

Tip sheet



Safeguarding in non-formal education programmes

For CSOs in Nigeria

This tip sheet outlines the risks of Sexual Exploitation, Abuse and Sexual Harassment (SEAH) and other harms and abuses in non-formal education programmes in Nigeria. The tip sheet is for civil society organisations (CSOs) working on education in Nigeria. The information in this tip sheet came from in-person consultations in Bauchi State and phone calls with individuals from Yobe, Borno, Edo, Gombe, Imo, Sokoto and Yobe States in Nigeria.

[Click here](#) to read an accompanying tip sheet on safeguarding formal education programmes.

What is non-formal education in Nigeria?

Every kind of learning that happens outside the formal education setting, such as continuing education, skill acquisition and adult learning can be called non-formal or informal education. It is delivered outside the framework of the formal education system to provide different types of learning to children. The different types of non-formal education programmes that CSOs in Nigeria implement and engage in include the following:

- The Almajiri/Qur'anic Education: "Almajiri" is an Arabic word (Almuhajirum) meaning "migrants. It is a non-formal method of acquiring Islamic knowledge by memorising the Qur'an under a teacher called Mallam. Almajiri Education is also called Makarantan Allo (Slate School) and Tsangaya (Learning Centre).
- Child Learning Centres: These are non-formal learning centres established for out of school children by CSOs and NGOs.
- Youth Learning Centres: They are established for Adolescent boys and girls (sometimes segregated). Basic Literacy and skills such as carpentry, Barbing, knitting, sewing, soap making. are taught in these centres.
- Adult Literacy Centres: functional literacy and continuing education for adults and youths who have not had the advantage of formal education or who did not complete their primary education. This may include nomads, migrant families, persons with disabilities and other categories or groups, particularly young girls, and women. Basic literacy and skills such as sewing, knitting, soap making. are taught in the centres.

Relevant laws and standards in Nigeria

- Federal Republic of Nigeria Child rights Act (2003)

Part 1, Section 2: *"Every person, institution, service, agency, organisation and body responsible for the care or protection of children shall conform with the standards established by the appropriate authorities, particularly in the areas of safety, health, welfare, number and suitability of their staff and competent supervision".*

The policy is being implemented in 29 states, but 7 states are yet to adopt it.

- **Federal Ministry of Education (FME) National Policy on Safety, Security and Violence Free Schools in Nigeria (2021)**

Section 5: *"(a) to create a safe learning environment for school users... (h)strengthen coordination among relevant institutions on school safety comprehensive education policies and security".*

- **Safe School Declaration (SSD, 2015)**

Currently being utilised mostly in the Northeast education programmes under the humanitarian emergency groups. Safety is the focus in the declaration.

- **National School Based Management Policy (NSBMC) Policy (2010)**

Safety is mentioned in Section 1.6 (g): *"Making the school environment safe and healthy for teachers, learners and the local community in general."*

- **Federal Republic of Nigeria National Policy on Education 6th Edition (2014)**

This is a mandatory policy for all Government approved schools.

- **National Teacher Education policy, (pre-service and in service) (2014)**

Prescribes opportunities for the continuing professional development of teachers and managers of basic education in Nigeria.

- **The Nigerian Teachers Code of Conduct (TCoC) 2006 revised (2013)**

Safety issues are embedded in clauses 36, 38, 42, 43. For example, (43) *"Teachers should not under any circumstance administer any corporal punishment except otherwise permitted by the school authority".*

- **The Law against Persons with Disabilities prohibition Act (2018) Disability Act**

- **National Agency for the Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons (NAPTIP), Prohibition Act (2015)**

The offer of free education is sometimes used as a bait by traffickers

- **Universal Basic Education Commission (UBEC) Act (2004)**

The Act is live, but data shows there are 13.2 children out of school. There is no action to tackle challenges of unlawful collection of levies in schools, large number of dropouts, retention of girls and funding issues for families and schools.

- **National Gender Policy (2006 revised 2021)**

Safety is not mentioned throughout the policy paper.

- **Individual schools have their own rules.**

These needs to be routinely reviewed. One focus is ensuring safety of children in school.

- **School regulatory bodies, relevant Ministries, Departments and Agencies (MDA) and civil society in collaboration with Parent-Teacher Associations**

Promote non-violent punishment in schools.

Risks of SEAH and other harms and abuses

Risks identified in different non-formal educational programmes include:

- **Travel to / from the non-formal education setting:**
 - Children engaged in non-formal learning may face a series of risks due to the location of the learning centres. Such risks include rape, sexual abuse, and harassment, often by boys. Adolescent girls are at higher risk. Risks are heightened in conflict affected areas.
 - Walking long distances before reaching the education centres may cause harm, especially in conflict affected areas.
 - Crossing major roads before getting to the learning centres may cause harm.
 - Non-formal education programmes often occur in the evening or at night because children are hawking and farming during daytime hours. This can increase the risks during travel.
- **At the non-formal education setting:**
 - Facilities, such as toilets, are often limited in non-formal learning centres. Due to the lack of toilets, adolescent girls do not attend learning centres when they are menstruating. Whilst looking for private places to address their menstrual hygiene needs can expose them to molestation from the boys at the learning centres.
 - Corporal Punishment is common in Almajiri/Tsangaya learning centres.
 - In Almajiri/Tsangaya learning centres there are often high numbers of children (100-200) under one leader / almajiri mallam. This can increase the risks of harm and abuse and may reduce opportunities for reporting or support.
 - Sodomisation of youngster's boys by older men were identified as a risk that is seldom discussed; therefore, the prevalence is unknown.
 - There are risks of prevalent harmful traditional practices. According to the Spotlight Initiative, Nigeria has the largest number of child brides in Africa and one of the highest prevalence rates in the world. Nigeria accounts for the third highest number of women and girls who have undergone female genital mutilation (FGM).
 - There could be a high risk of prostitution of children for commercial exploitation.

- There are soft risks which are equally important as they drive psychological needs e.g., issues of neglect and negligence treatment which can easily lead to emotional abuse.

Ways to mitigate the risks identified

Role of CSOs/NGOs and the non-formal education staff

- Many CSOs / NGOs develop their own safeguarding policies and procedures to identify and minimise safeguarding risks that are relevant to their programmes. The focus includes:
 - Developing a safeguarding policy and short code of conduct for all staff and associated staff, this includes learning facilitators even if they are volunteers. [Click here](#) for a RSH Nigeria podcast with more information.
 - Identifying and managing the risks for each education programme. [Click here](#) for a RSH Nigeria risk assessment more.
 - Developing ways for staff, learners, and other community members to report misconduct. [Click here](#) for a relevant infographic by RSH Nigeria.
 - Making sure that the recruitment process is safe to reduce the risks of staff and learning facilitators perpetrating abuse. [Click here](#) for the RSH Nigeria Safe Recruitment package.
 - Establish learning centres close to relevant communities and / or provide safe transportation.
 - Sensitise students and parents on the practice of safety in numbers (e.g., to walk in groups or in set pairs to school and not alone).
 - Support the establishment of “Safeguarding committee” in each learning centre. This may include community influencers, centre-based management committee, learning facilitators and parents who will identify risks that different children face and the ensure safety of all.
 - NGO/CSOs should provide training, advice, resources, and support as needed to the non-formal learning centres to update them on safeguarding and to ensure that all learners are safe.
 - Provision of Menstrual hygiene kits including traditional and tech innovations.
 - Livelihood support to the families.
 - Construction of key amenities like toilets and ablution blocks.
 - Tailored interventions based on the intersectionality of vulnerable children such as orphans, children separated from their parents and families, or children in family's dependent on humanitarian assistance, those living with different forms of disabilities.

- Advocacy against prevalent forms of Harmful traditional practices such as early marriage and female genital mutilation.
- CSOs managing the programmes and leaders at non-formal learning centres should develop and widely promote safeguarding measures for every learning centre. This should include:
 - Explaining and promoting what behaviour is expected from the learning facilitators and staff and from the children. This could be on posters, in group discussions, in community meetings. Where relevant, this should refer to existing laws and policies such as the Child Rights Act, National Commission for Mass Literacy, Adult, and non-formal Education Policy Guidelines, the Violence Against Persons Prohibition Act, and the Sexual Harassment in Tertiary Institutions bill.
 - Explaining to children and their parents / caregivers that they should report any inappropriate behaviour at the learning centre that they see or that they suspect might be happening to someone else. Share the contact details for reporting.
 - Co-creating and promoting confidential ways for children to report any inappropriate behaviour. For example this may be to a CSO manager.
 - Sharing how reports of inappropriate behaviour will be responded to.

The role of Government

- Government, alongside NGO's and CSO's, should continue to sensitise and educate children, parents / caregivers, and stakeholders on:
 - The importance of education that is safe and accessible for all girls and boys.
 - The negative impact of SEAH and other harms and abuses on children and their education.
 - Adherence to laws and policies in non-formal learning centres, including Child Rights Act, National Commission for Mass Literacy, Adult, and non-formal Education Policy Guidelines, the Violence Against Persons Prohibition Act, and the Sexual Harassment in Tertiary Institutions bill.
- Government to ensure that relevant legislation for safe learning facilities is applied and promoted in non-formal learning centres.
- Government to ensure that perpetrators of abuse against children in education settings are brought to justice.
- Government has an opportunity for joint and collective action in inter-agency cooperation's – Government Ministries, Departments and Agencies (MDAS) including

Ministry of Health, Education, National Agency for the Control of AIDS (NACA), the GBV services, Sexual Assault Referral Centres (SARCs), CSO.

- Governments should assign responsibility, accountability, and budgets for any SEAH / Safeguarding mitigation activities. A budget line should be included in proposals for SEAH, budget defence, appropriation and eventual release. The institutions responsible include the education related MDAs, the legislature and budget office.

Role of Community and Faith-Based Leaders

- Collaboration with traditional and Faith-based leaders would be beneficial to optimise safeguarding practices.
- Preaching, counselling and/or community mobilisation of followers on safeguarding and SEAH should be encouraged. Discussions should discourage the culture of silence and stigmatisation of survivors and promote incentives and reasons to report.
- Collaboration with parents to encourage them to ensure their children's safety when the children depart the learning centre and when they arrive home.
- Consult with parents, community members and the Almajiri Mallams about how they can support each other so the Almajiri Mallams stop sending children out to beg for food.