

REVIEWED PAPER

33rd WEDC International Conference, Accra, Ghana, 2008**ACCESS TO SANITATION AND SAFE WATER:
GLOBAL PARTNERSHIPS AND LOCAL ACTIONS****The Nigerian girls education project:
Giving the girl child a voice**

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The three-year Girls' Education Project (GEP) aims to improve the quality of life of girls by seeking to increase their enrolment, retention and completion of primary school education. The project is being implemented in six states of Northern Nigeria, under a bilateral agreement between the Federal Government of Nigeria and United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) with funding support from the Department for International Development (DFID). It uses an inter-sectoral approach to provide amongst other things, WASH facilities in the targeted schools. Results in three states include construction of 323 boreholes and 688 blocks of VIP latrines; establishment of WASH school clubs; enhanced partnerships between collaborating ministries, the three tiers of government, public and private sector, communities and schools. Other outcomes include increased enrolment and retention of girls as well as improved self esteem. This paper seeks to share the human impact of the GEP project in three states of Nigeria.

Background

According to the Federal Government of Nigeria, in 2003, 7 million Nigerian children of primary school age are not enrolled in primary school. About 4.3 million (62%) are girls with a net Enrolment Ratio of 74% for boys and 56% for girls, (a gender gap of 18 percentage points). Overall Net Attendance Ratio in Northern Nigeria is about 43% (FME, 2004) with a gender gap in excess of 40% in some states (FME, 2005). Prior to GEP, many schools in Northern Nigeria had no access to safe water or sanitation at all. The national pupil to toilet ratio was 292:1 and nearly 3000:1 in some states (FME 2002). The construction of water and sanitation facilities in schools complemented by effective hygiene promotion was thus a critical and integral part of the implementation of GEP. Thus the Girls' Education Project (GEP) focuses on six of the states with the largest gender gaps in Nigeria.

Project description

The GEP project is a three-year DFID funded project to support education of girls through increased enrolment, retention and completion.

The Project in Nigeria (2004-2007) is the largest DFID funded/UNICEF managed Girls' Education Project in the world, with £26 million of DFID funding over three years. It covers 20 school communities in six Local Government Areas (LGAs) each in six northern states of Nigeria (that is a total of 720 schools) and uses an inter-sectoral approach to provide amongst other things, Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) facilities in the targeted schools. Among the six states are three from which the human impact stories in this paper are drawn namely: Katsina, Niger and Sokoto.

Specifically, the strategies for implementing the water and sanitation component of the project in the three states named, employed another level of intersectoral collaboration within UNICEF between the WASH and Basic Education (BE) programmes. The funds for implementation were managed by the Basic Education programme whereas the technical support for service delivery in the field was provided by the WASH programme. This collaboration enhanced the implementation with resultant high numbers of facilities being constructed in these states thus providing substantial evidence from which to generate impact.

The exact mix of inputs and activities is based on the specific needs of girls, schools and communities, as identified through participatory planning processes and situation analyses. Inputs also vary according to what others are providing on the ground through the Universal Basic Education, for example (UNICEF, 2007). The project outcomes are thus results of collaborations among various stakeholders each playing

their roles and driving towards a common target of gender equity and parity especially in education. The project complements the efforts of the principal service providers to ensure that all schools become Girl/Child Friendly Schools. Inputs include training and capacity building to improve education quality, supply of school furniture, support for curriculum development, the provision of safe water and separate sanitation facilities for boys and girls in all target schools, improved nutrition in schools as well as improved data management at all levels of the educational system.

The management of the programme is done at various levels from the federal to the Local Government (LGA) level. The project is managed by both a team of consultants at various levels and government institutions. There is a GEP Manager at the National level and GEP Coordinators at the State and LGA levels.

The management structure is guided by a GEP National Steering Committee, which meets tri-annually and is presided over by the Honourable Minister of State for Education. State and LGA level GEP Steering Committees manage the project at the respective levels.

The steering committees are composed of various stakeholders such as the Ministries for Health, Education and Water, Rural Water and Sanitation Agencies, Non-governmental Organizations and traditional rulers.

The Rural Water and Sanitation Agencies in the states are responsible for the construction of water and sanitation facilities in the schools. This they do, also in partnership with private sector contractors who construct the actual facilities, with the agencies providing supervision and ensuring quality and adherence to standards.

At the community level, School Based Management Committees (SBMCs) and the Parents Teachers Associations (PTAs) have the responsibility for mobilizing the community to make sure all the children attend and complete school. They also have the responsibility to monitor and maintain school physical facilities to ensure a safe environment for children, assist with textbook/teaching material delivery, transmit skills, knowledge, values and traditions of the community, render annual statement of account, income and expenditure as well as identify and support the needs of school staff.

School pupils also play a key role in the management of the project through their involvement in Environmental Health clubs (EHCs). Apart from carrying out hygiene promotion in the schools and communities, members of the club are responsible for managing the water and sanitation facilities in the school, ensuring that the school environment is kept clean and the facilities are used in a hygienic manner.

The entire project is thus an interplay of partnerships and collaborations between external support agencies that provide funds, the government providing management and performing oversight functions as well as implementation through its agencies, participating communities and schools not only benefiting but also participating and managing project components at their level.

Within its life span, the project has been able to support the national government to formulate policies that would facilitate enrolment and retention in schools and systems have been put in place at state and LGA levels for data collection and processing. Teachers from the 720 schools have been trained and their communication skills enhanced.

The water and sanitation components of the project include construction of handpump boreholes, (Photograph 1) Ventilated Improved Pit (VIP) latrines and hygiene promotion.

The construction of the VIP latrines is done with considerations for gender. There are typically two blocks of 3-compartment latrines, with separate blocks for boys and girls facing different directions. This not only affords the girls privacy while going into or coming out of latrines at all times but also provides a conducive environment for changing and disposing of sanitary towels and materials during their menstrual periods.

To date, in the three states, a total of 323 handpump boreholes have been constructed. Also in these schools, 688 blocks of VIP latrines have been constructed with separate blocks for girls and boys. Katsina, Niger and Sokoto show that some results have been achieved and these are illustrated by stories told by the girls who are affected themselves.

Results from implementation

The main concerns of the Girls Education Project are **girls' enrolment and retention** as an avenue for achieving gender parity in education and towards achieving significant progress in the attainment of the Millenium Development Goals in Nigeria.

Increased enrolment of girls and the achievement of gender parity in schools

The intersectoral collaboration between BE and the WASH programme resulting in the provision of water and sanitation facilities has made remarkable impact on the successes recorded in increased enrolment, attendance/retention of pupils, especially girls in the schools.

According to the Output to Purpose Report (OPR) in February 2007, the enrolment of girls in 360 GEP focus schools in 'C' Field office increased from 5,556 in 2006 to 9,662 in 2007 (ie an increase of 4106 girls in the schools). This has led to reduction in gender gaps in the GEP focus schools in the states from 42.7% to 25.1% in Sokoto, 25.8% to 19.7% in Niger and 26.8% to 20.9% in Katsina (Figure 1).

Increased retention and reduced cases of school dropout of girls

There has been increased attendance and retention of girls in primary schools (Figure 2). This human impact is attested to by one of the girls herself:

Zilfa'u Sada (Photograph 2) is one of the two girls in the sixth grade in Unguwar Makera Primary School, one of the participating schools in Katsina State, Northern Nigeria. There are eighteen boys in her class. Only two of the 16 girls enrolled in her class made it to the sixth grade. The other fourteen girls had dropped out either due to poverty or to get married. This is a common trend in primary schools in Northern Nigeria. Several factors have in the past influenced the withdrawal of girls from school.

Lack of toilets and water facilities in the schools have been identified as contributory factors. Ninety percent of the 120 GEP schools in Katsina state did not have toilets and water at the inception of the project in 2004. Girls were particularly affected by this for obvious reasons. In the words of Zilfa'u, **"boys find it easier to go behind a tree or some bush to ease themselves during school hours. As a girl, you feel too shy to do so because you need privacy."** The option left for girls was to walk back home to use the toilet. Some of them never returned to school the same day. **"For my big friends, they don't come to school on those days when their period is on and like that they gradually stopped coming to school"** continued Zilfa'u.

"We now have privacy because our toilets are different from those of boys. We don't need to go home to ease ourselves. We are now confident. We have also been taught to wash our hands after using the toilets through the Water, sanitation and hygiene clubs. This has made us come to school regularly now," says Zilfa'u.

Her remarks were corroborated by Ibrahim Lawal, the head teacher of the school when he said, "we underrated the impact of a toilet. Girls' attendance has improved, and there is hardly a case of dropouts now."

Enhanced favourable learning environment for children

The construction of water and sanitation facilities in primary schools have helped to provide an optimal sanitary environment which is safe and conducive for physical, mental and emotional health of the school community necessary for the child to achieve maximum benefits from educational programmes.

The availability of the facilities has contributed to the health of the girls, enabling them to spend more time in school as well as providing an atmosphere conducive for learning, including the practice of safe hygiene.

Hauwa Barde (12 years, Pry six) in Central Primary School (GEP), Shiroro LGA, Niger state, sums up this impact in her own words:

"because of the toilets, I don't have stomach ache or vomit any more.

Before toilets were built for us, I and other pupils usually defecate at the back of our classrooms which caused bad smell during school hours. This disturbed our lessons because we spent time cleaning the faeces to stop the smell.

Now that I have started my periods, I can come to school even when I am having my periods because I can easily change my sanitary towels in the school toilets".

Enhanced self esteem among girls

Perhaps the most seemingly outstanding results in achieving gender parity are those not physically seen but have far reaching impact as they relate to the total person. Having water and sanitation facilities in schools have impacted on time utilised for learning, the economic status and self esteem of girls as reflected in Fatima's story.

Fatima Doma, 11 years, in Primary Six of Central Primary School, Shiroro LGA, Niger State:

"I am very happy about the water we now have from the boreholes. Before, I and other pupils fetch water to school from the community, during school hours which shortens the time for lessons.

I used to buy pure water (vended water in sachet) from shops around the school but now I don't have to spend money and time when I want to drink water.

I also am glad that I have water to clean myself when I go to the toilet, I don't have to use paper which is rough and not so nice.

I don't feel inferior to the children whose parents can send them to private schools, because my school has water, toilet, tables, chairs and books".

Mrs Ebun Adeyemo the Assistant Head Teacher in the school, says “the girls’ enrolment has increased from a ratio of 6 boys: 2girls to about 6:5.

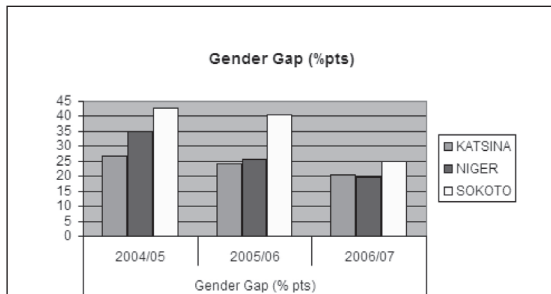


Figure 1. Gender gap in the three GEP States based on enrolment.

Source: Data from SUBEB of Katsina, Niger and Sokoto.

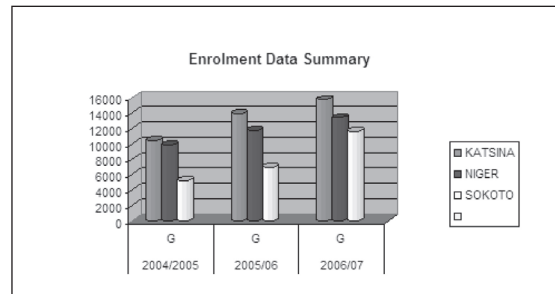


Figure 2. Attendance in the GEP Primary schools of the three GEP states.

Source: Data from SUBEB of Katsina, Niger and Sokoto.



Photograph 1. Hand pump borehole at Central primary school, Shiroro, Niger State



Photograph 2. Zilfa'u Sada in front of a block of latrine in her school

Summary and Conclusion

The provision of a child-friendly learning environment is critical to achieving the global targets for universal primary education and improving girl child enrolment and retention.

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