

# COMMUNIQUÉ OF THE NATIONAL CONFERENCE ON GIRLS' EDUCATION AND EMPOWERMENT IN NIGERIA ORGANIZED BY ADOLESENT GIRLS' INITIATIVE FOR LEARNING AND EMPOWERMENT [AGILE] PROJECT, FEDERAL MINISTRY OF EDUCATION, UNIVERSAL BASIC EDUCATION COMMISSION (UBEC) IN COLLABORATION WITH SULTAN FOUNDATION SUPPORTED BY THE WORLD BANK HELD AT FRASER SUITES, ABUJA, ON 28TH JANUARY 2025

## Preamble:

The National Conference on Girls' Education and Empowerment was held on January 28th, 2025, at Fraser Suites, Abuja. The conference served as a culmination of regional dialogues across Northern Nigeria, where stakeholders gathered to address the critical barriers to girl child education and chart a path toward sustainable solutions. The Conference is organized by the Federal Ministry of Education, Universal Basic Education, in partnership with the World Bank, support and collaboration with Sultan Foundation for Peace and Development. The event brought together high-profile dignitaries, legislators, government officials, traditional and religious leaders, education experts, development partners, and policymakers.

The conference provided a platform that shared insights and data on the state of girls' education and out of school children in Nigeria; highlighted best practices and lessons learned from regional initiatives; and develop actionable strategies to address identified social, cultural, economic, and systemic challenges. The conference reaffirmed the urgent need for bold and coordinated actions to overcome the barriers impeding girls' education and called on all stakeholders, especially traditional and religious leaders, to play a pivotal role in championing this cause.

## Key Observations

The conference identified critical barriers and opportunities related to girls' education and out of school children, informed by research, stakeholder input, and regional consultations. Key observations include:

- a) Addressing the challenge of girl child education and out-of-school children in Nigeria is essential not only for breaking the cycle of poverty **in communities** but also for serving as a transformative catalyst for accelerated national **development**.
- b) Representatives of both the executive and legislative arms of government have demonstrated strong commitment to ensuring that the girl child and out-of-school children are efficiently and comprehensively educated through the full utilization of governmental instruments and resources.
- c) Following three regional conferences and prior deliberations, this gathering should mark the conclusion of discussions and meetings. The focus must now shift entirely toward actionable implementation of the ideas and resolutions generated.
- d) Despite efforts to expand educational programs and opportunities in Nigeria, the girl child continues to face significant barriers to education. Currently, only about 30% of girls complete secondary school, and more than half of the out-of-school children in the northern region are girls. These barriers are largely rooted in societal norms and economic pressures.
- e) Observed data highlights the weak quality of education and delivery systems across the country. Enrolment and retention rates remain alarmingly low, particularly for girls, underscoring the need for urgent intervention.
- f) Poverty remains one of the leading causes of girls not attending school or dropping out prematurely. Financially struggling families often rely on girls for work to support household incomes, further perpetuating educational inequities.
- g) That entrenched cultural norms and traditional beliefs, not religion, perpetuate the view that girls' primary roles are domestic, discouraging families from investing in their education. The perception of boys as future breadwinners, while girls are expected to leave their families after marriage, continues to shape household decision-making.
- h) Insecurity in Northern Nigeria, characterized by abductions, violence, and school attacks, has heightened parental concerns about sending girls to school. This is

exacerbated by inadequate girl-friendly facilities, such as separate toilets and sufficient classrooms, contributing to high dropout rates.

- i) Traditional and religious leaders hold significant moral authority and influence over societal norms, positioning them as key drivers of change. However, despite ongoing awareness campaigns, resistance to girls' education remains widespread, requiring persistent, culturally sensitive advocacy.
- j) Community-driven programs led by traditional rulers, religious leaders, and development partners have successfully increased girls' enrolment and retention. Collaborative efforts among governments, development partners, and community leaders demonstrate the potential for meaningful change when resources and expertise are pooled.

## **Resolutions**

To address these challenges, the conference adopted the following resolutions:

- a) Government, traditional and religious leaders, and development partners agree to prioritize policies and programs that improve equitable and functional access to basic education, particularly for the girl child.
- b) Develop and implement a clear action plan outlining the roles and responsibilities of traditional and religious leaders in supporting and monitoring the implementation of these resolutions.
- c) Traditional and Religious Leaders will spearhead localized advocacy campaigns to mobilize communities and challenge harmful practices to promote the value of girls' education. They will integrate education-focused messages into sermons, traditional events, and community forums, aligning them with religious teachings and cultural values.
- d) Traditional and Religious Leaders to lead communities in celebrating families that educate their daughters and sons, showcasing them as role models to inspire broader societal change.
- e) Governments, development partners, with the support of Traditional and Religious Leaders should establish scholarships and conditional cash transfer programs to alleviate the financial burden of schooling for girls. Community funds, zakat, and other religious contributions will be mobilized to support families in need.
- f) Traditional and Religious Leaders will steer community-based programs, including women's cooperatives and microfinance initiatives, that will be launched to economically empower families, reducing their reliance on girls for labour.
- g) Local security committees will be established in collaboration with governments and community leaders to monitor and protect schools in high-risk areas. Early warning systems and partnerships with local security outfits will also be strengthened.
- h) Governments will invest in the construction of basic education facilities in local communities and refurbishments, incorporating gender-sensitive facilities such as separate toilets, menstrual hygiene management systems, accessibility for the disabled and safe transportation options.
- i) Collaborative efforts between governments, development partners, and private sector actors will be deepened to support infrastructure development, scholarships, and other sustainable initiatives.
- j) Committees comprising traditional rulers, religious leaders, parents, and teachers will monitor school enrolment, attendance, and retention rates. Progress reports will be regularly shared with relevant authorities.
- k) Traditional and religious leaders will leverage data on basic education outcomes to advocate for change, highlighting measurable benefits to counter resistance.
- l) State Governments should enact deliberate laws to hold parents accountable, imposing sanctions on those whose children are found begging on the streets or out of the school.

## **Next Steps/Call to Action:**

To ensure the effective implementation of the resolutions, the following steps will be prioritized:

- 1) Within the next one month a detailed regional/ state action plan will be developed by traditional and religious leaders.
- 2) Within the next three months, traditional and religious leaders will commence nationwide advocacy campaigns utilizing sermons, community meetings, and social and traditional media platforms to promote the importance of basic education and emphasize importance of girls' education. These campaigns will address cultural misconceptions and emphasize the alignment of education with religious and cultural values.
- 3) Advocacy materials, including culturally tailored sermon guides, flyers, and multimedia content, will be developed in collaboration with education specialists and community leaders to ensure targeted and impactful messaging.
- 4) National, State, Local Government, and Community-level task forces comprising traditional rulers, religious leaders, education officers, and development partners will be established to oversee the implementation of policies, monitor progress, and address challenges.
- 5) Community-based monitoring groups will track school enrolment, attendance, and retention rates for girls as well as out of school children. Regular progress reports will be shared with stakeholders, including government agencies and development partners, to ensure transparency and accountability.
- 6) Regional and national review meetings will be held every six months to assess the impact of resolutions, identify gaps, and recalibrate strategies as needed. Comprehensive data on enrolment, retention, and completion rates will be collected, analyzed, and disseminated to track progress.
- 7) Governments, in collaboration with local security agencies, will establish school protection plans that include regular patrols, early warning systems, and community-led security monitoring committees.
- 8) Religious and traditional leaders will actively mobilize resources through zakat, waqf (endowments), and other community-driven initiatives to support families in need. Private sector actors will also be engaged to fund infrastructure development and scholarship programs.
- 9) Traditional and religious leaders will make public declarations of their commitment to championing girls' education, reinforcing their accountability to their communities and fostering collective ownership of the initiative.
- 10) Religious leaders will incorporate education-focused themes into weekly and seasonal gatherings, drawing from religious texts that emphasize the universal importance of learning.
- 11) Regular forums will be organized in conjunction with UBEC, Sultan foundation and AGILE to review progress, work plans and showcase success stories, these forums will include participation by community members to encourage community ownership of solutions.

**Conclusion:**

The National Conference on Girls' Education and Empowerment and Basic Education concluded with a unanimous commitment by all participants to make girls' education a national priority. Recognizing that traditional and religious leaders hold a unique position to influence change, the conference emphasized their central role in reshaping societal attitudes and driving community-led solutions.



**HRH SAMAILA MUHAM AD MERA, CON**

**Emir of Argungu**

**National Coordinator, Sultan Foundation for Peace and Development On behalf of His Eminence**

**Muhammad Sa'ad Abubakar, CFR, Sultan of Sokoto.**