

**UNICEF AND PROTECTING THE RIGHTS OF THE GIRL CHILD IN
NORTHERN NIGERIA**

BY

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**BEING A PROJECT SUBMITTED TO THE DEPARTMENT OF INTERNATIONAL
RELATIONS AND STRATEGIC STUDIES, IGBINEDION UNIVERSITY OKADA, IN
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DEGREE IN INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS AND STRATEGIC STUDIES**

SUPERVISOR: DR. EMEKAAGBA

JULY 2025

CERTIFICATION

This is to certify that this project was carried out by **CELESTINE BLISS IFUNAYA** with the matriculation number **22/025399/ASS** and was supervised by DR. Emeka Agba of Igbinedion University Okada, in partial fulfilment of the award of bachelor's degree (B.SC) in International Relations and Strategic Studies.

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EXTERNAL EXAMINER

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DECLARATION

I, **CELESTINE BLISS IFUNAYA**, hereby declare that this research project titled: **UNICEF AND PROTECTING THE RIGHTS OF THE GIRL CHILD IN NORTHERN NIGERIA** is based on original research carried out by me. This work has not been submitted previously for the award of any degree, diploma, or certificate anywhere.

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this Project firstly to the almighty God, who has guided and protected me and given me the zeal to excel in all my dwellings. Secondly, to my grandmother who never stopped believing in a moment like this.

Finally, I dedicate this project to my late father, Late Chief Celestine, who wanted all his daughters to be successful graduates. It might not be convocation yet, but I am happy to say, I made it, Dad!

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To my family, your love is the foundation upon which this achievement stands: To my brother, who made sure I went to a good school, encouraged me when I gave up on school and supported me till I stood my ground. I am also very thankful to my mum who never stopped praying for me, to my sister Onyi who is always there for my beck and call, filling me with family's hot gossips that helped me stay connected and sane. I am thankful to my sister and second mother Ekene Obi, a woman of substance, the strongest woman I know, a woman that has taught me everything I know about independence, a woman that has inspired me to shine, a woman that has taught me to fly with my hands open and that the sky is only my starting point.

Most importantly I want to thank My best friend and forever partner, Maxwell, your support, tender love and kindness have you given me, thank you for being there for me, for listening to my many rants and cries, for celebrating and mourning with me, for being there for my highs and lows, for tolerating my imperfections and always pushing me to be the best version of myself, I couldn't have come this far without you, your support has been a beacon of strength and inspiration to me. To my friend, Mr. Shola, thank you for always being there for me, listening to my many rants and tears, for being a backbone, helping me with this project and being my closest friend in the department.

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ABSTRACT

This study critically examines the role of the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF) in protecting the rights of the girl child in Northern Nigeria, with a particular focus on promoting education. The discussion is grounded in the theory of human rights, emphasizing the universality, indivisibility, and interdependence of rights, while reviewing key concepts such as human rights, child rights, and specifically, the rights of the girl child. In Northern Nigeria, where deep-rooted socio-cultural practices, religious constraints, poverty, and insecurity pose significant threats to the wellbeing and development of girls, UNICEF has played a vital role in advancing access to education as a core strategy for empowerment and rights protection. Despite these efforts, the organization continues to face critical challenges including insurgency, gender discrimination, limited government collaboration, and logistical constraints. By evaluating UNICEF's strategic interventions and the barriers it encounters, this study highlights the importance of sustained international support, community involvement, and policy reforms in achieving long-term protection and inclusion of the girl child in Northern Nigeria's development agenda. The study calls for a strengthened multi-stakeholder approach to ensure the fulfilment of girl child rights in line with global human rights standards.

Keywords: UNICEF, Human Rights, Girl Child, Child Rights, Northern Nigeria, Human Rights

Word count: 193

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background to the Study

Northern Nigeria is known for its conservative culture and deeply rooted patriarchal norms, which often limit the opportunities and rights of the girl child. Gender disparities in education, early and forced marriages, female genital mutilation, and lack of access to healthcare are common issues faced by girls in the region. According to the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), Northern Nigeria has some of the lowest indicators for girls' education and health in the world, with high rates of illiteracy and maternal mortality among girls and women. These challenges perpetuate the cycle of poverty and hinder the overall development of the region (Udoh, 2024).

UNICEF, as a key international organization, is mandated to advocate for the protection and realization of the rights of every child, especially the most marginalized and vulnerable. In Northern Nigeria, UNICEF has been implementing various programs and initiatives to address the challenges faced by the girl child. These programs focus on improving access to quality education, promoting gender equality, providing healthcare services, and addressing the root causes of child marriage and gender-based violence (Koris, et al 2022).

One of the major initiatives of UNICEF is the 'Girls' Education Project' which aims to enhance girls' enrolment and retention in school through the provision of scholarships, teacher training, and the establishment of safe learning environments. Additionally, UNICEF has been actively involved in advocating for legal reforms to raise the minimum age of marriage, as well as providing support to survivors of gender-based violence and promoting community-based interventions to change social norms that perpetuate harmful practices (Bello, 2022).

Despite UNICEF's efforts, challenges persist in addressing the complex issues facing the girl child in Northern Nigeria. Socio-cultural barriers, limited access to resources, and the impact of conflict and insecurity all continue to hinder progress. For example, the ongoing Boko Haram insurgency in the region has led to the displacement of families, increased poverty, and disrupted access to education and healthcare, particularly for girls (Nwozor, & Okhillu, 2022).

At the same time, there are opportunities for positive change, including the engagement of religious and community leaders, the commitment of the government to address the needs of the girl child, and the resilience and agency of girls and women themselves. UNICEF's programs have increasingly focused on community engagement and empowerment, recognizing the importance of working with local leaders and families to bring about sustainable change (Story, et al 2017).

While there is a growing body of literature on the challenges facing the girl child in Northern Nigeria, there is a need for in-depth research on the specific role and impact of UNICEF's interventions in addressing these challenges. Understanding the effectiveness of UNICEF's programs, as well as the factors that enable or hinder their success, is essential for informing future initiatives and policies aimed at improving the well-being of the girl child. This study aims to fill this gap by providing a comprehensive analysis of UNICEF's efforts in Northern Nigeria and their implications for the empowerment of the girl child.

The girl child in Northern Nigeria continues to face significant challenges that hinder her overall well-being and development. UNICEF's programs and initiatives play a crucial role in addressing these challenges, but there is a need for a comprehensive assessment of their impact and effectiveness. This study aims to contribute to the existing body of knowledge by examining the role of UNICEF in addressing the challenges of the girl child in Northern

Nigeria, with the goal of informing evidence-based interventions and policies to improve the lives of girls in the region.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

The girl child in Northern Nigeria faces a myriad of challenges that hinder her holistic development. One of the primary challenges is the limited access to education. The region has a total of 19 states with higher percentage of population. According to the United Nations Girls' Education Initiative (Haqbeen; 2023), Northern Nigeria has some of the lowest rates of female literacy and school attendance in the world, with approximately 53% of primary school-aged girls not enrolled in school. This lack of access to education perpetuates a cycle of poverty and limits the prospects of the girl child in the region.

Furthermore, the prevalence of child marriage poses a significant threat to the well-being of the girl child in Northern Nigeria. The region has one of the highest rates of child marriage globally, with approximately 76% of girls being married before the age of 18. Child marriage not only deprives girls of their childhood but also exposes them to health risks, limited economic opportunities, and increased vulnerability to domestic violence (Enweonwu, 2024).

Another critical challenge is the prevalence of harmful traditional practices such as female genital mutilation/cutting (FGM/C) and gender-based violence. Northern Nigeria has some of the highest rates of FGM/C in the country, with a prevalence of 27% among women and girls aged 15-49 (Sanni, et al. 2024). These practices have grave implications for the physical and psychological well-being of the girl child, perpetuating a cycle of gender-based violence and discrimination.

Moreover, the girl child in Northern Nigeria faces challenges related to limited access to healthcare, nutrition, and protection from conflicts and humanitarian emergencies. As a result, the overall well-being and potential of the girl child in the region are severely compromised.

UNICEF has been engaged in various interventions aimed at ameliorating these challenges; however, assessing the efficacy and impact of these interventions is crucial to ensure that they are effectively addressing the multifaceted issues faced by the girl child in Northern Nigeria.

The overarching problem this research seeks to address is the effectiveness of UNICEF's interventions in addressing the complex challenges faced by the girl child in Northern Nigeria. It is essential to critically evaluate the impact of UNICEF's programs and identify potential gaps or areas for improvement to ensure that the rights and well-being of the girl child are adequately protected and promoted in the region. Additionally, understanding the contextual and socio-cultural factors that contribute to these challenges is crucial for designing targeted and sustainable interventions that can bring about meaningful change in the lives of the girl child in Northern Nigeria.

1.3 Research Questions

1. What are the specific challenges faced by the girl child in Northern Nigeria?
2. How has cultural and societal norms in Northern Nigeria affected the rights and well-being of the girl child?
3. What strategies and interventions has UNICEF implemented to address the challenges of the girl child in Northern Nigeria?
4. What are the challenges faced by UNICEF in addressing the plights of the girl child in northern Nigeria?
5. What are the policy and programmatic changes needed to sustain progress in the region?

1.4 Research Objectives

1. To identify the specific challenges faced by the girl child in Northern Nigeria.
2. To identify how cultural and societal norms in Northern Nigeria has affected the rights and well-being of the girl child.

3. To identify the strategies and interventions that UNICEF has implemented to address the challenges of the girl child in Northern Nigeria.
4. To identify the difficulties faced by UNICEF in addressing the plights of the girl child in northern Nigeria.
5. To identify policy and programmatic changes that are needed to sustain progress in the region.

1.5. Significance of the Study

The significance of the study lies in its potential to inform targeted interventions and policies that can positively impact the lives of girls in the region. By identifying the specific challenges faced by the girl child, UNICEF can tailor its programs to address these issues more effectively. Furthermore, the study can help raise awareness about the unique hardships faced by girls in Northern Nigeria, potentially leading to increased support and advocacy for their rights. Understanding the root causes of these challenges is crucial for the development of sustainable solutions that can bring about long-term change in the lives of girls in the region. Additionally, the findings of the study can serve as a basis for collaboration with local communities, governments, and other stakeholders to implement comprehensive strategies that promote the well-being and empowerment of girls. The study's significance also extends to the broader field of international development, as it can contribute valuable insights to the discourse on gender equity and the rights of the girl child. Ultimately, the study has the potential to drive meaningful progress towards achieving gender equality and improving the overall social and economic conditions for girls in Northern Nigeria.

1.6 Scope of the Study

This study examines UNICEF's role in protecting the rights of the girl child in Northern Nigeria, from 2000 to 2023, with a specific focus on Adamawa, Bauchi, and Gombe States out of the 19 states of the northern part of Nigeria. It explores UNICEF's interventions in education, healthcare, gender equality, and child protection, particularly in addressing issues such as child marriage, gender-based violence, and access to quality education.

The study also evaluates the impact of policies and programs implemented in collaboration with government agencies, NGOs, and local communities. It considers socio-cultural and economic factors that influence the effectiveness of these initiatives while assessing challenges and opportunities for improving girl-child rights in the region.

1.7 Limitation of Study

The research may be influenced by the biases of the researcher and the subjective nature of analyzing UNICEF and protecting the rights of the girl child, particularly in the context of northern Nigeria as well as the availability of data, access to relevant sources, potential language barriers, also, information regarding this research may be influenced on political bias or propaganda, affecting the accuracy of the study. Regional Variations might be another limitation i.e. the experiences of girls in different regions of Northern Nigeria may vary significantly due to factors such as ethnicity, religion, and socioeconomic status. Generalizing findings from one region to another may not be appropriate.

1.8 Methodology

This study will employ a qualitative research method. The data sources of this research work are secondary. These sources will be assembled and accumulated from books, both e-books and printed books, magazines such as Journal Storage (JSTOR), EBSCOHost, ResearchGate,

Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ), ProQuest, The United Nations, The United States Agency for International Development (USAID), articles, websites, newspapers such as Premium Times, BBC News, Aljazeera, and The Guardian, as well as press releases and official government documents.

1.9 Definition of Terms

UNICEF: The United Nations Children's Fund is a UN agency dedicated to providing humanitarian and developmental aid to children worldwide.

Northern Nigeria: A region in Nigeria known for its diverse cultures, challenges like poverty and insecurity, and significant populations of Fulani and Hausa people.

Child rights: The fundamental rights and freedoms that belong to every child, including the right to life, health, education, and protection from harm.

The girl child: A female child, often used to emphasize the specific challenges and vulnerabilities faced by girls in certain societies.

Gender disparity: The unequal treatment or opportunities between individuals based on their gender.

Gender equity: The fair treatment of individuals, regardless of their gender, ensuring equal opportunities and resources.

Gender based violence: Violence directed against individuals based on their gender, often targeting women and girls.

Challenges: Difficulties or obstacles that hinder progress or achievement, such as poverty, conflict, and lack of access to essential services.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1. Concept of Human Right

The term 'human rights', which has been used since World War II, gained importance in contemporary debates, and became a universal phenomenon. After the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) on December 10, 1948, by the United Nations, it was seen by many as a sign of optimism for the better protection, promotion, and enforcement of human rights. However, 50 years since the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, it has been reported that human rights abuses have not decreased. The world is filled with examples of violations of basic rights such as censorship, discrimination, political imprisonment, torture, slavery, disappearances, genocide, extrajudicial killings, arbitrary arrests and killings, poverty, etc. The rights of women and children are also ignored in many ways (O' Byrne 2005).

There are various contemporary definitions of human rights. The United Nations (UN) defined human rights as those rights which are inherent in our state of nature and without which we cannot live as human beings (Mishra, 2000). Human rights belong to every person and do not depend on the specifics of the individual or the relationship between the right-holder and the right guarantor (Adamu, 2023). Human rights are the rights that everyone has equally by virtue of their humanity. It is grounded in an appeal to our human nature (Agba E & Olufunmilade FM, 2020). Christian Bay defined human rights as any claims that ought to have legal and moral protection to make sure that basic needs will be met (Vincent, 1986). Human rights can be defined as those minimum rights which every individual must have against the state or other public authority by virtue of his being a member of the human family. Shree P. P. Rao said human rights are the inherent dignity and inalienable rights of all

members of the human family recognizing them as the foundation of freedom, justice, and peace in the world. For D. D. Raphael, human rights in a general sense denote the rights of humans. However, in a more specific sense, human rights constitute those rights which one has precisely because of being a human (Rajawat, 2001). In the words of Michael Freedon, a human right is a conceptual device, expressed in linguistic form that assigns priority to certain human or social attributes regarded as essential to the adequate functioning of a human being that is intended to serve as a protective capsule for those attributes; and that appeals for a deliberate action to ensure such a protection (Biswal, 2006).

2.2. Concept of Child Right

The concept of child rights refers to the fundamental rights and freedoms that all children are entitled to, as recognized, and protected by international conventions, treaties, and laws. It emphasizes the need to provide children with a nurturing and supportive environment that ensures their well-being and enables them to reach their full potential.

Prior to the enactment of the Child's Rights Act in 2003, several subsidiary laws such as the Labour Act and the Trafficking Act existed and contributed to the protection of the Nigerian child (Aja Nwachuku, 2017; Ogunniyi, 2019). However, these laws were inadequate when juxtaposed to the provisions of the United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child, thus necessitating a new legal framework to protect the rights of the child (Aja Nwachuku, 2017: 162). Therefore, the Child's Rights Act is the first broad and comprehensive legislation with elaborate provisions that protect the rights of the child in Nigeria (Egede, 2007; Aja Nwachukwu 2018; Assim, 2020 Enweonwu 2024).

One of the most significant international documents related to child rights is the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), adopted in 1989. The UNCRC provides a comprehensive framework for the protection and promotion of the rights of

children, defining their civil, political, economic, social, and cultural rights. The UNCRC recognizes that children have the right to survival, development, protection, and participation. It acknowledges children as active participants in society and highlights the importance of involving them in decisions that affect their lives. Article 12 of the UNCRC, for example, ensures respect for the child's freedom of expression and their right to be heard in all matters affecting them, giving them a voice in decisions and policies that impact their lives (United Nations, 1989).

Child rights extend beyond the basic provision of food, shelter, and education. They encompass a range of interconnected rights, such as the right to health, to a safe and clean environment, to protection from violence, abuse, and exploitation, and to equal opportunities for growth and development. These rights are crucial for ensuring children's well-being, enabling them to thrive, and breaking the cycle of poverty and disadvantage (Clark, et al. 2020). It is essential to highlight that child rights are not only recognized internationally but also incorporated into national laws and policies of many countries. Governments are responsible for ensuring the protection and realization of these rights within their territories (United Nations, 1989).

A major setback to the Child's Rights Act is its non-applicability across Nigeria. As a federation, Nigeria has 36 constitutionally recognized component units called states. Since the Child's Rights Act was passed by Nigeria's National Assembly, only 25 states have adopted it, leaving out 11 states (Olatunji, 2020). Nigeria has a dual legal order, which allows constituent states to either agree or refuse to adopt laws, which they may have divergent perceptions. But this is only practicable if the issues at stake are within their legislative competence. In the spirit of Nigeria's federal system, the country's constitution provides for two legislative lists, namely the exclusive and concurrent legislative lists. The National Assembly exercises absolute legislative jurisdiction on items contained in the exclusive list.

Both the National and State Assemblies are empowered to legislate on items in the concurrent list. However, if there is an inconsistency between the law made by the state and federal governments on an item in the concurrent list, the law made by the federal government is considered superior (Egede, 2007; Ebobrah and Eboibi, 2017). In addition, matters that are neither in the exclusive nor concurrent lists are regarded as residual and, therefore, squarely within the exclusive legislative competence of the Houses of Assembly of the States (Egede, 2007).

2.3 The Concept of the girl child Rights

The concept of the girl child rights refers to the recognition, protection, and promotion of the inherent dignity, equality, and freedom of female children in all aspects of life. It is a fundamental component of human rights aimed at addressing the unique vulnerabilities, discrimination, and inequalities faced by girls due to their gender and age. These rights encompass various domains, including education, health, protection from abuse, participation in decision-making, and access to opportunities for growth and development.

The evolution of the girl child rights can be traced back to international human rights frameworks that emphasized the need for gender equality and child protection. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) laid the groundwork for recognizing the equal rights of all individuals, irrespective of gender. Subsequently, the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) (1989) became a landmark treaty explicitly addressing the rights of children, with particular provisions relevant to the girl child, such as the right to education, protection from exploitation, and freedom from harmful traditional practices (United Nations, 1989).

2.3.1. The Rights of the girl child

i. Right to Education

The right to education is one of the most fundamental and transformative aspects of the concept of the girl child rights. As enshrined in various international conventions and declarations, including the Universal Declaration of Human Rights Article 26 (1948) and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) article 28-29, education is recognized as a cornerstone for personal development, empowerment, and societal progress. For girls, in particular, access to quality education plays a pivotal role in breaking cycles of poverty, challenging gender inequality, and advancing the broader agenda of human rights. Despite these imperatives, millions of girls around the world are denied their right to education due to systemic gender-based discrimination, entrenched cultural norms, and socio-economic barriers (UNESCO, 2022).

Education is a vital component of the girl child rights because it not only equips girls with knowledge and skills but also empowers them to claim other rights. When a girl is educated, she is better positioned to make informed decisions about her life, participate meaningfully in economic and political processes, and advocate for equality and justice. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly Goal 4 (Quality Education) and Goal 5 (Gender Equality), emphasize the critical need to ensure inclusive and equitable education for all girls. However, the realization of this right remains elusive for many girls due to a range of intersecting challenges that undermine their access to education.

One of the primary obstacles to the realization of girls' right to education is poverty. Economic hardship disproportionately affects girls, as families with limited resources often prioritize the education of boys, viewing them as future breadwinners. This reprioritization reflects deeply rooted patriarchal norms that undervalue the potential contributions of girls. According to UNICEF (2020), in many low-income countries, girls from the poorest households are twice as likely to be out of school compared to boys from the wealthiest households. This disparity is further exacerbated by indirect costs such as school uniforms,

transportation, and learning materials, which can be prohibitive for families already struggling to meet basic needs.

Cultural and social norms also play a significant role in restricting girls' access to education. In many traditional societies, girls are often confined to domestic roles, and their education is deemed unnecessary or even inappropriate. These attitudes are particularly prevalent in rural areas, where early marriages and child labour are common. The practice of child marriage, for instance, directly violates girls' rights to education by removing them from school and placing them in roles as wives and mothers at a young age. The World Bank (2017) estimates that each year of secondary education reduces the likelihood of child marriage by 5%, highlighting the critical importance of keeping girls in school. Furthermore, the lack of gender-sensitive educational infrastructure creates additional barriers to girls' education. Many schools in developing countries lack basic facilities such as separate toilets for girls, which can discourage attendance, particularly during menstruation. The stigma and lack of support surrounding menstruation often led to absenteeism and eventually dropouts. A study by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO, 2022) revealed that inadequate sanitation facilities are a significant factor contributing to high dropout rates among adolescent girls.

The consequences of denying girls their right to education is far-reaching and detrimental to individuals, families, and societies. Girls who are deprived of education are more likely to face poverty, limited job opportunities, and health risks, including maternal mortality and exposure to gender-based violence. Lack of education also perpetuates intergenerational cycles of disadvantage, as uneducated mothers are less likely to educate their children, thereby perpetuating inequality. Conversely, educating girls has a transformative impact. Research indicates that educating girls improves economic outcomes, reduces child mortality, and fosters healthier and more equitable societies. For instance, the World Bank (2020)

highlights that a 1% increase in the proportion of women with secondary education can result in a 0.3% rise in a country's annual GDP.

International organizations, governments, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have implemented various initiatives to address barriers to girls' education and promote their right to learn. Programs such as UNICEF's Girls' Education Initiative and the Global Partnership for Education (GPE) focus on providing resources, building gender-sensitive infrastructure, and advocating for policy reforms. These initiatives have made significant strides in increasing enrolment rates, reducing gender disparities, and raising awareness about the importance of educating girls. Despite these efforts, progress remains uneven, particularly in regions affected by conflict, displacement, and political instability. Conflicts and humanitarian crises pose severe challenges to the right to education for girls. In conflict zones, schools are often targeted, and girls are disproportionately affected by violence, displacement, and exploitation. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) estimates that refugee girls are 2.5 times less likely to attend school than their male counterparts. The COVID-19 pandemic further exacerbated these challenges, with school closures disproportionately affecting girls and increasing the risk of child marriage and exploitation (UNICEF, 2021).

The right to education for the girl child is not merely a moral imperative but also a strategic necessity for achieving sustainable development and gender equality. Addressing the barriers to girls' education requires a multifaceted approach that includes tackling poverty, challenging cultural norms, and investing in gender-sensitive infrastructure. Governments must prioritize policies that make education accessible, affordable, and safe for all girls. Community engagement is equally critical, as changing societal attitudes towards girls' education requires grassroots advocacy and awareness campaigns.

b. Right to Health and Well-Being

Health and well-being are integral components of the broader concept of the girl child rights, as they directly influence the quality of life, development, and opportunities available to girls. These rights are recognized in key international frameworks, including the United Nations Convention article 24 on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), which emphasizes every child's right to the highest attainable standard of health and access to health services. Despite these legal protections, the health and well-being of girls continue to be compromised globally due to structural inequalities, gender-based discrimination, and socio-cultural practices. Addressing these issues is essential for advancing the broader goal of gender equality and empowering girls to reach their full potential.

The health of the girl child encompasses physical, mental, and emotional well-being, yet gendered disparities often leave girls disproportionately vulnerable to health risks. For instance, unequal access to healthcare is a pervasive issue in many developing countries, where societal norms and resource constraints prioritize boys' health over that of girls. The World Health Organization (WHO, 2021) highlights that in some regions, girls are less likely to receive immunizations, essential medications, and proper nutrition, resulting in higher morbidity and mortality rates. These disparities are rooted in patriarchal structures that undervalue the lives of girls and view their health as less critical than that of boys.

A significant aspect of the health and well-being of the girl child is maternal and reproductive health. Many girls face risks associated with early pregnancy, often as a result of child marriage. The United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) estimates that approximately 12 million girls under the age of 18 give birth annually, with many of these pregnancies occurring in low-resource settings. Early pregnancy poses severe health risks, including obstetric complications, such as obstetric fistula, and heightened risks of maternal mortality.

In fact, complications from pregnancy and childbirth are among the leading causes of death for adolescent girls globally (UNFPA, 2021). These outcomes are compounded by a lack of access to reproductive health education and services, as well as the stigma surrounding discussions of sexual and reproductive health in many societies.

Malnutrition is another critical challenge affecting the health and well-being of the girl child. Gender-based disparities in food distribution within households often leave girls with inadequate nutrition, making them more susceptible to stunted growth, anaemia, and other health complications. The Global Nutrition Report (2022) reveals that anaemia prevalence is significantly higher among adolescent girls than boys, largely due to dietary deficiencies and menstrual health challenges. Poor nutrition during childhood and adolescence not only compromises physical health but also impairs cognitive development, reducing girls' ability to perform well in school and participate in economic activities later in life.

The mental health of the girl child is another vital, yet often overlooked, component of their well-being. Girls frequently face unique stressors stemming from gender-based discrimination, violence, and cultural expectations. These stressors can lead to anxiety, depression, and other mental health conditions, particularly in settings where access to mental health services is limited or stigmatized. According to the WHO (2022), adolescent girls are more likely than boys to experience depression, self-harm, and suicidal ideation, with these trends exacerbated in regions affected by conflict or humanitarian crises. Addressing the mental health needs of girls requires a comprehensive approach that includes increasing awareness, reducing stigma, and integrating mental health services into broader healthcare systems.

Gender-based violence significantly undermines the health and well-being of the girl child. Violence in the form of physical, sexual, or emotional abuse has devastating consequences

for girls' physical and psychological health. Harmful practices such as female genital mutilation (FGM) are widespread in certain regions, affecting over 200 million girls and women globally, according to the WHO (2021). FGM not only causes immediate health complications, such as severe pain, infection, and haemorrhage, but also has long-term effects, including chronic pain, infertility, and psychological trauma. Similarly, sexual violence against girls contributes to a higher prevalence of sexually transmitted infections (STIs), including HIV/AIDS, as well as unintended pregnancies. The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF, 2020) underscores the critical need to combat violence against girls as part of broader efforts to ensure their health and well-being.

The availability of health services and information is a fundamental aspect of ensuring the well-being of the girl child, yet significant gaps persist in many parts of the world. Adolescent girls often lack access to accurate information about sexual and reproductive health due to cultural taboos and inadequate education systems. Comprehensive sexual education is essential for equipping girls with the knowledge they need to make informed decisions about their health and well-being. However, in many regions, conservative social norms and policies restrict the implementation of such programs, leaving girls vulnerable to misinformation, exploitation, and preventable health risks (UNESCO, 2022). Furthermore, the intersection of poverty and health inequality exacerbates the challenges faced by the girl child. Girls from impoverished families are disproportionately affected by barriers to healthcare, including financial constraints, distance to health facilities, and discriminatory practices by healthcare providers. These barriers are particularly pronounced in rural and marginalized communities, where the availability of healthcare services is often limited. The World Bank (2021) emphasizes that targeted investments in health infrastructure and services for girls can significantly improve their health outcomes and contribute to broader societal benefits.

The COVID-19 pandemic has further highlighted and intensified the vulnerabilities faced by the girl child in terms of health and well-being. School closures and economic hardships during the pandemic led to increased rates of child marriage, gender-based violence, and mental health challenges among girls. Additionally, disruptions in healthcare services disproportionately affected girls' access to essential health interventions, including vaccinations and maternal care (UNICEF, 2021). These setbacks underscore the urgent need for resilient health systems that prioritize the needs of girls, particularly during crises.

c. Right to Protection from Abuse and Exploitation

Protection from abuse and exploitation is a critical dimension of the broader framework of the girl child rights, underscoring the necessity to safeguard girls from harm, discrimination, and practices that undermine their physical, emotional, and social development. The right to protection is enshrined in international instruments such as the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) article 34-37, which mandates that every child be shielded from all forms of abuse, neglect, exploitation, and violence. Despite these legal safeguards, millions of girls worldwide continue to experience various forms of abuse and exploitation, often exacerbated by gender-based discrimination, socio-economic vulnerabilities, and cultural norms. Addressing these challenges requires a multifaceted approach that includes legal reforms, education, community engagement, and international cooperation.

One of the most pervasive forms of abuse faced by girls is gender-based violence (GBV), which manifests as physical, sexual, and emotional abuse. Girls are disproportionately affected by violence within homes, schools, and communities, often perpetrated by individuals entrusted with their care or education. The World Health Organization (WHO, 2021) estimates that approximately 1 in 3 women worldwide experience physical or sexual violence during their lifetime, with a significant proportion of these cases occurring during

childhood or adolescence. For many girls, this violence begins early in life and is perpetuated by societal norms that condone or trivialize abuse against women and girls.

Sexual exploitation is another egregious violation of the girl child's rights, with millions of girls trafficked for purposes of sexual exploitation, forced labour, and child pornography. According to the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC, 2021), girls make up the majority of victims of trafficking for sexual exploitation globally, often lured by promises of education or employment opportunities. The psychological and physical trauma inflicted on trafficked girls is profound, with long-term consequences for their health, self-esteem, and ability to reintegrate into society. The commodification of girls as objects for profit underscores the systemic devaluation of their rights and humanity, often perpetuated by weak enforcement of anti-trafficking laws and inadequate victim support systems.

Child labour is another form of exploitation that disproportionately affects girls, particularly in developing countries where poverty and economic instability force families to prioritize survival over education. According to the International Labour Organization (ILO, 2021), an estimated 160 million children are engaged in child labour globally, with girls often working in hazardous or exploitative conditions such as domestic servitude, agriculture, and garment production. These environments not only expose girls to physical harm but also deny them access to education and opportunities for personal growth, perpetuating cycles of poverty and inequality.

Cultural practices and traditions also play a significant role in perpetuating abuse and exploitation of girls. Harmful practices such as child marriage and female genital mutilation (FGM) are deeply entrenched in many societies, often justified by cultural, religious, or economic reasons. Child marriage, which affects approximately 12 million girls annually according to UNICEF (2021), not only deprives girls of their childhood but also exposes

them to early pregnancies, domestic violence, and limited educational and economic opportunities. Similarly, FGM, practiced in parts of Africa, the Middle East, and Asia, subjects' girls to severe physical and psychological trauma, violating their right to health and bodily autonomy. Despite global campaigns to eradicate these practices, progress remains uneven, with resistance fuelled by societal norms and lack of enforcement.

The digital age has introduced new forms of exploitation, with online sexual abuse and cyberbullying emerging as significant threats to the girl child. The International Telecommunication Union (ITU, 2022) highlights that girls are disproportionately targeted by online predators and cyberbullying, often leading to psychological distress and withdrawal from digital platforms. The anonymity of the internet and inadequate regulatory frameworks exacerbate the vulnerability of girls to online exploitation, highlighting the need for stronger digital literacy programs and legal protections. Efforts to protect girls from abuse and exploitation must be rooted in robust legal and policy frameworks. International treaties such as the UNCRC, the Optional Protocol on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution and Child Pornography, and the ILO Conventions on Child Labour provide a foundation for addressing these issues. However, the effectiveness of these instruments depends on their implementation at the national level. Countries must enact and enforce comprehensive child protection laws, establish child-friendly reporting mechanisms, and ensure that perpetrators are held accountable. The role of law enforcement and judicial systems are critical in creating an environment where abuse and exploitation are not tolerated.

d. Right to Inclusion

Participation and empowerment are fundamental to the realization of the girl child's rights, embodying the principles of agency, voice, and equality. These elements are critical in enabling girls to actively engage in decisions that affect their lives and contribute

meaningfully to society. The right to participation is enshrined in various international legal frameworks, such as the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) article 12 to 15, which underscores the importance of including children, particularly girls, in decision-making processes at family, community, and national levels. Empowerment complements participation by equipping girls with the tools, skills, and confidence necessary to claim their rights and challenge systemic barriers. Despite significant strides, many girls worldwide are still denied opportunities to participate due to cultural norms, gender-based discrimination, and socio-economic constraints.

Participation entails the inclusion of girls in decision-making processes, fostering their ability to express opinions, influence outcomes, and take ownership of their lives. It recognizes girls as active agents rather than passive recipients of care and protection. Participation is integral to a holistic understanding of human rights, as it not only affirms the dignity of the girl child but also enhances the effectiveness of policies and programs designed to address their needs. According to the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF, 2021), empowering girls to participate actively in their communities leads to more inclusive and equitable development outcomes, benefiting both individuals and society at large.

The ability of girls to participate is often hindered by socio-cultural norms that prioritize male voices and restrict female agency. In many societies, girls are excluded from decision-making processes within their families and communities, reinforcing their marginalization. For instance, girls may be denied opportunities to express their preferences regarding education, marriage, or career choices, with decisions instead imposed upon them by parents or guardians. This lack of agency perpetuates cycles of disempowerment, depriving girls of the confidence and skills necessary to navigate their futures effectively (Plan International, 2020).

2.4. Causes of the girl child Right Violation

Gender-based discrimination is a profound and pervasive global issue that adversely affects the realization of the girl child rights. The girl child is particularly vulnerable to patriarchal societal norms and structural inequalities that perpetuate discrimination, often infringing upon her basic human rights. Understanding gender-based discrimination in the context of the girl child rights requires an exploration of its origins, manifestations, and consequences, as well as the global frameworks and strategies in place to address it.

The concept of the girl child rights is rooted in international human rights law, particularly in instruments such as the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). These treaties affirm that all children, regardless of gender, have the right to survival, development, protection, and participation. However, the girl child faces unique challenges due to entrenched gender inequalities that prioritize boys and men over girls and women (UNICEF, 2020). Discrimination against girls often begins before birth and persists throughout their lives, limiting their access to education, healthcare, economic opportunities, and decision-making power.

At its core, gender-based discrimination against the girl child is fuelled by deeply ingrained patriarchal norms and cultural practices. Patriarchal societies often value boys over girls, viewing the former as future providers and heirs while relegating the latter to subordinate roles. This cultural devaluation of girls is evident in practices such as sex-selective abortions, which remain prevalent in countries like India and China despite legal prohibitions (Bhalotra & Cochrane, 2020). Such practices underscore the systemic devaluation of girls and their perceived lesser worth, which directly contravenes their right to equal treatment.

In many societies, the educational opportunities available to girls are severely restricted due to gender-based discrimination. This is particularly pronounced in low-income and rural areas where limited resources often result in a preference for educating boys. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) has reported that girls are more likely than boys to drop out of school due to financial constraints, early marriages, and domestic responsibilities (UNESCO, 2022). This lack of education has far-reaching consequences, perpetuating cycles of poverty and limiting girls' ability to secure meaningful employment or advocate for their rights. Denying girls access to education not only violates their right to learning but also diminishes their potential to contribute to societal and economic development.

Another critical area where gender-based discrimination undermines the girl child rights is healthcare. Girls in many developing countries face disparities in access to health services, particularly during infancy and adolescence. Discriminatory practices such as son preference can lead to neglect of girls' nutritional and medical needs, resulting in higher mortality rates and poorer health outcomes (Sen & Östlin, 2008). Furthermore, harmful traditional practices like female genital mutilation (FGM) and early marriages expose girls to severe physical and psychological harm. The World Health Organization (WHO) estimates that over 200 million girls and women globally have undergone FGM, a practice rooted in gender inequality and societal control over women's sexuality (WHO, 2021). Such practices not only infringe upon the girl child's right to health but also violate her right to freedom from inhumane and degrading treatment. Gender-based discrimination also manifests in economic marginalization, with girls often denied opportunities to participate in economic activities or inherit property. In many patriarchal societies, inheritance laws and practices disproportionately favour male heirs, leaving girls economically dependent and vulnerable.

This lack of economic empowerment perpetuates cycles of poverty and limits girls' ability to exercise agency over their lives (UNDP, 2022).

i. Conflict: The violation of the girl child rights remains a pressing issue in many conflict-ridden regions across the globe. Armed conflicts, political instability, and civil wars significantly exacerbate existing gender inequalities, leaving girls more vulnerable to various forms of exploitation, abuse, and deprivation of their fundamental rights. Conflict disrupts social structures, displaces communities, and weakens law enforcement, creating an environment where violations against girls become more prevalent and, in many cases, normalized. The repercussions of conflict on girls extend beyond immediate physical and psychological harm to long-term disadvantages in education, healthcare, and economic opportunities.

One of the most profound effects of conflict on the girl child is the disruption of education. Schools are often targeted in conflict zones, leading to their closure or destruction. Additionally, armed groups frequently recruit boys as child soldiers, while girls are abducted for forced labour, sexual slavery, or child marriages (UNESCO, 2021). Even when schools remain operational, parents may be reluctant to send their daughters due to the heightened risk of sexual violence, abduction, or forced conscription by militias (Onyeozili, et al. 2021).

Education plays a crucial role in empowering girls and safeguarding their rights, yet conflict denies them this fundamental opportunity. According to the Global Education Monitoring Report, girls are 2.5 times more likely to be out of school in conflict-affected areas compared to those in stable regions (UNICEF, 2022). The lack of education severely limits their future prospects, perpetuating a cycle of poverty, early marriage, and economic dependency. Furthermore, in refugee settings, displaced girls face additional barriers, including language

difficulties, lack of infrastructure, and discriminatory cultural norms that prioritize boys' education (Nateghi, 2024).

The "Chibok girls' abduction" in 2014 by the Boko Haram terrorist group in Borno state Nigeria is a tragic example of the severe child rights violations that can occur in conflict zones. This incident involved the kidnapping of 276 schoolgirls, who were subjected to forced marriage, exploitation, and denial of education. The abduction of these girls highlights the vulnerability of children, especially girls, in conflict situations and the detrimental impact on their rights and well-being. Children in conflict zones are often the most vulnerable and at risk of experiencing various forms of abuse and exploitation. The abduction of the Chibok girls is a stark reminder of the grave violations of child rights that can occur during times of conflict. These girls were taken from their homes, families, and communities, and forced into a life of captivity and abuse.

The denial of education to these girls further exacerbates the violation of their rights. Education is a fundamental right for all children, and the abduction of the Chibok girls deprived them of this basic human right. The long-term consequences of being denied an education can have a lasting impact on their future opportunities and well-being. The exploitation of these girls through forced marriage also highlights the gendered nature of conflict-related violations. Girls are often targeted for specific forms of abuse, such as forced marriage, in conflict situations. This further underscores the need for gender-sensitive approaches to protecting children in conflict zones and upholding their rights.

Conflict creates an environment where gender-based violence, particularly sexual violence against girls, becomes widespread. Warring factions often use rape as a weapon of war to intimidate, control, and punish communities. Girls, especially those in displaced camps, are highly vulnerable to sexual exploitation by both armed actors and humanitarian personnel

who should be protecting them (DAVID, 2023). The prevalence of sexual violence in conflict zones has been widely documented in cases such as the Democratic Republic of the Congo, South Sudan, and Syria, where systematic rape has been employed as a strategy to instil fear and assert dominance (UNHCR, 2021).

Sexual violence not only inflicts immediate physical and psychological trauma but also has long-term repercussions, including unwanted pregnancies, sexually transmitted infections, and social stigma. Many survivors face rejection by their families and communities, further exacerbating their vulnerability. In some cases, girls who become pregnant because of rape are forced into early marriages with their perpetrators, a practice aimed at restoring so-called family honour (Human Rights Watch, 2020). The lack of legal frameworks and weak judicial systems in conflict zones make it difficult for survivors to seek justice, reinforcing a culture of impunity for perpetrators.

ii. Socio-Cultural Discrimination: Socio-cultural discrimination refers to the unjust or prejudicial treatment of individuals or groups based on their cultural, social, or ethnic characteristics. This form of discrimination often stems from deeply rooted societal norms, values, and stereotypes that categorize people according to perceived differences in ethnicity, language, religion, traditions, or other cultural markers. It perpetuates inequality by marginalizing certain groups while privileging others, often reinforcing systemic hierarchies and power imbalances within societies.

Socio-cultural discrimination is primarily underpinned by the construction of social identities and the hierarchies that accompany them. These hierarchies often arise from historical contexts, such as colonization, slavery, or the imposition of dominant cultures over minority groups. According to Bourdieu's theory of cultural capital, societies value certain cultural traits over others, creating unequal access to resources, opportunities, and social mobility

(Bourdieu, 1986). This value system fosters a framework where minority groups are disadvantaged for not conforming to the dominant culture's norms and practices. The cultural hegemony described by Antonio Gramsci also provides insights into socio-cultural discrimination. He argued that dominant groups maintain power by normalizing their culture and values, making them appear natural and universal (Gramsci, 1971). In this process, the cultures and practices of marginalized groups are often delegitimized or rendered invisible, leading to social exclusion and discrimination.

Socio-cultural discrimination manifests in various forms, often interwoven with institutional and systemic inequalities. One notable manifestation is ethnocentrism, where individuals or groups evaluate other cultures based on the standards of their own, leading to a perception of cultural superiority. Ethnocentric attitudes often drive policies and practices that marginalize minorities. For instance, the forced assimilation of Indigenous populations in Canada through residential schools exemplifies how socio-cultural discrimination seeks to erase minority identities to conform to dominant norms (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015).

Another expression is language-based discrimination, where individuals are marginalized based on their linguistic practices. Language is a core aspect of cultural identity, and its suppression can result in social and economic exclusion. For example, non-native speakers may face barriers in accessing education, employment, or public services due to linguistic prejudices, perpetuating cycles of poverty and marginalization (Skutnabb-Kangas, 2000).

iii. Religious Discrimination: In societies where religious beliefs are deeply intertwined with cultural practices, girls are often the most vulnerable to discrimination and violence. The rigid interpretation of religious laws frequently places them in a subordinate position, limiting their freedom of speech, education, and personal choices. Religious intolerance creates an

environment where dissenting voices—especially those of young girls—are silenced through coercion, exclusion, or even physical harm (Pourya & Hanafiah, 2024).

The tragic case of Deborah Samuel Yakubu, a young Christian student in Nigeria, is a stark example of how religious extremism fuels gender-based violence. Deborah was accused of blasphemy for expressing her personal opinion about her faith. This led to a mob attack where she was brutally killed, highlighting how religious sentiments are often weaponized to suppress the rights of women and girls. The violence against her was not just an attack on an individual but a statement reinforcing the systemic oppression of girls who dare to challenge religious norms. Her death reflects a pattern seen in various societies where young girls face the wrath of religious extremism simply for exercising their right to freedom of expression (Anyorikeya, 2024).

Another poignant example is the abduction of Leah Sharibu, a 14-year-old Christian girl, by Boko Haram insurgents in February 2018. While her Muslim peers were released, Leah was held captive for refusing to renounce her faith and convert to Islam. Reports indicate that she has since been subjected to forced marriage and childbirth in captivity. This case highlights the use of religious coercion as a tool to violate the rights of young girls, stripping them of their freedom and subjecting them to inhumane conditions. Furthermore, the pervasive issue of children accused of witchcraft in Nigeria exemplifies another facet of religious discrimination leading to rights violations (Adimekwe, 2024). These children, often from vulnerable backgrounds, face persecution, discrimination, and inhumane treatment based on unfounded religious and cultural beliefs. In December 2021, the Institute for Human Rights and Development in Africa (IHRDA) and partners sued Nigeria before the African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child, alleging the country's failure to protect these children from such abuses (Aka, 2024).

Similarly, other cases of the girl child rights violations due to religious discrimination abound. In some regions, girls are kidnapped, forced into marriages, or even denied access to education due to their religious beliefs or those imposed upon them. In conflict zones, extremist groups exploit religion as a justification for abducting and enslaving young girls, depriving them of their autonomy and future. These acts are often carried out with impunity, as religious justification shields perpetrators from legal consequences (Fine, & McClelland 2023).

Education is one of the most significant areas where religious discrimination affects girls. Many conservative religious communities discourage the education of girls, believing that their primary role is to be submissive wives and mothers. This has led to forced dropouts, child marriages, and even attacks on schools that educate girls. In extreme cases, young girls are killed or abducted for merely seeking an education. Moreover, religious bias in educational institutions can create a hostile environment where girls from minority religious groups are harassed, ostracized, or even expelled for expressing their beliefs. The fear of religious persecution forces many parents to either withdraw their daughters from school or conform to oppressive religious expectations that limit their intellectual and personal growth.

In Northern Nigeria, the implementation of Sharia law has contributed to religious discrimination by enforcing gender-biased policies that restrict the rights of girls, particularly in education, marriage, and personal freedoms. Many girls, especially from religious minorities, face systemic barriers to schooling, as some Sharia-based rulings prioritize Islamic education over secular learning and justify early marriages that cut short their academic pursuits. This legal framework reinforces gender inequality, limiting the ability of girls to make independent life choices and denying them the same rights and opportunities as boys, particularly in communities where religious laws take precedence over national child protection laws.

iv. Harmful Traditional Practices: The right to freedom from harmful traditional practices is a critical component of the broader concept of the girl child rights. These practices, which include child marriage, female genital mutilation (FGM), and other culturally ingrained customs, significantly infringe upon the physical, psychological, and social well-being of girls. While often justified by cultural, religious, or social norms, harmful traditional practices violate fundamental human rights and undermine the dignity and potential of the girl child. The international community, governments, and civil society have increasingly recognized the urgency of eliminating these practices to ensure girls can live free from violence, discrimination, and inequality.

Harmful traditional practices are deeply rooted in cultural or societal norms and are often perpetuated across generations despite their detrimental impacts on girls. These practices are usually gender-specific, reflecting and reinforcing patriarchal structures that subordinate women and girls. According to the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA, 2020), such practices persist due to deeply entrenched beliefs, poverty, lack of education, and inadequate legal protections. While these practices vary across regions, their unifying characteristic is the harm they inflict on the physical, psychological, and social development of girls.

Child marriage and female genital mutilation are among the most pervasive harmful traditional practices affecting millions of girls worldwide. The World Health Organization (WHO, 2021) estimates that over 200 million girls and women alive today have undergone FGM, and approximately 12 million girls are married before the age of 18 each year. These practices not only endanger the immediate health of girls but also have long-term consequences, including limited educational opportunities, increased maternal mortality, and the perpetuation of poverty cycles. Harmful traditional practices infringe upon multiple rights enshrined in international human rights instruments, including the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination

Against Women (CEDAW). These include the right to health, education, freedom from violence, and the right to make decisions regarding one's life and body. By subjecting girls to harmful practices, societies deny them the opportunity to realize their full potential and contribute meaningfully to their communities.

In other words, in Nigeria, the prevalence of child marriage remains alarmingly high, with 44% of girls married before the age of 18, totalling over 24 million child brides. This ranks Nigeria third globally in terms of the absolute number of child marriages. The legal framework in Nigeria presents challenges in addressing this issue. The Child Rights Act of 2003 sets the minimum age of marriage at 18; however, for the Act to be enforceable, each state must domesticate it under its own laws. As of now, many states in Northern Nigeria, where child marriage is most prevalent, have not adopted this Act, leading to continued practices of early marriage under customary and religious laws.

The physical health impacts of practices like FGM and child marriage are well-documented. FGM, for example, often leads to severe pain, infections, complications in childbirth, and increased risk of newborn deaths. Similarly, child marriage frequently results in early pregnancies, which pose significant health risks for young mothers, including obstructed labour and maternal mortality. The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF, 2021) emphasizes that these practices disproportionately affect girls from marginalized communities, exacerbating existing inequalities and perpetuating cycles of disadvantage. Psychologically, harmful traditional practices can lead to trauma, anxiety, depression, and low self-esteem. Girls who undergo FGM or are forced into early marriages often experience a loss of autonomy and agency, undermining their sense of self-worth. Socially, these practices limit girls' access to education, economic opportunities, and participation in public life, thereby reinforcing gender inequality. For instance, child marriage frequently leads to

school dropouts, as married girls are often expected to prioritize domestic responsibilities over education (UNICEF, 2021).

vi. Economic Constraint and Poverty

Economic constraints and poverty remain critical drivers of the violation of the girl child rights in Northern Nigeria. Many families in the region face financial hardships, making it difficult to provide basic necessities such as food, healthcare, and education. As a result, they often resort to practices that undermine the rights of the girl child, including early and forced marriages, as a means of economic survival (UNICEF, 2020).

In many communities, daughters are seen as financial assets rather than individuals with rights to education and personal development. Poverty-stricken households may give their female children into marriage in exchange for dowries or financial support from wealthier suitors. This practice not only perpetuates gender inequality but also exposes the girl child to risks such as domestic violence, health complications from early childbirth, and limited access to education (Eze et al., 2019). The prioritization of male education over female education further exacerbates the cycle of poverty, as girls who are denied schooling are left without the skills and opportunities needed to improve their socio-economic status (Ojo & Salihu, 2021).

2.5. Theoretical Framework

Human Rights Theory

Human rights theory is a complex field that seeks to understand and promote the rights and freedoms of individuals around the world. The concept of human rights is rooted in the idea that all human beings are entitled to certain fundamental rights simply by virtue of being human. These rights are considered to be universal, inalienable, and indivisible, meaning that they apply to all individuals, cannot be taken away, and are interconnected and

interdependent. The modern conceptualization of human rights has its origins in the Enlightenment period, when philosophers like John Locke and Immanuel Kant argued for the intrinsic dignity and autonomy of the individual. Locke's theory of natural rights in his book **TREATIES OF CIVIL GOVERNMENT**, for instance, posited that individuals possess inherent rights to life, liberty, and property, derived from their status as rational beings (Locke, 1689). Kant's moral philosophy further emphasized the categorical imperative in his book **METAPHYSICS OF MORALS**, which mandates treating individuals as ends in themselves rather than means to an end, thereby underscoring the universality of human dignity (Kant, 1785). Human rights theory also draws from earlier traditions, including natural law, which holds that certain rights are universal and unchangeable due to their divine or moral origins. Thinkers like Thomas Aquinas in his book *Summa Theologica* (i-ii, q. 91-94) integrated this perspective with theological principles, arguing that human rights are grounded in a divine moral order (Aquinas, 1265). This idea persisted and evolved into secular frameworks, forming the bedrock of modern human rights discourse.

One of the key principles of human rights theory is the idea of human dignity. Human rights theorists argue that all individuals possess inherent dignity and worth, and that this dignity must be respected and protected by society and the state. This principle underpins many of the rights and freedoms enshrined in international human rights instruments, such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (Donnelly, 2013).

Another important aspect of human rights theory is the concept of equality. Human rights theorists argue that all individuals are equal in dignity and rights, and that discrimination based on race, gender, religion, or any other characteristic is a violation of human rights. The principle of equality is enshrined in international human rights law, which prohibits discrimination and promotes equal treatment for all individuals. Human rights theory also

emphasizes the importance of individual autonomy and agency. Human rights theorists argue that individuals have the right to make choices about their own lives and to have their choices respected by others. This principle is reflected in rights such as the right to freedom of expression, the right to freedom of religion, and the right to privacy (Ignatieff, 2001).

In addition to these principles, human rights theory also recognizes the importance of accountability and transparency in upholding human rights. Human rights theorists argue that states and other actors have a responsibility to respect, protect, and fulfil human rights, and that they should be held accountable when they fail to do so. This principle is reflected in mechanisms such as human rights monitoring, reporting, and enforcement. Overall, human rights theory provides a framework for understanding and promoting the rights and freedoms of individuals around the world (Sen, 2009). By emphasizing principles such as human dignity, equality, autonomy, and accountability, human rights theory seeks to ensure that all individuals are able to live with dignity and freedom. Through international human rights instruments and mechanisms, human rights theory aims to hold states and other actors accountable for upholding human rights and to promote a more just and equitable world for all.

Human rights theory plays a crucial role in addressing the challenges faced by the girl child in Northern Nigeria, particularly in the context of UNICEF's efforts to promote and protect the rights of children in the region. The application of human rights theory to the situation of the girl child in Northern Nigeria highlights the need for a comprehensive and rights-based approach to addressing the various issues that impact their well-being and development.

One of the key challenges faced by the girl child in Northern Nigeria is access to education. According to UNICEF, girls in the region are less likely to attend school compared to boys, with factors such as poverty, early marriage, and cultural norms contributing to this disparity

(UNICEF, 2019). The right to education is a fundamental human right that is enshrined in various international human rights instruments, including the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the Convention on the Rights of the Child. By applying human rights theory to this issue, UNICEF can advocate for policies and programs that promote gender equality in education and ensure that girls have equal access to quality education.

Another significant challenge faced by the girl child in Northern Nigeria is child marriage. According to UNICEF, Nigeria has one of the highest rates of child marriage in the world, with over 40% of girls married before the age of 18 (UNICEF, 2020). Child marriage not only violates the rights of girls to education, health, and autonomy but also exposes them to a higher risk of domestic violence, early pregnancy, and maternal mortality. By applying human rights theory to the issue of child marriage, UNICEF can work towards strengthening legal protections for girls, raising awareness about the harmful effects of child marriage, and providing support services for girls at risk of or affected by child marriage. The application of human rights theory to the challenges faced by the girl child in Northern Nigeria is essential for promoting and protecting their rights. By adopting a rights-based approach, UNICEF can advocate for policies and programs that address the root causes of gender inequality and discrimination, and ensure that girls have equal opportunities to thrive and reach their full potential.

Liberalism:

Liberalism is a political and international relations theory that advocates for individual freedoms, democracy, human rights, and cooperation among states. It was first systematically propounded by John Locke in **Two Treatises of Government** (1689) and later expanded in international relations by Immanuel Kant in **Perpetual Peace** (1795), with modern contributions from scholars like Robert Keohane in **After Hegemony** (1984).

Liberalism, as a theory of international relations, emphasizes human rights, equality, and cooperation through institutions (Dunne et al., 2021). This theoretical framework is relevant in analysing UNICEF's efforts to protect the rights of the girl child in Northern Nigeria, where challenges such as early marriage, gender-based violence, and limited access to education persist (UNICEF, 2023).

One of the core tenets of liberalism is the promotion of human rights, which aligns with UNICEF's advocacy for the girl child's right to education and freedom from discrimination. UNICEF's initiatives, such as the Girls' Education Project (GEP3), funded by international partners, demonstrate liberalism's emphasis on cooperation between states and non-state actors to achieve common humanitarian goals (World Bank, 2022). By working alongside the Nigerian government and civil society organizations, UNICEF fosters dialogue and policy changes that advance gender equality, reflecting liberalist ideals of multilateralism and institutional collaboration (Keohane & Nye, 2012).

Moreover, liberalism underscores the role of international institutions in shaping domestic policies. UNICEF's advocacy for the implementation of the Child Rights Act in Northern Nigerian states showcases how global norms influence national legal frameworks, reinforcing the belief that international organizations play a vital role in promoting human security (UNICEF, 2023). The emphasis on education, healthcare, and protection from harmful practices resonates with the liberalist perspective that institutions can drive progress through capacity-building and empowerment initiatives (Slaughter, 2004).

Additionally, economic interdependence, another principle of liberalism, is evident in UNICEF's partnership with donor countries and organizations to fund projects aimed at improving the welfare of girls in Northern Nigeria. These collaborations highlight the liberal argument that economic and social development is interconnected with peace and security

(Ikenberry, 2018). By investing in girls' education and health, UNICEF contributes to long-term stability and economic growth, aligning with liberalism's vision of a cooperative international system.

CHAPTER THREE

UNICEF'S ROLE IN FOSTERING GIRL CHILD EDUCATION IN NIGERIA

The education of the girl child stands as a cornerstone for national development, wielding profound impacts on individual well-being, family health, economic prosperity, and societal progress (UNICEF, 2023a). In Nigeria, a nation grappling with significant socio-economic disparities and cultural complexities, the realization of this fundamental right for girls faces numerous formidable challenges. These include deeply entrenched patriarchal norms, poverty, insecurity, inadequate infrastructure, and harmful traditional practices, all contributing to alarmingly low enrolment and high dropout rates among girls, particularly in the northern regions (Human Rights Watch, 2022).

Against this backdrop, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) emerges as a critical and multifaceted actor, playing an indispensable role in advocating for, supporting, and actively working towards fostering girl child education across Nigeria (Shehu M & Olufunmilade F & Agba E, 2020). Through a comprehensive array of interventions, strategic partnerships, and unwavering commitment, UNICEF strives to dismantle the barriers that impede girls' access to quality education and empower them to reach their full potential. This chapter will delve into the various facets of UNICEF's engagement in promoting girl child education in Nigeria, highlighting key initiatives, challenges addressed, and the significant impact achieved.

3.1 The State of Girl Child Education in Nigeria

The state of girl child education in Nigeria remains a complex and multifaceted issue, shaped by socio-cultural, economic, and political factors. Despite significant strides in educational reforms and gender equity campaigns, the educational experiences and outcomes for many

Nigerian girls continue to lag behind those of their male counterparts, especially in rural and conflict-prone areas.

One of the major challenges confronting girl child education in Nigeria is rooted in socio-cultural norms and traditional beliefs. In many communities, especially in the northern regions, early marriage is still prevalent, and it often results in the premature withdrawal of girls from school. According to UNICEF (2021), Nigeria has one of the highest rates of child marriage in the world, with approximately 43% of girls married before the age of 18. This practice not only truncates their formal education but also exposes them to early pregnancies and health complications, thereby perpetuating cycles of poverty and dependence.

Economic hardship is another critical barrier. Many families, particularly those living below the poverty line, are forced to make difficult choices about which of their children to educate. In these scenarios, boys are often preferred over girls due to the perception that investing in a male child's education yields greater long-term economic benefits for the family. The cost of schooling—fees, uniforms, books, and transportation—can be prohibitive, and when combined with the opportunity cost of sending a girl to school rather than keeping her at home to assist with domestic chores or to work, education becomes an unaffordable luxury (Edewor, 2020).

Security concerns further exacerbate the situation. The Boko Haram insurgency in the North-East has had a particularly devastating effect on girl child education (Shehu M & Olufunmilade F & Agba E, 2020). The group's well-documented attacks on schools, including the abduction of schoolgirls in Chibok and Dapchi, have instilled fear in parents and students alike. According to Human Rights Watch (2016), these attacks have led to the closure of hundreds of schools and have caused a massive disruption in the academic

progression of thousands of girls. The psychological trauma experienced by affected girls also hinders their ability to return to and thrive in the educational system.

Policy frameworks and governmental interventions, while present, have often been inadequately implemented or underfunded. Although the Universal Basic Education (UBE) programme was introduced to guarantee free and compulsory education for all Nigerian children, gaps in enforcement and resource allocation have undermined its effectiveness. Gender-sensitive policies are frequently designed without sufficient attention to the unique barriers girls face, or they lack follow-through in execution due to corruption, bureaucratic inefficiencies, or a lack of political will (Ajayi & Olatunji, 2019).

In contrast, some progress has been recorded in various regions due to the intervention of international organizations and civil society groups. Programs supported by organizations like UNICEF, Plan International, and the Malala Fund have provided scholarships, improved school infrastructure, trained teachers, and conducted advocacy to change societal attitudes towards educating girls. These initiatives, although impactful, often operate on a limited scale and face sustainability challenges in the absence of robust state support (Ogunleye, 2022).

Educational outcomes for girls who manage to stay in school reveal additional disparities. Gender biases in classroom interactions, curricula that do not reflect the realities of girls' lives, and inadequate sanitary facilities—especially for menstruating students—can negatively affect girls' academic performance and school retention rates. Research by the World Bank (2020) shows that when girls are provided with a safe, inclusive, and supportive learning environment, their academic achievement and retention rates significantly improve.

3.2. UNICEF's Strategic Framework for Education in Nigeria

UNICEF's strategic framework for education in Nigeria is deeply rooted in its global mandate to uphold the rights of every child, particularly in accessing quality education. In Nigeria, a country marked by regional disparities, security challenges, and systemic weaknesses in public service delivery, UNICEF has tailored its education strategy to address these unique contextual challenges while aligning with national and international frameworks such as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and Nigeria's National Education Policy (Agba E & Saidu B, 2025).

At the heart of UNICEF's strategic framework in Nigeria is the commitment to achieving inclusive and equitable quality education for all children, especially the most vulnerable. This focus stems from Nigeria's considerable educational challenges, including high rates of out-of-school children, particularly in the northern regions, gender disparities, inadequate infrastructure, and a significant number of unqualified teachers (UNICEF, 2021). To tackle these issues, UNICEF prioritizes systemic interventions aimed at improving access, quality, and equity in education.

A core pillar of the framework is access to education, which UNICEF supports through various community-based and government-aligned initiatives. This involves promoting enrolment campaigns, advocating for the removal of financial and socio-cultural barriers, and supporting conditional cash transfers for vulnerable families to incentivize school attendance. These efforts are especially significant in conflict-affected areas such as the North-East, where ongoing insecurity has displaced millions and disrupted formal education systems (UNICEF, 2022). Another integral aspect of UNICEF's strategy is enhancing the quality of learning. This involves the development and implementation of competency-based curricula, the training and retraining of teachers, and the provision of age-appropriate learning materials. UNICEF partners with state ministries of education to deliver professional development programs that focus on child-centred and gender-sensitive pedagogy. Moreover,

the agency supports alternative learning pathways, including non-formal education programs, to reach children who cannot attend conventional schools, such as Almajiri children and internally displaced persons (IDPs) (UNICEF, 2021).

Equity and inclusion are also central to UNICEF's education agenda. The organization places a strong emphasis on gender equality in education, recognizing that girls, especially in rural and northern communities, face multiple barriers to schooling. UNICEF collaborates with local leaders and religious institutions to address harmful cultural norms, promotes girls' enrolment, and works to improve the school environment by ensuring the availability of separate sanitation facilities and protection from gender-based violence (Haider, 2024). The strategic framework also integrates support for children with disabilities, advocating for inclusive policies and the provision of assistive technologies and specialized teacher training.

In addressing systemic challenges, UNICEF engages in robust policy dialogue and capacity-building efforts with government agencies at the federal and state levels (Agba E & Saidu B, 2025). It supports data-driven planning through tools such as the Education Management Information System (EMIS) and helps governments develop and implement costed education sector plans. The organization also fosters multi-sectoral collaboration, recognizing that health, nutrition, and protection services significantly influence educational outcomes. For instance, school feeding programs and deworming initiatives are incorporated into broader education strategies to enhance attendance and cognitive performance (Bundy, et al, 2024).

Finally, UNICEF's framework emphasizes resilience and emergency preparedness, especially in light of Nigeria's vulnerability to conflict and climate-related disruptions. In response to crises, UNICEF deploys rapid education interventions such as the establishment of temporary learning spaces, distribution of learning kits, and psychosocial support for affected children and teachers. The agency's work during the COVID-19 pandemic highlighted its agility, as it

supported remote learning solutions including radio and television programming, digital learning platforms, and teacher guidance on continuity of learning (Matafwali & Masaiti, 2024).

3.3. Policy Advocacy and Capacity Building

UNICEF plays a pivotal role in advancing child education in Nigeria through strategic policy advocacy and capacity development. These interconnected strategies are central to the organization's broader objective of strengthening education systems and promoting equitable access to quality learning opportunities for all children, particularly the most marginalized. Policy advocacy and capacity building are not merely support functions but are instrumental mechanisms through which UNICEF influences sustainable change within the Nigerian education landscape.

UNICEF's policy advocacy efforts are grounded in the principle of child rights and the international commitment to Sustainable Development Goal 4, which calls for inclusive and equitable quality education and lifelong learning opportunities. In Nigeria, where educational challenges are compounded by regional disparities, poverty, insecurity, and weak institutional frameworks, UNICEF engages with key government stakeholders to shape and reform policies that directly impact child education (Nwoke, 2024). This involves supporting the development and implementation of comprehensive education sector plans at federal and state levels, which serve as blueprints for aligning government strategies with international standards and best practices.

Through its advocacy, UNICEF encourages increased public investment in education, emphasizing the need for budgetary allocations that reflect the urgency and scale of Nigeria's educational deficits. For instance, UNICEF has continually highlighted the gap between Nigeria's education budget and the international benchmark of allocating 15–20% of national

budgets to education (UNICEF, 2022). By facilitating dialogue between government officials, civil society, and development partners, UNICEF strengthens political will and accountability in delivering education reforms, particularly those targeting marginalized populations such as girls, children with disabilities, and those living in conflict-affected areas.

In addition to policy reform, UNICEF's capacity-building initiatives focus on enhancing institutional and human resource capabilities within the education sector. This approach is essential to ensuring that policy changes translate into effective practice. UNICEF works with ministries of education to improve data collection and management systems, such as the Education Management Information System (EMIS), which is critical for informed decision-making, planning, and monitoring of educational progress (Sarpong, & Pushpanadham 2025). By improving the reliability and usability of education data, UNICEF empowers policymakers to identify gaps, allocate resources more effectively, and track the performance of education programs over time.

Capacity building also extends to the professional development of educators and administrators. UNICEF supports the training of teachers in child-centred and inclusive pedagogies, equipping them with the tools to address the diverse learning needs of students. This is particularly vital in Nigeria, where many teachers lack formal training and classrooms are often overcrowded and under-resourced. Moreover, UNICEF strengthens local capacities for school management, enabling principals, community education committees, and school-based management boards to play more active roles in improving school performance and accountability (Ayoade, n.d.). Furthermore, UNICEF integrates a multi-sectoral approach to capacity development, recognizing that factors beyond the classroom influence education outcomes. The organization collaborates with health, nutrition, and protection sectors to build a holistic support system for learners. For example, by providing safe learning environments, psychosocial support, and school health services, UNICEF ensures that schools are not only

centres of learning but also hubs of well-being and child protection. This approach was particularly evident during the COVID-19 pandemic, when UNICEF helped government counterparts develop remote learning strategies and build digital competencies among educators to minimize learning disruptions (Munoz-Najar, 2021). Importantly, UNICEF's advocacy and capacity-building efforts are tailored to Nigeria's federal structure, where states have considerable autonomy over education. To address this, UNICEF maintains a strong field presence and state-level partnerships, providing technical assistance that is contextually relevant and responsive to local needs. This decentralized approach enhances the sustainability of UNICEF's interventions, as local actors gain ownership and capacity to sustain reforms over the long term.

3.4. The Girls' Education Project (GEP)

The Girls' Education Project (GEP) stands as a significant element of UNICEF's strategic intervention to improve child education in Nigeria, with a strong emphasis on reducing gender disparities in school enrolment, retention, and learning outcomes. Launched in partnership with the Federal Government of Nigeria and with financial support from the UK's Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO), the GEP reflects UNICEF's broader commitment to advancing gender equity and empowering girls through education in a context where socio-cultural and economic factors significantly hinder female education, especially in northern Nigeria.

The Girls' Education Project, particularly in its third phase (GEP3), represents a comprehensive, multi-year program aimed at increasing access to quality basic education for girls in states with the highest rates of gender disparity in education. These include Bauchi, Katsina, Niger, Sokoto, Zamfara, Kano, and Kebbi—states where girls are disproportionately out of school due to early marriage, poverty, child labour, insecurity, and entrenched gender

norms (Akoji, & Abaji, 2025). The GEP, therefore, addresses both the demand and supply sides of education through integrated interventions that are rooted in community engagement, policy advocacy, and systems strengthening.

Central to the success of the Girls' Education Project is its focus on community mobilization and behavioural change. UNICEF works through traditional and religious leaders, mothers' associations, and school-based management committees to shift perceptions around girls' education. By engaging key influencers and caregivers, the GEP fosters community ownership and promotes the benefits of educating girls, not just for the individual, but for families and the broader society. One effective approach employed is the use of community dialogues and public declarations that challenge harmful practices such as early marriage and promote the rights of girls to attend and complete school (Panigadi, 2023).

Another critical component of the GEP is the training and deployment of female teachers, particularly in conservative rural areas where parents are more likely to allow their daughters to attend school if female teachers are present. UNICEF has supported the recruitment and training of female teachers through targeted scholarship and mentoring schemes, thereby improving the gender sensitivity of the teaching workforce and creating safe, inclusive learning environments for girls (Oganetse, & Phiri, 2025). This not only enhances enrolment but also positively impacts learning outcomes and retention rates among female students.

The provision of girl-friendly infrastructure is also a vital aspect of the project. Recognizing that poor school infrastructure is a deterrent for girls, particularly in terms of water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) facilities, UNICEF has supported the construction of gender-segregated toilets and provided menstrual hygiene management materials. These improvements have contributed to creating a more conducive learning environment for adolescent girls, who might otherwise drop out due to the lack of such facilities. In addition

to addressing physical and social barriers, the GEP has invested heavily in data-driven planning and monitoring. UNICEF supports state and local education authorities in using disaggregated data to track progress in girls' enrolment and to identify underserved areas. The project also builds the capacity of educational planners and policymakers to integrate gender-sensitive approaches into education policies and budgets, thereby ensuring sustainability and alignment with national education strategies (Amiri, et al, 2025). Importantly, the GEP also integrates life skills and empowerment programs for girls. These include training on leadership, health, hygiene, and financial literacy, which aim to equip girls with the knowledge and confidence to navigate their environments and make informed choices. By incorporating these elements, the GEP goes beyond academic instruction to foster holistic development and resilience among female learners.

The impact of the Girls' Education Project has been substantial. By 2022, GEP3 had reached over 1.5 million girls with improved learning opportunities, trained more than 66,000 teachers in gender-sensitive pedagogy, and engaged tens of thousands of community stakeholders to advocate for girls' education (UNICEF, 2022). The success of the project has not only contributed to a reduction in gender disparities in school enrolment in participating states but has also set a model for integrated, community-led educational reform in other parts of Nigeria.

3.5. Community Mobilization and Social Norms Change

Community mobilization and social norms change are central to UNICEF's strategy in fostering child education in Nigeria, especially in regions where cultural and social barriers significantly hinder school enrolment and retention, particularly for girls. These approaches recognize that systemic educational challenges are institutional and deeply embedded in societal beliefs and practices. UNICEF's work in this area aims to create an enabling environment where education is not just accessible, but also socially supported and valued.

UNICEF employs community mobilization as a tool to engage families, traditional rulers, religious leaders, and community-based organizations in promoting the right to education. By involving local influencers, UNICEF facilitates dialogue that challenges harmful norms such as early child marriage, child labour, and the perception that girls do not need formal education. These actors are pivotal because they hold moral authority within communities and can influence attitudes and behaviours that affect educational decisions (UNICEF, 2021). For instance, religious leaders in northern Nigeria have been instrumental in advocating for Islamic support of girls' education, countering long-standing misconceptions that limit girls' schooling.

Through initiatives like the Girls' Education Project (GEP), UNICEF organizes community dialogues, town hall meetings, and household visits that serve both as platforms for awareness and as tools for consensus-building around the value of child education. These activities help demystify education, encourage parental support, and increase local ownership of school-related interventions. Additionally, mothers' associations and school-based management committees are empowered to play proactive roles in school governance, promoting enrolment and retention through grassroots advocacy (UNICEF, 2020).

Social norms change is also pursued through strategic communication campaigns, using radio, television, and interpersonal communication to shift public perceptions. These campaigns often highlight positive role models and success stories of educated girls and boys, reinforcing the long-term social and economic benefits of schooling. The messaging is carefully tailored to resonate with local values while promoting progressive change. The results of these efforts are evident in increased community participation in education and a gradual shift in attitudes toward issues like girls' schooling and inclusive education. UNICEF reports have documented a rise in enrolment rates and improved community support for

education in intervention areas where such mobilization and norm-change strategies have been implemented (Wazir, & Sinha 2024).

3.6. Provision of Learning Materials and Safe School Facilities

The provision of learning materials and safe school facilities forms a critical part of UNICEF's approach to fostering child education in Nigeria. These efforts address both the quality of education and the physical conditions under which children learn, especially in underserved and conflict-affected areas. Access to adequate learning resources and safe, inclusive environments directly influences school enrolment, attendance, and learning outcomes, making them essential components of an effective education system.

UNICEF works with federal and state education authorities to ensure that children have access to textbooks, writing materials, and other instructional resources aligned with the national curriculum. This is particularly vital in Nigeria, where many public schools are under-resourced and children often lack the basic materials needed for effective learning. By distributing millions of textbooks and learning kits, especially in rural and emergency-affected regions, UNICEF reduces the financial burden on families and helps bridge educational inequalities (UNICEF, 2021). These materials also support teachers in delivering lessons more effectively, thereby improving the overall quality of education.

Equally important is the creation and rehabilitation of safe school facilities. Schools are often damaged or destroyed in areas affected by conflict and natural disasters, displacing children and disrupting their education. UNICEF responds by constructing temporary learning spaces and rehabilitating damaged classrooms to provide secure and stable learning environments. The organization also ensures that school facilities include essential components such as gender-segregated toilets, clean water, and handwashing stations, which are crucial for promoting attendance, particularly among girls (UNICEF, 2020). Moreover, UNICEF

integrates safety and protection measures into school infrastructure, including child-friendly designs, fencing, and training for school staff on child safeguarding. These measures are vital in regions facing insecurity, where the threat of attacks on schools has discouraged many families from sending their children to school. UNICEF's Safe Schools Initiative, launched in response to rising violence in northern Nigeria, reinforces the importance of schools as protective spaces and promotes strategies for risk reduction and emergency preparedness (Uloko, & Ada, 2022). Through these interventions, UNICEF not only improves access to education but also ensures that children learn in environments that are conducive to their physical, emotional, and cognitive development. The availability of learning materials and the assurance of safety in school premises significantly increase enrolment and retention rates, especially among vulnerable groups such as girls, displaced children, and those with disabilities.

3.7. Response to Emergencies and Conflict Situations

UNICEF's role in fostering child education in Nigeria includes a critical focus on responding to emergencies and conflict situations. With large parts of northern Nigeria, particularly the North-East, affected by armed conflict, displacement, and natural disasters, millions of children are at risk of missing out on education. These emergencies not only destroy infrastructure but also disrupt learning processes, deepen educational inequalities, and expose children to exploitation and abuse. UNICEF's interventions are therefore designed to ensure the continuity of education in times of crisis while protecting the rights and well-being of children.

A cornerstone of UNICEF's emergency response is the establishment of temporary learning spaces and the rehabilitation of damaged school infrastructure. In areas affected by the Boko Haram insurgency and other security challenges, such as Borno, Adamawa, and Yobe states,

UNICEF has supported the construction of safe and accessible learning centres, often using tents or locally sourced materials that can be rapidly deployed (Solomon, 2024). These spaces are designed not only to provide immediate access to education but also to offer psychosocial support and a sense of normalcy for displaced and traumatized children.

UNICEF also ensures that education is integrated into humanitarian response plans by working closely with federal and state governments as well as other partners under the Education in Emergencies (EiE) framework. The organization helps coordinate education clusters that map needs, mobilize resources, and align interventions to avoid duplication and reach the most vulnerable populations. In conflict-affected zones, UNICEF provides emergency education kits that include teaching and learning materials, recreational supplies, and hygiene items, enabling rapid resumption of schooling even in the absence of formal school structures (UNICEF, 2022).

To address the learning gaps caused by prolonged school closures or displacement, UNICEF has implemented alternative learning programs. These include radio and television-based instruction, community learning groups, and accelerated education programs designed to help children catch up on missed schooling. During the COVID-19 pandemic, UNICEF's support for remote and digital learning platforms helped to maintain learning continuity for millions of Nigerian children, especially those in lockdown or conflict-affected areas (Usman, & Sambo, 2021). Furthermore, UNICEF integrates child protection services into its emergency education responses. Teachers and facilitators are trained in psychosocial support, child safeguarding, and gender-based violence prevention, ensuring that learning environments are not only accessible but also safe and inclusive. This holistic approach recognizes that education in emergencies must go beyond academics to address the emotional and physical security of learners.

UNICEF also advocates for the implementation of the Safe Schools Declaration in Nigeria, which commits the government to protecting schools from attack and ensuring the continuation of education during armed conflict. Through the Safe Schools Initiative, UNICEF works with national and state authorities to strengthen school safety planning, train security personnel, and promote community engagement in protecting learning spaces (Ogunode, et. al, 2024).

CHAPTER FOUR

CHALLENGES OF UNICEF AID WORK IN NORTHERN NIGERIA

UNICEF's aid work in northern Nigeria, especially in the realms of child education, health, and protection, faces numerous challenges due to the region's complex humanitarian landscape. These challenges significantly affect the organization's capacity to deliver effective interventions and require constant adaptation and resilience. Key obstacles include insecurity and conflict, logistical constraints, cultural and gender norms, limited infrastructure, weak government capacity, and funding limitations.

4.1. Insecurity and Armed Conflict

Insecurity and armed conflict represent some of the most significant and persistent challenges facing UNICEF's aid work in northern Nigeria. The region has been plagued by a protracted insurgency led by Boko Haram and its splinter faction, the Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP), particularly in Borno, Yobe, and Adamawa states. These armed groups have targeted schools, abducted students, and attacked aid convoys, making the delivery of humanitarian assistance, especially in education, health, and child protection, complicated and dangerous (Romulus, 2025).

The insurgency has disrupted the lives of millions, with over 2.2 million people internally displaced in the northeast alone as of 2022. Among them are over 1 million children whose education has been interrupted, delayed, or altogether denied (Jones, et al, 2022). For UNICEF, which plays a leading role in the Education in Emergencies (EiE) sector, insecurity restricts access to affected communities, making it challenging to establish or maintain temporary learning spaces, distribute educational materials, or provide psychosocial support. In many areas, humanitarian workers must rely on military escorts, limiting their mobility and flexibility, while also raising concerns about the neutrality of aid delivery. The deliberate

targeting of schools and education personnel by insurgents further undermines UNICEF's educational programs. The 2014 abduction of schoolgirls in Chibok and similar attacks in Dapchi and Jangebe have created widespread fear and mistrust in the school system. Parents are often reluctant to send their children, especially girls, to school for fear of abduction or violence. This climate of fear significantly reduces enrolment and attendance rates and reinforces deep-rooted gender disparities in education access (Ige et, al 2024). In addition, schools are frequently repurposed as shelters for displaced families, delaying the resumption of learning activities even in relatively secure areas.

Beyond education, insecurity hampers UNICEF's health and nutrition interventions, as vaccination teams and health workers face life-threatening risks. In conflict zones, outreach services like immunization campaigns, child protection programs, and malnutrition screenings are often postponed or cancelled due to safety concerns. The destruction of health and school infrastructure further compounds these challenges, leaving entire communities without access to basic services for extended periods (Herbst, 2024). Moreover, insecurity undermines coordination and monitoring efforts. Humanitarian access restrictions prevent UNICEF staff and partners from assessing needs, supervising projects, and ensuring accountability. The lack of a stable presence in many high-risk areas means that UNICEF must rely heavily on local actors, many of whom lack the capacity or resources to implement programs effectively. This not only affects the quality and reach of aid but also delays timely responses in rapidly evolving emergency situations. In response to these conditions, UNICEF has worked to adapt its strategies, including by supporting remote learning through radio and mobile platforms, engaging community-based facilitators, and integrating protection measures into all education activities. However, such adaptations, while crucial, are not substitutes for safe, inclusive, and physically accessible education and health services. Until there is a significant reduction in violence and a restoration of peace in northern Nigeria,

insecurity will continue to pose a formidable barrier to UNICEF's ability to deliver life-saving and life-sustaining services to children and families in need.

4.2. Logistical and Accessibility Constraints

Logistical and accessibility constraints pose formidable challenges to UNICEF's humanitarian and development work in northern Nigeria. These difficulties are compounded by poor infrastructure, vast geographical distances, harsh environmental conditions, and the ongoing conflict in many parts of the region. Such constraints significantly hinder the timely and effective delivery of essential services in education, health, nutrition, and child protection. The northern region, especially the North-East, is characterized by underdeveloped transport networks, with many rural communities lacking paved roads or reliable transport systems. During the rainy season, which typically runs from June to September, roads in remote areas become impassable due to flooding and erosion. This seasonal inaccessibility often leads to the suspension or delay of UNICEF-supported programs, including distributing learning materials, constructing temporary learning spaces, and delivering health supplies such as vaccines and nutritional supplements (UNICEF, 2021). Even in drier months, poor road conditions and long travel distances between service delivery points severely limit the frequency and reach of field missions.

Insecurity in the region further exacerbates these logistical issues. Many areas affected by Boko Haram and other armed groups are under military control, and humanitarian access is tightly regulated. Aid workers frequently require military escorts to travel, particularly in Borno State, which severely limits their ability to conduct needs assessments, deliver supplies, or monitor ongoing projects. The presence of landmines and improvised explosive devices (IEDs) on roads also poses a constant threat, creating dangerous bottlenecks in aid logistics and restricting access to populations in need (Sparrow, et al, 2024). In many cases,

whole communities are cut off for weeks or months, with children unable to attend school or access basic health services.

These access difficulties also affect the ability to maintain consistent staffing. Skilled personnel, particularly teachers, healthcare workers, and child protection officers, are often reluctant to work in hard-to-reach or insecure areas due to the risk and hardship involved. This leads to chronic understaffing, which reduces the quality and frequency of services delivered and hampers UNICEF's efforts to build sustainable local capacity. For example, in education, many schools supported by UNICEF in conflict-affected areas struggle to retain trained teachers, especially female educators, which undermines efforts to promote girls' enrolment and learning (NWABUWE, n.d). Additionally, storage and transportation of supplies such as educational kits, vaccines, and therapeutic food are significantly affected by inadequate warehouse facilities, unreliable electricity, and fuel scarcity. Cold chain systems for vaccines, which require constant refrigeration, are particularly vulnerable in remote areas where electricity supply is erratic or entirely unavailable. These challenges often result in wastage, delays in service delivery, or the scaling down of critical interventions. UNICEF has attempted to mitigate these constraints by partnering with local NGOs and community-based organizations that can access areas where international staff cannot operate safely. The use of mobile outreach teams and pre-positioning of supplies before the rainy season are also strategies employed to circumvent some logistical hurdles. Nonetheless, these are reactive measures that do not eliminate the systemic barriers posed by poor infrastructure and insecurity.

4.3. Cultural and Gender Barriers

Cultural and gender barriers significantly impede UNICEF's aid work in northern Nigeria, particularly in the areas of education, child protection, and health. The region is home to

deeply rooted socio-cultural norms and religious beliefs that influence gender roles, family dynamics, and perceptions of formal education. These cultural dynamics often conflict with UNICEF's objectives of promoting universal access to education and equitable development for boys and girls, making it difficult to implement and sustain programs effectively.

One of the most persistent challenges UNICEF faces is the widespread practice of early and forced marriage, particularly among girls. In many northern Nigerian communities, girls are often married off before the age of 18, a practice justified by cultural and religious expectations surrounding female modesty, obedience, and reproductive roles. These marriages typically mark the end of a girl's education, denying her access to future opportunities and perpetuating cycles of poverty and dependence (Hailu, & Beyene, 2025). Even when schools are physically accessible, families may choose not to enrol or keep girls in school out of fear that formal education will conflict with their traditional roles or expose them to "immoral" influences.

UNICEF's Girls' Education Project (GEP3), which aims to increase girls' enrolment and retention in schools across northern Nigeria, has consistently encountered resistance in conservative communities where religious leaders and parents are sceptical of Western-style education. Many believe that education beyond basic literacy is unnecessary for girls, and others express concerns about co-educational environments or the presence of male teachers (UNICEF, 2020). In some cases, cultural resistance has led to active boycotts of education programs or harassment of female students and educators. These gender norms also affect the recruitment and retention of female teachers, who are crucial for encouraging girls' enrolment and participation. In many communities, parents are only willing to send their daughters to school if female teachers are present. However, cultural restrictions on women's mobility and employment outside the home limit the pool of qualified female teachers willing or able to

work in rural or insecure areas (Osman, et al, 2025). This shortage undermines UNICEF's efforts to create inclusive and gender-sensitive learning environments.

Child-rearing practices shaped by tradition also influence how education and health interventions are received. For instance, decisions regarding children's schooling or health care are typically made by male heads of households, leaving mothers and female caregivers with limited influence. In such contexts, even well-designed programs targeting mothers or girls may have little impact unless men are also engaged and supportive. UNICEF has increasingly worked with religious and traditional leaders to shift attitudes and promote the value of education for all children, but these efforts require time, trust-building, and sustained community engagement. Furthermore, stigma and discrimination against children with disabilities—another group often marginalized due to cultural beliefs—add another layer of complexity. In some northern communities, disabilities are misunderstood as curses or divine punishment, leading to the exclusion of such children from both school and social life. These barriers complicate UNICEF's inclusive education agenda, which seeks to ensure learning opportunities for all children regardless of gender, ability, or background (Bani Odeh & Lach, 2024).

4.4. Limited Infrastructure and Institutional Capacity

Limited infrastructure and weak institutional capacity are significant challenges that constrain UNICEF's ability to effectively deliver educational, health, and protection services in northern Nigeria. These structural deficiencies have long-standing roots in underinvestment, systemic neglect, and the destabilizing effects of conflict, particularly in the northeast. The lack of essential facilities and functional governance mechanisms not only affects access to services but also undermines the sustainability and scalability of UNICEF's programs across the region.

In many parts of northern Nigeria, especially rural and conflict-affected areas, school infrastructure is either inadequate or entirely absent. Thousands of schools lack basic amenities such as classrooms, furniture, toilets, water supply, and electricity. According to UNICEF (2021), more than 10.5 million Nigerian children are out of school, with the majority concentrated in the northern states where physical learning environments are often overcrowded, dilapidated, or unsafe. The lack of gender-sensitive facilities, such as separate toilets for girls, also discourages school attendance and retention, especially for adolescent girls during menstruation (Ngonyani, & Kamando, 2023). These gaps in infrastructure are compounded in emergency contexts where schools are destroyed by conflict or repurposed as shelters for displaced populations, further reducing educational access.

The health sector similarly suffers from poor infrastructure, which limits the reach and impact of UNICEF's child health and nutrition programs. Many primary health care centres in the north operate without clean water, reliable electricity, or cold chain systems for vaccines. This makes it difficult to conduct immunization campaigns or provide maternal and child health services consistently. Furthermore, the transportation of medical supplies is hindered by bad roads and a lack of functional health logistics systems, often resulting in delayed or disrupted service delivery (Addy, 2024). Institutional capacity at the state and local government levels is another major bottleneck. Weak public sector governance, bureaucratic inefficiencies, and low human resource capacity hinder collaboration with UNICEF and the implementation of joint programs. Local education and health authorities often lack the technical expertise, financial autonomy, and logistical resources necessary to manage and sustain donor-funded initiatives. This creates a heavy dependency on UNICEF and its partners for both program execution and oversight, which in turn affects long-term sustainability (Alesani, 2023). In some cases, corruption and mismanagement further compromise the effective use of resources and delay progress.

Teacher availability and quality also suffer due to institutional weaknesses. Many schools in northern Nigeria are understaffed, and where teachers are present, they often lack adequate training. The lack of investment in teacher professional development and support services directly affects learning outcomes. UNICEF has attempted to fill this gap through the training of teachers and education personnel, but such interventions are limited in scope due to the scale of the challenge and the absence of robust state-led teacher management systems (Ivie, 2025). Moreover, the limited availability and reliability of data present challenges for effective planning and monitoring. Weak statistical systems at the subnational level mean that many children are invisible to service planners, making it difficult to target interventions or measure impact. This impedes not only UNICEF's internal program management but also its ability to advocate for systemic reforms and increased domestic investment in child-focused services.

4.5. Funding Constraints and Donor Fatigue

Funding constraints and donor fatigue significantly hinder UNICEF's ability to sustain and scale its humanitarian and development interventions in northern Nigeria. The region's complex and prolonged humanitarian crisis, driven by insurgency, displacement, poverty, and underdevelopment, has placed immense pressure on donor resources. While the needs in sectors such as education, health, nutrition, and child protection continue to grow, funding has not kept pace, leading to gaps in service delivery and program reach.

UNICEF relies heavily on voluntary contributions from governments, multilateral organizations, and private donors to fund its operations in Nigeria. However, as crises persist without clear resolution, donors often become fatigued, leading to a reduction in funding commitments. According to UNICEF (2022), in its 2022 Humanitarian Action for Children appeal for Nigeria, only 47% of the required \$100 million was received, leaving more than

half of the urgent needs unfunded. This shortfall affects the continuity of programs such as the provision of safe learning spaces, child-friendly health services, psychosocial support for traumatized children, and nutrition interventions for severely malnourished children.

Donor fatigue is especially acute in protracted crises like that of northeastern Nigeria, where there is no clear endpoint in sight. After more than a decade of conflict, global attention often shifts to newer emergencies, such as those in Ukraine, Gaza, or Sudan, resulting in declining international interest and competition for limited humanitarian resources. As a result, UNICEF is forced to make difficult decisions about program prioritization, often focusing on life-saving interventions at the expense of long-term development or education goals (Chenge, 2024). The uncertainty and inconsistency of donor funding also disrupt planning and implementation. Many grants are short-term, making it difficult to build sustainable infrastructure, retain skilled staff, or develop long-term capacity within government institutions. In education, for instance, funding gaps have meant that schools supported under projects like the Girls' Education Project (GEP3) have struggled to maintain teacher salaries, learning materials, and classroom maintenance beyond the donor cycle (UNICEF, 2020). This undermines efforts to improve enrolment and retention, particularly for girls in conservative and underserved communities.

Additionally, administrative overhead and conditionalities attached to donor funds often delay the disbursement of resources. In fragile regions like northern Nigeria, where rapid response is critical, bureaucratic delays in releasing funds can lead to missed opportunities during short windows of access, especially in insecure or flood-prone areas. UNICEF has called for more flexible, multi-year funding to allow for strategic planning and quicker response to emergencies (Mostafa, n. d). Compounding the issue is the limited capacity of the Nigerian government to fill the funding gap. Although federal and state authorities are key partners, they often lack the financial and institutional strength to fully co-finance or sustain

UNICEF-led initiatives once external support ends. As such, programs risk collapsing or losing momentum once donor funding is exhausted. This dependency on external financing highlights the urgent need for greater domestic investment in child-centred sectors and improved governance of resources.

4.6. Psychosocial Trauma and Community Distrust

Psychosocial trauma and community distrust are profound challenges that significantly affect UNICEF's aid work in northern Nigeria, especially in the conflict-affected regions of the northeast. Years of insurgency, displacement, and violence have left deep psychological scars on children and adults alike, complicating efforts to deliver education, protection, and health services. This trauma, coupled with widespread distrust of external actors, including humanitarian agencies, hampers the effectiveness and acceptance of UNICEF's programs in affected communities.

The ongoing Boko Haram insurgency has subjected millions of children and families in Borno, Yobe, and Adamawa states to extreme violence, abductions, sexual exploitation, and the destruction of homes, schools, and communities. Many children have witnessed the killing of family members or experienced direct violence, resulting in post-traumatic stress, anxiety, depression, and behavioural issues. According to UNICEF (2021), more than one million children in the region require psychosocial support due to the emotional and psychological impact of conflict and displacement. These mental health burdens directly affect children's ability to learn, engage in school activities, and develop healthy social relationships.

UNICEF has incorporated psychosocial support into its child protection and education programming, often by training teachers and social workers to identify and support children

showing signs of trauma. However, the scale of need far exceeds available resources. In many communities, there are few, if any, trained mental health professionals, and traditional beliefs about mental health often stigmatize psychological suffering or misinterpret it as spiritual affliction (Klein, 2024). This lack of awareness and the social stigma around mental health issues reduce community engagement with UNICEF's psychosocial interventions, thereby limiting their impact.

Community distrust presents another critical challenge. In some areas, years of unfulfilled promises from government authorities, coupled with the complex role of international organizations during the conflict, have led to suspicion and resistance toward external interventions. Some communities associate aid agencies with foreign agendas or perceive them as aligned with specific political or religious interests. Others harbour resentment due to uneven distribution of aid, especially in Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) camps and host communities where resources are scarce and competition is high (Human Rights Watch, 2020). Such perceptions can lead to poor cooperation, reluctance to attend aid-sponsored programs, and even hostility toward UNICEF personnel. The challenge is particularly acute in reintegration efforts for children formerly associated with armed groups. UNICEF works with Nigerian authorities to provide rehabilitation, education, and psychosocial support to these children. However, reintegration into their communities is often met with stigma, fear, and rejection. Families and neighbours may view these children as threats rather than victims, thereby undermining UNICEF's rehabilitation efforts (UNICEF, 2021). The resulting alienation can lead to further trauma and an increased risk of re-recruitment or criminal behaviour. Distrust is also fuelled by gaps in communication between aid workers and communities. In regions where humanitarian access is limited and monitoring is restricted; communities may feel excluded from decision-making processes and misunderstand the goals of UNICEF's programs. This communication gap is exacerbated by language barriers and

cultural differences, making it difficult to foster meaningful community participation or feedback mechanisms. To address these challenges, UNICEF has increasingly prioritized community engagement and social cohesion initiatives. Working through local NGOs, religious leaders, and traditional institutions, the agency seeks to build trust and improve local ownership of programs. Psychosocial interventions are also being integrated into broader child welfare and education services to reduce stigma and promote emotional healing as part of routine support.

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY, CONCLUSION, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1. Summary

The study examines the critical role played by the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF) in promoting and protecting the rights of girls in Northern Nigeria, with a specific focus on child education. The study highlights that Northern Nigeria faces significant challenges such as child marriage, low school enrolment among girls, poverty, cultural biases, and insecurity, all of which threaten the rights and future of the girl child. UNICEF has emerged as a key player in advocating for and implementing interventions aimed at improving access to quality education for girls and ensuring their protection from harmful practices. The research outlines how UNICEF's efforts, particularly through initiatives like the Girls' Education Project (GEP) and the Safe Schools Initiative, have contributed to increased enrolment and retention of girls in schools across several northern states. These programs focus on reducing gender disparities in education by providing learning materials, training female teachers, engaging communities, and offering conditional cash transfers to families to encourage girls' education. UNICEF also supports advocacy campaigns to sensitize communities on the importance of educating girls and upholding their rights. However, the study also discusses the major challenges facing UNICEF's aid work in Northern Nigeria. These include deeply rooted cultural and religious norms that resist female education, insecurity and violence caused by insurgent groups like Boko Haram, inadequate infrastructure, and weak policy implementation by state governments. Additionally, financial constraints and limited coordination among stakeholders often hinder the full realization of program goals. In sum, while UNICEF has made measurable progress in protecting and promoting the rights of the girl child in Northern Nigeria, especially through education, the study recommends stronger collaboration with

local actors, increased investment in education infrastructure, and continuous community engagement to overcome existing barriers and ensure lasting impact.

5.2. Conclusion

This study critically assessed the role of UNICEF in protecting the rights of the girl child in Northern Nigeria, with particular focus on education, legal protection, and social welfare. The findings reveal that the girl child in Northern Nigeria faces multiple, deeply rooted challenges that hinder her development and violate her fundamental rights. Among the most pressing issues are early and forced marriage, cultural and religious norms that discourage female education, gender-based violence, poverty, limited access to quality healthcare, and frequent exposure to domestic labour at the expense of formal education. These factors collectively contribute to the marginalization and disempowerment of the girl child in the region. In responding to these issues, UNICEF has undertaken numerous interventions aimed at promoting girls' education, advocating for legal reforms, and mobilizing communities to protect the rights of girls. Programs like the Girls' Education Project (GEP) and Safe Schools Initiative have made measurable impacts by increasing school enrolment and retention for girls, particularly in conflict-affected and underserved areas. UNICEF has also engaged in partnerships with state and local governments, traditional leaders, and civil society to challenge harmful practices and promote policy change. Despite these efforts, the organization faces significant challenges in implementing its programs effectively. These include entrenched socio-cultural resistance to gender equality, insecurity from terrorist groups like Boko Haram which specifically target schools and girls, limited political will and weak institutional frameworks, and insufficient funding. Moreover, logistical difficulties in accessing remote and conflict-prone areas further hinder the delivery of aid and services. In conclusion, while UNICEF has played an instrumental role in advocating for and

safeguarding the rights of the girl child in Northern Nigeria, addressing the persistent structural and societal barriers requires sustained collaboration among stakeholders.

5.3. Recommendations

1. **Community Awareness Campaigns:** UNICEF should strengthen awareness campaigns to educate communities on the importance of girls' rights and education. Engaging religious and traditional leaders can help change harmful cultural beliefs.

2. **Legal Enforcement of Child Rights:** Support for the full domestication and implementation of the Child Rights Act in all Northern states is essential. This will ensure legal protection for girls against early marriage and abuse.

3. **Access to Quality Education:** UNICEF should work to expand access to safe, inclusive, and girl-friendly schools. Providing learning materials and female teachers can help retain girls in the education system.

4. **Improved Security Measures:** UNICEF can collaborate with government agencies to secure schools in conflict-affected areas. Safe learning environments encourage parents to allow girls to attend school.

5. **Economic Support for Families:** Poverty is a major reason girls are withdrawn from school or forced into early marriage. UNICEF should expand cash transfer programs and livelihood support for vulnerable families.

6. **Partnership with Local Organizations:** UNICEF should partner with local NGOs that understand the cultural context and can help deliver targeted interventions. These partnerships increase program effectiveness and sustainability.

7. Monitoring and Evaluation: Establishing strong monitoring and evaluation systems will help UNICEF assess impact and improve programs. Data-driven approaches ensure better planning and accountability.

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