



Safe School Initiative (SSI) in Nigeria: Challenges of Implementation and Way Forward

Niyi Jacob Ogunode¹, Olowonefa. J.A (PhD)², Jegede Deborah³, Abubakar Musa⁴

^{1,2} Department of Education, University of Abuja

³ Post-graduate Students University of Abuja

⁴ Federal University Wukari, Nigeria

Abstract: The Safe Schools Initiative was launched at the World Economic Forum on Africa in Nigeria in 2014 by a coalition of Nigerian business leaders working with the United Nations special envoy for Global Education, the Global Business Coalition for Education and World at School. The implementation of the Safe Schools Initiative faced with many challenges. This article discussed the challenges faced with the implementation of the Safe Schools Initiative programme in Nigerian North East Nigeria. This article identified inadequate funding, corruption, poor monitoring and evaluation, political instability, undefined roles of tiers of government, insecurity problem and lack of political will as challenges the Safe Schools Initiative programme faced during implementation in Nigeria. To address this challenges, the article recommended adequate funding of the Safe Schools Initiative programme, improvement in the monitoring and evaluation of the programme, redefine the roles of each tier of government in the implementation of the programme, government should monitor the funds released for the implementation of the programme and ensure the political will of implementing the programme Safe Schools Initiative.

Keywords: Education, Initiative, Safe, Schools, Programme.

Introduction

In 2015, the governments of Norway and Argentina led a process among United Nations (UN) Member States to develop the Safe Schools Declaration, an inter-governmental political agreement dedicated to protecting education in armed conflict. The Safe Schools Declaration outlines a set of commitments to strengthen the protection of education from attack and restrict use of schools and universities for military purposes. It seeks to ensure the continuity of safe education during armed conflict. The Declaration was opened for countries to endorse at the First International Conference on Safe Schools in Oslo, Norway, in May 2015 (GCPEA 2022).

In March 2017, the government of the Argentine Republic hosted the Second International Conference on Safe Schools, further building upon the development of a global community dedicated to protecting education in armed conflict. In May 2019, the government of Spain hosted the Third International Conference on Safe Schools in Palma de Mallorca, and in October 2021, the government of Nigeria hosted the Fourth International Conference on the Safe Schools Declaration in Abuja (GCPEA 2022).

In May, 2014, in response to the mass abduction of school children in the North Eastern States of Nigeria, the Safe Schools Initiative (SSI) program was launched by the Government of Nigeria and

the UN Special Envoy for Global Education, Gordon Brown, alongside with the Nigerian Global Business Coalition for Education and private sector leaders in Abuja (GCPEA 2022).

The North-eastern Nigeria has witnessed an unprecedented level of insurgency from 2009 till date onward, leading to a declaration of a 'State of Emergency' in Adamawa, Borno and Yobe States in 2013. The first four months of 2014 saw a further escalation of the humanitarian and security situation. It is projected that out of the estimated 11 million Nigerians who live in the three states under a state of emergency, up to six million have been affected by the insecurity, with four million people in Borno state alone. As many as 1,500 individuals, including women and children, were killed in the first three months of 2014. Access by people and organizations to the affected communities is becoming increasingly difficult and, as a result, the populations most affected are often not reachable. The militant group, Boko Haram, has carried out violent attacks in the north-eastern parts of Nigeria. Thousands of Nigerians have been killed, and many more have been forced to flee their homes. Schools have been the 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. It has resulted in the killing and abduction of hundreds of teachers and students and the destruction of school buildings and teaching materials. As a result of increased attacks on education, all schools in Borno State were closed from the 14th March 2014, and roughly 253,000 children were out of school in the 2013-14 school year (Borno SUBEB) (Shaba, 2015).

By the end of 2014, Adamawa, Yobe and Borno State Universal Basic Education authorities have reported a total of 338 schools destroyed. Also, at least 196 teachers and over 314 learners killed and more than 276 learners abducted. The situation has further fuelled the perception of schools as 'danger zones' and threatens the gains achieved by targeted school enrolment drives in northern Nigeria. In order to Safe the schools and ensure children are going to schools, the Nigerian government, private sector and international partners launched the Safe Schools Initiative (SSI) in May, 14, 2014. One of the cardinal goal of Safe Schools Initiative (SSI) programme is to provide security to educational institutions across the Northeast Nigeria and to ensure safety of children in the schools (Shaba, 2015).

It is unfortunate that since the implementation of the Safe Schools Initiative (SSI) programme, public schools have been continuously been attacked and students kidnapped. Since 2014 till data, there have been series of attacked and kidnapping of students. In April 2014, 276 schoolgirls were abducted by Boko Haram insurgents in a boarding school in Chibok, Borno State. In 2018, another 110 other schoolgirls were also abducted from their school in Dapchi, Yobe State. In 2021, over 300 students were abducted by armed bandits from a girls' secondary school in Zamfara State last Friday. The Government Science College, Kagara in Rafi Local Government Area of Niger state also witnessed another on February 17, when 42 persons were abducted from. Twenty-seven students, three staff and 12 members of their families abducted. In December 2020, it was Government Science Secondary School Kankara, in President Muhammadu Buhari's home state of Katsina, northwest Nigeria, where 350 boys were kidnapped by gunmen at night

Leadership newspaper (2021) observed that the programme which was set up in response to the growing number of attacks on the right to education after the abduction of over 300 school girls in Chibok community, Borno State, have not been effective with many of the schools, especially in Northern Nigeria still, under attacked. AllAfrica (2021) disclosed that after seven years after, the lack of safety measures in schools have ignited fear in the lives of thousands of Nigerians with so many schools coming under attacks. The programme, which was set up in response to the growing number of violations against the right to education after the kidnapping of the Chibok schoolgirls, has apparently not been yielding the expected results with many of the schools, especially in Northern Nigeria, having come under attack by Boko Haram terrorists and, lately, by bandits.

It is important to examine the implementation challenges in the North East Nigeria.

Concept of Safe School Initiative (SSI)

The Safe School Initiative was launched in Nigeria in May 2014 after the abduction of 276 schoolgirls from their school in Chibok, Borno State. The Safe Schools Initiative was launched to help protect education in Nigeria following the abduction of the Chibok girls.

The aim of the Safe School Initiative programme included moving students in the highest risk areas to schools in safer parts of the country, provision and distribution of learning materials and rebuilding of schools with extra security measures. AllAfrica (2021) submits that the initiative was to ensure that young people are not only safe in going to school but are also provided with an environment ripe for learning, growth and development free of fear. The objectives of Safe School Initiative are: to transfer secondary students to other states; to support to education in IDP camps; and to pilot safe schools models including community mobilization. According to Businessday (2021) the promoters had planned the Initiative to begin by building community security groups to promote safe zones for education, consisting of teachers, parents, police, community leaders and young people themselves. In the longer term, the programme would focus on bolstering the safety of schools – providing school guards and police in partnership with Nigerian authorities, training staff as school safety officers, and providing counsellors to schools at risk of attack. The programme also aimed at delivering basic services in education and helping families, whose lives have been devastated by the conflict to rebuild their livelihoods and infrastructure (Businessdays, 2021). The initiative “was formulated to design and Implement the best of global standards in the educational sector in Nigeria through the employment of qualified teachers, provision of library and laboratory equipment, conducive environment for teaching and learning, as well as provision of habitable classrooms and hostels (Businessday,2021).

The Safe School Initiative programme has three components, namely: the transfer of vulnerable learners in violence-affected communities to safe areas and boarding schools in states not affected by violence; the initiation of the safe school model in 10 schools in each of the three states affected by the Boko Haram insurgency; and the provision of high-quality education to children affected by the conflicts and living in camps for Internally Displaced Persons. The initiative programme covered Adamawa, Borno and Yobe states, and Gombe state all in Northeast Nigeria.

The sources of funds for the programme came for the Nigerian government, private sectors and international communities. The Government of Nigeria has established a national Safe Schools Fund to accommodate capitalization from the Federal Government, Private Sector, and grants from donors. This national fund is to be complemented by the establishment of the Nigeria Safe Schools Initiative Multi-Donor Trust Fund (Nigeria SSI MDTF) also for donors for matching co-financing and implementation of activities pertaining to the initiative (Pascalobservatory, 2015).

Challenges facing the Implementation of Safe School Initiative (SSI) Programme in Nigerian North East States

This article identified inadequate funding, corruption, poor monitoring and evaluation, political instability, undefined roles of tiers of government, insecurity problem and lack of political will.

Inadequate Funding

Inadequate funding is a major problem affecting the implementation of the Safe School Initiative (SSI) programme in North East Nigeria. The funds require to beef up securities in the educational institutions in the Northeast is large and is not available in the cafer of the federal, state and local government. The full implementation of Safe School Initiative (SSI) programme require huge investment in educational infrastructural facilities, employment of more security personnel and installation of security gadget in all educational institutions. The cost implication of this is high. The inability of the federal government to fund the programme well is responsible for the poor implementation of the Safe School Initiative (SSI) programme in the Northeast Nigeria. This submission is confirmed by Punch (2021) that report that the Federal Government has identified lack of funds and logistics as among factors hampering the implementation of the nation’s Safe School Initiative. Also, Ogunode & Adah (2020) submitted that inadequate funding is one of the major

problem facing the implementation of educational policies in Nigeria. The budgetary allocation for education is very poor that it cannot be used to implement the various educational policies in the educational sector

Corruption

Corruption is may be another fundamental problem preventing effective implementation of the Safe School Initiative (SSI) programme in the Northeast Nigeria. The limited monies released for the programme might have been mismanaged or looted by some managers and administrator of the programme. VON, (2018) submits that \$20million voted for the commencement of the Safe Schools Initiative to cover over 500 rural schools and the impact is not felt in the Northeast Nigeria. Frustrated by the ongoing attacks, activists are demanding to know how that money is being spent. Nigerian lawmakers have suggested a probe amid allegations of mismanagement. Also, Socio-Economic Rights and Accountability Project in (2021) as reported by Punch urged the President, Major General Muhammadu Buhari (retd.), to “direct the Attorney General of the Federation and Minister of Justice Mr Abubakar Malami, SAN, and appropriate anti-corruption agencies to investigate allegations that \$30m safe school fund is missing, mismanaged or diverted, and to bring to justice anyone suspected to be involved, as well as recover any missing money.” SERAP urged him to “direct Mr Malami and appropriate anti-corruption agencies to investigate why the Safe Schools Initiative, established to bolster security at schools in response to the abduction of the Chibok schoolgirls has failed to stop frequent abductions of students, and to ensure the safety and security of Nigerian children in schools across the country.” SERAP also urged him to “ask the United Nations Special Envoy for Global Education, Mr Gordon Brown to wait for the outcome of any investigation into the spending of the \$30m initially budgeted for the Safe School Initiative programme before leading the international community and donors to push for more funds for the programme.” (Punch, 2021). Ogunode & Adah (2020) opined that institutional corruption is another problem preventing the full implementation of educational policies in Nigeria. Funds allocated for the implementation of educational policies and programme are been diverted by some of officials in the ministries of education into private pocket.

Poor Monitoring and Evaluation

Poor monitoring and evaluation is another big problem facing the implementation of the Safe School Initiative (SSI) programme in the North East Nigeria. The monitoring and evaluation system designed to monitor and evaluate the progress and implementation of the Safe School Initiative (SSI) programme in the Northeast Nigeria is poor, weak and ineffective. Ogunode, Samuel, Audu & Pajo (2020) observed that there are many challenges militating against effective monitoring and evaluation of educational programme in Nigeria. Some of the challenges include; inadequate funding of monitoring and evaluation programmme, inadequate professional monitoring and evaluating officers, poor capacity development of monitoring and evaluating officers, corruptions, insecurity, inadequate monitoring and evaluation tools, political instability and lack of political support. To solve this challenges, this article recommends the following: the government should provide: adequate funding for monitoring and evaluation programmme, employment of more professional evaluator and monitors, constant capacity development programme for monitoring and evaluating officers, fight all institution corruption, provide security for Monitoring and Evaluating officers, provide adequate monitoring and evaluation tools, ensure political stability and the political officeholders should support the activities of monitoring and evaluation in the co

Political Instability

Political instability is another challenge preventing the implementation of the Safe School Initiative (SSI) programme in the North East Nigeria. The government that started the programme is no longer in the affair of the government. The new administration lack the political will to objectively implement the programme since the designing and formulation of the programme was done by the former administration, implementation will be difficulty with new ministers and cabinet members. Ogunode & Adah (2020) observed that lack of continuity in the implementation of educational policies in Nigeria is another factors preventing effective implementation of educational policies like

the Safe School Initiative (SSI) programme. Many sound educational policies have been suspended because of changes in government. According to Manafa, (2011) the constraint to the implementation of educational policy in Nigeria is lack of Continuity in Commitment to Policy. This affects the smooth implementation of policy. Nigeria's educational system has witnessed a series of changes in policies and programmes. Constant change in power or system of government in the past has contributed to the problem of ineffective implementation of the policy statement of Education For All (EFA).

Undefined Roles of Tiers of Government

Another challenges preventing effective implementation of Safe School Initiative (SSI) programme in North East Nigeria is the undefined roles of tiers of government in terms of technical roles, financial roles and administrative roles. The roles of each tier of the government from the federal, states and local government is not define in the implementation process and this is affecting the implementation of the programme. Both the federal, state and local government in terms of finance, technical support and administrative should have been defined for smooth implementation of the programme. The inability of the planned document to identify this significant roles of each level of government is affecting the implementation of the Safe School Initiative (SSI) programme in Nigeria.

Insecurity Problem

Insecurity problem have been a major setback to the implementation of the Safe Schools Initiative (SSI) programme in the Northeast Nigeria. Since the inception of the programme, the Boko haram have increase their attacks on public institutions especially the educational institutions in the Northeast Nigeria. According to Gordon Brown, (2016) the Nigeria's Safe School Initiative, an initiative to help protect hundreds of schools in Northeast, will continue inspite of the Boko Haram attacks, the UN Special Envoy for Global Education. Ogunode & Adah (2020) submitted that insecurity challenges is another major challenge facing the implementation of educational policies in Nigeria. Many educational policies designed and formulated to improve the access to education and improve the quality of education have been frustrated due to the insecurity problem in the country. Many educational programme like safe school initiative, girl child education, women education and universal basic programme have been slow down by the various forms of insecurity problem facing the country.

Lack of Political Will

Lack of political will to implement the Safe School Initiative (SSI) programme as designed by the government, private sector and international communities in the states and local government councils is a very big problem that has affected the implementation of Safe School Initiative (SSI) programme in Nigeria. Ogunode & Adah (2020) observed that lack of political will to implement the educational policies in Nigeria is another problem facing the implementation of educational policies in Nigeria. The Child act right bill signed and passed into the law by the federal government of Nigeria have not been signed by many states government because they don't have to sign the bill into law for implementation in their various states.

Way Forward

To address this challenges, the article recommended adequate funding of the programme, improvement in the monitoring and evaluation of the programme, redefine the roles of each tier of government in the implementation of the programme and ensure political will of the implementation of the programme.

- a) Government should increase the funding of the Safe School Initiative (SSI) programme;
- b) Existing monitoring and evaluation systems in the Safe School Initiative (SSI) programme including for feedback and social performance are incomplete and unreliable. They are consequently not fit to inform policy-making or implementation. Considering this, annual monitoring of environmental and social performance needs to be conducted during the

implementation of the Safe School Initiative (SSI) programme Program, including for the actions indicated in table below.

- c) The government should develop the political will to implement the Safe School Initiative (SSI) programme. It will help to guarantee quality education for the children
- d) The government should define the roles of each tier of government in the implementation of the Safe School Initiative (SSI) programme in Northeast;
- e) The government should monitor all funds released for the implementation of the programme and ensure the funds are used for what is meant for; and
- f) The government should tight security in the Northeast states to aid smooth implementation of the programme.

Conclusion

The Safe Schools Initiative was launched at the World Economic Forum on Africa in Nigeria in 2014 by a coalition of Nigerian business leaders working with the United Nations special envoy for Global Education, the Global Business Coalition for Education and World at School. The implementation of the Safe Schools Initiative programme is faced with many challenges. This article identified inadequate funding, corruption, poor monitoring and evaluation, political instability, undefined roles of tiers of government, insecurity problem and lack of political will are the challenges preventing the implementation Safe Schools Initiative programme in Nigerian North East states. To address this challenges, the article recommended; adequate funding of the Safe Schools Initiative programme, improvement in the monitoring and evaluation of the Safe Schools Initiative programme, redefine the roles of each tier of government in the implementation of the programme, government should monitor the funds released for the implementation of the Safe Schools Initiative programme and ensure political will of the implementation of the Safe Schools Initiative programme.

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