

## GIRLS' EDUCATION IN NIGERIA

Nigeria, Africa's most populous country, has 114 million people and more than 250 ethnic groups. Although Nigeria has had a National Policy on Education since 1981, it has not been implemented effectively and efficiently due to rapid population growth, insufficient political will, a long period of undemocratic governance, and poor management of scarce resources. Women and girls have been most affected by these negative factors. The national literacy rate for females is only 56%, compared to 72% for males, and in certain states the female literacy, enrolment and achievement rates are much lower. For example, girls' net enrolment in Sokoto, one of the six target states under the UNICEF African Girls' Education Initiative, is 15%, compared to 59% for boys.



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### THE BARRIERS

- **Poverty and economic issues.** With 70% of the population living below the poverty line, girls are often sent to generate income for families by selling wares in the market or on the street.
- **Early Marriage and Teenage Pregnancy.** These have also militated against girls' attendance, retention and achievement in schools. About 30% of school-age girls drop out of school having already begun childbearing before the age of 18.
- **Inadequate school infrastructure.** Classroom space, furniture, and equipment are lacking; many schools are in rugged and unsafe physical condition; water, health and sanitation facilities are inadequate; and pupil teacher ratios are high, with as many as 100 students in one class, especially in schools in urban slums.
- **Cultural and religious biases.** Many Nigerian parents, especially in large families with limited resources, enrol boys in school instead of or before girls. Some parents also keep their daughters out of school due to misinterpretation of the tenets of Islamic religion.
- **Gender bias in content and teaching and learning processes.** Boys are given more opportunities to ask and answer questions, to use learning materials, and to lead groups. Girls are given less time on task than boys in primary and secondary school science classes. Teachers' use corporal punishment and create an intimidating classroom environment.
- **Poorly qualified teachers.** By 1996 only 33% of all primary school teachers held the minimum Certificate of Education qualification mandated by the Government in 1989.

### UNICEF IN ACTION

In 2001, Nigeria joined the African Girls' Education Initiative (AGEI). UNICEF together with the Nigerian Government and its partners is involved in the following:

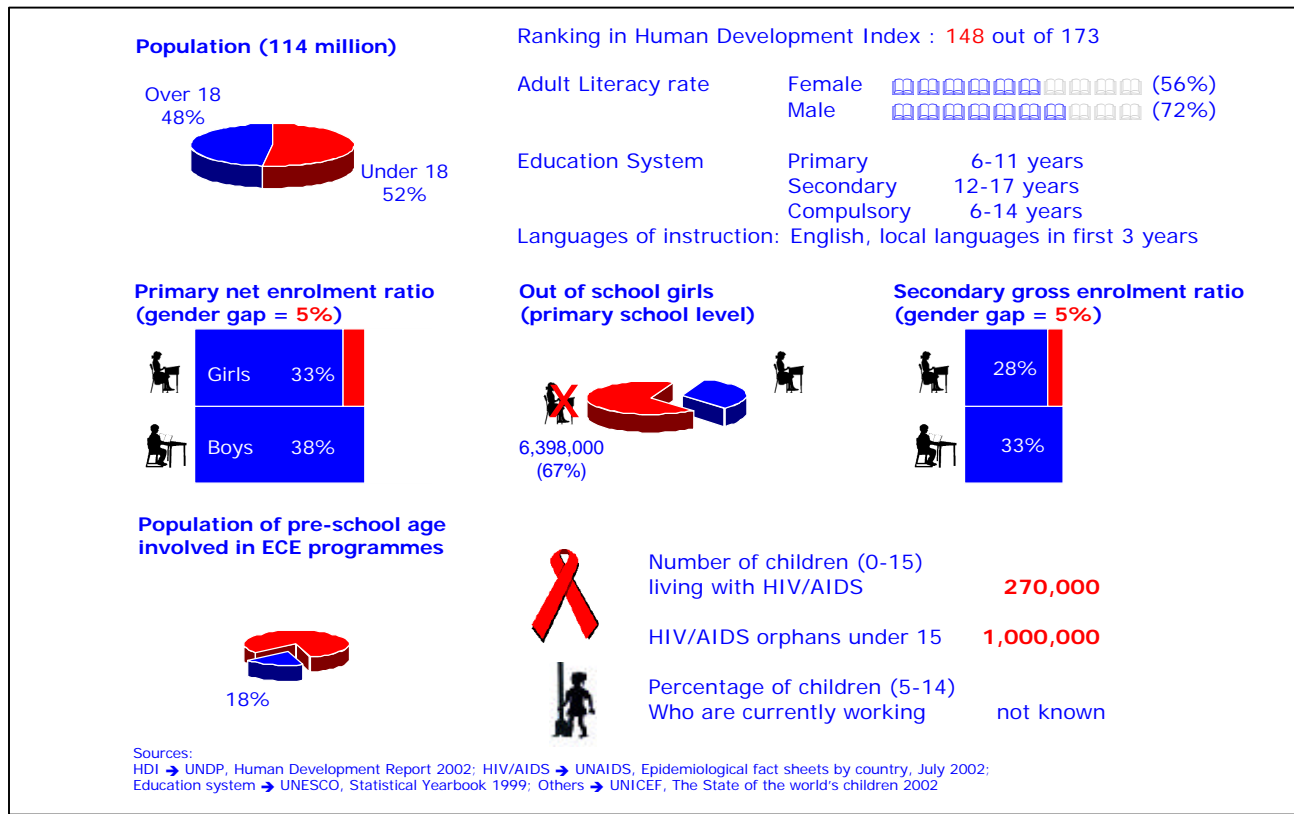
- Raising national awareness on girls' education through public awareness campaigns, rallies, and seminars.
- Building schools' technical capacity to develop girl-friendly school environments, and helping communities to sustain girls' education.
- Collaborating with Government and other stakeholders in reviewing existing curriculum and teaching materials for gender sensitivity.
- Promoting the employment of more female teachers to serve as role models and increase parents' confidence that their female children will not face sexual harassment in school.
- Promoting the development of pedagogical skills that will enhance the participation of girls and improve learning outcomes.

### KEY ACHIEVEMENTS

UNICEF has supported the Government in the following initiatives:

- Development of a National Policy on Education that acknowledges the need to equalize educational opportunities between girls and boys.
- Launching of a Universal Basic Education programme that will focus on improving access, retention, and quality of curriculum delivery for nine years of formal education. Early childhood care and development, pre-primary education, adult literacy, and education of all underserved groups, including girls, are integral components of the programme.
- Collaboration among key governmental institutions and other partners, including local communities in the six target states to plan implementation and monitoring of the AGEI.

## GIRLS' EDUCATION: NIGERIA AT A GLANCE



### FUTURE PLANS

Nigeria has been selected as a World Bank EFA Fast Track Initiative country and this will affect the scale and impact of future programmes in education.

UNICEF, together with the Government and its partners, will work in six target states with the lowest female literacy and enrolment rates in three key areas:

- Conducting advocacy activities by meeting with PTAs, traditional rulers, religious leaders, NGOs, and other community groups to build support for girls' education; promoting the employment of more female teachers; establishing more girls-only primary schools; and organizing rallies on the negative effects of child labour, especially for girls.
- Improving the quality of educational service delivery to enhance girls' participation and improve learning outcomes, retention, and achievement, by providing in-service training for teachers, administrators and inspectors, and by evaluating the curriculum for gender sensitivity.
- Improving the learning environment by refurbishing schools, providing classroom furniture, books and materials, water and toilets for each of five schools in six states.
- Promoting sustainability and community ownership of this initiative by empowering the community members and building capacity at the grass-roots level.