



The State of Education for Crises-affected Children and Adolescents in Nigeria

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Introduction



Imagine being a 12-year-old child forced to flee your home due to violence, losing not just your sense of security but also your education. This is the lived reality for millions of Nigerian children living in conflict-affected regions. Since 2009, when Boko Haram launched its insurgency in north-eastern Nigeria, communities in Borno, Yobe, and Adamawa states have endured relentless attacks on schools, including bombings, abductions, and killings, which have devastated the education system.

Over the past 15 years, more than 2,295 teachers have been killed, and over 19,000 have been displaced. Almost 1,400 schools have been destroyed, many of which remain closed due to severe damage or ongoing insecurity. Between 2009 and 2015, more than 910 schools were destroyed and at least 1,500 were forced to close, disrupting education for nearly 1 million school-age children. At the peak of the crisis, more than 57% of schools in Borno State were shut down, leaving over half of the state's learners without classrooms. By early 2016, about 952,000 children had been affected by prolonged school closures. Approximately 2.8 million children in Borno, Yobe, and Adamawa remain in need of education-in-emergencies support. For these children, education is no longer a guaranteed right but a rare privilege, thousands of schools remain shuttered, many teachers have fled; and countless students face an uncertain future.

This crisis reflects a broader national emergency. Nigeria currently has the highest number of out-of-school children in the world, an alarming 20 million, many of whom are affected by armed conflict, displacement, and economic hardship^[1].

^[1] Unicef (2024). Nigeria Appeal: Humanitarian Action for Children - Nigeria. Available From: <https://www.unicef.org/appeals/nigeria>

These children and adolescents face not just the immediate threat of violence but also the long-term consequences of interrupted learning, which could trap them in cycles of poverty and marginalization, especially among already vulnerable populations. The right to education, once promised in national commitments and global goals, now hangs in the balance for a generation of Nigerian children.

The challenges facing crisis-affected children in Nigeria

The barriers to education for crisis-affected children in Nigeria are complex and deeply rooted. While conflict-related destruction of school infrastructure is a serious concern, deeper structural and socio-economic challenges exacerbate the crisis.

- **Conflict and Insecurity:** In conflict zones, children fear for their safety on their way to school. In Borno state, over [1,700 children have been abducted by gunmen since 2014 with 17 mass school abductions recorded in six years](#). The abduction of schoolgirls, [attacks on education facilities, and the recruitment of children](#) into armed groups have created an environment of persistent fear, severely limiting children's access to education and undermining their ability to learn^[2].
- **Displacement:** Over [2.2 million](#) people are internally displaced in Northeast Nigeria due to insurgency and violence. **51%** of the displaced population are school age children between 3 to 17 years. Many of these children in displacement camps often lack access to formal education, with makeshift learning centres unable to meet the high demand. **60%** of children in IDP camps have no access to education, and host community schools face extreme capacity constraints, unable to accommodate additional displaced children
- **Economic Hardship:** For many families, education is a luxury they cannot afford. The economic impact of conflict forces children to work, beg, or engage in unsafe activities to support their families. [Child labour report](#) shows that **57.1%** of children ages 4 to 14 years in the northeast region of Nigeria are engaged in one form of economic activities. **27.9%** of these children are engaged in full-time work while **29.3%** are working and schooling simultaneously in order to make ends meet^[3].

^[2]Onapajo, H. (2025). Child Soldiers of Boko Haram: Why (and How) Children Join Armed Groups in Northeastern Nigeria. Journal of Asian and African Studies, 00219096251318237.

^[3]National Bureau of Statistics (NBS), 2022. Nigeria Child Labour Survey. Available From: <https://www.nigerianstat.gov.ng/pdfuploads/CHILD%20LABOUR%20REPORT%20FINAL.pdf>

- **Gender Disparities:** Girls are disproportionately affected by the education crisis. [60% \(more than 10 million\)](#) of the out of school children in Nigeria are girls. Cultural norms and safety concerns have prevented and discouraged parents and guardians from sending their girls to school. As a result, many face early marriage as an alternative to education.
- **Psychosocial Barriers:** Apart from the disruption of the educational activities caused by crises, the prolonged exposure to violent conflicts, displacements, loss of lives, properties, and livelihoods also affect the mental health and wellbeing of children in these areas. [Children exposed to conflict often suffer from trauma, making it difficult for them to focus and learn.](#) In addition, many schools lack counsellors or trauma-informed teachers to help students cope with their experiences.

Innovative Solutions:



Despite these challenges, efforts are underway to bring education to Nigeria's most vulnerable children. Some of these efforts include;

- **Accelerated Education Programs (AEPs):** These are flexible, age-appropriate programs designed to provide access to basic education for disadvantaged, out-of-school, and over-age children and youth. They use accelerated learning methodologies to help individuals catch up on missed education, often due to factors like poverty, conflict, or marginalization. These programs condense years of learning into shorter periods, helping out-of-school children catch up and reintegrate into formal education.

AEPs aim to equip learners with foundational skills and knowledge, enabling them to reintegrate into formal education or gain skills for vocational training. So far, **AEPs** in Nigeria have reached hundreds of thousands of out-of-school children, particularly in the northern regions and have made significant strides in addressing educational disparities among vulnerable populations. For example, the Education Crisis Response (**ECR**) Program which ran for 3 years from **2014 to 2017** reached more than 80,000 out of school children in Adamawa, Bauchi, Borno, Gombe and Yobe state and helped transition over 30,000 back into formal education^[4]. Also, the Opportunity to Learn (**OTL**) Program which is running from **2021 - 2026** has served over **34,000** out of school children in Borno, Yobe and Adamawa states ^[5]. A recent and notable addition is the Accelerated Basic Education Programme (**ABEP**), officially launched on **June 23, 2022**^[6]. **ABEP** builds on previous AEP models and has been piloted in Borno, Yobe, and Adamawa with encouraging results. The programme has demonstrated strong potential to close learning gaps for children affected by conflict and displacement. However, to ensure sustained impact and reach more marginalised learners across the country, there is an urgent need to scale up ABEP, expanding its geographical coverage, securing sustainable and long-term funding, and integrating it into national education policy frameworks. These steps are essential to promote equity and inclusion in education, ensuring that more excluded and over-age children can be brought back into school, catch up academically, and eventually reintegrate into formal or vocational education pathways.

○ **Safe Schools Initiative (SSI):** This is a program designed to protect students and educational institutions from violence and attacks, particularly in response to the 2014 Chibok schoolgirls abduction. The SSI is a collaborative effort involving government, private sector, civil society organizations, and international partners, and has led to the construction of fortified learning spaces and the deployment of security personnel to ensure a safe learning environment for children^[7].


○ **Community-Based Learning:** **NGOs** and local organizations are implementing alternative education models, including mobile schools, radio learning, and digital platforms, to reach children in remote or insecure areas. For example, **UNICEF** is supporting radio learning classes and clubs as alternative learning pathways in north-east Nigeria^[8]. These radio classes provide out of school children in IDP camps with access to education. The radio clubs are led by the children with supervision from a community-based mentor where children listen to pre-recorded education programs.

^[4] Education Crisis Response (2017). 'Education Crisis Response Project: Meeting Learning Needs in Crisis-affected Northeast Nigeria'. Final Report. Washington, DC: USAID.

^[5] Atiku Institute for Development (2025). Opportunity to Learn (OTL). Available From: <https://aid-aun.org/index.php/projects/education/otl>

^[6] <https://reliefweb.int/report/nigeria/out-school-children-fg-plan-international-launch-accelerated-education-programme?>

^[7] Ogunode, N. J., Ayeni, E. O., & Daniel, A. A. (2024). Safe School Initiative Programme and Human Security in Nigeria. Information Horizon: AMERICAN Journal of Library and Information Science Innovation, 2(5), 110-121.

 **Psychosocial Support and Trauma-Informed Education:** Recognizing the impact of conflict on mental health, some schools and alternative learning centres are incorporating psychosocial support into their curriculum. Teachers and facilitators are being taught and trained on how to weave-in socio-emotional learning activities during lessons to help traumatized learners heal and strengthen their resilience. For example, the [*Education Crisis Response \(ECR\) Program trained over 1,000 non-formal facilitators*](#) on Social Emotional Learning (**SEL**) to enhance their capacity to support the psychosocial well-being, resilience, and academic engagement of conflict-affected children. To ensure this becomes the norm rather than the exception, there is an urgent need to institutionalise **SEL** and trauma-informed approaches by embedding them into both pre-service and in-service teacher training curricula. Equipping every teacher, not just a select few, with the tools to recognise and respond to trauma, can transform classrooms into spaces of healing and hope, especially for Nigeria's most vulnerable learners.

While these innovations have made significant strides in tackling the out of school crises for vulnerable children in conflict-affected regions, several gaps and issues still persist in their implementation. Firstly, funding shortage impedes the sustainability of these programs. Most of these innovations are donor-driven with limited financial commitment from the government. In some cases, they are seen as **NGO**-led interventions rather than an integral part of the education system. Another issue lies in the coordination of these programs. Different stakeholders including government, **NGOs**, and donors often operate independently, leading to overlaps and duplication in the delivery of innovations. In addition, poor learning facilities including accessible and conducive learning space and learning materials often affect the effectiveness of education solutions. Furthermore, inconsistent and weak monitoring and assessment systems make it difficult to track learner progress which could affect their transition back into formal education. Finally, many vulnerable children, particularly in hard-to-reach, remote, and high-risk areas remain unreached due to the unavailability of basic infrastructure such as roads and commute networks.


^[8] UNICEF, 2023. Radio Learning Brings Hope and Education to Displaced Children like Awana in North-East Nigeria. Available From: <https://www.unicef.org/nigeria/stories/radio-learningbrings-hope-and-education-displaced-children-awana-north-east-nigeria>


A Call to Action:



The fight for education in crisis-affected areas of Nigeria requires urgent attention and the participation of everyone. Government, civil society organizations, and individuals all have a role to play in ensuring equal access to quality education for vulnerable children.

- 🕒 **Scaling Up Accelerated Basic Education Programme (ABEP):** Governments and development partners should prioritise scaling up ABEP across underserved regions by allocating dedicated resources and integrating the programme into national and sub-national education sector plans.
- 🕒 **Strengthen and Scale Community-Based Learning Models:** Government and education stakeholders should formally recognise and incorporate community-based learning approaches, such as radio learning, mobile classrooms, and digital platforms, into education sector strategies, especially for crisis-affected regions. This will ensure continuity of learning for out-of-school children in hard-to-reach or insecure areas. In addition, development partners and government agencies should support the scale-up of successful community-led models by investing in locally driven innovations, training community mentors, and expanding access to low-tech and no-tech learning solutions. Empowering communities to take ownership of education delivery strengthens sustainability and resilience in fragile contexts.

 **Institutionalising Psychosocial Support and SEL:** The Federal Ministry of Education, in collaboration with teacher training institutions and regulatory bodies like Teachers Registration Council of Nigeria (TRCN) and National Commission for Colleges of Education (NCCE), should incorporate SEL and trauma-informed practices into pre-service curricula and ongoing in-service training programmes. In addition, a comprehensive national Social Emotional Learning (SEL) framework should be developed to guide curriculum design, teacher training, classroom practice, and monitoring, ensuring that all learners receive psychosocial support, particularly in emergency-affected contexts. Civil society organisations (CSOs) can complement these efforts by mobilising resources and equipping local educators with the practical skills needed to support trauma-affected children. Beyond the classroom, CSOs should collaborate with community leaders, parents, and youth to encourage continued learning and address social barriers such as child marriage, child labour, and stigma. This community-based approach strengthens local support systems and promotes emotional resilience and improved learning outcomes among vulnerable learners.

 **Prioritise and Institutionalise Education in Emergencies Funding:** To ensure timely, inclusive, and sustainable education responses in crisis-affected areas, urgent steps are needed to institutionalise funding for Education in Emergencies (EiE). This includes establishing a dedicated budget line for EiE within national and state education budgets to support targeted interventions such as accelerated education programmes, psychosocial support, alternative learning platforms, and safe learning spaces for displaced and vulnerable children; developing and implementing robust budget tracking and accountability mechanisms to monitor the allocation, disbursement, and impact of EiE funding, ensuring transparency and effective use of resources.

Education is not just a privilege; it is a fundamental human right. Ensuring that every child in Nigeria, regardless of their circumstances, has access to quality education is not just an investment in the future, but a moral responsibility. We cannot afford to let a generation of children be lost to conflict and crisis. The time to act is now.