

# Northern Nigeria: Approaches to Enrolling Girls in School and Providing a Meaningful Education to Empower Change

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## Abstract

This paper proposes that a combination of interventions is necessary to enrol and retain girls in school in Northern Nigeria, an essential pre-requisite for sustainable development. Some have very specific gender targeting such as rights based advocacy and scholarships for rural female teachers. However in addition it has been found that systemic improvement to schools are also necessary to make them places of learning for all children.

Scaling up such interventions in areas of acute deprivation and weak governance is problematic; approaches which can be embedded in decentralised forms of government are described. The provision of qualified female teachers who both come from and are likely to stay within a rural area is identified as *essential* in making schools safer, girl child friendly environments that promote learning and are accepted by parents.

## Introduction

Nigeria is a large, complex and essentially composite country, dominated by three ethnic groups: the Hausa, the Igbo and the Yoruba, with a predominately Islamic North and Christian / Animist South. According to the Human Development Report 2009, 34,1 % of the population in Nigeria lives below the national poverty line. These large numbers living below the poverty line imply that Nigeria's economic dependency on oil revenues has allowed elites to capture and control the nation's wealth, excluding the large majority of the population, many of whom live in poverty.

Federal legislation supports social inclusion and gender equality; however implementation is weak, with exclusionary informal norms such as ethnic bias, discrimination based on indigeneity, gender, disability, HIV status and age being dominant. In many Northern States the combined impact of gender relations and local interpretation of Islam is particularly severe, deeply constraining

women's access to services and assets, their voice in the household, their ability to organise and have voice in communities<sup>1</sup>. The table below starkly shows key differences in national human development indicators, with comparisons between southern, urban Lagos and Jigawa, one of the poorest Northern States (see table 1).

The Millennium Development Goals (MDG) achievement in Nigeria is constrained by these exclusionary dynamics that lead to both the poor and women as overlapping, marginalised and discriminated against groups.

Nigeria as other countries, is striving to ensure that all children have unfettered access to education through the implementation of the universal basic education programme and comprehensive education reforms. However, despite the efforts, the education sector is still characterized by a variety challenges. This has made access and participation in education for a large number of boys and girls a challenge. Statistics from the 2006

School Census show an enrolment figure of 24,422,918 (male -13,302,269, 54.5%; female - 11,120,649: 45.5%) indicating a gender parity of 83.6%. There are however large geographical differences, with more males enrolled in the primary schools than females in the North while a near parity is recorded in the South. About 65% of primary school children in the North are male while 35% are female. By and large, this fact is replicated by the gender imbalance in participation, whereby girls are relatively disadvantaged.

**Table 1:** Human Development Indicators for Nigeria, Jigawa and Lagos States

Human Development Indicators for Nigeria, Jigawa and Lagos States <sup>ii</sup>			
Indicator	National	Jigawa State	Lagos State
Poverty Incidence	54.7%	95%	63.6%
Life Expectancy	Men: 46 Women: 47	52.2 years	55 years
Net Enrolment Rate at Primary School	Urban: 69.5% Rural: 55.7% Girls: 56.5% Boys: 63.7%	Urban: 58.4% Rural: 27.1% Girls: 24% Boys: 32.3%	Urban: 82.4% Rural: 76.8% Girls: 79.3% Boys: 84.2%
Maternal Mortality rate per 100,000 live births	704 in 1999	Unknown	650
Access to safe water	12%	64.6%	83.4%
HIV/AIDS Prevalence	5.8%	Unknown	3.5%

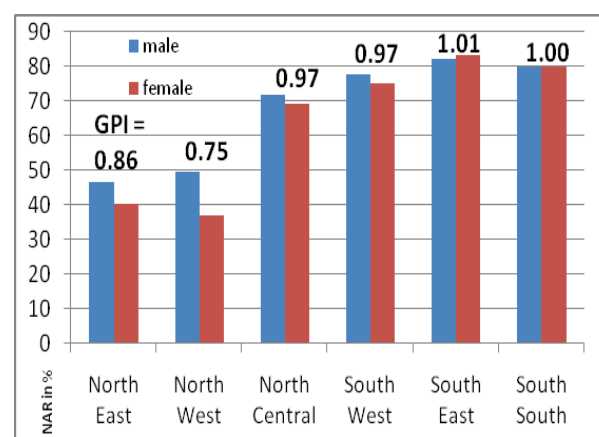
### Girls Education Project (GEP) in Nigeria

The Girls Education Project was designed and launched in 2005 following the successful implementation of African Girls' Education Initiative (AGEI – 2001-2003) by UNICEF Nigeria, with support from the Norwegian Government. AGEI

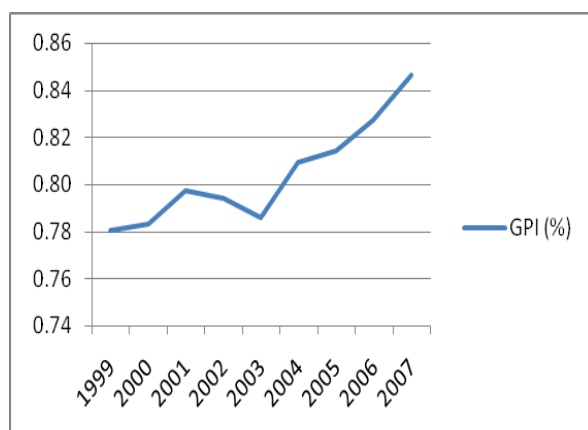
laid the foundations for the development of 'Strategy for Acceleration of Girls' Education in Nigeria (SAGEN) and then SAGEN Plus, with support from other major international development partners, which was launched by UNICEF and the Federal Minister of Education in July 2003. This resulted in the important Girls' Education Project (GEP) launched in December 2004, as a major partnership between FME, DFID and UNICEF in support of girls' education. The project initially implemented in six northern states of Nigeria (Borno, Jigawa, Bauchi, Katsina, Sokoto and Niger), with the worst disparities between boys' and girls' enrolment in primary school.

GEP seeks to bring about social and economic changes in poor traditional societies that have historically discriminated against girls and women. While accurate and up to date statistical information is lacking, all sources indicate (i) very low school enrolment rates and (ii) a major gender disparity against girls in the North West and North East zones of Nigeria, as shown in figure 1 and 2 below. Data also shows that though attendance rates for girls are improving, there is marginal increase among girls from the lowest quintile (figure 3).

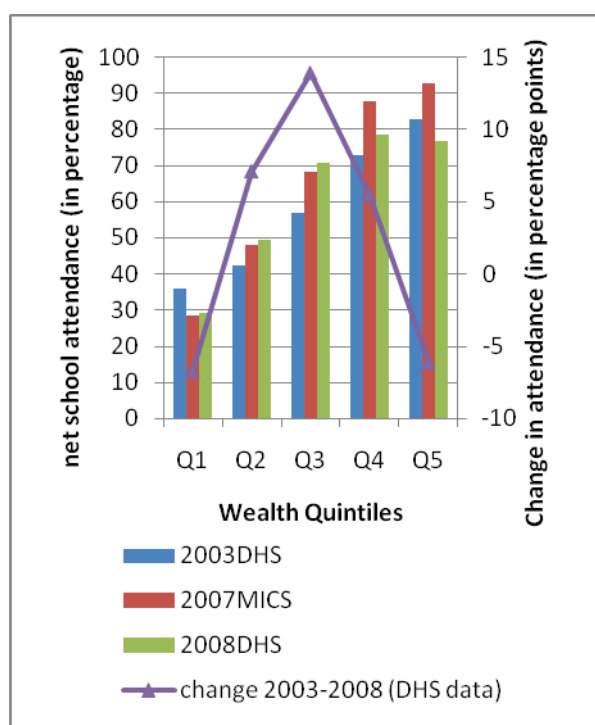
**Figure 1:** Gender Parity Index (GPI) and net attendance ratio (NAR) by the six geo political zones in Nigeria (DHS 2008)



**Figure 2:** Gender Parity Index (GPI) in percent for public primary schools



**Figure 3:** Net primary school attendance for girls in Nigeria per wealth quintile



GEP has evolved over time to promote more effective interventions such as advocacy with traditional leaders, female teacher training and community support modalities. It also seeks to mainstream improvements into the government education systems. A national component of the programme promotes the spread of best practice and gender education policy to other States. Equally, support is

provided in developing institutional and personnel capacity for gender and education evidence-based policy and strategy development, implementation planning and monitoring and evaluation. State support of the project includes institutional and personnel capacity building for mainstreaming gender initiatives to address gender constraints to education access, persistence and completion at state levels. This includes ensuring the coordination of project activities as well as those being implemented by government bodies, ensuring that credible and timely gender sensitive education annual plans are prepared, and pursuance of advocacy activities in support of improved girls' education. In addition, technical assistance is provided in three specific different areas of:

- (1) Improving state planning and data management systems with support located in the Directorate of Planning, Research and Statistics (DPRS) of the State Ministry of Education (SMOE). Key emphasis is laid in support towards development of a 10-year education sector strategic plan (ESP) that recognises and mainstreams gender issues in education.
- (2) Establishment of school based management committees (SBMCs) with support located in the Directorate of Planning, Research and Statistics (DPRS) of the State Universal Basic Education Board (SUBEB). Focus is given in ensuring that long and medium term sector plans (SESP/SESOP) are compliant with SUBEB's intentions to fund support to SBMCs to improve schools and the quality of learning, especially for girls. Additionally, support is provided in the SBMC pilot funding system and in preparation of viable, focussed School Based Development Plans (SBDP).
- (3) Improvement of quality in teaching and learning with support situated in

the State College of Education (SCOE). Support is directed towards assisting the Principal of the SCOE and the relevant Heads of Department, to produce innovative strategies, courses and approaches that will improve the quality of teaching and learning in UBE schools (primary and junior secondary). Further, support is provided in building institutional capacity and developing human relations strategies and relates its work to the teacher development sections of the SESP, SESOP and the State SEEDS documents, particularly where they relate to SBMCs and SBDPs.

Through these modalities, media communications and advocacy on national policy, successful interventions for girls' education are being more widely promoted across Northern Nigeria.

### **Approaches to Improving Boys and Girls Education in Nigeria**

Education, especially of girls is widely regarded, as one of the key strategies to bring about fundamental change; empowering and building human, social and economic capital. For example international comparisons show a 1% increase in the number of girls with secondary education, boosts annual per capita income growth by 0.3% and four years additional schooling lowers fertility rates<sup>iii</sup>.

Good quality Universal Basic Education (UBE) has been enshrined in the Nigerian constitution for over a decade, but subsequent legislation, federal finance and attention as part of the Presidential 'Seven Point Agenda' have made only slow progress in the past decade..

The 2009 EFA GMR<sup>iv</sup> reports Nigeria as a long way off track to meet the MDGs of universal primary education and gender equity in education. The GMR estimates Nigeria's net enrolment rate for the school

year ending in 2005 at 63%. About 8 million Nigerian children of primary school age are out of school, the largest number in the world. The majority are girls, concentrated in Northern States: a Gender Parity Index 0.83 disguises local disparities and the very low levels of schooling: *'in Nigeria, some 97% of poor Hausa-speaking girls have fewer than two years of education'*<sup>v</sup>

Reasons for Nigeria's poor performance are accurately summarised by the 2009 EFA GMR as "the price of weak governance". Institutional fragmentation, weak public financial management, corrupt ineffective procurement systems and an absence of long-term planning and budgeting to support basic services are all primary causes underlying the visible symptoms of failure: overcrowded classrooms, poorly trained teachers, few textbooks and outmoded teaching methods. The quality of Nigerian basic education is poor even by regional standards. Making better use of government funds is the key to meeting MDGs 2 and 3 in Nigeria; particularly as donor funding is small in proportion to the nation's substantial oil resources.

### **Interventions on the Broader Education Systems**

A fundamental strategy that has been adopted with considerable success under GEP is that by improving the supply of quality education, more boys and girls enrol in school. Where significant gender disparities already exists, this means that more of the new intake are girls than boys, as long as care is taken to tackle gender discrimination on cultural or religious grounds (see advocacy section below). For example as a result of the provision of books and other school requirements as an incentive for all children to enrol in school, statistics indicated a large surge in enrolment and a decline in the gender

disparity over a period of 2 -3 years, as shown in table 2 and 3 below.

**Table 2:** Girls' Increase in Enrolment in the Different focus schools/states between 2004 and 2008, in percentages

Bauchi	Borno	Katsina	Jigawa	Niger	Sokoto
71	90	75	105	50	135

**Table 3:** The exiting gender gaps by focus schools/states from 2004 until 2008 in percentages

Region	2004/05	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08
Bauchi	12	10	6	6
Borno	13	10	9	9
Katsina	27	24	20	19
Jigawa	20	19	16	16
Niger	35	26	20	19
Sokoto	39	40	25	26

Substantial work has been undertaken in building capacity in the Nigerian State Government's ability to collect data and analyse their education systems, identify the numerous problems and disparities (not least gender), and develop long and medium term gender sensitive strategic plans to improve the basic education system. However just as gender friendly legislation is often ignored, the 'fiscal federalism' and unaccountable government systems has limited the ability to which well constructed plans are actually budgeted and implemented in practice.

In some States lobbying through the national UNGEI apparatus<sup>vi</sup> has been successful in getting dedicated counterpart finance released in the Government budget<sup>vii</sup>.

However as reported in many diverse environments<sup>viii</sup>, a way to better utilise school finance has been through the promotion of decentralised recurrent school grants. School Based Management Committees (SBMC) are trained and then empowered through the grants awarded conditional upon local school plans that would include improvement of the school

environment, provision for increased girls' enrolment and participation in the classroom, and improved quality of educational inputs and services. Practice has found that in the first year most communities elect to repair infrastructure and provide sanitation, while learning materials and female specific interventions come later.

Although school grant expenditure is largely none gender specific, the net effect is to enrol and retain more children in school with the majority benefiting being girls. Substantive statistical evidence is not yet available on this approach, but since 2008 SBMC school grant provision has been rapidly scaled up and in 2010 over 4,500 schools are to receive support using both donor and government funds. This is thought likely to be both beneficial for a substantial population of girls (and boys), but also to be more sustainable if government financial systems continue to co-finance community backed initiatives such as SBMC. For instance in Bauchi in 2009, it was recorded that the state provides regular monthly finance (~N25m) to SUBEB to support girls' education activities since May 2008. The finance for Female scholarships (N19m) is 84% from the State far. Furthermore, using State finance 28 schools have had latrines provided in 2009. Prior to GEP many schools in Northern Nigeria had no access to safe water or sanitation at all. The national pupil to toilet ratio was 292:1 and nearly 3000:1 in some states (UNESCO/FME, 2002). GEP schools are now benefiting from the installation of boreholes and hand-pumps as well as separate toilets for girls and boys. This is directly impacting on their own lives and is also conveying positive messages to their families and communities.



One of the schools in focal areas provided with a borehole promoting girl's education

In summary, the introduction of decentralised finance to schools (grants) through school community committees (SBMC) are a useful modality for raising quality in schools and promoting female inclusion. Considerably more finance was used in the first phase of GEP providing traditional project inputs provision; facilities, materials, equipment and training at a relatively small number of schools (under 10% coverage). While this approach raised both the school enrolment and quality of service considerably, the level of support could not be replicated or sustained elsewhere and had the potentially adverse effect of draining students from other unsupported schools<sup>ix</sup>

### **Advocating for the Rights and Reality of Girls Education in Islamic Northern Nigerian**

GEP's communication strategy is driven by traditional and religious leaders, who consistently reinforce the key message that educating all children is a religious duty, drawing on evidence from the Qur'an and other religious texts. A frequently posed question is: "How can a society ensure there are sufficient female doctors and teachers to service the needs of its women if its daughters do not go to school?". They play a great role in the mobilisation of their community members in support of girls' education and the successes recorded in GEP are largely attributable to their immense contributions.



Chairman of Borno State Universal Basic Education Board enrolling a pupil into Primary One into the GEP supported Jauro Shehu Nomadic Community School

At the community level the newly formed School-based Management Committees conducted house to house campaigns to remind community members of their duty to send all their children to school and more recently in the 2006 enrolment campaign SBMCs have started to establish community data bases on all 'out of school children'. In some cases demand has been such that the challenge is now to ensure that a quality education is delivered so that the children are retained in school. For example the number of children registered in the Mainok Primary School, Borno State increased from 80 last year to over 300 for this year, and over half of the new entrants are girls.

The SBMCs have also helped to explode another myth – that women cannot deliberate in the same forums as men. Communities have adhered to the new SBMC policy that women must be members of these forums, whereas before met in separate 'Mother's Groups', which often had very little influence over decision-making.

GEP is grounded in a wider partnership represented by the Nigeria Girls' Education Initiative which was launched in 2005 to expand inclusion in the 2003 "Strategy for the Acceleration of Girls"

Education in Nigeria” (SAGEN), launched by the FGN and UNICEF in July 2003. NGEI, a strong ally in education for girls has influenced and mobilized resources particularly at the state levels for improving education for girls.

### **Scholarships for Female Trainee Teachers from Rural Areas**

The 2009 EFA GMR cited earlier again draws international attention to the huge global demand for well trained and motivated teachers without whom the education system cannot function. Allowing for attrition it estimates 3.8 million additional teachers are need by 2015 and the current deployment masks huge disparities between regions, the urban – rural divide and in the gender composition of the workforce.

Further evidence from a multi-country African – S. Asian study (including Nigeria) comes to the pessimistic conclusion that *‘most school systems are faced with what amounts to a teacher motivation crisis, which has far reaching implications for the MDGs’* and is a major factor in the provision of an unacceptably low quality of education to millions of children<sup>x</sup>. Low pay (close to the poverty line), poor conditions and bleak career prospects have had a major impact over the last three decades, particularly in rural areas where insufficient, haphazard incentive packages have proved insufficient to recruit or retain teachers.

The difficulty in posting teachers to rural areas is particularly severe for female teachers due to security, housing, social and cultural factors<sup>xi</sup>. In India 61% of urban, but only 24% of rural primary teachers were female, similarly in Zambia the proportion of female teachers in rural schools is half of that found in urban schools<sup>xii</sup>. In Malawi it was reported rural posts are refused be female teachers and

some seek only urban teachers as husbands to avoid such postings<sup>xiii</sup>.

Similar practices and problems with teacher postings in rural areas are also common in Nigeria, with ineffective systems of teacher training, deployment and career management. Many of the Nigerian State Colleges of Education have huge enrolment into the National Certificate of Education (NCE) courses, but most of the students are from urban areas and many with poor grades have enrolled as a means of ‘last resort’ to enter tertiary education. Some attempts to address this mismatch of teacher supply and demand are being piloted, for example at Oro College in Ilorin, Kwara State the student intake has been massively reduced and two other colleges converted to other purposes.

Although formal tuition fees have been abolished for female students in many State Colleges of Education, the costs of subsistence and security concerns over accommodation deter admissions from rural areas. The Nigerian Gender Education policy encourages *‘State Governments to design innovative strategies for a massive drive to train and deploy female teachers from within states to work as teachers, particularly in rural areas where teacher deployment is a challenge’*<sup>xiv</sup>.

Best practice suggests the deployment of more qualified women teachers to rural areas so that the schools will be more girl-child friendly, encourage girl participation, allay parental concerns and improve the quality of learning. Women teachers at primary level are considered more likely to make the classrooms and school a more welcoming, learning environment and discourage the use of corporal punishment (e.g. *bulala* whip that is unfortunately prevalent in many Nigerian schools).

In 2008 GEP introduced a new scheme of trainee teacher scholarships for women from rural areas with the worst teaching staff gender imbalance. It intends in the medium term to increase the proportion of qualified female teachers in rural areas who would act as role models and local mentors to poor rural girls. A key element of the scheme is that each rural district is awarded a discrete number of places and local women are sought who are much more likely to want to return, settle and teach in their own communities.

This scheme started with enthusiasm early in 2009 with 770 students being admitted using co-financing from GEP, government and private philanthropic funds. An annual stipend of around US\$330 is being provided by the scheme, while the State is covering all other additional tuition related costs. The Colleges of Education have been pro-active in helping with accommodation, for students with infants a special house had been rented, the kind of practical step needed to overcome a real barrier to higher education for women from rural communities. Mechanisms to mentor the students and keep links with their home communities (e.g. teaching practice) are being put in place by the Colleges.

The scheme has been very popular and an additional 1,110 new female trainees scheduled to start in 2010. Of these around 80% are government financed, suggesting the initiative will be both sustainable and scalable.

The impact on girls education in particular, as well as boys, when rural schools start to receive a steady flow of local qualified women teachers, with potential impacts on 100,000s of primary students. Nigeria with an additional 32 States also offers a huge potential for wider replication of this initiative.

The video documentary accompanying this paper and the boxed study below provide more graphic testimony of this scheme's practice and potential.

**Box Case study: Zainab - Young Mother and now Trainee Teacher (Aug 2009)**



1. Zainab, student teacher and child
2. Meeting with student teachers in Azare, Bauchi

A group of around 100 students welcomed us and quickly became animated to describe their happiness at being selected and to outline the challenges being faced; to get books and light for evening study, health care and for some child care. Zainab, aged 26 years was typical of the 43 young mothers who were also now trainee teachers. While calmly holding her two-month son Abudlhai, she recalled how for the last 3 years she has 'done nothing' since finishing secondary school, except raising her older two children. Her husband had agreed to the teacher scholarship scheme and now she was there, with a younger relative to help with her baby while she studied. The



programme provide a N 50,000 (\$320 / £200) annual scholarship of which she directly receives around 60% for living costs. This works out at N 5,000 (\$32/£20) per month during term, which Zainab had found adequate so far to cover expenses.

It seems to be a small price to pay for getting women who actually **want to teach** in rural Nigeria into colleges of education. Currently most colleges have very high levels of enrolment of urban student, many of whom are looking for a tertiary education but have absolutely no intention of working in the public school system.

### Summary

Currently, there is an upward trend of enrolment and retention rate of boys and girls in the GEP states. The increase of Integrated Quranic Education institutions is accompanied by an enhanced girls' participation. An education management information system has been set up and 3 states have now developed gender sensitive education sector plans. School based management committees have been established and are functioning. In the GEP schools the textbook ratio is on average of 1:3. Strong advocacy continues with the support of religious leaders and UNGEI. This is necessary in order for Nigeria to reach the Millennium Development Goals for gender equity and universal primary education.

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<sup>i</sup> DFID Nigeria Social Exclusion and Gender Inequality Assessment (2008, Hughes et al)

<sup>ii</sup> Data sourced from Education Data Survey (2004), Core Welfare Indicators (2006), Living Standards Survey (2004), UNDP (2008), [www.nigeriastat.gov.ng](http://www.nigeriastat.gov.ng) and [www.lagosstate.gov.ng/c/portal](http://www.lagosstate.gov.ng/c/portal)

<sup>iii</sup> Girls' Education in the 21st Century: Gender Equality, Empowerment and Economic Growth, World Bank 2008

<sup>iv</sup> Education For All Global Monitoring Report, UNESCO 2009

<sup>v</sup> Education For All Global Monitoring Report, UNESCO 2010

<sup>vi</sup> Nigeria's Girls Education Initiative (NGEI), State Chapters often have a Governor's wife as the Patron.

<sup>vii</sup> Bauchi State Government Budget, 2009

<sup>viii</sup> [Decentralized Decision-Making in Schools: The Theory and Evidence on School-Based Management](#) Felipe Barrera-Osorio, Tazeen Fasih, and Harry A. Patrinos with Lucrecia Santibanez. World Bank 2009

<sup>ix</sup> Fatuma Chege, Jamiu Oluwatoyin Zakariya, Christiana Okojie, Omo Aregbeyen (Independent Consultant GEP Review), UNICEF Nigeria, 2008

<sup>x</sup> Teacher Motivation in Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia, P. Bennell and K. Akyeamong, DFID Education Papers, Researching the Issues No. 71, 2007

<sup>xi</sup> School Management Councils: a lever for mobilising social capital in rural Punjab Pakistan, F. Khan 2007, Prospects Quarterly Review of Comparative Education. Vol 137 No.1 pp 57-79

<sup>xii</sup> Teacher Motivation in Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia, (cited above)

<sup>xiii</sup> Teacher Motivation and Incentives in Malawi, E.C. Kadzamira, Zomba Centre, University of Malawi, 2005

<sup>xiv</sup> National Policy on Gender in Basic Education, Nigeria Federal Ministry of Education, 2007