

POLICY BRIEF

Fortress of Learning: A Secure Schools Initiative for Northern Nigeria.

A Case for the adoption and implementation of the National
Policy on Safety, Security and Violence Free Schools.





The current insecurity across the northeast caused by banditry and terrorism affects all aspects of human life in the region. So far, the various interventions from both state and non-state actors have significantly improved the situation on ground. However, in 2023, UNICEF estimated the total number of out-of-school children in Nigeria to be 20.2 million, while UNECO estimated the number to be 20million. More specifically, about 1.6 million children are still out of school in Adamawa, Borno, and Yobe states (UNICEF, 2023). Additionally, approximately 1.2 million children are out of school in Bauchi state alone (UNICEF 2022). These out-of-school numbers are not unconnected with incidences of insecurity (the most notorious acts of school-targeted terrorism: Chibok, Buni Yadi, GSS Damaturu, and Dapchi), poor education infrastructure, among other factors. We believe that the adoption and implementation of the National Policy NPSSVS in Bauchi, Borno, and Yobe will significantly reduce the rate of dropouts, improve enrollment, and enhance school safety and security in Northeast Nigeria.

PROBLEM STATEMENT

In Nigeria, the education sector faces significant challenges, with safety being one of the most pressing concerns.

Access to education in Nigeria is in dire straits. Statistics reveal that 1 in every of the world's out-of-school children is in Nigeria. Specifically, reports indicate that about 10.5 million children aged 5 to 14 are out of school; about 61 per cent of children aged 6 to 11 attend primary school regularly, while only 35.6 per cent of children between the ages of 36 and 59 months (3 – 5 years) are able to access early childhood education in Nigeria.

School children in Borno, Bauchi, Yobe, Jos, and Adamawa face significant security dangers, primarily from Boko Haram insurgency and armed bandits. Over the past decade, over 2,295 teachers have been killed and more than 1,400 schools destroyed in the region.

Kidnappings are prevalent, with high-profile incidents such as the Chibok and Dapchi abductions highlighting the risk.

Additionally, many schools remain closed due to security threats, depriving 3.5 million children of education. These dangers contribute to psychological trauma, reduced educational attainment, and a disrupted learning environment, significantly impacting children's future prospects.

Incidents like the kidnapping of the Chibok school girls and Dapchi school girls still remain green in the memories of Nigerians. Also, following the second term break in Gombe State in 2024, the Gombe State Ministry of Education directed schools to delay resumption till May 2024 due to the recent incidents of kidnapping in the area.

This decision was made with the utmost consideration for the safety and security of students and their families. School kidnappings have not only traumatized communities but have also led to widespread fear and a decline in school attendance, particularly among girls. According to UNICEF, more than 1,000 children have been abducted from schools since December 2020, highlighting the urgent need for enhanced safety measures in educational environments.

The implementation of the National Policy on Safety, Security, and Violence-Free Schools by state governments in Nigeria is vital for addressing the systemic issues of school safety.

It will not only protect children and teachers from violence and abductions but also restore confidence in the education system, encouraging higher enrollment and retention rates. Ensuring safe schools is a critical step towards achieving Sustainable Development Goal 4, which aims to provide inclusive and equitable quality education for all.



Safe School Declaration (SSD): In May 2015, SSD was opened for endorsement by countries at an international conference held in Oslo, Norway. The SSD was meant to provide countries with the impetus to express support for the protection of learners, teachers and learning environments from attack during times of armed conflict. The declaration commits to ensuring that all forms of educational pursuit continue during armed conflict and that countries implement concrete measures to deter the use of academic institutions by the military.

The Safe Schools Initiative: The Safe Schools Initiative was introduced in Nigeria on May 7, 2014, by the UN special envoy for global education to safeguard education in the country following the Chibok girls' kidnapping. The initiative has three key elements which are: Relocating at-risk students from violence-prone areas to safer regions and boarding schools in unaffected states; Implementing the safe school model in 10 schools within each of the three states impacted by the Boko Haram insurgency; Providing high-quality education to children affected by conflicts and residing in internally displaced persons (IDP) camps. Despite facing challenges in funding and logistics, these three components are part of the Nigerian government's commitment to ensuring school safety in the country.

Minimum Standards for Safe Schools: The Minimum standards was developed from the National Policy for Safety, Security and Violence free schools to harvest comprehensive tools that prescribe the bare minimum qualities and practices that schools must adhere to in order to keep learners, school users and schools safe, secure and violence free.

National Policy on Safety, Security, and Violence-Free Schools in Nigeria (NPSSSVFS): The NPSSSVFS provides a framework for a well-coordinated systems to support safety and security practices in schools across Nigeria bringing into focus the prevalence of human-induced and natural hazards in school environments as well as the violence and abuse perpetrated against learners while at school.

By signing up to the National Policy on Safety, Security, and Violence-Free Schools in Nigeria, state governments can access international support, technical expertise, partnering with public stakeholders and funding opportunities to bolster their efforts in safeguarding educational institutions for all.

RECOMMENDATIONS AND IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGIES:

1. The Commissioner of Education should adopt the National Policy for Safety, Security and Violence Free Schools for the States.
 - The Honourable Commissioner of Education to immediately set up a policy review committee headed by the Director of Policy or Director Quality Assurance to review and develop the State policy. The Committee to partner with the SCALE Team for Technical support.
 - The Policy Review Committee to conduct stakeholders engagement on the Policy to ensure that all Stakeholders are consulted and the policy is all inclusive within two weeks of its establishment.
 - The Committee to submit final draft and reports of engagement to the Honourable Commissioner within 30 days of inauguration.
2. The Commissioner should task the education Stakeholders and the Ministry of Education and SUBEB on the implementation of the Policy.
 - The Director of Finance to work with all Stakeholders to ensure that some components of implementation such as teachers training, renovation and stakeholders engagement are captured in 2025 budgets.
 - The Director of Finance to partner with USAID SCALE project to train all budget officers and Directors in the education sector MDAs to improve budget quality and improve performance.
 - The Director of Quality Assurance should partner with relevant Non-State Actors for training of teachers and school administrators on the implementation of the policy.
3. The Commissioner to strengthen Private Sector Collaboration towards improved investment in education.
 - The Commissioner to set up a Team in synergy with the Ministry of Budget, Economic Planning and Multilateral Coordination to review the Private Sector Engagement strategy and implement some of the recommendations in the education funding framework.

REFERENCES

- National Policy on Safety, Security and Violence Free Schools (NPSSSVFS)
- UNICEF 2023.
- UNESCO 2023.
- Bauchi, Borno and Yobe states official websites (State Accountant Generals report 2021,2022, and 2023)

ADVOCACY ASKS:

Domestication and implementation of the National Policy on Safety, Security and Violence-free Schools (NPSSVFS) in Bauchi, Yobe and Borno.

Increased budgetary release and performance in education for Infrastructure and school training on disaster and risk reduction, in Bauchi, Yobe and Borno.

