertise beyond education – in health, child protection, nutrition, and much more – enables us to take an integrated approach. This means we combine our strategies across different sectors, ensuring we don't just support children's learning, but all their basic needs.

What your investment could do for children in Nigeria

US\$3 million

can remove financial barriers for 50,000 girls to enroll and be retained in school in northwest Nigeria.
16% internal rate of return

US\$1 million

can improve foundational literacy and numeracy for 25,000 girls to increase their likelihood of completing basic education in northwest and northeast Nigeria.
10% internal rate of return

US\$250,000

can provide 10,000 girls with menstrual hygiene management kits and skills to increase attendance and retention in junior secondary school.

US\$500,000

can provide life skills to 20,000 girls in junior secondary school in northern Nigeria.

US\$1.4 million

can provide school grants to 2,000 schools and support 600,000 children in the most marginalized areas with quality learning materials.

Endnotes

- ¹ National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) and UNICEF. (2022). *Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey 2021, Statistical Snapshot Report*. Abuja: National Bureau of Statistics and United Nations Children's Fund, at <<https://www.unicef.org/nigeria/media/6126/file/2021%20MICS%20Statistical%20Snapshots%20Report.pdf>>
- ² Universal Basic Education Commission (UBEC). (2018). *Digest of Basic Education Statistics for Public and Private Schools in Nigeria*. Abuja: UBEC, at <<https://education.gov.ng/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/DIGEST-OF-STATISTICS-PUBLIC-PRIVATE.pdf>>
- ³ Calculation based on total out-of-school population globally according to UNESCO Institute for Statistics.
- ⁴ UNICEF. (2017). *Generation 2030 Africa 2.0: Prioritizing investments in children to reap the demographic dividend*. New York: UNICEF, at <https://www.unicef.org/sites/default/files/press-releases/glo-media-Generation_2030_Africa_2.0.pdf>
- ⁵ Universal Basic Education Commission (UBEC). (2019). *2018/2019 Annual School Census*.
- ⁶ Under the Almajiri system, parents send their children, mostly boys aged 4 to 12, to distant locations to acquire Qur'anic education. Many rural and poor families who cannot afford formal schooling have made this choice. There are approximately 2 million Almajiri children in Nigeria.>
- ⁷ Data extracted from the 2018/19 Education Digest and the National Personnel Audit from the Universal Basic Education Commission. See <<https://education.gov.ng/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/2018-NATIONAL-PERSONNEL-AUDIT-REPORT-Oct.-2019.pdf>>



For more information contact:
Saadhna Panday-Soobrayan
Chief, Education, UNICEF Nigeria
spanday@unicef.org

UNICEF Nigeria
United Nations House
Plot 617/618, Diplomatic Drive
Central Business District
PMB 2851, Garki, Abuja, Nigeria

www.unicef.org/nigeria/

© United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)
August 2022

unicef  for every child