**ADOLESCENT GIRLS MISSING FROM THE RADAR OF DEVELOPMENT:**

**PILOT PROJECT FROM FEDERAL CAPITAL TERRITORY, NIGERIA**

Nigeria has a significant youth population, of which about 17 million are girls between the ages of 10 and 17, however, 9.52 million (56%) of these girls are not in school. This briefing brings together evidence from a participatory research project that involved training six girls aged 9-18 from the six Area Councils of the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja as peer researchers. These young people then collected data from adolescent girls currently missing from the radar of education development as well as from village leaders. The aim of the project was to help such girls develop leadership skills and have a voice in decisions that affect them.

The research was carried out by Change Managers International in collaboration with the Center for Gender Security Studies and Youth Advancement, University of Abuja and theTabitha Cumi Foundation. It is one of a series of pilot studies exploring how public services could be more inclusive of disadvantaged social groups in ODA-eligible contexts. The studies are supported by an international partnership of academic, policy and non-government organisations collaborating to produce new knowledge and solutions to exclusion and disadvantage. More details of the PEI collaboration and a full report for this project can be found [here](https://medicinehealth.leeds.ac.uk/directory_record/1366/partnerships_for_equity_and_inclusion).

## A picture containing person, outdoor, people, group  Description automatically generatedKEY RECOMMENDATIONS

• There is an urgent need for the government at Federal, State, and Local Government levels to develop intervention policies of inclusion for adolescent girls who are out of school and therefore missing from the radar of development.

• Government should ensure access to good quality basic amenities in rural areas such as education, health and judicial processes*.*

## CASE STUDY

An adolescent girl from Kuje described the impact of poor access to education and healthcare on her life chances, relationships, health and finances:

“w*ithout being educated, you cannot be seen or known in the community… when a female is educated, she can express herself and she is well recognized in the community. It is important for the development of the communities… when I want to marry, my husband will respect me, and I will be able to express myself and be respected.*

*We do not have health centres in my community. Like when someone is pregnant and in labour, we have to take the person to Dafara community, health care and treatment is not free. One will have to pay first before [being] attended to by the nurses there.”*

• Policy provision is also needed for girls at risk of dropping out of school to enable them to complete their education.

• Annual budgetary provision is needed to provide support and empowerment for girls who cannot return to school but wish to engage in trade. The process of disbursement and monitoring of these funds should be overseen by the Ministry of Women’s Affairs.

• Access to free education should be revived, especially in rural areas and through involving village heads, their wives and other village women leaders.

## FINDINGS

* Abaji, Rimba 1 and Rimba 2 are two agrarian communities with a quarry area located in the communities. Due to activities in the quarry around and financial limitations being experienced by adolescent girls and inability of parents to care for their children, some of the girls are involved in the trade of selling sand to the construction companies for the meagre sum of 1500 naira (about $3.7) for over 20 tons of sand. In Bwari, adolescent girls interviewed said they were never forced to work and did so of their freewill for upkeep of their families. In Kuje the girls said that due to the inability of their parents to support their education beyond secondary school, they resolved to trade as a means of saving for their education and upkeep. One participant in Kuje, however, said that her mother sometimes asked her to contribute to cooking expenses and could threaten not to feed her when she was unable to do so.
* Barriers to adolescent girls’ education also came from poor policy action in terms of the lack of public secondary schools in some of the communities and the sometimes dilapidated structures of schools. This meant that even when parents were interested in supporting their daughters to go beyond a primary school level of education, they could be discouraged by the extra transport costs involved in sending the girls to out-of-area schools, for which there were no free school buses to convey them. Some parents went the extra mile to rent accommodation closer to these schools but this could raise other issues of concern such as financial pressures on the girls themselves. One participant said

*“sometimes they have to meet boys for money when their rent expires and when they run out of food and pocket money while living alone*.*”*

This was also the case in Gwagwalada where the girls reported that they relied on boys to take care of their personal expenses.

* Adolescent girls involved in the study were subjected to poor living and social conditions that exposed them to unwanted pregnancies and poor health. Pointing out another negative effect of this, a community leader agreed that early marriage could be a reason for increased gender based violence as underage couples were not yet mature enough for marriage.

In the communities involved in the study, it was, therefore, common to find girls who were not educated beyond primary school level. In addition to the poor secondary school facilities, participants also attributed this to a preference for education of male children over female children in the context of severe financial pressure on families. Participants pointed out that adolescent girl education is usually perceived as a burden to the family and a financial loss as she would be married off eventually. An adolescent girl from Kuje said:

“ *Because we have a large-family of an average of 11 children, there is usually an arrangement to send some to school while others learn a trade, especially girls. In cases where a girl is sent to school it is usually difficult to pay school fees and some drop out of school. It has increased suffering as fathers are usually torn between providing for all the children with so much pressure from their wives, this creates more problem for the family as unhealthy competition arises. Fathers also have to work harder in their farms to meet up with their obligations to the family.”*

* Girls involved in the study wanted to have control over their lives and to make choices in matters that concerned them, including their education, employment and marriage:

*“everyone has different desires and the needs of the adolescent girls will be fully captured when young girls have a place in decision making.”* Adolescent girl in Amac

*“they ought to participate in decision making so that they can be elected as leaders in their society.”* Adolescent girl in Kwali

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