

The Girl-Child and Social Protection in Nigeria

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Social protection strategies and policy frameworks have often neglected children's vulnerability to violence, exploitation, abuse and neglect. Yet, children need special attention in social protection policy as they are often more vulnerable than the adult. In Nigeria, there is no overarching policy on social protection and no national policy on social assistance and for vulnerable children in particular. Even as there is a need to focus on Nigerian children in general, particularly, there is an urgent need for an understanding of the multiple and often intersecting vulnerabilities and risks that the girl-child face, which are often higher than those faced by boys. This study, therefore, examines the state of social protection in Nigeria; the vulnerabilities and risks that threaten the social and economic wellbeing of the girl-child in Nigeria; the mechanisms and initiatives that the Nigerian government can put in place to enhance social protection in general and that of the girl-child, in particular; and the roles non-governmental actors play in the provision of social protection in Nigeria.

Keywords: Social protection, girl-child, vulnerabilities, risks, poverty reduction

Introduction

The girl-child of today is the woman of tomorrow. The skills, ideas and energy of the girl-child are vital for full attainment of the goals of equality, development and peace. For the girl-child to develop her full potential, she needs to be nurtured in an enabling environment, where her spiritual, intellectual and material needs for survival, protection and development are met and her equal rights safeguarded. - Report of the Fourth World Conference on Women. *Beijing, 4-15 September 1995, Article 39.*

This study is concerned with the social protection of the girl-child, a biological female offspring from birth to eighteen (18) years of age, with a focus on Nigeria. According to Section 277 of Nigeria's *Child Rights Act 2003*, a child is a person below the age of eighteen years. Social protection is an important component of poverty reduction strategies and efforts to reduce vulnerability to economic,

social, natural and other shocks and stresses. As noted by Gabel (2014: 1),

Children are one of the most vulnerable groups in almost any population because of their physical and emotional dependence on adults and social status. Their vulnerability is greater in developing countries because of the higher incidence of poverty and less developed social protection mechanisms in place compared to industrialized countries. Children who grow up in socially, economically, and politically secure households in societies where human rights are respected are more likely to be self-sufficient, skilled, and self-confident individuals than children raised in stressful environments.

Prior to entering adulthood, children, especially girls, experience income poverty through detrimental allocations of their time between education and work (paid and unpaid), deficits in developing uncompromised physical, mental, and emotional capabilities, and at times

violation of their physical integrity (Antonopoulos, 2013: 16). Ordinarily, approaches which cater for all people should be integral components of the social protection agenda; however, children, and especially the girl-child, are most often neglected in the social protection strategies and policy frameworks.

Children need special attention in social protection policy as they are usually more vulnerable than the adult. Although, all children need this attention, the girl-child needs a little more attention. There is an urgent need for an understanding of the multiple and often intersecting vulnerabilities and risks that the girl-child face, which are often higher than those faced by boys (for example, the case of the abduction of over 200 Chibok girls in Northern Nigeria by Boko Haram insurgents), in order to provide adequate social protection strategies and policy frameworks accordingly.

This paper, therefore, examines the state of social protection in Nigeria; the vulnerabilities and risks that threaten the social and economic wellbeing of the girl-child in Nigeria; the mechanisms and initiatives that the Nigerian government can put in place to enhance social protection in general and that of the girl-child, in particular; and the roles non-governmental actors play in the provision of social protection in Nigeria. It is believed that addressing these will go a long way in the reduction of child poverty, improve well-being, and address inequities in Nigeria.

Conceptual Clarification and Framework

Murphy (1998: 11) defines poverty as “the state of deprivation of possessions and services considered necessary for a full and active life both in the short term and over the long run”. Basic human needs considered necessary for a person’s wellbeing include adequate food, water, shelter, clothing, health, and energy to cook (and sometimes heat), a safe and clean environment, adequate sanitation, security from crime, and a minimum level of education. Certain services provided by public agencies, such as health care, education, credit and technical assistance are also considered to be necessary. Other assets,

such as tools and land, are important possessions necessary to make a living over the longer run.

According to Albrecht *et al.* (2000), theories of poverty generally fall into two major categories: cultural and structural. Cultural explanations are generally based on what has been called a “culture of poverty” in which the primary problem lies with the individual. According to cultural theories of poverty, people are poor because they have a distinctive culturally determined way of life that largely explains the occurrence and persistence of poverty. Relevant aspects of this “defective” culture include a limited time horizon, impulsive need for gratification, low aspirations, and psychological self-doubt. When these aspects are taken together, the resulting worldview helps poor people to cope with pervasive hopelessness and despair. Poor families and communities then socialize their young with these ingrained values and norms, and consequently limit or obstruct their successful participation in mainstream institutions. The resulting “underclass” thus becomes permanent and is “locked into its own unique, but maladaptive culture”. According to the structural theories of poverty, the causes of poverty can be found in the social or economic system rather than in the individual. These theories argue that people are poor because of racism, gender, class and segregation which limit or deny certain categories or groups of people access to training or jobs that are sufficient to maintain an acceptable standard of living or quality of life.

Social protection is an integral component of any strategic effort to reduce the incidence and severity of poverty. According to Scott (2012: 5), social protection is concerned with people who are vulnerable or at risk in some way, such as children, women, elderly, disabled, displaced, unemployed, and the sick, and with ways of transferring assets to these vulnerable groups. There is no consensus on the definition of social protection. Countries, organisations and agencies define and use the term in different ways (see some definitions in Table 1).

Table 1: Definitions of Social Protection

Agency	Definition
Multilateral Development Banks	
World Bank	Social Protection is a collection of measures to improve or protect human capital, ranging from labor market interventions and publicly mandated unemployment or old-age insurance to targeted income support. Social Protection interventions assist individual, households, and communities to better manage the risks that leave people vulnerable.
AfDB	Social protection and labor market regulation reduce the risk of becoming poor, assist those who are poor to better manage further risks, and ensure a minimal level of welfare to all people (CPIA 2008).
ADB	The set of policies and programs designed to reduce poverty and vulnerability by promoting efficient labor markets, diminishing people's exposure to risks, and enhancing their capacity to protect themselves against hazards and interruption/loss of income. Social protection consists of five major elements: (i) labor markets, (ii) social insurance, (iii) social assistance, (iv) micro and area-based schemes to protect communities and (v) child protection.
United Nations	
United Nations	A set of public and private policies and programs undertaken by societies in response to various contingencies to offset the absence or substantial reduction of income from work; to provide assistance to families with children as well as provide people with basic health care and housing.
ILO	The set of public measures that a society provides for its members to protect them against economic and social distress that would be caused by the absence or a substantial reduction of income from work as a result of various contingencies (sickness, maternity, employment injury, unemployment, invalidity, old age, and death of the breadwinner); the provision of health care; and, the provision of benefits for families with children.
UNDP	Social protection refers to policies designed to reduce people's exposure to risks, enhancing their capacity to protect themselves against hazards and loss of income. Social protection involves interventions from public, private, voluntary organizations, and social networks, to support individuals, households and communities prevent, manage, and overcome the hazards, risks, and stresses threatening their present and future well-being.
UNICEF	A set of public actions which address not only income poverty and economic shocks, but also social vulnerability, thus taking into account the inter-relationship between exclusion and poverty.
WFP	Integrated systems of institutionalized national measures, which may include contributory pensions, insurance schemes and safety nets.
Bilateral Donors, EU and OECD	
DFID	Social protection can be broadly defined as public actions – carried out by the state or privately – that: a) enable people to deal more effectively with risk and their vulnerability to crises and changes in circumstances (such as unemployment or old age); and b) help tackle extreme and chronic poverty.
EU	Measures put in place to provide a minimum standard of welfare and to protect citizens against the risks of inadequate income associated with unemployment, illness, disability, old age, the cost of raising a family, or the death of a spouse or parent.
GTZ	A framework that helps people to cope with life's risks and cushion their consequences.
OECD	Social protection refers to policies and actions which enhance the capacity of poor and vulnerable people to escape from poverty and enable them to better manage risks and shocks.

Source: Yemtsov, 2013: 7

Traditionally, social protection has focused on short-term protective safety nets: mechanisms to protect people from the impact of shocks such as flood, drought, unemployment or the death of a

breadwinner, as well as insurance interventions linked to formal employment. This focus on short-term poverty mitigation has been criticised as an expensive, welfarist intervention and a

disincentive for individual self-reliance (Scott, 2012: 5). As a result of concerns with supporting equitable growth, social protection has evolved to include longer-term preventative and promotive perspectives. These approaches highlight the structural causes of chronic poverty and attempt to address the social, economic and political barriers vulnerable people face in climbing out of poverty. Building upon the idea of promotive social protection, which seeks to strengthen the agency of vulnerable people, social protection has also been discussed in terms of its transformative character, through which social protection operates with a rights-based approach to transform the status and opportunities of marginalised groups.

This paper adopts the definition of social protection by Stephen Devereux and Rachel Sabates-Wheeler (2004: 9) as “the set of all initiatives, both formal and informal, that provide: social assistance to extremely poor individuals and households; social services to groups who need special care or would otherwise be denied access to basic services; social insurance to protect people against the risks and consequences of livelihood shocks; and social equity to protect people against social risks such as discrimination or abuse.” It also adopts their rights-based framework that pushes social protection to go beyond the “safety net” role it has conventionally played. In their framework, social protection offers aid to the poor and prevents poverty, but it also empowers the poor and transforms societies by creating opportunities for socially vulnerable groups to participate in individual and economic growth. The four main categories of this framework are:

- protective measures to provide relief from deprivation, such as narrowly targeted safety nets for people facing livelihood shocks (e.g. food aid as emergency relief) and social assistance for the chronically poor;
- preventive measures to avert deprivation, including formal social insurance schemes (e.g. health insurance, unemployment benefits, pensions and maternity benefits); informal risk-pooling mechanisms (e.g. savings clubs, burial societies); and diversification strategies to spread risk;
- promotive measures to enhance incomes and capabilities in the short and long term (e.g.

school feeding or public works with skill training); and

- transformative measures to address vulnerabilities arising from social inequity and exclusion (e.g. protection against discrimination or sensitization campaigns on HIV and AIDS).

In this wise, social protection is the set of all initiatives, both formal and informal, that provide:

- Social assistance to extremely poor individuals and households. This typically involves regular, predictable transfers (cash or in-kind, including fee waivers) from government and non-governmental entities to individuals or households aimed at reducing poverty and vulnerability, increasing access to basic services and promoting asset accumulation.
- Social services to marginalised groups that need special care or would otherwise be denied access to basic services based on particular social (rather than economic) characteristics.
- Social insurance to protect people against the risks and consequences of livelihood, health and other shocks. Social insurance supports access to services in times of need, and typically takes the form of subsidised risk-pooling mechanisms, with potential contribution payment exemptions for the poor.
- Social equity measures to protect people against social risks such as discrimination or abuse. These can include anti-discrimination legislation (in terms of access to property, credit, assets, services) as well as affirmative action measures to attempt to redress past patterns of discrimination (Pereznieto and Fall, 2009: 14).

It is assumed that countries that include these types of measures in their social protection efforts will facilitate social inclusiveness and strategies that empower people to assert their rights, and particularly address the specific vulnerabilities and risks faced by children.

The Vulnerabilities and Risks of the Girl-child in Nigeria

Garcia and Gruat (2003: 2) define vulnerability as a ‘state of high exposure to certain risks, combined with a reduced ability to protect or defend oneself against those risks and cope with their negative consequences’. Hoogeveen, Tesliuc, Vakis and Dercon (2004: 6) refer to vulnerability as ‘exposure to uninsured risk leading to socially unacceptable levels of wellbeing’. According to them, exposure to risk may be seen as one of the many dimensions of poverty. To Pelling (2003: 47), vulnerability broadly comprises of three main components namely exposure, resistance and resilience. Exposure is described as a product of physical location and the character of the surrounding environment. Resistance on the other hand is perceived as a reflection of the capacity of an individual to maintain a balance between economic, psychological and physical health conditions; while resilience is the ability to cope with or adapt to stress. It is a reflection of the

extent of planned preparation undertaken in the light of potential difficulties, and of spontaneous adjustments made in response to felt stress.

Poor households are typically more exposed to risk (see Table 2) and with the least protection. This exposure has a direct bearing on well-being. Even more important is how risk exposure causes poverty or increases the depth of poverty (Hoogeveen *et al.*, 2006). In an attempt to avoid risk exposure, households may take costly preventive measures, which in turn, contribute to poverty. The decision not to invest in a high risk but high return activity not only means foregone income but also a higher likelihood that a household is poor. If security concerns force parents to take children out of school, this disenfranchises the children from their right to basic education. And, if credit and insurance markets are poorly developed, exposure to risks may induce households to hold portfolios of assets that, while possibly well suited to buffering consumption, are not necessarily the most productive.

Table 2: Examples of Risks

Categories of risks	Examples of risks
Natural Risks	heavy rainfall, landslides, volcanic eruptions, earthquakes, floods, hurricanes, droughts, strong winds, etc.
Health Risks	illness, injury, accidents, disability, epidemics (e.g., malaria), famines, etc.
Life-cycle Risks	birth, maternity, old-age, family break-up, death, etc.
Social Risks	crime, domestic, violence, terrorism, gangs, war, social upheaval, etc.
Economic Risks	unemployment, harvest failure, business failure, resettlement, output collapse, balance of payments shock, financial crisis, currency crisis, technological or trade-induced terms of trade shocks, etc.
Political Risks	discrimination, riots, political unrest, coup d'état, etc.
Environmental Risks	pollution, deforestation, land degradation, nuclear disaster, etc

Source: Adapted from Holzmann and Jørgensen, 2000: 12

In many developing countries, children live in a situation of vulnerability and risk, and are exposed to a combination of systematic discrimination based on age and social status, education and health. The girl-child is more exposed to vulnerability and risk due to gender discrimination at the household and community level (Hartl, 2006: 2). At the root of the discrimination and bias faced by the girl-child around the world is the customs, traditions and typical mindset of the society which considers the female as inferior. In fact, in Nigeria, the neglect and rejection of a girl-child normally

starts from birth when the news of safe delivery is broken to the family and especially to the father. Many women who have had a series of girl-children continue to get pregnant with the hope of producing a male child so as to be “accepted” by the husband’s family and to satisfy the society whose expectation is that the male children will preserve the family lineage. The women are usually exposed to and subjected to various risks in the process.

These vulnerabilities are even stronger in rural areas, where poverty, traditions and lack of infrastructure and services prevail (Hartl, 2006:

2). In many parts of the world, female feticide, female infanticide, sexual abuse, marginalization in terms of nutrition, health care and education, violence against the female and various forms of bias is the norm, and most of the time they do not have decision making power of their own. An adolescent girl is often married without her consent and becomes pregnant long before her body, emotional and psychological feelings are mature or ready for it.

From birth to eighteen (18) years of age, the young child is totally under the care of the adult who may be her parents or guardians and older siblings. The period is made up of infancy, childhood, early and late adolescence stages of development. During this period, the girl-child is malleable, builds and develops her personality and character. She is very dependent on the significant others, those on whom she models her behaviour, through observation, repetition and imitation. Her physical, mental, social, spiritual and emotional developments start and progress to get to the peak at the young adult stage (Offorma, 2009). However, during this period also, the girl-child faces a lot of challenges. She is at the mercy of practically every male she comes into contact with, including her father, siblings, relatives, acquaintances and strangers. She can be defiled, molested or abused by any of them. Some of the major challenges facing the girl-child in Nigeria can be summarised as:

- Traditional practices detrimental to the health or development of the girl-child, for instance female genital mutilation;
- Lack of attention to special nutritional needs essential for her future role as child bearer and care-giver;
- Drop-outting from school due to poverty, teen-age pregnancy, and disability;
- Gender stereotyping;
- Negative portrayal as sex objects/victims in advertisements, musical video clips;
- Proliferation of pornographic materials that promote and reinforce sexual abuse;
- Being hired as domestic helpers, thus living away from home
- Engaging in hawking activities thereby being exposed to physical/psychological abuse/interrupted schooling;

- Girl-children especially from rural areas being victims of illegal recruitment/trafficking;
- Early marriage (marriage before age of 18)/forced marriage;
- Increasing rate of teen-age pregnancy.

Girls are particularly affected by low enrolment and most of them grow up illiterate. They also tend to work early in their lives and get married early. According to a Report by the Federal Government (2014), about 20 per cent of young women age 15-19 years is currently married. The proportion in urban is 8 per cent and rural is 28 per cent. The proportion for those with secondary education is 6 per cent but for none educated is 72 per cent. North-West has about 52 per cent of young women age 15-19 years currently married, while it was only 3 per cent in South-East. Percentage of women age 15-49 years in polygamous marriage/union in Nigeria is 34 per cent. In Nigeria, 18 per cent of women married before age 15 while 40 per cent married before age 18. In the Northern part of Nigeria especially, many parents marry off the girls as soon as they reach puberty ostensibly to protect them from premarital sex and pregnancy outside marriage. Consequentially, cases of Vesicovaginal Fistula (VVF), maternal mortality, have been on the increase especially in rural areas.

Some of the cases of early marriages have led to tragic situations such as the one involving Wasilat Tasiu, a 14-year old bride who poisoned and killed her husband, Umar Sani, and four other guests in Kano a few days after she was married off in December 2014 (Abah, 2016). According to her, she committed the crime in order to realise her dream of acquiring an education. Another tragic incident involved Rahama Hussaini who killed her husband, Tijjani Nasiru, in March 2015 in protest over being forced to marry the man who was her cousin (Abah, 2016).

Also, abduction of young girls, with many of them forced into early marriages, is on the increase in Nigeria. The recent cases of Ese Oruru and Patience Paul are just a few examples. Ese Oruru, 14, from Bayelsa state was allegedly abducted and taken to Kano state, forced to convert to Islam and was already about 5 months

pregnant at the time she was rescued by the Police (Omonobi, 2016). Patience Paul, 15 year old from Benue state was abducted in Sokoto state, forced to convert to Islam and was sexually abused for seven months before she was rescued by the Police (Joseph, 2016).

Early sexual involvement increases the risk of pregnancy, and when the mother is of school age she tends to abandon schooling, leading to decreased social opportunities, which translate into reduced lifetime earnings and thus the reproduction of female poverty (Chandra-Mouli, Camacho, Camacho, 2014). Poverty also leads some girls into prostitution and thereby abandons school. In addition, lack of information and knowledge about how to protect themselves from HIV and AIDS makes young people particularly vulnerable to contracting such diseases. In urban areas where a large number of children live in difficult conditions (these are usually children who have migrated from rural areas either by themselves or with their parents or relatives) without basic amenities, children tend to move out to live in the street or engage in criminal activities such as drug use and theft (Ould El Hadj and Diakhate, 2006: 7). Poor rural parents often send their children (particularly girls) to relatives or acquaintances in urban areas with the hope that the host family will enrol them in school in exchange for domestic work (Gustafsson-Wright and Payne, 2002). Many young girls also engage in hawking activities in order to help in supporting their household. Some of them have become victims of abuse and molestation with some even ending their lives tragically. A case in point is that of Sarah Ibikunle, 15, who was hawking fish for her mother but was felled by bullets during gun battle between the Police and some armed robbers in Lagos (Igbowelundu, 2015).

The socioeconomic status of girls in the northern zones lags behind those in the south: over two-thirds of girls in the North aged 15-19 years are unable to read compared to less than 10% in the South; in the North only 4% complete secondary school and more than 50% are married by age 16 (British Council Nigeria, 2012: 2). The National Policy on Education

stipulates free basic education for every Nigerian child. Although education is free in Nigeria, costs associated with it often prove prohibitive for poor families, thus, children are still forced to work, either to attend school or to support the family full-time. Also, the 2006 National Gender Policy and its Strategic Implementation Framework emphasize the central role of female education as a key determinant for achieving broader development objectives. However, the national primary Net Enrolment Rate for girls in 2010 was 55% compared to 60% for boys; completion rates remain low and at least 53% of out-of-school children are girls (ActionAid, 2012).

In addition to issues of school access, family and school resources, and attitudes towards education, school attendance in northern Nigeria is impeded by insecurity, especially as a result of the activities of Boko Haram, an Islamist militant group, which opposes Western education. The kidnapping of about 276 school girls in Borno state by the insurgents in 2014 testifies to the magnitude of risk that girls bear when they attend school.

Existing Social Protection Initiatives and Implementation in Nigeria

With a population of approximately 170 million people, Nigeria is the most populous country in Africa. It is the 12th largest producer/exporter of petroleum worldwide with an annual Gross Domestic Product of USD262.6 billion in 2013 (World Bank, 2013) and an annual growth rate of around 6.6% (National Health Demographic Survey, 2014). However, Nigeria has one of the highest numbers of people living in poverty and inequality. According to the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) National Poverty Index report 2012, about 112 million Nigerians (or 67.1 per cent of the country's total population of 167million) live below poverty level, living below US\$1.00-US\$1.25 per day. As shown in Table 3, the distribution of poverty in the country varies by geographic location and is also influenced by socio-cultural and religious norms and prevalence of conflict and instability, as much as by economic environment.

Table 3: Geographical Distribution of Poverty in Nigeria

Region	Poverty rate (%)
North west	71.4
North east	69.1
North central	60.7
South west	49.8
South South	55.5
South east	59.5

Source: NBS, 2012

Nigeria ranked 152 out of 158 countries on the 2015 Human Development Index (HDI). Gross Domestic Product (GDP) annual growth in Nigeria averaged about 6 per cent from 2005 until 2015, reaching an all-time high of almost 9 per cent in 2010. In 2015, GDP growth fell significantly due to low oil prices to a record low of slightly over 2 per cent (World Bank, 2016).

With over 60% of the population below 18, children are represented disproportionately in poor households (Holmes *et al.*, 2012: 1). Nigeria's under-five mortality and maternal mortality rates for the poorest are among the highest in the world, and poverty and deprivation exacerbate child protection issues, including trafficking, prostitution and abuse. From 2010 to 2013, the out-of-school rate for children 6-14 increased from 24 to 30 per cent, with 95 per cent living in the northern states, and the incidence increasing faster among girls, children from the poorest two income quintiles and in rural areas (World Bank, 2016).

As noted by Hagen-Zanker and Tavakoli (2011: 1), despite its relative wealth, Nigeria spends less on social protection than many African countries. For example, between 2006 and 2007 Nigeria spent 0.9% of consolidated government expenditure on social protection while Ethiopia, Kenya, Malawi, Mozambique and Uganda spent an average of 1.4% in the same year. Also, general public services and economic affairs together made up more than 50% of Nigeria's consolidated government expenditure in 2010, with spending on social sectors averaging 20% over the period 2005-2010. Of the social sectors, education made up approximately 12% of total government expenditure in 2009, health around 7% and social protection only about 1.4%.

In 55 years of independence, Nigeria has no overarching policy on social protection and no national policy on social assistance for vulnerable children in particular, and most especially the girl-child, despite its membership of the International Labour Organisation (ILO), the International Social Security Association (ISSA) and despite being signatories to several international Conventions and Charters. Nigeria has ratified a number of key international social equity legislation instruments which form part of the transformative social protection agenda, including the Civil and Political Rights Covenant, the Economic, Social and Cultural Rights Covenant, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Violence Against Women and the Convention on the Rights of the Child. However, not all states have passed these, implementation is weak, and there is limited, if any, conceptual link between the broader regulatory policies of equality and rights and social protection policies. Also, Nigeria is a signatory to both the 1989 UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (WSC). Following ratification of the CRC in 1991, the government of Nigeria simplified and translated this document into the three major Nigerian languages. Nigeria also ratified the Declaration and Plan of Action for Children arising from the WSC, held in New York in 1990. This action was followed up with the preparation of a National Programme of Action (NPOA) for the Survival, Protection, and Development of Children, adopted in 1992. However, coverage and enforcement of these laws remain limited (Hagen-Zanker and Holmes, 2012).

According to UNICEF (2012a), the Federal Government, the state governments and the local governments are key players in the social

protection systems. Some of the institutions involved in social protection policy formulation and implementation and their activities as listed by UNICEF (2012a) are briefly identified below:

A. *Federal Ministry of Education (FME):*

The FME has several policies and strategies that are social protection in nature. These policies and strategies target the weak and poor in society, with a view to enabling them access basic education and break the intergenerational cycle of family poverty. Some of these policies and strategies are:

B. *Universal Basic Education:* In September 1999, former President Olusegun Obasanjo launched the Universal Basic Education (UBE) programme and in 2004, he signed the UBE Act into law. By this Act, universal basic education was declared free and compulsory for all Nigerian children irrespective of circumstances of birth, religion, ethnicity, geographical location or gender. All the states and local governments adopted the free and compulsory education policy. The extension of UBE to include pre-primary, adult and non-formal education and nomadic education implies further extension and spread of social protection of the vulnerable poor in all situations from costs of education. However, the implementation of free and compulsory UBE has not been on the same scale in all the states, as some states still charge students certain fees.

C. *School Feeding programme:* School feeding programme called Home Grown School Feeding and Health Programme (HGSFHP) was promoted by the FGN in collaboration with UNICEF on a pilot scale in 12 states of the federation and was intended to enhance children's nutrition and health status while attracting them to school so as to boost school enrolment and retention. However, due to paucity of funds, the FME did not sustain the programme, but some states like Ebonyi, Osun and Bauchi still continue the school feeding programme.

D. *Free Uniforms:* Some states, especially in the northern geopolitical zones of the country, for instance Niger and Kaduna,

have a programme of free school uniform for children in basic education. This goes a long way to reducing the costs of schooling and enhance enrolment and retention.

E. *The National Health Insurance Scheme:* In 2006 the government introduced the National Health Insurance Scheme (NHIS) which is pro-poor and intended to make health services accessible to Nigerians regardless of their socio-economic status. The NHIS is expected to reduce the population of children at risk of dropping out of school due to loss of parents or guardians, or due to the children's morbidity and illness. However, the NHIS is a contributory scheme which only applies to the formal sector at present, while the informal sector with more of the poor is not yet covered by NHIS. The health insurance schemes work in a way that the registered sick only pay a small proportion of health delivery costs while 80% or 90% is paid for by the insurance cover.

F. *The Primary Health Care Programme:* The Primary Health Care programme is critical to child survival and development, particularly the poor and vulnerable children in the society. Some of the Primary Health Care programmes include the National Programme on Immunization against child killer diseases, Advocacy on exclusive breast feeding in the early months of the life of the child, Guinea Worm Eradication Programme, Advocacy and Sensitization on HIV/AIDS, prevention of mother-to-child transmission and free distribution of antiretroviral drugs. Primary health care programmes assist the poor and vulnerable in many ways to survive and to take care of their children. The government effort to prevent the transmission of HIV/AIDS indirectly impacts positively on out of school children (OOSC) reduction efforts by preventing children from becoming orphans.

G. *National Poverty Eradication Programme (NAPEP):* The National Poverty Eradication Programmes (NAPEP) was formed in January 2001 to eradicate poverty in Nigeria by 2010. NAPEP integrates four sectoral schemes: Youth Empowerment Scheme

(YES), Rural Infrastructural Development Scheme (RIDS), Social Welfare Services Scheme (SOWESS) and Natural Resources Development and Conservation Scheme (NRDCS). NAPEP has offices in all 36 states and FCT, and all 774 local government areas in the country. The supervising body is the National Poverty Eradication Council (NAPEC) chaired by the President for policy formulation, coordination, monitoring and review of all poverty eradication activities in the country. Thirteen ministers whose ministries are involved in poverty alleviation activities are members of the NAPEP committee. The prominent activities of NAPEP in social protection are:

1. *Conditional Cash Transfer (CCT)*: This is a programme designed to assist the abject poor in society, through accredited NGOs and its state offices, National Poverty Eradication Programme (NAPEP) identifies the very poor and vulnerable families in the communities. These families are given sustaining grants and trained in some trade for one year. After the training the benefiting families are given substantial grants (N84,000 to N100,000) to start a business on the condition that their children must be maintained in school until the completion of their education. The Girls' Education Programme also gives poor parents cash grants on condition that their daughters are supported to remain in school until completion.
2. *Micro-Finance Credit*: NAPEP gives micro-finance credits to individuals or groups who have some projects with promising feasibility. NAPEP has supported many NDE graduates with micro-finance credit for the establishment of their businesses.
3. *Village Solution Scheme*: Village Solutions Scheme is a village community-driven development programme in which the community is guided in their economic development efforts that involve modernizing the villages and promoting income

generating activities. The village community development associations which the village is encouraged to organise themselves into are given technical expertise and enabling environment. NAPEP coordinates the associations by bringing in Federal government, state government, local government, International NGOs, FBOs, financial institutions to partner with the village community development associations.

4. *KEKE-NAPEP Scheme*: The Keke-NAPEP scheme started in 2001 was designed to eliminate the menacing Area Boys in Nigerian cities by giving them gainful employment in the transport business. Over 3,000 Keke-NAPEP tricycle vehicles were distributed in 2001. Today more than a million Nigerian youths are employed in the Keke-NAPEP transport business.

H. *Federal Ministry of Women Affairs and Social Development (FMWA&SD)*: FMWA &SD is the ministry whose major mandate is social protection and human development. The mandate on child development and protection are domiciled in this ministry. Its major activities on social protection are:

1. *Advocacy for the Signing of the Child Rights Act*: It was the FMWA&SD that pushed hard for the Federal government to accept and sign into law the Child Rights Act (CRA). Since the signing of the CRA in 2003, the FMWA&SD has been working extremely hard to get the states and FCT to sign the same act. At least 24 states and FCT have signed the Act and started implementing it. Advocacy and sensitization continues to get every state sign the CRA.
2. *Establishment of Family Courts in the States*: The FMWA&SD is currently in top level advocacy to get the states that have signed the CRA to establish Family Courts for the trial of infringements on the rights of the child. So far, only seven states (Lagos, Ekiti, Akwa Ibom, Cross River, Ondo, Kogi and Nasarawa) and FCT have

- established the Family Courts for determining cases of infringement of the rights of children in the states. For the ministry, Advocacy continues so as to get all the states establish the Family Courts.
3. *The National Child Policy (NCP)*: The NCP is a document prepared in 2007 by the FMWA&SD containing an aggregation of various child related policies, setting out objectives to be achieved under the four clusters of rights: Survival rights, Development rights, Protection rights, and Participation rights based on an analysis of the context of the Nigerian child. These policies serve as guidelines for the effective implementation, coordination, monitoring and evaluation of child right issues in the country. Activities on the rights of the child are evaluated based on the four clusters of the NCP.
 4. *Establishment of Homes for Settling Abused Children in the States*: The FMWA&SD has promoted the establishment of homes in each state and FCT where abused children are settled before reintegration with their families. The children may be those that are abandoned by their parents, or those that ran away from their home due to maltreatment and suffering, or those that are lost and being looked for by their families. When such children are located they are given a temporary home while their troubles are managed. While they are in the homes they would go to school or learn some skills. As soon as their parents are located, the issues of the children are discussed and arrangements are made to reintegrate the children with their families/homes.
 5. *Establishment of Shelters /Drop-in Centres for Trafficked Children*: Each geopolitical zone of the federation has a drop-in centre or shelter for temporary settlement of trafficked children. These centres are built by FMWA&SD for joint use with NAPTIP and ILO. The ministry, in collaboration with NAPTIP and ILO has different mechanisms for tracking child trafficking. Anti-trafficking networks have been established in the states to track traffickers in persons, especially women/girls and children.
 6. *Establishment of Drop-in Home for Children Accused of witchcraft and Thrown out by Family*: This is a recent development in many states, especially Akwa Ibom and Cross River states. Young children are accused of being witches and wizards and thrown out of the home or inhumanly physically punished to inflict serious bodily injuries. The FMWA&SD and other stakeholders, including NGOs have risen to the challenge. The ministry has established a home/shelter in Akwa Ibom to take in these victims, with a view to reintegrate them with their communities/families. Meanwhile the victims go to school from their emergency shelter. The Akwa Ibom State government has recently promulgated a law banning accusation of children to be witches and wizards. People convicted under this law would be sentenced to 10 years imprisonment.
- I. *National Agency for the Prohibition of Traffic in Persons (NAPTIP)*: NAPTIP was established as an Agency by Act of the Federal Government in August 2003, as a derivative of sections of the constitution prohibiting trafficking in persons. It came as a response to fight human trafficking. The Federal government has signed cooperation agreements with countries sharing borders with Nigeria and others which are seen as the main destinations of victims of trafficking originating from Nigeria. NAPTIP has established anti trafficking networks in at least 22 states to fight the problem. Strong partnership have been developed with various stakeholders and agencies like the Police, Immigration, Customs services, etc. The Nigeria Immigration, the Police, and the Custom

Service have special Units dedicated to checking human trafficking.

Other Federal Government led programmes include:

- The conditional cash transfer In Care of the People (COPE), a cash transfer programme funded by the MDG Office Conditional Grant Scheme which targets poor female-headed households, HIV/AIDS patients and people with disabilities.
- The Maternal and Child Health Care programme (MCH), a health fee waiver for pregnant women and children under five implemented by the Office of The Senior Special Assistant to The President on the Millennium Development Goals (OSSAPMDGs) in collaboration with the National Health Insurance Scheme (NHIS). This programme offers free primary health care to children under five years and free primary and secondary health care for pregnant women up to six weeks after child birth.
- The Maternal and Child Health project of the Subsidy Reinvestment and Empowerment Programme (SURE-P MCH), a four-year programme that aims at increasing the supply of maternal skilled and child health workers and demand for corresponding services from vulnerable communities.
- A community-based health insurance scheme implemented in several States (Holmes *et al.*, 2012).

Also, apart from the government, a significant number of non-governmental actors are involved in funding and implementing social protection in Nigeria, including donors, international non-governmental organisations and civil society. For instance, the Girls' Education Project in Nigeria, funded by the UK Department for International Development (DFID) in partnership with UNICEF, aims to get 1 million more girls into school by 2020. The project calls for the deployment of 10,500 female teachers to rural areas where the predominance of male teachers deters parents from sending their girls to school. In return for a scholarship grant of around £200, newly-qualified female teachers commit to teach in rural schools for two years.

However, as laudable as these programmes and initiatives are, many of them were not sustained and many states in the country did not key into the implementation of these programmes. Also, only a fraction of the poor have benefited from social protection programmes, thus, poverty still remains a fundamental problem in the country.

Particularly, only a few social protection programmes are directly targeted at children and are targeted to a very specific and limited group (children under five and those in primary/secondary education) and address two very specific risks; health and education (and to some extent income poverty). Current programmes are limited in terms of preventing and responding to (domestic) abuse and exploitation. Referrals to other social welfare services are important but are generally missing, as are these social welfare services themselves. Links between child protection and broader social protection are generally weak (Hagen-Zanker and Holmes, 2012). Only a few programmes like the conditional cash transfer (CCT) programme have been implemented through the State education sector in three Northern states (Kano, Bauchi and Katsina) and the establishment of schools exclusively for girls in some local governments in Katsina State are directly targeted at the girl-child.

Enhancing the social protection of the girl-child

Ordinarily, Nigeria is not supposed to have any business with poverty considering the enormous human and natural resources the country is endowed with. However, various factors can be adduced for the inability of the government to provide for its citizens. These include lack of good leadership, massive corruption at all levels, and lack of political will.

However, there seem to be a likelihood of commitment to the improvement in the social protection agenda of the country. According to the World Bank (2016: 1), public expenditure on social protection programmes has grown in recent years. In 2012, Federal spending on social protection increased from an average of about 0.3% of GDP in the previous three years to 0.42%. Annual Federal per capita expenditure on social protection rose from US\$3.5 in 2009 to

US\$6.3 in 2012. However, overall coverage of existing programs remains low and is poorly targeted. In 2016, the Government's proposed budget allocation to social protection of US\$2.5 billion (0.4 per cent of GDP) is an important step towards sufficient and sustainable sector spending. Also the Government has shown a renewed commitment through a significant budget inclusion of N500 billion (approximately 9% of the total 2016 budget) for social protection. The World Bank in March 2016 has also announced a \$500 million (about N99.5 billion) support for the Federal Government's Social Protection Programmes.

A draft National Social Protection Policy is currently being finalized, while the Muhammadu Buhari administration has also set up a National Social Safety Nets Coordinating Office (NASSCO) under the Office of the Vice President, with the responsibility of coordinating all social safety net initiatives in the country. As part of measures aimed at lifting Nigerians out of poverty, the administration has laid down a six-point social protection programme which is to be coordinated by the office of the Vice President:

1. The Teach Nigeria Scheme (TNS): The federal government plans to directly hire 500,000 graduates as teachers. Under the scheme government will hire, train and deploy the graduates to help raise the quality of teachers in public schools across the nation.

2. The Youth Employment Agency (YEA): Between 300,000 to 500,000 non-graduate youths would be taken through skill acquisition programme and vocational training for which they would be paid stipends during the training.
3. Conditional Cash Transfer (CCT): The government would pay directly N5000 per month to one million extremely poor Nigerians this year on the condition that they have children enrolled in school and are immunized.
4. Homegrown School Feeding (HSF): The federal government would serve one meal a day to students of primary schools in collaboration with state governments.
5. Free Education Scheme For Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths (STEM): Where tuition payment would be paid for about 100,000 STEM students in tertiary institutions in the country.
6. Micro Credit Scheme (MCS): Under the MCS, the Federal Government would give N60bn loan to one million artisans and market women and men.

While this may be a step in the right direction, the wellbeing of children is not adequately addressed. The most effective social protection measures that will cater for children should include a combination of approaches that increase income, improve livelihoods, and address underlying and social causes of vulnerability (See Table 4).

Table 4: Model of Social Protection

Social Protection Component	Examples
<p>Social transfers</p> <p>Predictable direct transfers to individuals or households to protect them from the impacts of shocks and support the accumulation of human, productive and financial assets</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cash transfers (including pensions, child benefits, poverty-targeted, seasonal) • Food transfers • Nutritional supplementation • School feeding programme • Provision of ARVs • Public works
<p>Programmes to ensure access to services</p> <p>Social protection interventions that reduce the financial and social barriers households face when accessing social services</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Birth registration • User fee abolition • Health insurance for both formal and informal sectors • Exemptions, vouchers, subsidies • Anti-stigma programmes to promote access to services
<p>Social support and care services</p> <p>Human resource-intensive services that help identify and reduce vulnerability and exclusion, particularly at the child and household level</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Family support services • Home-based care • Programme for Adolescent Mothers
<p>Legislation and policy reform to ensure equity and non-discrimination</p> <p>Changes to policies/legislation in order to remove inequalities in access to services or livelihoods/economic opportunities, thereby helping to address issues of discrimination and exclusion</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Minimum and equal pay legislation • Employment guarantee schemes • Childcare policy • Maternity and paternity leave • Removal of discriminatory legislation or policies affecting service provision/access or employment • Inheritance rights • Sensitization programmes

Source: Adapted from UNICEF, 2012b: 4

Family allowances, social pensions, and other cash transfers linked to school attendance tend to have positive gender effects (Tabor, 2002). For instance, according to Williams (2007), in South Africa, the effects of social transfers on the education of girls are strong. However, providing social protection to a household cannot alone ensure that children's well-being is prioritised and that children are not deprived of education and other development rights. Access to social protection must be accompanied by measures that change trends in the community and make parents realise the needs and rights of children, as well as adequately ensure the wellbeing of the parents.

To achieve this, a comprehensive set of interventions for enhancing sensitivity in general within the community and for encouraging parents to invest in their children should be put in place. Though, many of the social protection measure in Table 4 are not directly targeting children or the girl-child specifically, they are likely to have important positive impacts on them since children are basically considered in the context of families and households. For example, while improving the

availability of schools and quality of education will help get more children to enrol and stay in school, the children of poor families who cannot afford school supplies or who depend on income from child labour are still likely to not enrol, attend less, and drop-out early. Therefore, social protection instruments such as cash transfers, home-based care, and anti-discrimination legislation boost income and food security and provide social support to even the playing field so that the most excluded are also able to benefit from health, education, water and sanitation, and other social services. Also, community sensitisation programmes to enhance girl-child education and to eradicate harmful socio-cultural practices are very crucial for social protection of the girl-child.

Conclusion

Norton *et al.* (2001: 7) noted that the overall rationale for social protection is "to promote dynamic, cohesive and stable societies through increased equity and security". Vulnerability captures the interaction between exposure to risk

and the capacity to respond and cope. Social protection must, therefore, both reduce exposure to risks and increase resilience in an integrated manner. Government has a sacred duty to protect its citizens particularly the poor and disadvantaged. Although a high proportion of Nigerians are children, with a large percentage of them being poor, children receive relatively little attention as targets of social protection or targets for investment. Existing social protection programmes in Nigeria do not sufficiently address the needs of children and families. Social protection policies are an essential element of realizing children's rights, ensuring their well-being, breaking the vicious cycle of poverty and vulnerability, and helping all children realize their full potential (ILO, 2015: xi).

The establishment of effective and sustainable social protection interventions requires considerable political will, on the part of the government and other actors, including donor agencies, international non-governmental organisations, civil society and the communities. Interventions should build on existing policies and programs and integrate with existing community structures such as schools, health facilities and community groups. As noted by UNICEF (2012b: 3)

investing in social protection and children makes sense from both an economic and a human development perspective. The demonstrated impacts of social protection on children's development last long beyond childhood, increasing adult productivity, decreasing the burden of human development losses, and contributing to breaking the intergenerational transmission of poverty.

Thus, investment in children is a key factor in poverty reduction and economic growth. Quality free and inclusive public education should be provided for all children regardless of gender. However, as noted by UNICEF (2007: 1):

Girls' education does not only bring the immediate benefit of empowering girls, but is seen as the best investment in a country's

development. Educated girls develop essential life skills, including self-confidence, the ability to participate effectively in society, and protect themselves from HIV/AIDS, sexual exploitation. Girl's education also helps cutting children and maternal mortality rates, contributing to national wealth and controlling disease and health status. Children of educated women are more likely to go to school and, consequently, this has exponential positive effects on education and poverty reduction for generations to come.

There is, therefore, a need to keep girls in school, invest in the quality of these schools and in making them safer and more girl-friendly. Therefore, there is a need for the government to strengthen its initiatives towards eliminating gender disparities in school enrolment, retention and completion at all levels of education (primary, secondary and tertiary), and ensuring full and equal access to quality education for both boys and girls, for instance, through the provision of scholarships for deserving students, subsidies for books and school supplies, establishment of free transportation to and from school and so on. Also, increasing teachers' deployment to rural areas, especially females, as well as improvement of teacher training are likely to have an impact on girls' enrolment and retention in school.

For out-of-school girls, there is a need to build bridges between formal and non-formal education programmes and develop basic literacy skills. Also, community sensitisation by both government and non-government agencies with support from the media on the benefits of educating the girl-child abusive as well as eradication of socio-cultural practices that tend to affect girls is essential in the provision of social protection for the girl-child. Wealthy Nigerians and non-governmental organisations can also assist by providing scholarships in order to bridge the gap and facilitate education for the girl-child.

There is a need to enact and enforce legislation to protect the safety and security of girls and to eliminate incidents of abuse, violation and harassment of girls. Stringent penalties should

be in place for perpetrators of acts of violation against them. Also, there is a need for the effective adoption and implementation of the rights and principles enshrined in the Child Rights Act 2003 by all the states in the country.

Furthermore, there is a need for the gathering and availability of reliable disaggregated data, especially gender based, for proper planning, monitoring implementation and evaluating the impact and progress on social inclusion and social protection provision in Nigeria.

Lastly, provision of social protection is not the duty of the government alone; all hands must be on deck to contribute to the protection of the girl-child.

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