

SECURITY ISSUES IN THE NORTHEAST: THE ROLE OF UNITED NATIONS CHILDREN'S FUND IN ADDRESSING EDUCATIONAL CRISES IN BORNO STATE

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ABSTRACT

Security difficulties in northeastern Nigeria, notably in Borno state, have resulted in a major educational crisis. The Boko Haram insurgency in Borno state, Nigeria, has caused a major educational crisis, cumulating in murder of over 2,295 teachers and displacing thousands of students. In response, UNICEF has been working to provide emergency education assistance to affected children, enrolling approximately 750,000 children in schools constructing temporary learning spaces, and distributing educational resources. Although significant efforts have been made, major challenges persist, such as a 40% funding gap and the appalling conditions faced by displaced children. This report investigates UNICEF's role in addressing the educational crisis in Borno state. It focuses on the organization's activities, the obstacles they face, and the financing gaps in providing emergency education support to affected children. This paper aims to provide a complete picture of Borno state's educational crisis, as well as how UNICEF is addressing it. The findings proffer effective solutions to help to establish effective solutions for dealing with educational crises in conflict-affected areas, as well as guide policy and programming decisions to support the education sector in Borno state.

KEYWORDS: Security, UNICEF, Education, Borno State.

1 INTRODUCTION

In Northeast Nigeria, Borno State has been specifically affected by a long-lasting security crisis for over a decade. The Boko Haram insurgency, which began in 2009, has resulted in unprecedented levels of violence, displacement, and humanitarian needs. Despite the security challenges, education remains a critical component of the humanitarian response, providing a sense of normalcy and stability for children, promoting social cohesion and community resilience, and supporting future economic growth and stability. The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) has been at the forefront of the humanitarian response, engaging in efforts to address the educational needs of children affected by the conflict through emergency education services, infrastructure rehabilitation, teacher training, and advocacy for children's rights. This paper aims to examine the role of UNICEF in addressing the educational crisis in Borno state, Northeast Nigeria, and offers a comprehensive analysis of the security situation the importance of education amidst the crisis, and the interventions implemented by UNICEF to support the education sector.

2. OVERVIEW OF SECURITY CHALLENGES IN BORNO STATE.

1. **Terrorism and Insurgency:** Boko Haram's violent campaign against Western-style education has led to the destruction of schools, abduction of students and teachers, and disruption of the education system. (INTERNATIONAL CRISESGROUP, 2019, P.5)

2. **Kidnappings and Abductions:** The group's tactic of kidnapping students and teachers has created a climate of fear, making it difficult for students to access education and for teachers to teach. (AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL, 2018, P.10)
3. **Displacement and Migration:** The conflict has led to the displaced of millions of people, including students and teachers which has led to a lack of skilled workers and a decline in educational outcomes.
4. **Military Response:** The Nigerian military's response to the insurgency has also been criticized for its heavy-handed approach, which has led to human rights abuses and further destabilization of the region.

2.1 IMPACT OF THESE CHALLENGES ON EDUCATION.

1. **School Closures:** The conflict has resulted in the closure of schools, with many students unable to access education due to fear of violence or displacement.
2. **Destruction of Infrastructure:** The destruction of schools and educational infrastructure has led to a shortage of classrooms, teachers, and educational materials.
3. **Disruption of Academic Calendar:** The education system has been severely impacted by the conflict, leaving many students unable to finish their studies as the academic calendar remains disrupted
4. **Teacher Shortages:** The abduction and displacement of teachers have led to a shortage of qualified educators, further exacerbating the education crisis. (UNICEF, 2020)

2.2 CONSEQUENCES OF THESE CHALLENGES.

1. **Decline in Educational Outcomes:** The conflict has led to a major drop in educational outcomes, with many students unable to access or complete their education.
2. **Shortage of Skilled Workers:** The conflict has led to a shortage of skilled workers, as many students are unable to access or complete their education.
3. **Economic Consequences:** The decline in educational outcomes has resulted in decreased economic productivity. This situation further worsens the economic challenges facing the region

3.0 UNICEF'S PRIMARY INITIATIVES IN BORNO STATE TO IMPROVE EDUCATIONAL OUTCOMES.

In response to the ongoing educational crises in Borno State, UNICEF has implemented several critical interventions aimed at improving access to quality education for vulnerable children and adolescents affected by conflict and the COVID-19 pandemic.

1. **Transformative Educational Programs:** UNICEF, in collaboration with the Norwegian government, has prioritized the transformation of educational systems through the 2023-2027 FGN/UNICEF-assisted Basic Education Program. This initiative focuses on skills development. It ensures that every child, particularly the most vulnerable, not only receives an education but also acquires essential skills for future success. (Abubakar, 2024). A significant component of this program is the National Skills Development Framework, which encompasses foundational, transferable, digital, and job-specific skills. This comprehensive framework outlines the core skills necessary for success in various fields, identifying essential means for realization through flexible and diverse learning pathways. Furthermore, the program includes initiatives that specifically target marginalized groups, ensuring that children from conflict-affected backgrounds are not left behind. (ABUBAKAR, 2024)
2. **Infrastructure Development and Support:** In collaboration with the European Union, UNICEF is addressing significant educational challenges in Borno State by constructing and renovating classrooms and toilet facilities. This initiative is expected to benefit at least 20,000 children and improve access to education for conflict-affected populations (UNICEF, 2021). The construction of 116 classrooms and 53 latrines is critical in supporting educational engagement in a region where over 1,400 schools have been destroyed due to conflict (UNICEF, 2021). These newly established facilities are designed not only to alleviate classroom congestion but also to enhance the learning environment, particularly for girls who face additional barriers to education.
3. **Innovative Learning Support in IDP Camps:** In addition to structural improvements, UNICEF has partnered with the Restoration of Hope Initiative (RoHI) to implement radio learning activities at the Muna Garage IDP Camp School. This initiative employs adolescent assistant teachers, such as Hauwa Bukar, to facilitate lessons for approximately 1,500 vulnerable children whose education has been significantly disrupted (UNICEF, 2021).

The program features radio broadcasts that provide lessons three times a week, allowing children to engage with educational content despite the challenges posed by displacement and conflict. These adolescent assistants play a crucial role by translating lessons from Hausa to the Kanuri language, ensuring that students fully comprehend the material. Moreover, they are responsible for maintaining classroom order, marking scripts, and enforcing hygiene practices to mitigate the spread of COVID-19. This initiative not only addresses immediate educational needs but also empowers youth like Bukar, who balances teaching duties with her own studies while providing financial support to her family (UNICEF, 2021).

3.1 IMPACT OF THESE INTERVENTIONS

UNICEF's programs in Borno State have significantly contributed to enhancing community engagement and providing qualitative support, as exemplified by the experiences of educators like Ngare Bukar, the head teacher at Modu Makaranta Primary School in Maiduguri. Bukar's journey from a lawyer to an educator reflects the profound impact of UNICEF's initiatives, particularly in fostering a sense of purpose and community among teachers and students affected by conflicts.

- 1. Teacher Training and Professional Development:** Through the Partnership for Learning for All (PLANE) project, UNICEF has facilitated on-the-job training for teachers in northeast Nigeria, including training in methodologies such as Teaching at the Right Level (TaRL) and psychosocial support. Bukar credits UNICEF for enhancing his teaching capabilities, noting that the TaRL methodology has transformed learning outcomes for children in his school. He explains, 'In three weeks, you will see children identifying letters or reading,' highlighting the program's effectiveness in enabling children to achieve competencies that allow them to pursue further education (UNICEF, 2024).
- 2. Community Support and Engagement:** Bukar's commitment to training other educators exemplifies the ripple effect of UNICEF's programs. After participating in various trainings, he organizes in-house sessions for his colleagues, ensuring that the knowledge gained is disseminated throughout the school. This approach not only enhances the skill sets of fellow teachers but also builds a supportive community dedicated to improving educational outcomes. Bukar states, "To support my teachers in their work better, I step down from all training, even if my school is not selected," illustrating his dedication to collective growth and development (UNICEF, 2024). This sense of community engagement is essential in areas where resources are limited, and collaboration can make a significant difference.
- 3. Resilience Amid Adversity:** Despite facing personal tragedies, including the loss of two brothers to armed conflict, Bukar remains optimistic about the future of education in Borno. His story reflects the resilience cultivated through UNICEF's interventions, which not only enhance educational practices but also contribute to a supportive community framework. By investing in teachers and addressing the holistic needs of students, UNICEF is making strides in creating a more stable and engaged educational landscape in Borno State. Additionally, UNICEF's programs in Borno have profoundly impacted community engagement and qualitative support by empowering educators, fostering collaboration, and addressing the psychosocial needs of students. Through initiatives like PLANE, UNICEF is not just improving educational outcomes but also nurturing a resilient community capable of overcoming the challenges posed by conflict.
- 4. Vocational Training and Empowerment:** Amina and Mohammed are among the 15,552 young people who have benefited from vocational training programs facilitated by UNICEF and BOSAME, funded through a European Union education intervention project. Amina, who was forced to drop out of school due to safety concerns and economic hardships, has turned her life around by acquiring skills that allow her to produce snacks and local drinks. She now earns approximately 15,000 naira (about 30 US dollars) monthly, enabling her to contribute to her family's needs. "With the money I earn from this business, my family and I survive," she shares, highlighting the direct benefits of vocational training on economic stability (UNICEF, 2021). This empowerment not only enhances individual livelihoods but also strengthens family units within the community.
- 5. Supportive Ecosystem for Young Entrepreneurs:** Similarly, Mohammed, who had never attended school but learned the trade of cobbling, exemplifies how vocational training can lead to economic independence. With his newfound skills, he now earns between 6,000 and 15,000 naira monthly, enabling him to support his family and contribute to household expenses. "It feels good to be able to support my family," he expresses, emphasizing the emotional and financial relief that comes from being able to contribute (UNICEF, 2021). The program's support in providing a startup fund of 9,000 naira allowed him to acquire the necessary materials to begin production. BOSAME's initiative to link skilled trainees with local business owners further enhances employment opportunities and community integration, helping young people establish sustainable livelihoods.
- 6. Building a Path to Education:** Both Amina and Mohammed's stories underscore the program's impact on not only immediate economic gains but also long-term educational goals. Amina is now pursuing her studies to

become a teacher while also supporting her siblings' education. Mohammed, who has resumed his education in Primary 5, is motivated to enroll his siblings as well. This focus on education, alongside vocational training, exemplifies a holistic approach to community development, enabling individuals to envision a brighter future despite the odds stacked against them.

7. **Community Engagement and Networking:** UNICEF and BOSAME's strategies for community engagement extend beyond individual success stories. The program encourages access to training facilities for all certified graduates, allowing them to utilize equipment for production and sales. "We have told our instructors to provide access to all young persons trained by us for free," explains Umar Lawan, BOSAME UNICEF Focal Officer, emphasizing the program's commitment to fostering a supportive network for young entrepreneurs (UNICEF, 2021). This collective approach strengthens community ties, enhances skill-sharing, and promotes an environment where young individuals can thrive together.

Overall, the impact of UNICEF's vocational training programs in Borno has created a ripple effect of empowerment, community engagement, and qualitative support. By equipping young people with practical skills and promoting educational opportunities, UNICEF is not only meeting critical demands but also laying the groundwork for a more resilient and self-sufficient community in northeast Nigeria.

4.0 KEY CHALLENGES FACED BY UNICEF IN BORNO STATE INTERVENTION

1. **Security Issues:** The abolition of traditional leadership institutions such as chiefs in Borno State has engendered an unstable security situation thereby hampering the operation of UNICEF and other humanitarian agencies. There are considerable threats to the security of UNICEF officers and their collaborators due to the existence of non-state actors and the threats of abductions, mugging, and other acts of violence (UNICEF 2020).
2. **Logistical Challenges:** The availability of transport and the ability to move people and goods for work or develop a dependable supply chain has been hindered by the ruin of roads, bridges, and buildings. The lack of basic services such as health care, education, and sanitation has aggravated the humanitarian crisis in Borno State and the region in general.
3. **Funding Limitations:** Because of the magnitude and nature of the humanitarian situation in Borno State, there are relatively high resources estimated for UNICEF's activities, yet funding shortfalls have proven the organization's response ineffective. Rescue activities are rightly emphasized and thus overshadow other places of emphasis for instance the case of development assistance is where funding is currently lacking for a necessary measure (UNICEF, 2020).
4. **Community Engagement and Social Mobilization:** The conflict has generated burdens on both social structures and cultural practices thereby making it difficult to interact with local populations and sensitize them on issues such as vaccination and nutrition. Trust accrual is low considering that even UNICEF as humanitarian aid organization is defeatable to engagement and inclusion of people for mobilization of communities through humanitarian organizations.
5. **Health and Nutrition Challenges:** There is high disease burden with incidences such as malaria, cholera, measles ranking very high and hence making women and children vulnerable to health challenges. Healthcare services especially maternal and child health care services are not embraced hence that has brought a health problem in Borno State.
6. **Education Challenges:** There has been interruption in the education system with many schools being destroyed or closed and teachers and students either displaced or killed due to the conflicts. Lack of access to educational facilities has brought great challenges to children and especially girls who are extremely at the risk of losing their right to education.

4.1 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR IMPROVING EDUCATIONAL INTERVENTIONS.

1. The Nigerian government should prioritize the protection of schools and educational infrastructure to ensure that students can access education safely. Humanitarian organizations should provide support to displaced students and teachers to ensure that they can continue their education and teaching. The government should also address the root causes of the conflict, including poverty, inequality, and lack of access to education, to prevent further violence and instability.
2. **Create Temporary Learning Environment:** Open basic learning structures within the IDP camps and host communities during the first weeks or months of displacement so children can immediately be enrolled into

school and receive their education. These spaces may be developed in tents, community halls or other structures and contain simple educational aids and equipment.

3. **Recruit and Train Teachers:** Hire teachers with adequate knowledge of the Boko Haram situation and best approach towards teaching young children in Borno State. Develop capacity on trauma sensitive Basic Education, Psychosocial Support and Conflict Sensitive Education to enable teachers to manage children caught up in the conflict. (UNICEF, 2018, PG 30).
4. **Focus on Girls' Education:** “As the timeless saying goes, if you educate a woman, you educate a nation.” Some measures that we believe would help include putting in place structural measures such as offering scholarships, mentorship and other forms of assistance for girls to attend school. And Address issues that affects girls in school like Early marriages, Gender based violence and poor sanitation facilities to enhance a favourable learning environment. (UNICEF, 2018, P.30)
5. **Sensitization:** Also, to increase education literacy to parents and other members of the community, consult with local communities with an aim of mobilizing them on education sensitive issues and education related causes. (HOFFMAN, 2017, P.60)

5.0 CONCLUSION

UNICEF has greatly increased its support to Borno State, reaching children and families affected by the conflict. It provides essential services like education, health, and nutrition, such as establishing temporary classrooms and training teachers. However, ongoing funding is necessary to maintain these educational programs. Education is crucial for restoring normalcy, promoting social integration, and enhancing problem-solving skills. There is an urgent need for governments, donors, and stakeholders to invest more in education in conflict-affected areas, especially in Borno State, to ensure sustainable development of educational systems.

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