



POLICY BRIEF

WILL OUT OF SCHOOL CHILDREN ACT AS BANE TO HARNESSING DEMOGRAPHIC DIVIDEND IN NIGERIA?

INTRODUCTION

Children as the future of any economy represent an important pillar in harnessing demographic dividend in Nigeria. Education is the overall development of an individual, aimed at producing middle-level and high-level manpower with the requisite skills and know-how needed to facilitate the society's drive to prosperity and growth. Relevant education is a vital prerequisite for combating poverty, empowering women, protecting children from hazardous, exploitative labour, sexual exploitation, promoting human rights and democracy, protecting the environment and influencing population growth. Quality education is often provided through formal school system. Unfortunately many children do not attend school. Children out of school are at an increased danger of abuse, exploitation and recruitment into bad behaviour. They can serve as a bane to any policy put in place to achieve economic growth and sustainable development, and subsequently demographic dividends.

CONTEXT OF OUT-OF-SCHOOL CHILDREN IN NIGERIA

Nigeria has one of the highest population growth in the world and this has put pressure on the country's resources, including public services and infrastructure. With children under 15 years of age accounting for 45 per cent of the total population, the burden on education can be overwhelming. Primary school enrolment has increased in recent

years; however, the net attendance is only about 70 per cent in 2011 and 60.9 per cent in 2016. The result is that there are about 14.6 million out-of-school children in the country (Figure 1) and there are more female children out of school.

The effects of the activities of out of school children to the security of the country includes: cultism, drugs, robbery, stealing, fagging, begging, street fights and attack on innocent people (gangsterism); wickedness for lack of parental care and love, early death rate, unhealthy living, poor nutrition and form of psychological and other social vices.

Figure 2 presents the percentage of out of school children in Nigeria by age and gender. The rate declines from age 6 till age 11 which corresponds to the age many Nigerian children finish primary education. Beyond that age there is increase in population of out of school children. Many boys also drop out of school to enroll for trade (most especially in the South Eastern Zone) and apprenticeship.

Since 2009, the attacks by Boko Haram in the North east Nigeria have also left many children with no access to classrooms as well as teachers. Most recently, the kidnaps of girls in secondary schools such as the Chibok girls and Dapchi girls' abduction has also contributed to the loss of interest in education of children in such areas. Most schools have been deserted and security

Figure 1:

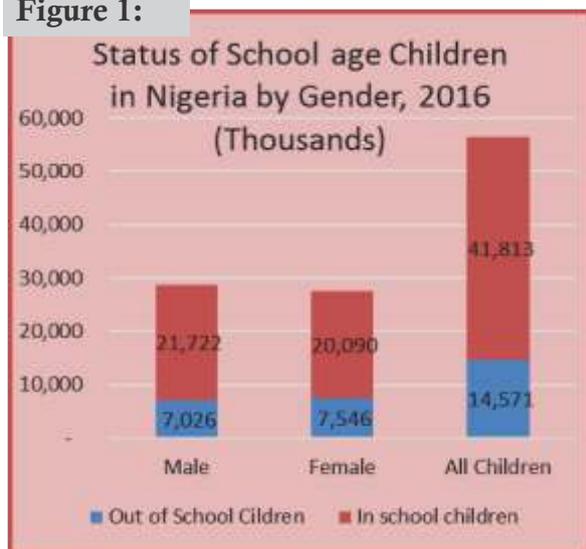
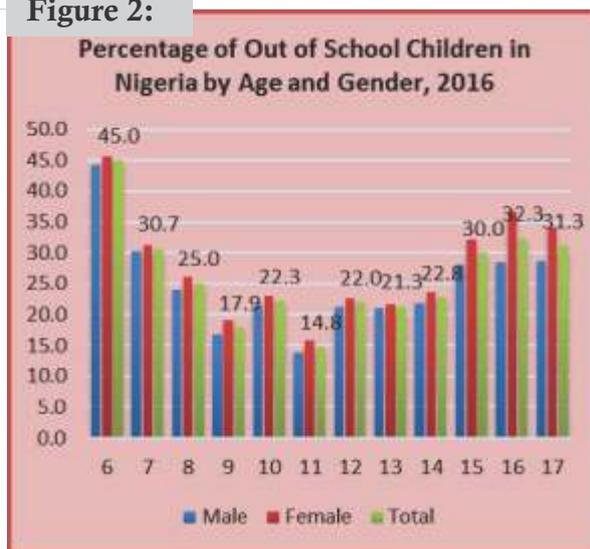


Figure 2:



Source: Computed from data obtained from National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) and United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF). 2017

issues have prevented parents from enrolling their children in schools thus depriving many children of access to education. Many teachers have also been killed and schools burned down or closed for security reasons. The cultural phenomenon of "Almajiri" education has also impacted on the psychological and social developments of children in Nigeria.

Furthermore, other main factors leading to increase in the number of out of school children include funding, long distance/unsafe travel to school, violence against girls (social, sexual), socio-political and economic constraints, underachievement, insecurity, environment,

poverty, early child marriage and peer group influence among others. These demand lasting solution to boost the Nigerian economy.

Although Nigeria has a well-articulated policy of Universal Basic education Programme, there are concerns about the quality of education that children receive from government owned schools. This has led to increase in private schools with attendant high cost which further increases the incidence of out of school children. Those who cannot afford the private schools sometimes shun school altogether on the belief that the required benefits might not be reaped from government schools.

Figure 3:

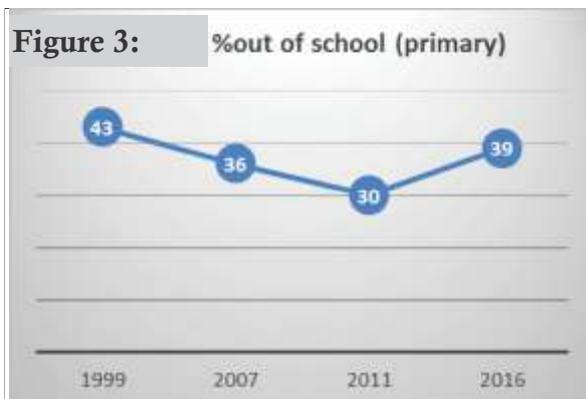
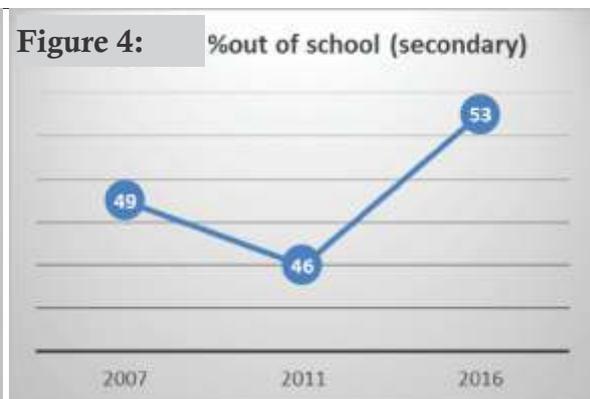


Figure 4:



Data Source: Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS) 1999, 2007, 2011, 2016.

Figure 5: Percentage of Primary School Children Out of School in Nigeria, 2016

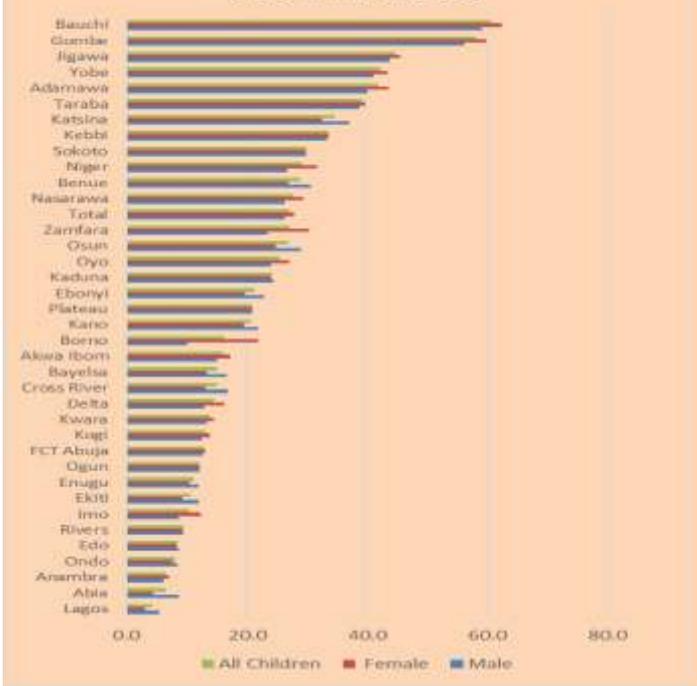
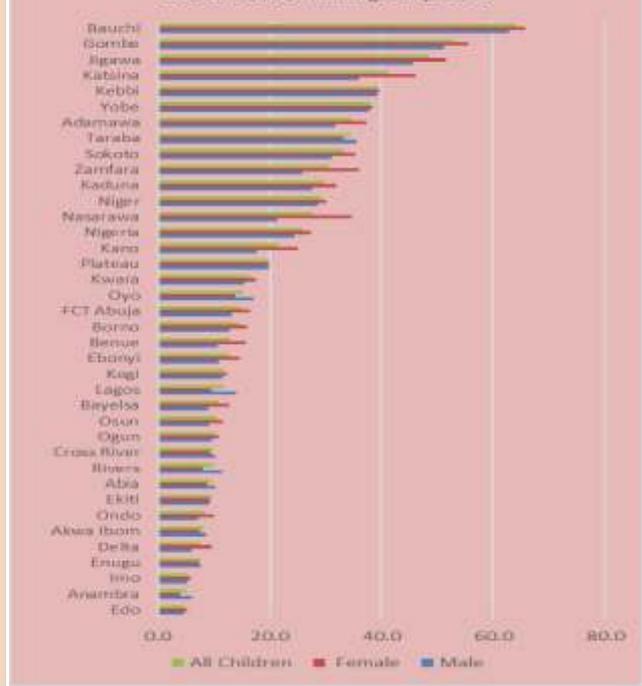


Figure 6: Percentage of Secondary School Children Out of School in Nigeria, 2016



Source: Computed from data obtained from National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) and United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF). 2017

Figures 3 and 4 show the percentage of primary school and secondary school children that are out of school.

Over the years, the percentage of children out of school in the primary school has been on the decrease, which serves as an improvement in the education system (Figure 3). However, the situation took a new turn in year 2011 for both primary and secondary school as the percentage of out of school children increased to 39% and 53% respectively. This can be partly explained by the insurgencies happening in the country as at that time. This is well revealed in the number of out of school children by states.

Figures 5 and 6 show the wide disparities in the proportion of children that are out of primary and secondary schools by state in Nigeria. The figure revealed that out of school children is mainly a northern phenomenon as most states in the southern Nigeria has relatively low proportion of children out of school.

POLICY OPTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Following the issues raised and drivers of out of school children in Nigeria, the following policy options are suggested and recommended to curb the incidence of out of school children in Nigeria.

- Government should put in place safety net to improve economic opportunities of parents. Most of the out of school children are as a result of the inability of their parents to fund the schooling of their wards.
- It is highly recommended that government at all levels institutes laws that will prohibit child labour. In this wise, every state government should domesticate Child Right Act to protect and promote the interests of children in the country and also reduce incidence of early marriage among female children.
- Government at all level should engage traditional and religious leaders on the benefit of formal education to children. Most parents

refuse to send their children to school on the basis that those who have gone to school have nothing to show for it in terms private returns to them. Efforts should be made to reduce widespread unemployment.

- Most children especially in the Northern region are out of school due insurgency and security problems in the region while those that are not displaced are afraid of attending school. Therefore adequate security measures should be put in place in the region to protect children and their family, to create conducive environment for schooling and allay fear of kidnapping and other forms of insurgency in the region. Adequate investments should also be put in place to improve school structures that has been pulled down by insurgencies
- Policy measures for the reabsorption of school dropped out children should be put in place by government to provide opportunity for a second chance at school.
- There should be adequate enforcement of the Universal Basic Education (UBE) system in Nigeria, such that parents will be willing to send their children to school, as well as ensure effective monitoring and evaluation activities. UBE Act has sanctions for parents not enrolling their children in school but the willingness to implement the sanctions has been very low.
- School feeding programmes should be expanded to cover all primary school children serve as incentives for school enrolment and attendance.
- Finally, there is a trade off between the quality and quantity of children, families with smaller number of children are less likely to have their children out of school as they ensure adequate schooling for the children to build their human

capital. Hence, family planning should be encouraged to reduce total fertility rates and average family size.

CONCLUSION

Education and schooling is a major factor that lead countries to haven demographic dividend. Where children do not have access to quality and relevant education, they can not have good employment. If 14.6 million children in Nigeria do not have education, it therefore implies that in the next 10 years, 14.6 million children will not be adequately prepared to enter labour market, hence, they will engage in low income activities and as a result, they will not be able to earn enough income during their working age and eventually not having enough savings for their old ages. This is why adequate policies should be implemented to prevent this scenario. Children are the future of Nigeria. Every child should be given an opportunity to go to school in order to guarantee Nigeria the opportunity of harnessing demographic dividend.

REFERENCES

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