



## **POLICY BRIEF**

### **Girl Child Education in Kano State**

**June 2018**



### **Introduction**

This policy brief is produced as part of the “Gulmakai Network: Working for Girls Education in Northern Nigeria project (GCEP)”, which is funded by the Malala Fund. This advocacy project is being implemented in Adamawa, Borno and Kano states by ACE Charity. The main objectives of this project are as follows:

- To create the environment for the re-enrolment and retention of out-of-school girls in secondary schools in the target states.
- To improve parents and community gatekeepers’ commitment to

support girl child education in selected communities in the target states.

- Ratification of the Child Rights Act in the target states.

These objectives are designed to support other ongoing efforts to improve girl child education outcomes in the three target states. This brief is the first in a series of policy briefs that will be produced for this project and will be used to create awareness of the challenges inhibiting against the capacity of girls to fulfil their potential, including proffering solutions -

effective policies and actions- to addressing the problem. Kano state is the focus of this brief which uses desk reviews, findings from discussions with relevant stakeholders, and results from scoping visits to develop its content.

### Overview of Girl Child Education in Northern Nigeria

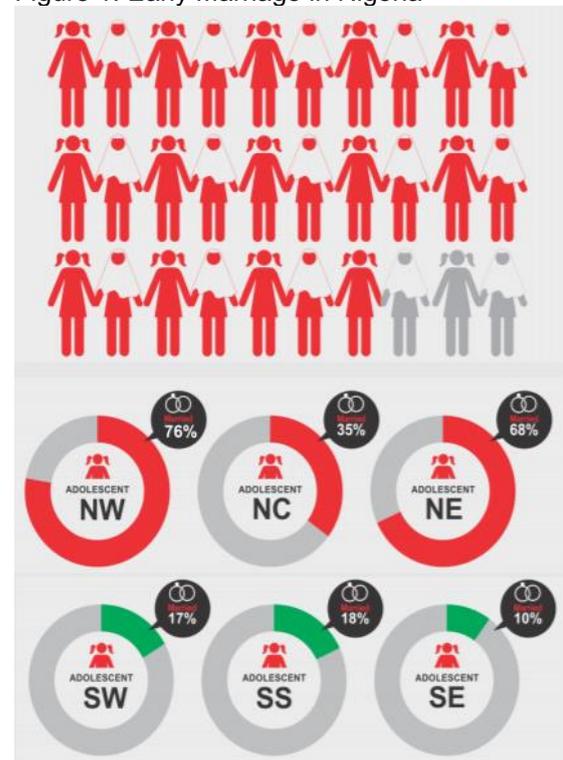
High gender inequity in education in Northern Nigeria places most young girls at a severe disadvantage. Less girls and women attend schools not because of their dwindling number in the population, but because of the futility of their education. Traditional parents in Northern Nigeria tend to be more concerned with ensuring that their daughters “get settled”, which in most cases means marriage immediately after secondary school. The challenge of poor education outcomes for the girl child cannot be divorced from the recurring challenge of early marriage or child marriage in Northern Nigeria especially considering that when girls go to school, they tend to delay marriage, have fewer but healthier children (i.e. improved sexual and reproductive health), exhibit improved nutritional outcomes, and contribute more to family income and national productivity.<sup>1</sup>

The recent National Demographic Health Survey Report (NDHS) (2013) indicates that 37.8% of girls/women have no education at all as against 21.2% of the boys/men with no education at all. The North West and North-Eastern parts of Nigeria account for the highest proportion of women with little or no education, i.e. 69% and 64% respectively. One of the main factors responsible for this is child/early marriage. Other factors include: poverty, child labour, illiteracy/ignorance, weak legislative frameworks, religious and cultural practices, and social stratification. Of all these factors, early marriage stands out as the main cause of poor education outcomes for girls in Northern Nigeria including Kano state. The underlying causes of early marriage are multifaceted but include poverty, the desire of parents to prevent promiscuity among their female

children, fear of rape, lack of education or employment opportunities for girls, and traditional perspectives of the primary role of women as wives and mothers (UNICEF, 2008).

The basis for the acceptance of early marriage among parents and communities in Northern Nigeria, in particular, largely emanates from the desire to preserve the value of virginity, fears about pre-marital sexual activity, and outdated socio-cultural and religious norms (see Figure 1). However, given low literacy levels among most parents, they are oblivious to its effects on the future and wellbeing of their female children. It is unfortunate and worrisome that the girl child has no power or choice to resist the pressure.

Figure 1: Early Marriage in Nigeria



Source: Africa Check

Based on the information presented in Figure 1, the North West and North East regions of Nigeria account for the highest number of girls that get married before they are 18 years, i.e. 76% and 68% in 2004 respectively.<sup>2</sup> These dire statistics informed the selection of Kano state as one

<sup>1</sup> British Council, Girls’ Education in Nigeria: Issues, Influencers, and Actions, Report 2014.

<sup>2</sup> Africa Check, Education for the Girl Child in Northern Nigeria, Briefing Report, July 2017

of the target states for the “Working for Girls Education in Northern Nigeria Project”.

### **Girl Child Education in Kano State**

Modern education (i.e. education whose origins can be traced to Nigeria’s colonial past) has not been fully accepted in Kano state because of its historical antecedents which linked education development with Christian missionary activities. There is still a lingering suspicion that Western education is an instrument of Christianity. Consequently, many parents -especially in rural areas, are reluctant to accept the importance of educating their male children let alone girls.

Girls in Kano are under-represented in

state level. Northern politicians consider the education of every Nigerian citizen desirable, but they are often confronted with the reality of prevalent religious and socio-cultural practices. In a somewhat democratic system the majority rules, and until the majority is convinced of the importance of changing certain social practices that stifle girl child education (e.g. early marriage), a politician seeking election must be aware and respectful to the feelings of voters, most of whom view girls through the traditional lens.

Limited political commitment to improving girl child education is evidenced by the continuous decline in sector allocations in budget appropriation. For instance, the

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post-primary or secondary education. The challenge of low enrolment of girls in Western-type secondary schools characterizes the social structure in the state. The transition rate of female students from the last year of primary school to secondary is low in Kano state, i.e. 19% in 2009 based on figures obtained from the Kano State Primary Education Board. Furthermore, according to the 2015 Nigeria National Education Data Survey (NEDS), “only 8% of the girls from the poorest households complete their primary education”.

In the introduction section of this policy brief, several factors were identified as being responsible for poor girl child education outcomes in Northern Nigeria. While poverty, limited exposure on the part of parents, and child marriage are leading causative factors, there is also the problem of the lack of political will or commitment on the part of government especially at the

share of the education sector in total state expenditure declined from 19% in 2007 to 17% in 2008. The share of recurrent expenditure in education, as a proportion of aggregate state recurrent expenditure, decline from 17% to 14%, and the share of capital expenditure decline from 39% to 33% during the same period.<sup>3</sup>

Furthermore, the weak education infrastructure -especially at the primary and post-primary levels- in the state serves as demonstrable evidence of the lack of political commitment towards improving girl child education outcomes. Dilapidated classrooms, inadequate learning or instructional materials for students, poor Water and Sanitation facilities (WaSH) in schools, limited number of tables and chairs, limited professional development opportunities for teachers, and high teacher to pupil ratio amongst others, characterize the state of secondary school education in Kano state. Having said this,

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<sup>3</sup> Education Sector Support Programme in Nigeria (ESSPIN), Annual Report: Kano State, 2016.

subsequent administrations in the state have initiated certain activities aimed at addressing the problem with support from development partners. For instance, since 2003 when the UNESCO/UNICEF MLA Study was conducted to assess student learning achievement, Kano has not had a mechanism to assess numeracy and literacy. With the support of the Education Sector Support Programme in Nigeria (ESSPIN), a DFID-funded program, Kano piloted an assessment of Primary 2 and Primary 4 students in 2009, ahead of an exercise that took place in five states in 2010.

Advocacy on the part of NGOs and CSOs has helped in galvanizing some action on the part of the government to reduce gender disparities in basic and secondary education in the state. For instance, the government has abolished all forms of fees for girls and has established some girls' only schools at both levels. Also, efforts have been made to increase the number of female teaching staff. The total number of teaching staff under the Kano State Universal Basic Education Board (KSUBEB) as at August 2009 was 44,095 out of which 8,220 (18%) were female. And the total number of teaching staff under State Secondary School Management Board (SSSMB) was 7,625 out of which 1,955 (25%) were female as at September 2010. Even though the proportion of female teachers to male teachers remains small, the current administration -through the SSSMB- is currently recruiting more female teachers as a way of encouraging the participation of girls in secondary education.

Although the drop-out rate among girls is significantly high compared to their male counterparts, existing capacity is insufficient to meet demand leading to high student-teacher ratio and this is partly responsible for low enrolment, particularly among girls. Schools and classrooms are insufficient to meet the demand for secondary education. In fact, some of the secondary schools visited by ACE Charity in the state had 1 teacher to about 80 students and even more in certain cases. Furthermore, out of 489 junior secondary

schools, 216 are disarticulated. Consequently, most secondary schools, especially within and around the Kano metropolitan area, employ the double-shifting system in a bid to accommodate as much students as possible.

Poverty remains a critical inhibiting factor to improved girl child education in Kano state. According to the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS), 62% of the population in the state live below the poverty line as at 2012. As a result, many households, especially in rural areas prioritize the education of their male children over the female children given associated costs. While the state government has abolished tuition fees in government-run schools, there are hidden or add-on costs that students are required to pay. These hidden or ancillary costs also casts some doubt on the capacity of the state government to fulfil its mandate of unrestricted access to basic education especially for Grades 1 to 9.

On average, most secondary schools in the state charge students N700 or US\$2 for development levy. Disconcertingly, most parents cannot afford this fee let alone purchase textbooks for their children. Some schools also charge students between N3,000 (i.e. US\$8) and N5,000 (i.e. US\$12) for school uniforms since the government hardly provides uniforms for students in government-owned secondary schools. Another factor that discourages many parents from sending their girl child to school is the cost of the final West African Secondary School Certificate Examination (WASSCE) or O' Level which costs N15,000, i.e. US\$50.

The Kano State government -through the Kano State Ministry of Education (SMoE)- has in the past subsidized the cost of WASSCE fees for some students; however, majority of them are unable to sit for the exams given their poor background. Again, the Kano State government does not currently provide scholarship for secondary education; the Kano State Scholarship Board (KSSB) only provides scholarships to a selected number of indigent students for tertiary or university education.

Ideally, SUBEB is supposed to ensure that the government delivers on its promise of free education; however, this is not the case. For one, the funds allocated by the government to the Universal Basic Education (UBE) scheme since it was launched in is not commensurate with the demands of this policy. This has resulted in poor implementation of the policy as KSUBEB lacks the funds and technical capacity to improve access to basic education (i.e. primary and junior secondary) for children, especially girls. In fact, the state government has not fully fulfilled its counterpart funding obligations for some development projects including those targeted at the education sector. Despite this challenge, development partners continue to provide systems strengthening support -especially in the areas of education planning, teacher development, and budget management- to relevant education authorities and administrators so that they are better positioned to improve access to quality basic education for boys and girls in the state. For instance, with support from ESSPIN & State Education Sector Programme (SESP), the Kano state government is making efforts to develop an Electronic Management Information (EMIS) system to improve data availability and encourage an evidence-based approach to planning and implementing education activities in all sub-sectors.

Currently, the UBE Act guarantees access to basic education from Grade 1 to 9, primary and junior secondary school. The implication of this is that many girls drop out after their junior secondary education thus, paving the way for them to be married off early by their parents. Consequently, several NGOs and CSOs are increasingly calling for an amendment to the existing UBE Act to accommodate senior secondary education. Amending the Act will enable many girls -especially in Northern Nigeria- to complete their secondary education at least before they are married off. Furthermore, girls who complete their secondary education are more likely to pursue tertiary education since they are eligible to access

scholarship from the state government through the Kano State Scholarship Board.

## **Conclusion**

The current environment for education in Northern Nigeria, including Kano State, does not favour the girl child. Socio-economic and socio-cultural constraints continue to prevent many girls and women from fulfilling their full potential. From a socio-economic standpoint, poverty is one of the main causes of poor girl child education outcomes in Northern Nigeria. An estimated 60% of the population in Kano state are categorized as 'poor'; consequently, many households cannot even afford to educate their male children let alone the females. When faced with a choice of whom to send to school, many households are more likely to prioritize their male children. Linked to this are typical gendered barriers to girl child education in Northern Nigeria. In addition to poverty, cultural proclivities around the role of the girl child as 'mother' and 'wife'. This age-old perception is difficult to change especially in rural areas. Adding to the problem is the reluctance of Northern politicians to challenge such norms especially as their political capital hinges on being sensitive to the religious and cultural leanings of majority of the electorate. This is one of the reasons why the Child Rights Act has yet to be passed and domesticated in most states in Northern Nigeria including Kano state. In the absence of political commitment towards transforming social norms that act as a barrier to improved girl child education outcomes, little is likely to be achieved in this regard. Domesticating the Child Rights Act in Kano State should improve the environment for girl child education to a reasonable extent. This is why ACE Charity is working closely with other Gulmakai Champions and NGOs to advocate for the passage and domestication of the Act in Kano state.

## **Recommendations**

There are several approaches to improving girl child education outcomes in Kano state. Some of these approaches require certain programs and policies designed to eliminate the tangible and intangible

barriers that prevent the girl child and women from realizing their full potential. These include:

- Passage and domestication of the Child Rights Act which reinforces the right of every child, especially the girl child, to quality basic education.
- Amendment of the UBE Act to enable girls complete their secondary education and stand a better chance of pursuing university education.
- Improving WaSH facilities in existing secondary schools including delivery of targeted sanitary and hygiene education to girls in girls-only secondary schools.
- Include the award of scholarships to indigent students for secondary education with a quota system that awards more scholarships to girls than boys.