

Joint Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence – 8 February 2022 - Plan International Input

Introduction

My name is Laban Onisimus. I work for Plan International as the Education Lead in Nigeria.

I lead teams in development and humanitarian operations in conflict-affected regions of Nigeria focusing on child protection and education in emergencies. My work also involves influencing States' commitment to ensuring access to education and gender-responsive education financing – with an emphasis on the nexus of development and humanitarian intervention. I also work with partners across Nigeria and the West African region to improve gender-responsive education interventions in crises.

Background information

The protracted crisis in the Lake Chad Basin region remains one of the most severe humanitarian emergencies in the world, affecting the North East of Nigeria, the Far North region of Cameroon, the Lake region of Chad and the Diffa region in Niger- not forgetting the crisis in the Sahel region – Mali and Burkina Faso, as well as the ongoing and neglected conflict in Northwest Southwest Cameroon

More than 17 million people are living in the affected areas across the four countries of the Lake Chad Basin. 10.7 million people need humanitarian assistance to survive and more than 6 million of them are children. The recent increase in attacks in the Lake Chad region, in addition to the COVID- 19 pandemic, is adding new challenges to the already overwhelmed populations living in the region, exacerbating their vulnerabilities.

There are various reports citing an alarming 70% rise in rape and other forms of sexual violence in 2020 compared to the previous year, and that girls made up a quarter of all child victims of verified grave violations – and were mostly affected by rape, comprising 98% of all victims, followed by killing and maiming.

We are horrified to hear this large increase, as it is likely just the tip of the iceberg because sexual violence is typically underreported. It is also crucial to recognize

that though these are also the grave violations most associated with girls, we must not miss the impact the others have on them in order to better protect and prevent.

The following are key challenging issues in the NE Nigeria;

- Sexual violence against girls
- Abduction of children
- Attacks against schools
- Recruitment or use of girls for attacks

Sexual violence against girls

Thousands of adolescent girls have been denied their right to education and a dignified life because of the 11 years' crises in Northwest Nigeria and some parts of Chad, Niger and Cameroon. Horrific sexual violence against adolescent girls (10 to 19 yrs) is occurring in the conflict. Victims of sexual violence, including rape, experience physical, social, mental, emotional, sexual health problems and sometimes death, especially in areas lacking access to adequate healthcare and because of attacks on healthcare facilities. Because of its severe psychological and sociological impact on the survivor, sexual violence further escalates feelings of helplessness and weakness that can drain the victim's self-esteem and fuel a sense of vulnerability in the face of subsequent sexual violence.

Abduction of children

On the night of 14th –15th April 2014, 276 female students aged from 16 to 18 were abducted in Chibok, Borno State – Northwest Nigeria. This was the first case of abduction that got global attention – as I speak to you today, some of these girls are yet to return home. Some parents have died while waiting for them.

This was the most high profile incident – it has not stopped there: in December 2020, 333 girls were abducted in Kankara and 80 in Dandume. In 2021, the trend continued: 300 abducted in Jangebe in February, 136 in May in Tegina. The list goes on.

Attacks against schools

Ladies and gentlemen, may I remind you that a root cause of the crisis is hostility toward secular education, and it has gained notoriety for its repeated attacks on schools and universities, as well as teachers, administrators, and students, wreaking havoc on an already fragile education system.

Children have had to abandon their education after being displaced by violent attacks on their communities, and many teachers have been forced to flee to other states.

Recruitment or use of girls

I am going to shift the focus here to highlight the use of girls by armed groups, including especially those use as suicide bomber

Girls are normally viewed as less of a threat than their male counterparts.

Between June 2014, when the insurgent groups reportedly deployed its first female suicide bomber, and February 2018, about **468** women and girls have been deployed or arrested in **240 suicide attacks**, the most by any terrorist movement has used - killing roughly **1,200** and injuring some **3,000**.

What are we doing in responding the above challenges?

- Supporting to increase access to safe inclusive and quality primary and secondary education (formal) for both boys and, girls in particular in areas of displacement or return/resettlement.
- Provision of credible alternatives for relevant and flexible (Accelerated Basic Education Programmes) Non-Formal Education (NFE) opportunities for out of school children and youth
- Strengthening the capacities of public administration and community engagement (School based Management Committees) in management and delivery of safe inclusive quality education services

Our Recommendations

- Improve the security conditions for adolescent girls.
- Advocate for comprehensive and sustained measures to protect education from attack.
- Take measures to mitigate the security threats faced by adolescent girls as a result of the economic and associated food and water crises.
- Recognize that girls have their own specific rights, needs, and agency in humanitarian settings and require age-appropriate policy responses.
- Facilitate access to education, which responds to the specific needs of adolescent girls, particularly at secondary school level and particularly for those who are displaced, and deliver other education programmes and training which responds to their complex security needs.
- Increase funding for Development and Humanitarian aid to the Northeast

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