



## **The Safe Schools Initiative: Protecting the Right to Learn in Nigeria** Published at the World Economic Forum in Abuja, Nigeria – 7 May 2014

As the global community has now turned its attention to the recent kidnapping of over 200 Nigerian girls and the horrific attacks on innocent children for wanting to go to school, there needs to be a response to counter the frequent and violent acts of terror against girls and boys. The militant group, Boko Haram, has carried out violent attacks in the northern parts of Nigeria. Thousands of Nigerians have been killed and many more have been forced to flee their homes.

Schools have been a primary target of the attacks. Since 2011, Boko Haram, whose name means “Western education is forbidden,” has expanded its attacks to the direct target of schools, resulting in the destruction of school buildings and teaching materials and the abduction and killing of hundreds of teachers and students.



There is an urgent need for protection so that education can continue. The government should ensure that the right to education without discrimination becomes a reality for all Nigerians. Working alongside government authorities, the Safe Schools Initiative provides a programmatic response for protection of schools and prevention of future attacks on schools.

The “Safe Schools Initiative” entails a combination of (1) school-based interventions; (2) community interventions to protect schools; and (3) special measures for at-risk populations. The Initiative could be implemented in Adamawa, Borno and Yobe states, already in a declared state of emergency, and expanded to others in the north and, as a national initiative, to cover the entire country. Based on Nigerian statistical data (see Annex one), there are approximately 5,362 public primary and secondary schools in these three states.

This memo provides a general framework for the Initiative based on best practices from global standards and initiatives, highlighting school and community-level actions and special provisions for schools in high-risk areas. The appendix includes the estimated number of schools by state.

### **Components of the Safe School Initiative: School, Community, and Special Measures**

As independent school resources are insufficient to address the frequency and scale of attacks, the “Safe Schools Initiative” will focus on school and community interventions, with special measures for the most at-risk and vulnerable.



**At the individual school level, based on best global practice in the protection of schools, it is recommended that each supported school consider the following interventions to be a “Safe School”:**

- 1. Reinforced school infrastructure.** Bolstering the physical protection of schools is necessary to shield staff and students and provide a means of self-defense. As recommended by the Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack, this may involve the use of boundary walls and/or the installation of barbed wire as basic and cost-effective mechanisms. Additional measures should be taken for any student or teacher housing. The construction of boundary walls to thwart attacks and abductions has been implemented in 8,327 Afghani schools with first priority for girls’ schools.
- 2. Armed guard(s).** If appropriate, in collaboration with law enforcement or military personnel, schools may wish to be provided with guards. These may include the military or state-assisted paramilitary, police, or privately hired security. Armed guards could repel attacks and intimidate would-be attackers and are common practice in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas of Pakistan, where school districts employ private armed security to thwart attacks. The use of armed guards may not always be appropriate.
- 3. Training staff as school safety officers.** Staff at each school must be trained on security measures including procedures for evacuation of school buildings and communicating with security officials. Selected safety officers in schools must also ensure each classroom has an emergency pack containing supplies that must accompany each class when an evacuation occurs. All safety officers should have a way to communicate with local authorities should a school come under attack.
- 4. School counselor visits.** Counselors can be based in each school or appointed to carry out regular school visits in several communities. They can greatly assist students who have experienced attacks in addressing trauma so that they are able to refocus on learning. Counselors may also help students cope with the perceived militarization of their schools that can occur with the presence of armed protection and is shown to decrease student learning if left unaddressed.
- 5. A school security plan.** In line with guidance provided by local authorities, each school should have a safety plan so that all students know what to do in the case of an emergency. All staff and students must be familiarized with the plans and corresponding procedures. These must also be communicated to families and the broader community.
- 6. Part of a rapid response system.** When schools are attacked, there should be a response unit so they are quickly repaired or rebuilt, and destroyed education material replaced. A senior official could be designated in each state to oversee the rapid response system and ensure that education is made available at alternative locations until schools are rebuilt and secure conditions ensured.



**Additional measures can be taken to involve the community in the protection of schools.** The Global Coalition for Protect Education from Attack has provided several examples of community-based programs that can be adapted to the Nigerian context.

**Relevant community-based interventions that could be part of the Safe Schools Initiative include:**

1. **Community Education Committees:** As communities have specialized knowledge about their particular context and conflict dynamics, and may even know the individuals involved, they may be the best suited to devising practical solutions for protecting education from attack and for helping negotiate schools as peaceful zones.

For example, UNICEF trained volunteers to serve as intermediaries between the community and the school management as part of Community Education Committees in Somalia. These committees help to reduce the influence of al-Shabaab in the schools, particularly when respected elders and religious leaders participate. They have been successful in several regions in curtailing attack.

2. **Teacher-Student-Parent Defense Units:** By fostering these units, members work together to protect education, so that, for example, parents warn teachers of imminent attack. Parents also get involved in school affairs, making inquiries of the administration about student participation in political camps at schools. All members work together to try to remove militia camps from school grounds. In Zimbabwe, students and community members formed voluntary groups in several schools.
3. **Religious leader engagement:** Engagement of religious leaders in the promotion of education has had a significant impact in reducing attacks. The Safe Schools Initiative in Nigeria could focus on engaging religious leaders to speak about the importance of education. For example:
  - In Afghanistan, in collaboration with community shuras and protection committees, respected imams or religious mullahs sometimes use their Friday speeches to raise awareness about the importance of education in Islam.
  - In Peshawar in Pakistan, prominent Muslims from the community delivered speeches about the importance of education and of sending students back to school in a program supported by UNICEF.
  - In Somalia, religious leaders have gone on public radio in government-controlled areas and visited schools to advocate against the recruitment of children.
4. **Community-driven negotiations to develop and agree to codes of conduct for *Zones of Peace*.** In some communities, collaboration among diverse political and ethnic groups in widely publicized mass meetings can lead to the development of “Safe School Zones.” Undertaken in countries such as Nepal and the Philippines, the writing and signing of codes of conduct define what was and was not allowed on school grounds in order to minimize violence, school closures and the politicization of schooling. For instance, terms of the code in some cases included “no arrest or abduction of any individual within the premises” and “no use of schools as armed bases.” The signatory parties kept their commitments, in general, and these efforts helped communities to keep schools open, improving protection as well as school governance.



**In some of the most at-risk locations, the Safe Schools Initiative may wish to advocate for special provisions with the government to improve overall security and ensure special provisions are in place particularly for schools in high-risk areas:**

- 1. Consolidate schools through zoning.** Consolidating schools ensures targeted and efficient use of available resources to maximize protection and prevention of attacks.

Considerations include:

- Zone by Local Government Area (LGA): Consolidated schools should be made available in each LGA. This facilitates access to schools for teachers and students.
  - Explore the use of shifts: With consolidation, there will be a dramatic increase in the number of students and teachers using select school infrastructure. Utilizing a shift-based system of schooling, which involves teaching a group of children in the morning and another in the afternoon, can minimize a strain on resources.
  - Position consolidated schools in safer areas: Consolidated schools should be located in low-risk areas, preferably away from thick bushes that can compromise security efforts.
- 2. Provide security guidelines for private schools.** Private schools, which are largely responsible for their own security, should be provided with security guidelines that must be followed to ensure the safety of their staff and students. Regular inspections could be carried out to ensure these guidelines are obeyed.
  - 3. Utilize alternative solutions for schools in high-risk areas.** In areas that are especially high-risk where schools are more likely to be under attack, it is important to employ alternative methods of education delivery that minimize the possibility of schools being targeted. This may include temporary or mobile schools, community-based schools or distance learning provided by business, NGOs or UN agencies.

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## Appendix A: School-Level Data

States in Designated "State of Emergency"		
State	Number of Public Primary <sup>i</sup>	Number of Public Secondary <sup>ii</sup>
Adamawa	1,890	296
Borno	1,668	206
Yobe	1,013	289
<b>Subtotal</b>	<b>4,571</b>	<b>791</b>
<b>Total Public Schools in States of Emergency: 5,362</b>		

Additional States not in Designated "State of Emergency"		
State	Number of Public Primary	Number of Public Secondary
Abia	1,605	653
Akwa Ibom	1,146	608
Anambra	1,038	504
Bauchi	2,601	288
Bayelsa	537	297
Benue	4,486	749
Cross River	1,017	487
Delta	1,006	1,066
Edo	1,288	918
Ebonyi	1,138	103
Ekiti	788	210
Enugu	1,485	498
Gombe	1,734	171
Imo	1,269	380
Jigawa	1,868	781
Kaduna	4,341	235
Kano	4,813	683
Katsina	2,353	774
Kebbi	1,587	329
Kogi	3,188	163
Kwara	1,658	544
Lagos	986	569
Nassarawa	1,652	483
Niger	3,954	513
Ogun	1,921	332
Ondo	1,164	844
Osun	1,760	690
Oyo	2,992	902
Plateau	1,989	1,143
Rivers	1,667	800
Sokoto	1,967	535
Taraba	1,514	91
Zamfara	1,408	254
Abuja	477	85
<b>Subtotal</b>	<b>64,397</b>	<b>17,682</b>
<b>NATIONAL TOTAL</b>	<b>68,968</b>	<b>18,473</b>
<b>TOTAL NUMBER OF PUBLIC PRIMARY AND SECONDARY SCHOOLS = 87,441</b>		

<sup>i</sup> Most recent country data available from the National Bureau of Statistics, Nigeria. Public Primary Schools (2010).

<sup>ii</sup> Most recent country data available from the National Bureau of Statistics, Nigeria. Public Secondary Schools (2010).