

## **Securing the Rights of Early School Children in a Terrorized Society: Implications for World Best Educational Practices**

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### **Abstract**

*Nigeria is currently witnessing severe and frantic insecurity challenges. Today, parent lives in absolute suspicion and constant fear of an impending disaster on their children; either in form of a bomb attack, abduction/kidnapping or both. Statistics shows that about eight million children of school age are not out of school in Nigeria. Many children are abused physically, mentally, sexually, psychologically and morally on daily basis. Some who are of school age are on the streets hawking while many live on the streets to become hoodlums tomorrow. Others are objects of rape, child labour even at an early age while a large number of these children are even used for rituals. Majority of the early education centres have no fence or security guards, even where these are available, the security system is very porous. Could this be a reflection of the backdrop of the overall gross insecurity in the country? Are parents gullible and insensitive to security needs of their children? Are teachers and administrators culpable? What roles could major stakeholders play to seal the leaking holes and ensure safety and security of school children in Nigeria? This study focuses on these and other issues and makes recommendations on the way forwards.*

**Keywords:** Insecurity, School Safety, Child's Rights, Child-Friendly Schools, Sexual violence

### **Introduction**

Security is an encompassing phenomenon that is paramount to individuals, entities, communities and even nations. Security has to do with self-preservation which is the first law of existence. Security implies a stable, relatively predicable environment in which an individual or group may pursue its ends or objectives without disruption, harm, danger and without fear of disturbance or injury. A country's national security therefore is concerned with the well-being, welfare and interest of her citizens, preservation of her sovereignty and territorial integrity against external aggression. The importance attached to security was well captured in the Nigerian constitution of 1999: Section 14(2) (b) of the constitution states that "the security and welfare of the people shall be the primary purpose of government", Invariably therefore, the Constitution has saddled the Government with the responsibility of safeguarding lives, property, welfare of Nigerians against both internal and external threats including other forms of danger. Thus it is incumbent on the Government to monitor public order and safety, including law and order.

It has however been observed that no matter how endowed and organized a country is, it can hardly be totally free/devoid of security challenges. The security challenges nations contend with are inextricably linked with their history, culture, social structure and economic conditions. In order to tackle security challenges nations established the armed forces. Police, security agencies and other Para-military forces. It is however to be noted that given the broader perspective of national security, government security agencies alone cannot provide the desired peaceful environment. The sobering plight of Africa's, indeed, Nigeria's children has continued to attract significant concern worldwide. (UNICEF,2011).

In view of this, few countries have banned corporal punishment outright, and there are still many countries where corporal punishment is a regular part of schooling. Both girls and boys are subjected to various forms of sexual violence in and around schools. The violent acts can be perpetrated by teachers or school administrators or, in other instances, by students (mostly male) against female

students and sometimes even against teachers. Gender violence also includes harassment and abuse based on heterosexism and homophobia. Bullying refers to the repeated negative actions of one or more students against another. It can include taunting, teasing and other forms of verbal abuse, physical violence and other harmful actions. (Bayden&Gobbs, 2007). While some forms of gang violence may also be categorized as bullying, the main differences between the two are the structural features of organized gangs and their use of weapons. Gangs and gang conflict may be located within a school or between schools, or they may exist outside schools but have a major impact on what happens inside schools by way of drug use, drug trafficking, extortion, gang, rape and so on. Cigno and Rosati (2011) assert that School as a 'target' refers to the way that the school itself might attract such forms of violence as arson, vandalism and destruction of teachers property, and how it features in less common forms of violence, such as spree shootings, hostage-taking by terrorists and kidnappings.

Child-friendly schools normally have clear policies, plans, measures and budgets to address these elements. They should review procedures constantly to make sure they keep up with any changes in the school or wider community. The Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) spells out the obligations of government to facilitate children's right to learn in a safe and secure environment, whether a conventional school or a designated learning space in an emergency. The CRC specifically calls on all States Parties to take appropriate measures to ensure protection of children from all forms of violence, injury, abuse and neglect, to ensure that school disciplines is administered in a manner consistent with the dignity of the child and to ensure children's right to the best possible health care (African Centre for Education and Development, 2007).

Makaramba (2009) argues that child-friendly schools and learning spaces should embrace these principles and standard in creating a learning environment where children are free from fear, anxiety, danger, disease, exploitation, harm or injury. They need to create a healthy, safe and protective environment through the provision of school-based health, nutrition, water and sanitation services and codes of conduct against violence.

### **Security Challenges to the Rights of Early School Children**

Millions of children attend schools that are reasonably unsafe most of the time. Schools are sometimes targets for violent attacks during civil conflicts, putting children at risk of kidnapping and forced recruitment as child soldiers, labourers or sex slaves. The UN Study on Violence against Children reveals that children worldwide are at risk of violence in and around the school. The threats range from rape, sexual abuse, stereotyping and other forms of humiliation. At times teachers, school authorities and peers are the perpetrators of such abuse. Sometimes schools fail to protect children from exposure to health hazards, such as pollution, toxic substances, noise and fume, or may place them in unhygienic environments that compromise their health. Schools may be careless by not adequately predicting, preventing and preparing for threats to children's health and safety in the face of a rapidly changing environment (UNDP, 2007).

Incensed by the grim conditions facing children, especially those in the developing world, such as Africa, the United Nations (UN) has since 1955, observed May 27 of each year as Children's Day worldwide, and drawn attention, annually, to matters affecting children of the world. So grim was the picture of the African child that the African Union (AU), in 1990 adopted an African Charter on children's rights and welfare and went ahead to ratify a recommendation that June 16 each year be observed as African Children's Day. Also, the UN in 2003 set aside November 18 every year as World Child Abuse Day. Despite these efforts the fate of children across the world appears to worsen. The need for the world to do more for children has become rather obvious. But how much parents, societies and governments would be willing to do in this regard is hardly worth the mention (UNDP, 2007; UNICEF, 2009).

Basu & Tzannatos (2012) opine that child abuse and neglect have since been accepted as normal trafficking and kidnapping have become the order of the day. Also worrisome are the discounts on the

health and feeding needs of the child, hence, cases of malnourishment and child morbidity remain unacceptably high even as problems traditionally associated with child bearing and upbringing have been further aggravated by the prevailing economic adversity and debilitating economic policies. Consequent upon this, this paper seeks to redress these insecurity issues, and secure the Nigerian children at home and in school.

**United Nations Provisions on Child's Rights**

Whereas, convention on the rights of the child: children's rights to healthy. Safe and protective environments:-

Article 2: Education must be provided without discrimination on any grounds.

Article 19: States Parties shall take all appropriate legislative, administrative, social and educational measures to protect the child from all forms of physical or mental violence, injury or abuse, neglect or negligent treatment, maltreatment or exploitation, including sexual abuse. Protective measures should include prevention and identification, reporting, referral, investigation, treatment and follow-up of instances of child maltreatment.

Article 24: States Parties recognize the right of children to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of health and agree to take appropriate measures to ensure the provision of necessary medical assistance and health care to all children, to combat disease and malnutrition, to provide adequate nutritious foods and clean drinking water, taking into consideration the dangers and risks of environmental pollution, to ensure that parents and children are informed, have access to education and are supported in the use of basic knowledge of child health and nutrition, hygiene and environmental sanitation and the prevention of accidents.

Article 28: States Parties are obliged to take all appropriate measures to ensure that school discipline is administered in a manner consistent with the child's human dignity.

Article 29: State Parties agree that the education of the child shall be directed to: (a) the development of the child's personality, talents and mental and physical abilities to their fullest potential; (b) The development of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, and for the principles enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations;... (d) The preparation of the child for responsible life in a free society, in the spirit of understanding, peace, tolerance, equality of sexes, and friendship among all peoples, ethnic, national and religious groups and persons of indigenous origin; (e) The development of respect for the natural environment. Article 37: States Parties shall ensure that children are not subjected to torture or other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment to punishment (UNICEF, 2011).

**Roles of School System in Improving Child-Friendly and Secured Schools**

Studies such as Chidero (2006), Ebigbo (2010) and Omede and Omede (2012) reported that most of the year, children spend more time at school than anywhere else other than their own home. At school, children need a secure, positive and comfortable environment to help them learn. The table below shows the assessments of risks, interventions and costs in a child-friendly school.

<b>RISK</b>	<b>SCHOOL INTERVENTION</b>	<b>COST</b>
<b>Redressing physical insecurity challenges</b>		
Traffic injuries fatalities en route to school or home	Teach traffic safety Assign older children or adults to accompany younger children through traffic Build barriers between recreation and traffic Areas	Minimal except for fencing, which can be expensive
Lacerations or other Injuries	Ensure that corners of furniture are rounded and well sanded especially for younger children Ensure that furniture is sturdy and well maintained Keep school grounds clean, paying special attention	No direct costs

<b>Redressing physical insecurity challenges</b>		
	<p>to hazards such as broken glass, needles, blades (instruct younger children to request assistance from an adult to remove such items) Make first aid available in the school (train teachers in basic response) Prepare a map of environment risks and an evacuation strategy To be used in the case of sudden onset natural disaster</p>	
Drowning	<p>Properly cover all wells Closely supervise or erects barriers to ditches or than bodies of water deeper 10 centimeters near schools Teach swimming and water safety with consideration for flood related drowning</p>	
Violence (beating, hitting weapons injuries, etc.)	<p>Advance institutional ethos of zero tolerance of violence Establish and implement policies against corporal punishments; Support alternative forms of discipline Establish and implement rules with consequences regarding pupil-to-pupil violence Engage law enforcement personnel as needed Hold dialogues in the school to empower children to protect themselves Provide adult supervision during break periods and intervene as necessary in children's arguments</p>	
Sexual violence	<p>Develop transparent physical environment (children visible in classrooms and around school) Establish and enforce policy of zero tolerance of teacher-to-child sexual violence Employment children, especially adolescent girls to identity and reduce risks and report incidents Evaluate whether distance or remoteness of school facilities (water, school garden, latrines) puts children at risk</p>	
Abduction	<p>Establish appropriate procedures (all adults register upon entering schools, etc.)</p>	
<b>Redressing Physiological insecurity challenges</b>		
Malaria (acquired at school or attendance)	<p>Eliminate standing water in school grounds and surrounding area Educate children impacting on malaria prevention, such as use of insecticide-treated mosquito nets (collaborate with public health officials to increase supply of mosquito nets to children and families) Teach children and teachers to recognize malaria</p>	Minimal
<b>Redressing physical insecurity challenges</b>		

Hunger and under nutrition	<p>symptoms and seek early treatment</p> <p>Engage children in community education to reduce standing water, increase use of insecticide-treated mosquito nets.</p> <p>Monitor children at risk</p> <p>Establish school feeding programmes, organize regular checks by health workers for malnutrition</p> <p>Support school gardens</p>	Free, if organized through partner and supported by the community
Common childhood disease	<p>Collaborate with health sector to ensure complete immunization coverage for all children in school</p> <p>Worms, diarrhea, cholera (diseases spread through fecal-oral transmission) Provide a source of safe drinking water</p> <p>Provide sex-segregated latrines</p> <p>Teach and encourage good hand-washing practices</p> <p>Provide water for washing near the latrines</p> <p>Provide a sanitary location for food preparation and Distribution</p> <p>Educate children regarding disease prevention</p> <p>Establishment of water and sanitation facilities, maintenance costs</p>	
Acute respiratory illness	Provide access to clean energy for cooking in homes and schools (smokeless or solar stoves)	
Dehydration	<p>Provide a source of potable water</p> <p>Teach water hygiene</p> <p>Educate teachers on ways to identify symptoms early and how to respond to fainting, seizures, etc.</p>	
HIV/AIDS	<p>Develop collaborations to ensure that the special needs of children with HIV and AIDs are met</p> <p>Provide safe storage area for medications</p>	
<b>Redressing Psychological insecurity challenges</b>		
Trauma of sexual abuse	<p>Ensure that physical injuries are dealt with</p> <p>Provide counseling and support</p> <p>Protect confidentiality</p> <p>Empower children through prevention</p> <p>Remove risks (such as the presence of a perpetrator in the school)</p> <p>Develop mechanisms for reporting incidents and deal with complaints effectively to unstill confidence in the process</p> <p>Enforce zero tolerance rules</p>	
Bullying (can also be a physical risk)	<p>Provide counseling to deal with children's damaged self-esteem and feelings of fear and humiliation</p> <p>Establish anti-bullying programmes, if appropriate</p>	

	Provide adult supervision before and after school and at breaks Enforce rules with regard to treatment of peers	
Trauma caused by an emergency conflict or forced migration due to climate change	Assess children for effects (such as loss of concentration, change in achievement levels, frequent distracting thoughts)Reduce risks to children and build their sense of security in their environment Develop counseling programmes with professional counselors Train teachers to identify and support children at risk	
Prejudice or exclusion	Support ethos of inclusion and respect Encourage dialogue regarding differences and develop understanding Build teacher's capacity to identify equity issues Develop mechanisms for reporting incidents and deal with complaints effectively to instill confidence in the process	

*Source: United Nations, UN Study on Schools as protective environments New York, 2006.*

### **The Need for Protective Aspects of the School Curriculum**

Curriculum in a child-friendly school must be well designed and well implemented. The children entering the school should be confident that they will acquire basic tools for learning and a range of knowledge and skills in various subjects that enable them to know about, participate in and contribute to their community and society. The skills-building curriculum should include critical information on nutrition and health, water and sanitation, environment education for sustainable development, climate change adoption and ways to deal with HIV and AIDS (UNDP, 2007).

When life skills include human rights education, children come to understand the nature of basic rights as set forth in the CRC and to apply human rights standards to real situation, from interpersonal to global levels. Children begin to think critically, grappling with dilemmas presented when people's rights come to conflict, such as in disputes caused safe water scarcity or other environment problems. Two other life skill components with implications for the curriculum and human rights are non-discriminatory education and peace education (Omede & Omede, 2012).

Non-discriminatory education challenges children's stereotypes of groups of people based on gender, race, religion, ethnicity, disability and other characteristics. It aims to prevent children from stigmatizing particular groups and end the pernicious effects of stigmatization on those ostracized groups. For example, if children from one ethnic group hear that children from another group are dirty or lazy, they may believe the rumours without questioning. Basu and Tzanntos (2012) affirm that marginalized groups may internalize the stereotypes. In non-discriminatory education, children confront stereotypes as they learn to understand, accept and appreciate cultural, class gender and ability differences. They learn to ask questions about the knowledge passed on to them by books, the media, adults and other children. For example if a science or mathematics textbook shows mostly pictures of men, children will learn to ask routinely, "where are the women?" they will learn to challenge the false belief that girls and women cannot perform well in mathematics and science or that boys cannot do certain handicrafts.

Finally, teachers and students openly explore issues of discrimination and the denial of human rights in the context of the underlying power structures that create inequality within a society. In peace education,

girls and boys learn how to avoid conflict and how to mediate and resolve conflicts. They learn to understand and challenge images of others as 'the enemy' presented in books, television and other media. Students begin to examine the causes of conflict, the relative merits of cooperation and competition and the place of trust within positive interpersonal relationships (Ebigbo,2010).

Cigno and Rosati (2011) accentuate that peace education curriculum pays attention to interpersonal violence, such as child abuse, bullying and harassment; which typically involve both direct and indirect violence including psychological violence. Peace-building and conflict-resolution skills can be relevant and useful when such resources as water, food and household energy are scarce. Additionally, peace education provides information about telephone hotlines, medical care and other services for victims of abuse, and about the risks of exploitation and trafficking. Burra (2005) observed that since the school day is short and topics are many, teachers and those who set national curriculum timetables must find ways to integrate these essential life skills into the Curriculum along with health, nutrition, peace-building and non-discrimination. Time must be set aside for specific lessons in these areas.

In emergency situations, standard curriculum practices may be disrupted and key teaching and learning materials may be lost. In conflict or post-conflict situations, the curriculum may no longer appear acceptable or relevant for the changing circumstances (Makaramba, 2009). This frequently creates an opportunity to develop a different curriculum, better adapted to the new situation and local needs. In constructing this new curriculum, the emergency situation is considered. A curriculum that integrates healing activities, such as dance, storytelling and music, not only affects children's ability to learn but also their capacity to heal and recover from the posttraumatic stress of being a victim or perpetrator of violence. Throughout an emergency, it is important for teacher and community workers to organize recreational opportunities for children.

### **Teacher's Roles in Securing School Children**

In child-friendly schools, teachers should strive for relevant and child-centred teaching and learning. First teachers must learn about healthy, safe environments and in turn teaches key concepts to children. School heads should organize the schools, and teachers should organize their classes to support a clean, healthy, protective environment for learning. For this to work as efficiently as possible, each classroom should do a risk assessment and prepare and maintain a disaggregated register of students, teachers and key community partners (Ekpenyong&Oarhe, 2007).

Teachers should note orphans and other vulnerable children, in particular. A similar register or database should be compiled and kept at the national level. Pre-service and in-serve training should be offered to teachers on life skills, child-centred and participatory teaching methods, peer education and ways to promote gender-sensitivity in classrooms. This may involve such simple strategies as teachers asking students to keep track of how many times the teacher calls on girls or boys during a lesson to ensure equal opportunities for students to participate (Ololube, Ubogu& Egbezor,2000).

Teachers and other school personnel need to be educated on the many forms of violent and ways to assess violence and around schools. With such training and preparedness, teachers will recognize early signs of domestic violence through children's behaviour changes or physical injuries. Because of their regular contact with children, teachers are often the first person to whom children will disclose abuse and exploitation. Teachers can help report and refer such cases in order to prevent further abuse and provide necessary health care or psychosocial support. Early warning signs of violence and abuse may include absence, disappearances or dropping out of school (Benitez, 2003).

Mohammed (2006) opines that most teachers show the girls and boys in their classes the same protective care they show their own children or siblings. But there are cases of teachers harassing girls or boys and violating children's rights. Schools must have a zero tolerance policy for such harassment or violence by teachers against girls or boys. Policies should be in place and enforced as teachers who

violate children will be prosecuted and expelled from teaching, not simply transferred to another school as is the case in some countries.

### **Roles of Parents and Community in School Children Security**

All stakeholders are needed to support and sustain a protective environment. The relationship between the school and the community is reciprocal. For instance, child-friendly school students bring lessons of daily care and health, hygiene and environmental education to their families and communities. Families and communities in turn provide financial and other support to maintain and repair the school facilities. Teachers, parents and community members are actively involved in the planning and implementation of educational monitoring and evaluation via parent teacher associations and other groups (Chidero, 2006).

In child-friendly schools, families and community members participate in school activities, after-school programmes and curricula preparation. One challenge in developing a child friendly school is violence prevention. Violence as defined by some families, communities and countries is considered acceptable behaviour in other areas. For example, corporal punishment-beatings, canings, other physical punishment-has been banned in some countries, while many countries still consider it to be an essential part of school discipline (Gusua,2008).

By bringing girls, boys, families, teachers and community members into the discussions, child protection issues-such as corporal punishment, sexual abuse, early marriage, child labour and other forms of exploitation-can be brought to the fore. Schools can influence attitudes and behaviours and can help break the silence around sensitive topics. By advocating for child rights and protection, school officials, teachers, parents and children can become catalysts for positive change in the lives of individual children, in communities and within society as a whole (African Centre for Education and Development, 2007).

UNDP (2007) reports that in some countries, political tension brings the risk of violence in the community. Schools that are tuned into these developments can gauge when it is time to take preventive measures. When the school community takes its responsibility to prepare seriously forward-thinking attention can bring about appropriate preventive measures.

### **Conclusion**

The premium placed on the development of the child by humankind is not misplaced; in fact, if the wisdom in the sing-song that children are the leaders of tomorrow is properly distilled, we would come to terms with the stark reality that they are indeed the future. Sadly however, parents and guardians and even stronger members of society exhibiting the might-is-right mentality, have religiously violated the rights of the child with impunity and brutal efficiency. Child-friendly schools work with families, communities, and medical and legal professionals to support children in need of special protection and help parents understand and respect children's rights. At the community level, health workers, teachers, police, social workers and others must be equipped with the skills and knowledge required to identify and respond to child protection problems. Students should also participate in peace education within a non-discriminatory school culture. Satz (2005) reiterates that life skills curricula enable children to develop listening and speaking skills, communication and negotiation skills, assertiveness and empathy. They learn self-protection, ways to recognize perilous situations, cope with and solve problems, make decisions and develop self-awareness and self-esteem.

### **Recommendations**

In child-friendly schools,attention should be given to the following elements:

1. Prediction:School authorities need to foresee imminent risk or possible dangers that could affect children within the school,its vicinity or the wider community. These may range from seasonal influenza to more dangerous potential pandemics such as a vain flu, or vector-borne diseases such as



malaria and dengue fever, which are emerging in colder climates as temperatures rise. They may be dangers posed by impending extreme weather or the school's proximity to hazardous sites.

2. Prevention: School authorities should take precautionary measures to avert risks to children's health and safety. Giving flu shots and other vaccines to all children at the right time helps prevent serious illness designated traffic crossing points for children can prevent vehicle accidents. Community mapping of environments risks and vulnerabilities to natural disasters can head off potential calamities. And using proper hand-washing procedures and following other health practices prevent the spread of disease.

3. Preparedness: schools must have resources and procedures in place deal swiftly and decisively with specific dangers to children's health and safety. Warning systems from a simple school bell to more sophisticated tools such as text messages, can allow schools to alert students, families and school personnel to danger or emergency. Training teachers and students in simple first-aid skills, installing fire extinguishers and emergency lighting, scheduling evacuation drills and creating designated assembly points, safe areas and ways of calling for assistance can help prepare the school community to respond to accidents and emergencies.

4. Protection: Prohibiting weapons in schools, providing appropriate supervision of play areas and designing classrooms so that activities within them can be easily observed from outside are ways to help prevent bullying, assaults and abuse in and around schools. Fencing off areas of potential danger, such as swimming pools or water wells, and clearing or spraying areas of stagnant water where mosquitoes can breed are all prevention measures that the school community can invest in to protect children and staff.

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