

The Right to Education of Internally Displaced Students in Schools: Issues, Challenges and Prospects.

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Introduction

Worldwide, the number of Internally Displaced People (IDP) is estimated at 51.2 million, according to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR: 2014). Nigeria has the largest population of displaced people in Africa (3.3 million IDP) and the third highest population of displaced people in the world, behind Syria (6.5 million people IDP) and Colombia (7 million IDP). Conflict, natural disasters, political uncertainty, religious conflict, ethnic violence, insurgency, militancy, kidnapping and recently terrorism are amongst the major causes of displacement in Nigeria. People tend to naturally move their family and property away from violent prone areas to more peaceful, stable and predictable surroundings. Though, it is important to note that displacement is not limited to poverty stricken, conflict affected or war ravaged countries alone. Yet displacement can also be found in middle income countries such as Georgia, Colombia, Azerbaijan, Syria and Turkey.

According to the Norwegian Refugee Council (2014) the number of people displaced as a result of brutal attacks by the Islamist armed group Boko Haram in north-eastern Nigeria is predicted at 912,000 cutting across states such as Borno, Yobe, Taraba, Nasarawa, Kaduna, Kano, Plateau and Zamfara. The government led counter-insurgency operation against Boko Haram and other continuous inter-communal conflict, notably in the Middle Belt region of Nigeria has only aggravated the level of displacement in this part of the country. On the average it is estimated that in 2013, an average of 2,800 Nigerians per day were forced to leave their homes and search for protection somewhere else as a result of conflict and persecution (Norwegian Refugee Council, 2014).

In periods of displacement children face a lot of hardship they are usually subjected to inhuman conditions such as violent attacks, illnesses, malnutrition, physical and emotional assault, community services, hygiene and sanitation, limited food and water. Under such circumstances, Internally Displaced Children (IDC) often become more prone to diseases and death, girls are believed to be more vulnerable to these problems especially sexual abuse. Additionally, internally displaced children lack access to education and health services which are critical for their survival later on in life. The chapter explicated the concerns raised by educational stakeholders and policy makers on the management of internally displaced students in schools in Nigeria and efforts to improve their academic performance.

Internally Displaced Children (IDC) in Nigeria and Right to Education

Every human being on earth has certain fundamental rights and one of such rights is the right to education. Internally displaced people are not exempted, they also have the right to education. The right to education is clearly stated in the Guiding Principles as contained in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and numerous major human rights treaties around the world including the United Nations Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement (UN, 2004). The United Nations (UN) General Assembly in 1959 insisted on free and compulsory primary education for all people around the world. This calls for free and compulsory education, and the prohibition of discrimination in education for all individuals irrespective of gender, race, country or location can be collectively regarded as *right to education*.

The right to education enables people to have an understanding of their fundamental rights and to have access to other essential rights such as civil and political rights of freedom of information, expression, right to vote, socio-economic rights and cultural rights and others. The right to education forms the cornerstone of all the other rights because it ensures the delivery of life-saving information, provides a sense of normality, and prevents people from getting involved in other activities like violence and criminal activities which are inimical to progress. Therefore the right to education is considered the “fourth pillar” of humanitarian assistance to victims of conflict, insurgency and displacement. It is regarded as vital as good nutrition, healthcare, and shelter.

The education of children even in conflict ravaged nations is of great importance to both the international community and the countries where these violent acts are being perpetuated.

According to the United Nations (2004) the right to education entails four essential areas; availability, accessibility, acceptability, and adaptability. These four key areas of the right to education are essential equally both in peaceful and conflict times. In the context of internal displacement these four areas must be considered as important factors that can determine the overall performance of internally displaced children (IDC).

1. Availability

It is the right of every child to have free and compulsory quality primary education and education in general. This should be available for all internally displaced children (IDC) regardless of where in the world, including Nigeria. Educational institutions such as schools should be available to all IDC, regardless of where their refugee camps or settlements are located. Availability entails providing sufficient number of school buildings, conducive sanitation facilities and toilets for both genders. Availability also entails material provision of financial and human resources required for schools to function optimally. This means that enough trained, well paid teachers as well as educational materials in these schools should be made available. The availability of these materials in schools will ensure that IDC perform well in school activities (Ibeanu, 2005).

2. Accessibility:

This is a crucial factor in terms of the right to education which can determine the overall performance of students, especially internally displaced children (IDC). Accessibility implies easy access, easy use, approachability, user friendliness, convenience, safety and security. All these require an educational institution (school) that is free from discrimination and attacks, and physically accessible to IDC from their various camps and settlements. Physical access to education means that educational services are not just available, within safe physical reach of the IDP settlements but they are within a peaceful and harmonious school environment. Internally displaced children should have the freedom to walk or join a vehicle to schools without risking being attacked or otherwise threatened along the way. In some cases security personnel could be provided to these students to and from school and also while in school to guarantee safety. It is important to note that accessibility as it is defined in this paragraph if provided can have a positive impact on the performance of IDC in school (Olagunju, 2006).

3. Acceptability

The provision of educational services to IDC in a manner that is both available and accessible is not sufficient. It is also vital that education services for IDC fulfil the requirement of acceptability. This means that the form and content of education must be of good quality, the language of instruction must be understandable by all students and culturally appropriate for the internally displaced children. Similarly, the principle of respect for cultural and religious background of all IDC who are students is also relevant and forms an aspect of acceptability. Both majority and minority ethnic groups who are internally displaced should be treated equally and allowed to express themselves freely. The feeling and act of acceptability within the school environment also enhances the performance of IDC who are in schools that provide an enabling and acceptable school environment (Durosaro, & Ajiboye, 2011).

4. Adaptability

Adaptability entails that the education system and school environment should be flexible, take into consideration interest of the child and the learning speed of each child. Internally displaced children (IDC) require special attention and care. They should be gradually inculcated into the scheme of things of their various schools, since their individual learning speed differs. The school environment should be structured in a way that it recognises that displacement can continue for decades. As such schools should help internally displaced children adapt to their current surroundings, as well as prepare them for their life after displacement. Programmes should be structured in a manner that ensures that internally displaced children can remain in school or re-enter regular education at other levels of education when due. This will significantly improve on their performance and academic ability later on in life at the secondary and tertiary levels of education (Adegbite, 1999).

The performance of internally displaced children at all levels of education can be enhanced, once these children are given all the necessary educational requirements needed. The 4A's (Availability, Acceptability, Accessibility and Adaptability) listed above are critical to the provision of quality education for internally displaced children in Nigeria. The government, educational administrators and policy makers must fuse in these factors while providing education for this segment of the population in order to enhance their academic performance in school.

Problems Preventing the Education of Internally Displaced Children in Nigeria

Internally Displaced Children (IDC) have rights and one of such fundamental rights is the right to quality education. It is beneficial to the ministry of education, the government, educational stakeholders and the general public to ensure that IDC are educated (Dryden-Peterson, 2010). However, during periods of conflict and social unrest, education is usually the last factor on the minds of both people and the government. This situation leaves many IDC without access to the knowledge, protection, emotional stability and support which

education provides. Some of the basic difficulties hampering the education process of IDC in Nigeria include the following:

1. Language of Instruction

Internal displacement usually takes place across diverse ethnic groups, its effect on the education of the minority ethnic group and the foreign population is usually serious, because they do not speak the common language of instruction. IDC from certain tribes may not be able to speak the local dialect of the community where they have taken refuge. This prevents them from understanding or communicating in the common language of instruction. The result of this could be significantly low student attendance in school and high level of illiteracy amongst IDC that is the inability to read and write. Thus the language of instruction could act as a hindrance preventing IDC from receiving education and limit their performance in school, since they do not understand the language of instruction in their respective schools. However, the Guiding Principle 23 of the UNHCR affirms the right of IDPs to receive education respectful of their culture, language and identity (UNESCO, 2011).

2. School Material Requirements

School materials such as school fees, pens, pencils, books, uniforms, are basic requirements that students are expected to come to school, however, most parents and guardians of IDC are unable to afford these materials. Their inability to provide these educational materials could be attributed to having lost their source of income as a result of displacement (Ferris, & Winthrop, 2010). In Nigeria, the inability to provide these essential school material requirements for students has caused significant school absenteeism amongst male and female IDC, especially among adolescents, and it can also affect the performance of students in school negatively.

3. Economic responsibilities

In Nigeria, IDC are often used as a cheap source of labour at home by their parents. Instead of going to school, they are engaged with domestic or agricultural work to generate income that will provide the family's basic needs. This is common amongst IDC from families with single parents or women as heads of household, the children are forced to work, sell things on the streets or hawk in order to make some money (Dryden-Peterson, 2010). This is usually at the expense of schooling, thus increasing the attrition and dropout rates in schools. This is frequent among girls, who typically are burdened by domestic, child-care or agricultural responsibilities. IDP are usually poverty stricken and this forces them to do desperate things to survive. Economic difficulties can negatively affect the performance of students in school and IDC adolescent girls sometimes dropout of school and go into prostitution just to provide for their families.

4. Citizenship Requirements

According to the UNESCO (2011), citizenship requirement is another factor that may prevent internally displaced children from attending school in the areas to which they have been displaced. This is particularly an issue in Nigeria, since most families fleeing the attacks of Boko Haram in the North East for example moved into neighbouring countries such as Chad, Cameroon and Niger. They are not regarded as citizens of these countries and as such are usually not given the educational incentives citizens of these countries are entitled to. This limits their exercise of certain rights, including the right to education and the right to shelter. This affects internally displaced children (IDC) negatively because they are deprived of education and left to fall behind their peers. At the same time, re-registration by displaced persons in their new countries of residence tends to be a long and tedious process, which is usually made worse by administrative obstacles at the local governments. The inability of internally displaced children to be regarded as citizens of countries where their settlement camps are located can affect their academic performance.

5. School fees

Ferris and Winthrop, (2010) indicated that based on international laws education is expected to be free particularly at the primary level of education, in reality however, school fees often are illegally imposed on students at the primary and secondary levels. Bearing in mind that many IDP have severe economic changes, the enforcement of school fees creates difficulty for them. Some state governments in Nigeria have instituted an official policy of waiving school fees for IDC. However, these policies have not been fully implemented and are quite limited in scope and implementation because some school head teachers and principals still collect various fees and levies from students, such as exam fees, developmental and excursion fees amongst others. School fees and other financial educational requirements for internally displaced children if removed entirely or reduced to the barest minimum can give them the freedom to focus on their studies thereby improving on their academic performance.

6. Misplaced Records

Often displacement leads to a loss or seizure of an individual's identification documents, without which IDC will not be able to enrol in school. The process of reclaiming lost or seized documents usually requires that IDPs go back to their place of origin, even if the area is still unsafe. The lack of necessary documents showing the educational achievement of IDC spoils their opportunity for further education and employment. Moreover, displaced teachers may be barred from teaching if they lose their teaching certificates. This not only denies qualified IDP teachers a source of income but also can have repercussions on the availability of education and the performance of students for IDP and other children (Dryden-Peterson, 2010).

7. Discrimination

The discrimination that IDPs face cuts across ethnic, religious, economic and social spheres. These forms of discrimination limit IDC access to education. Indigenous and minority IDC in Nigeria have been turned away from entering classrooms in some states in Nigeria and other countries in Africa because they are discriminated treated like outsiders or outcast and not treated equally with other students. The UNESCO (2011) stated that discrimination in terms of access to education may also take the form of segregated schools established strictly for IDC. These schools in most cases lack basic essential educational infrastructure. This system of separate schooling is especially problematic because the internal displacement of students can continue for years, like in some countries such as Nigeria.

8. Security

In some IDP camps, schools and other forms of educational services are not available as such IDC are required to travel long distances daily to the nearest school. This may require students walking a considerable distance to and from school every day. Some of these routes to school may not be safe for IDC especially girls because they can be remote, rural and bushy (Dryden-Peterson, 2010). Traveling to school may require traversing areas filled with checkpoints set up by military forces or other armed groups, where children may be subjected to harassment, rape and abduction. When children feel unsafe and unprotected on their way to school or while in school this can deter students and other IDC from going to school or seeking any other form of educational service that is away from their camps or settlements where they feel safe.

9. Non-existent School Infrastructure

In conflict regions of Nigeria, schools, educational institutions, religious institutions and educational infrastructure. In some cases school buildings and students may even be specific targets for attack. For instance, the Chibok saga of 2014 where more than 200 girls were abducted and their school burnt down, the school is presently virtually non-existent. In Northern Nigeria, schools, teachers and even students have been singled out for attack by the Islamist group Boko Haram. In IDP settlements and camps, the available educational services and educational infrastructure are even less organised, and there is an absence of the basic necessities (Ferris, & Winthrop, 2010). In areas where schools and educational infrastructure exist, they are makeshift, under trees, under-resourced, over-crowded and limited to primary education. Poor or non-existent school infrastructure has a direct implication on student performance as these students use inadequate facilities for teaching and learning.

Displacement is a traumatic life-changing experience which cannot be removed because it leaves a long lasting emotional and psychological scare in the minds of people who face the horrors of displacement. The education of displaced children is an essential part of providing them with some form of knowledge, emotional stability and security. However, the difficulties hampering this education process from taking place as outlined above, affect these children most because their young minds are still in the early stages of development.

Solving the Problems of Educating IDC

The provision of quality education to IDC is critical to their development, safety, wellbeing and development of the society as a whole. Unfortunately, the difficulties educational authorities and administrators encounter in their quest to provide quality education to IDC cannot be undermined. These obstacles however can be surmounted by taking certain steps that will help ensure that IDP have access to quality education. These steps include:

1. Emphasis on Education for IDC:

The government should prioritise the education of IDC at the earliest stages of the displacement emergency that is providing education to IDC should be of great importance to the government even at the onset of their displacement. This should include systematically providing these IDC with temporary

educational services, such as school educational materials and tools to get them started and mobile educational institutions should be made available in IDP camps and settlements places, this will positively improve on student performance (Hyll-Larsen,2003).

2. Provision of Academic Staff:

The provision of teachers and other educational personnel that are essential in the education process is critical to the sustenance and provision of education to IDC. These teachers and educational volunteers will actively participate in the education process in displacement camps and settlements centers for them it will be virtually impossible for knowledge transmission to take place. As such teachers could be hired from within the camps that consist teachers who are IDP, especially female teachers, these teachers will teach in IDP camps to ensure the successful process of educating IDC and improve their overall academic performance (Gerschutz,& Karns, 2005).

3. Provision of Security:

Organizing security escorts for IDC to and from schools that are situated a long distance from their settlement camps is a necessity that will motivate students to attend school and reduce truancy and attrition. These security personnel should also be made available at entrance of the various schools to act as a deterrent to people who are bent on causing mayhem. This will significantly solve the problem of insecurity, rape and violent attacks being experienced by internally displaced students, thus making them willing to go to school and improve academic performance (Kalin, 2008).

4. Temporary Documentation:

IDPs whose academic credentials, records or other forms of documentation have been lost, damaged, forgotten or stolen should be provided with temporary documentation so that they can register for school without having to return to their conflict prone areas. This will ensure that more students register into schools and thus significantly reduce the number of unregistered internally displaced students wandering the streets (Hyll-Larsen, 2003).

5. Advocating for School Fees Removal:

Promotion of the abolition of school fees at the primary and secondary levels of education especially for internally displaced children and impoverished children, so that these children are not deprived of quality education simply because their parents cannot afford their school fees (Gerschutz,&Karns, 2005). This will encourage the students to focus on their academic work and improve their performance rather than worry about the payment of their school fees.

6. Break the Language Barrier:

The government and private sector should as matters of necessity ensure that internally displaced children have access to education in a language they understand. This means providing them with teachers that are capable of speaking and teaching their native language, this will increase the number of students willing to attend schools and significantly reduce truancy and discrimination. The use of a language of instruction that is understood by students will improve their ability to comprehend what is taught as well as their academic performance. (Gerschutz, & Karns, 2005).

7. Funding School Feeding Programs:

Government should sponsor feeding programs in schools to encourage school enrolment amongst IDC and thus support the children's realization of their intellectual potential. These free feeding programs or free lunch in school will act as a motivational tool for IDC to attend school, knowing that at the end of every day they will be fed (Hyll-Larsen, 2003). This will help the children concentrate on their school work and thus improve their academic performance, since a hungry child would be less willing to study.

8. Provision of Basic Necessities:

The government at the federal and state level in Nigeria could assist in the provision of some basic necessities such as clothing, soap and sanitary material for girls, the building of separate toilets for students, providing childcare opportunities for adolescent mother as well as the teaching of home economics. These will act as motivational materials and entice internally displaced students to attend school, thus significantly reducing truancy (Gerschutz, & Karns, 2005). The provision of these

necessities for students will help them with the necessary academic materials they need for learning thus improving their academic performance.

9. Provision of Alternative Schooling:

The government and educational authorities should be able to restructure the school timetable in such a manner that alternative schooling or evening classes, skills-training programs are made available for internally displaced children and adolescents whose household or economic obligations prevents them from attending regular classes or school programs. This will increase the number of internally displaced students who receive education at an early and crucial stage of their development(Kalin, 2008).

10. Monitoring Material, Financial and Human Resources:

The government should ensure the proper monitoring and reporting of human and financial materials made available to educational institutions in settlements and camps of internally displaced people. Most internally displaced camps and settlements receive funding from the United Nations through the UNHCR, the government and private bodies, however most of these funds do not trickle down to the various schools instead they are looted to the detriment of the schools. The government should set up a monitoring committee that will observe and take record of resources and how they are managed. This should be done in order to reduce corruption, theft and criminality to the lowest minimum(Hyll-Larsen, 2003). The provision of much needed financial resources in school helps to improve teaching and learning, thus improve academic performance.

11. Award of Scholarships:

The government should award scholarships to internally displaced children based on their financial predicament, to help fund their education, including higher education this will act as a motivation to spur them to study more. This could be embarked upon across the state where such displacement is found to make internally displaced children feel appreciated (Kalin, 2008). Records show that students who are given scholarship awards appreciate the need to perform well in school and this increases their desire to study hard in school.

In Nigeria and its neighbouring countries several internally displaced children are deprived of education and the opportunities it provides. Therefore a lot of attention and importance has to be given to minimizing the interference to the education process of these internally displaced children. Emphasis should be on maximizing the potential benefits of educating these young minds and providing all the critical support mentioned above which will encourage these internally displaced children to go to school and improve their performance in school.

Conclusion

Displacement is a social dilemma witnessed in some countries around the world. Its impact on the educational performance of displaced children as stated in this chapter cannot be undermined. The overall need to adopt strategies and measures which will ensure the educational survival of these children is crucial particularly in developing countries such as Nigeria. Providing internally displaced children with an education environment that ensures availability, acceptability, accessibility and adaptability is a vital aspect of improving their academic performance. Similarly, the problems being faced by educational institutions which cater for internally displaced children should be looked at by government and educational authorities in order to build upon the standard of education offered to these children and improve their performance in school. Finally, the solutions above to tackle the educational problems faced by internally displaced children who must have their right to education respected and provided by the government should be considered. These solutions form the pillars to improving the educational performance of students in schools around and within displaced communities, camps and settlements in Nigeria and around the world.

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