



**BUILDING A SAFE AND PROSPEROUS  
FUTURE FOR NIGERIA'S CHILDREN  
THROUGH EDUCATION**

## BUILDING A SAFE AND PROSPEROUS FUTURE FOR NIGERIA'S CHILDREN THROUGH EDUCATION

**A humanitarian catastrophe is unfolding. North-east Nigeria is currently facing one of the worst humanitarian crises on the African continent. Nearly 400,000 children are severely malnourished<sup>1</sup>, which is life-threatening without treatment and nearly 3 million conflict affected children are in need of education humanitarian assistance.<sup>2</sup>**

The number of food insecure people – those without enough food to grow and develop normally, and stay healthy – has increased by around 50 per cent since March to more than 4.4 million.<sup>3</sup> Deadly diseases have followed, with cases of acute watery diarrhea and measles reported. Two years since the last case in Nigeria, polio has returned. Children have suffered grave violations of their rights, not only

being deprived of education, but being killed, abducted and sexually abused. Over 2.7 million children are in need of protection, including more than 20,000 children separated from their parents or guardians in the chaos.<sup>4</sup> As new areas become accessible, the true and devastating scale of the crisis is becoming clear. However, it receives very little attention, knowledge of it is not widespread and it is currently overshadowed by other serious emergencies in the world. UN's Emergency Relief Coordinator Stephan O'Brien has called the Lake Chad Basin crisis the most under-reported and most under-funded and least addressed of the big crises the world is currently facing.<sup>5</sup> The crisis needs urgent attention and action from all actors, and education must be at the heart of the response and the long-term change desperately needed for the children of north-east Nigeria.



A boy attending Save the Children's education programme in an IDP camp in Maiduguri.

Photo: Tommy Trenchard, Save the Children



### Snapshot of the education situation

- North-east Nigeria is faced with an emergency rooted in opposition to education. Targeted abductions and attacks on schools have left children and their parents in constant fear. More than 600 teachers have been reported murdered and 19,000 displaced, 1,200 schools have been damaged and destroyed.<sup>6</sup> Nearly 3 million conflict-affected children are in need of education humanitarian assistance.<sup>7</sup>
- The education needs are overwhelming both in IDP camps and in host communities, where more than 50% is under the age of 18.<sup>8</sup> Some informal learning centers are established, but not nearly enough to cater for all the children in need. There are still areas in the north-east which have not yet been accessed and remain with unknown humanitarian needs. It is expected that still more children will be identified as traumatized in varying degree in the worst affected areas.
- The crisis has deteriorated an already fragile and weak education system. Nigeria is reported to have the highest population of out of school children in the world.<sup>9</sup> The picture is particularly bleak in the north-east, a region systematically marginalized for decades. Literacy levels in the north-east are the lowest in the country, with 91 and 72 percent unable to read after completing grades 4 and 6, respectively, and 29 percent unable to do simple addition after finishing primary school.<sup>10</sup>

*“It is the lack of education that brought us into this cycle of poverty and lawlessness, and it is education that will bring us out of it.”*

(IBRAHIM, 46, FATHER TO FIVE) \*

### Children out of school – futures at stake

The terrorist group Jama'atu Ahlus Sunnah Lid Da'awati Wal Jihad, more commonly referred to as Boko Haram and loosely translated to “Western education is forbidden”, have carried out terrible atrocities in the north-east of Nigeria since 2009. Schools have been attacked and destroyed, teachers have been killed or forced to flee, thousands of school aged children have been kidnapped, raped and even recruited as suicide bombers. With high numbers of children in the north-east being out of school prior to the crisis, the conflict has exacerbated children's access to schooling. Millions of children are currently denied their right to education and a stable and prosperous future.

The ongoing conflict has displaced nearly 2 million people<sup>11</sup>, which has further deteriorated the access to schooling, as 55 % of the internally displaced people (IDPs) are children.<sup>12</sup> While some informal learning centres have been established in IDP camps, 80% of the IDP children live in host communities, and receive little or no education.<sup>13</sup> Many people still live in areas recently targeted by insurgents, or are trapped in between the fighting of the insurgents and the military. The insurgents have also carried out cross-border attacks, spreading the conflict into the neighboring countries of the Lake Chad Basin; Cameroon, Chad and Niger. The region

constitutes some of the poorest countries in the world, with limited capacity to cater for education needs.

The systematic marginalisation of the north of Nigeria for decades, combined with widespread corruption, deep rooted poverty and lack of trust in the government have undoubtedly fueled the conflict and contributed to its devastating impact. The emergency has also put pressure on an already weak and malfunctioning education system. Nigeria has an estimated 13.2 million school-age children (6–14 years old) not in school– the largest out-of-school population in the world. Of the 13.2 million, fully 12.6 million (95 percent)<sup>14</sup> are in the north of the country, reflecting a clear north/south divide. In Yobe, one of the conflict-affected states, the school non-attendance-rate was as low as 12% prior to the crisis.<sup>15</sup> The ongoing conflict has undoubtedly exacerbated the systematic drivers behind low school attendance in the region. In the World Economic Forum's (WEF) 2016-17 “Global Competitiveness Report”, Nigeria ranked 122nd out of 138 countries for quality of primary education and 136th out of 138 for primary education enrolment as a percentage of the total population.<sup>16</sup>

Free basic education was passed into law in 2004, but parents are still expected to pay for uniforms, materials and transport. Poverty is thus reported to be the main barrier for school attendance. With more than 50 % of the population in the north-east living below the poverty line<sup>17</sup>, many

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families cannot afford these costs. Other underlying factors to why Nigerian children are out of school are ethnicity, religion, geography and disability.<sup>18</sup> Being a muslim girl from the poorest household in the north-east of the country means your chances of going to school are meagre, if you also have a disability you will most likely never obtain your right to education. Before the uprisings started in 2009, 72% of children age 5–16 had never attended school in Borno

state, the hardest hit area of the crisis, while literacy rates were as low as 28% across all the north-eastern states, compared to 52% for the whole of Nigeria.<sup>19</sup> Differential access to education is demonstrated to be a driving factor behind the growing inequality in Nigeria.<sup>20</sup> Over the years, there is an increasing trend of private sector involvement in the establishment and funding of education in the country.



Isma'il.  
Photo: Sussan Akila,  
Save the Children

### “I learn new things every day”

Isma'il\* is a 10-year-old boy who was out of school for about 2 years because his family had to move as a result of the insurgency in Northeast Nigeria. When they moved to the IDP camp, his mother was sad to see that her son didn't receive any education as she strongly believes education will make him more useful to himself, the family and his community. She also knew how much her son enjoyed going to school and that he had great appetite for learning, even teaching his fellow students and younger siblings. When an early childhood learning space started recently in the camp where they are staying, it also attracted older children who are eager to learn. The trainers stay on to teach the older children like Isma'il. Both children and parents are excited about the chance to have a learning space right where they live.

“I am happy to be back to school because I learn new things every day which makes me smarter. When we came here, after sometime I realized I can no longer go to

school, I became sad. My best subject is mathematics, I am happy whenever I have an assignment in mathematics. I want to become a pilot, I sometime sit down and picture myself sitting in a plane and driving it. I know how to make paper planes, I make them for my siblings and we enjoy playing with them. I also make jets; I always tell my mother there is a difference between a plane and a jet. The military use jets to fly.

I believe going to school will help me achieve my dream, I am happy I now have a school just right where we live. Even though this cannot be compared to the school at home, being in school makes me feel like I am home again.

I help my younger ones with their assignments every time. I am happy to do it with them, especially when it is mathematics. We always finish our assignments before we go out to play, that way even our parents are happy with us. My father will always ask if we did our assignment, my mother too.

### The Chibok girls, and all the other girls, and boys...

On 14 April 2014, Boko Haram militants attacked a government secondary boarding school in Chibok, Borno state, where girls from surrounding areas had gone to take exams. Their kidnapping sparked one of the biggest global social media campaigns, with tweeters using the hashtag #BringBackOurGirls. 57 of the schoolgirls managed to escape in the immediate aftermath of the abduction, and in October 2016, 21 girls were released after the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and the Swiss government had acted as mediators in the talks between the government and the insurgents. Little is known about the fates of the almost 200 girls who are still missing.

And even less is known about the thousands of other children who have been abducted. Numbers are difficult to verify, but there is reason to believe that more than 7000 women and girls<sup>21</sup> and as many as 10 000 young boys<sup>22</sup> have been kidnapped, many forcefully taken from

their schools. While the girls are forced to marry the Boko Haram fighters, raped and even used as suicide bombers, the boys have been trained in boot camps in abandoned villages and forest hide-outs, and later forced to kill their own family and friends. Although some have later been rescued by the military, there is reason to be concerned about how the abductees, including children, are treated by the military after release. Some are held in military facilities for months with little clarity about their status as victims or detainees.

In recent months, the insurgents have increasingly used suicide and bomb attacks as the Nigerian military pushes the group out of territories they once controlled. But President Muhammadu Buhari has declared Boko Haram “technically” defeated, and said success in the campaign would be measured on the return of the Chibok girls and other abductees.

### The militarization of schools

In addition to the strategic attacks on schools, killing and kidnapping of teachers and students, the insurgents have also used schools for various purposes in areas where it has seized control, including to detain captives and to store and manufacture weapons.<sup>23</sup> In addition, research shows that Nigeria's security forces were temporarily stationed in some schools in Borno in 2013 and 2014, before the government closed all schools in the state. As of late 2015, forces continued to use schools in parts of the state where military operations were ongoing. In at least three of those cases, the insurgents apparently attacked the schools due to the presence of the military.<sup>24</sup>

As schools are now reopening in newly liberated areas, armed guards and military personnel still have a strong presence at schools for security reasons. Military personnel is also reported to have taken up teaching in the IDP camps. This is happening at the same time as Nigeria, as one of the first countries in the world, endorsed the Safe Schools Declaration in May 2015. The declaration is an international political commitment that lays out certain concrete measures that states can take in order to better protect students, teachers, and schools during times of armed conflict. If the Nigerian government is to fulfill its commitment as demonstrated by signing the declaration, it must take immediate steps to implement these concrete measures, as put forward in the *Guidelines for Protecting Schools and Universities from Military Use during Armed Conflict*.

### The education response to date

Although the education needs are overwhelming, the education sector has so far received limited funding and there are only a few actors currently implementing education programmes. Overall, the revised UN appeal is \$484 Million, of which \$121 Million (26%) has been covered. The UN appeal for the education sector is \$23.4 million, of which only 18 % has been covered.<sup>25</sup> Funding constraints remains the biggest challenge for agencies to scale up and expand coverage; only 27% of the 2016 Humanitarian Response Plan targeted school-aged children have been reached with education support leaving as many as 73% of the target group behind.<sup>26</sup>

Government and private schools in Maiduguri, the state capital of Borno state, and other areas that the military has recently gained control over, have reopened in recent months, many of them having been closed for two years or more. However, some schools are still unable to open because they are destroyed or because they lack the necessary teachers or learning materials. Some schools are also reported to be hosting IDPs.<sup>27</sup> As there are still parts of the affected states that are too dangerous to go to, particularly in Borno state, little information regarding education needs is available. However, based on recent interviews with IDPs, including parents and teachers in Maiduguri, most teachers, if not killed or abducted, left the villages when the insurgents attacked. Thus, there is reason to believe that there are very few schools operating in these areas.

As the current data and figures concerning the education sector is largely based on estimates, there remains an urgent need to carry out education assessments and revise



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the current humanitarian response plan as it relates to education. The national Education in Emergencies Working Group plans on leading a coordinated, joint education needs assessment in the coming months which will seek to address these key information gaps and provide partners with essential information for the planning and decision making of their response activities.

Furthermore, scaling up the immediate response will contribute enormously to life saving and life sustaining of children through interventions delivered using school as an avenue for provision of essential services including but not limited to malnutrition monitoring, hygiene promotion and psychosocial support. It will be equally important to ensure that children have access to quality and relevant learning opportunities when they are at school. All involved actors must therefore work together to ensure that a comprehensive, ambitious and integrated quality education response plan is implemented.

### Why we must invest in education

Save the Children knows that education is key to any humanitarian response. Denying children the right to learn at a time when its benefits are needed the most causes additional harm that can often persist a long time after the crisis has ceased. **Learning is not only a critical element of relief for the children having lived through the Nigerian conflict, but also a crucial investment in the future development of their society.** We must prevent further losses by giving children and youth of the north-east the chance to cope, rebuild their lives and shape their societies.

**Education breaks the vicious cycle of poverty.** Investment in education is essential to break the cycle of poverty, violence and inequality that have fueled the Nigerian crisis. Still education is often the first service suspended, and the last service restored in crisis-affected communities. **Education builds resilience and transform societies.** Education as a catalytic force must be strengthened in north-east Nigeria in order to minimise the harmful and traumatic effects the conflict have had on the children in the region.



Save the Children is targeting 3-5 year olds in our Early Childhood Care Development programmes. Due to the big needs, older children with no access to primary or secondary education also joins the smaller children.

Photo: Tommy Trenchard, Save the Children



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**Education is a right.** No matter what their status or where they are, children and youth have a right to keep learning. With more than one million children displaced, and nearly 3 million conflict-affected, a more lasting, coordinated education response is needed to ensure every child in the region reaches their full potential.

Finally; the children and their parents themselves prioritize and value education. **Education gives hope for the future.** As said by a mother of a boy attending one of Save the Children's education programmes in an IDP camp in Maiduguri:

"When the education program started here I was very happy. I am happy that my children can now go back to school, that this important part of their lives, learning, is now back. I can now be sure of the future again; I know they can take care of me when I am old. They will also grow to take care of themselves and the community too"<sup>28</sup>

There is a desperate need to prioritize education for children, whose chances of fulfilling their potential are slipping away with each further day out of school. An entire generation of children and youth has been shaped by violence, displacement and a lack of opportunity.

The affected states, but also the entire nation, have a common interest and shared responsibility to provide education for the children in the north-east, irrespective of their ethnicity, religion, household income or gender.

**There is no solution to the crisis in Nigeria which does not involve education.**

### Key actions required

Every day a child is out of school, is a day too many. The time is now to recognize that not only does education have an instrumental role to play in helping Nigeria's children heal the wounds from a terrible conflict, feel protected and acquire the necessary skills to progress, but education is also the foundation needed for the north-east to develop and prosper.

#### Nigerian government:

- Support scaling up of the education sector response by working with all involved partners through the Education in Emergencies Working Group, and ensure



Young and eager to learn.

Photo: Dan Stewart, Save the Children

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the humanitarian response reflects the true scale of education need, so that all children in the conflict affected states receive safe, protective, relevant and inclusive quality education.

- Address the deep-rooted causes to why children are out of school, including gender disparities. The alarmingly high out of school population, low enrollment and high illiteracy rates, high teacher-pupil ratios and the general weak state of the education sector in the north-east clearly shows that this is not only an emergency issue, but also a development issue that need a long-term and systematic approach.
- Take immediate steps to stop the military use of schools in line with the Safe Schools Declaration and the Guidelines on Protecting Schools and Universities from Military Use During Armed Conflict, and effectively implement the Safe Schools Initiative, and work with school authorities, community leaders and parents to ensure better security for the north-east region's schools.
- Ensure that schools are rebuilt and well-functioning with the necessary materials available, and plan for increased student population in areas with high out-of-school numbers prior to the crisis, by ensuring more classrooms and teachers are in place before IDPs return home.
- Provide incentives, psycho-social support and additional training to conflict-affected teachers so they continue to teach and support children's learning and wellbeing.
- Incentivize the households of vulnerable, orphaned and marginalized children to support these children's continued education by providing them with targeted and relevant assistance, including food and livelihood support.
- Roll out 'back to school' campaigns to ensure children and their families know classes have resumed, what level of support they will receive if they return to school and why it is important for children to keep going to school.

### Humanitarian actors:

- Recognise education as a key, if not critically enabling, component of an integrated approach to sustaining and protecting Nigeria's children during the current crisis.
- Support a scaling up of the education sector response by working with the Government of Nigeria, and all involved partners, to ensure the humanitarian response reflects the true scale of education need, describes the level of response required and requests

enough funding to ensure a much greater proportion of the affected school children are supported to return to school and receive safe, protective, relevant and inclusive quality education.

- Ensure education is prioritised in the HRP 2017 allocations, either through dedicated allocations to the education sector or by specifying applications that take a multi-sector approach and incorporates education priorities in funding allocation decisions.
- Support and work jointly with national and local NGOs and partners, including community groups and School Based Management Committees (SBMCs). Nigeria has a strong and thriving civil society with the local knowledge needed to pro-actively deal with a volatile situation, protect learning spaces, strengthen resilience and reach the people in need.
- Commit to undertake more regular assessments to ensure the impact of the emergency on children's education is better understood, particularly in respect to marginalized groups of children, and to enable the development of targeted responses to ensure their right to education is fulfilled.

### Donors:

- Fund Nigeria's humanitarian appeal for education and specify that a proportion of the money it commits to the food, water, nutrition and protection sectors must also go to schools-based programming, where appropriate.
- Recognise schools are an effective platform from which to holistically meet children's humanitarian needs and that scaling up the education response in northeast Nigeria is key to ensuring conflict-affected children not only survive but continue to progress through a long-term commitment to the strengthening of the education needs in the north-east.
- Encourage OCHA Nigeria and humanitarian partners to take a multi-sectoral approach to meeting the needs of conflict-affected children, which has schools at its centre.
- Encourage and financially support Nigerian government's effort to make schools safer and publicly denounce attacks on schools and illegal use of schools for military purposes.



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## Notes

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\* Name changed to protect identity, interview carried out by Save the Children 14th of October 2016.







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