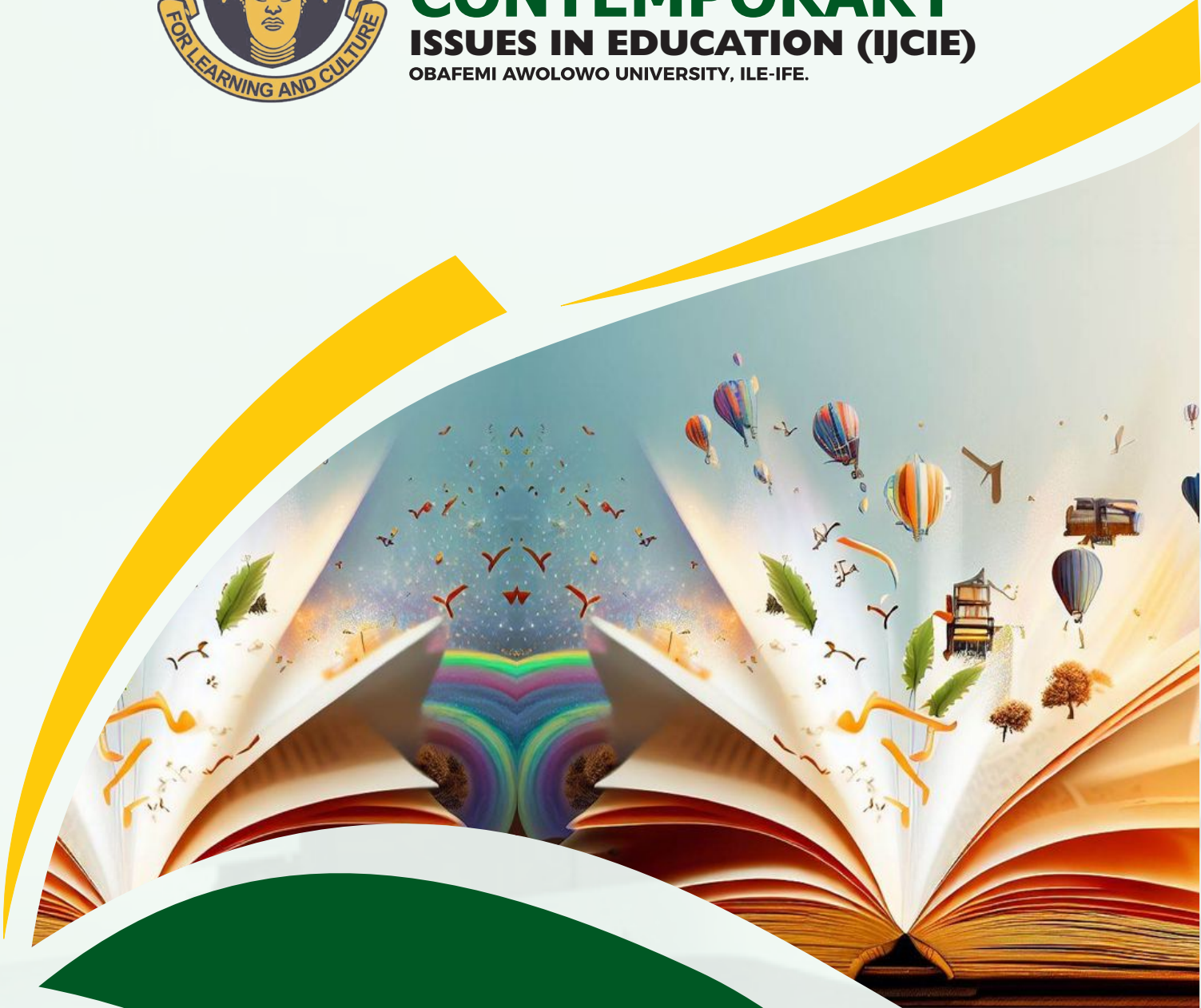




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INSECURITY AS A COG IN BASIC EDUCATION IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

Insecurity significantly hampers basic education in Nigeria, manifesting through various forms of violence, abductions, and terrorism. This disruption affects enrollment rates in the North, South-West and South -East thereby undermining the quality of education. More than half of all schools in the northeastern state of Borno, Nigeria, are closed with millions of children unable to start classes because of the ongoing threat of Boko Haram. For instance, the persistent threat from the terrorists has led to the closure and destruction of over 1,400 schools, leaving millions of children without access to education..The paper will also examine, how Kenya's Al Shabaab's presence has significantly disrupted education in the country, particularly in the north-eastern region, leading to school closures, teacher exodus, and a potential increase in vulnerable youth susceptible to recruitment by the militant group. The impact of insecurity from banditry and inter-communal violence has also disrupted schooling, particularly in rural areas, where children face 9 dangers on their way to school. In Mali, the rise of extremist groups has resulted in the shutdown of schools, particularly in conflict-affected regions, forcing children to abandon their education. These examples highlight a broader trend across Africa, where insecurity poses a formidable challenge to educational attainment. The interplay of violence, fear, and displacement creates an environment where learning becomes secondary to survival, ultimately stunting national development and exacerbating cycles of poverty and instability. Addressing insecurity in Nigeria and similar contexts is imperative for restoring access to basic education and ensuring that children can learn in a safe and supportive environment.

Keywords: Insecurity, basic education, Al Shabaab and Boko Haram.

Introduction

In recent years, Nigeria has faced significant challenges related to insecurity, particularly impacting the education sector. The rise in violence and instability across the country has led to the closure of schools, the displacement of students, and a general decline in educational attainment. Factors such as terrorism, banditry, and communal conflicts have created an environment where education is compromised (Abubakar A, (2021)). More than half of all schools in the northeastern state of Borno are closed with millions of children unable to start classes because of the ongoing threat of Boko Haram. Also, the persistent threat from the terrorists has led to the closure and destruction of over 1,400 schools, leaving millions of children without access to education (UNICEF 2022) . The Southwest and Southeast of the country equally have disturbing stories of insecurity resulting into poor enrollments of students.

Similarly, in Kenya, Al Shabaab's presence has significantly disrupted education in the country, particularly in the north-eastern region, leading to school closures, teacher exodus, and a potential increase in vulnerable youth susceptible to recruitment by the militant group (UNICEF 2022) . The impact of insecurity from banditry and inter-communal violence has also disrupted schooling, particularly in rural areas, where children face dangers on their way to school. In Mali, the rise of extremist groups has resulted in the shutdown of schools, particularly in conflict-affected regions, forcing children to abandon their education. These examples highlight a broader trend across Africa, where insecurity poses a formidable challenge to educational attainment. The interplay of violence, fear, and displacement creates an environment where learning becomes secondary to survival, ultimately stunting national development and exacerbating cycles of poverty and instability. Addressing insecurity in Nigeria and similar contexts is imperative for restoring access to

basic education and ensuring that children can learn in a safe and supportive environment.

This paper explores the nature of insecurity on basic education in Nigeria, its implications for students and communities, and potential strategies for mitigating its effects.

Conceptual Clarifications

Insecurity

Insecurity refers to the state of being open to danger or threat, leading to fear and uncertainty. In the context of Nigeria, insecurity encompasses various forms of violence, including terrorism, banditry, kidnappings, and communal clashes. These issues have emerged as critical obstacles to educational access and quality. In particular, groups like Boko Haram have targeted schools, viewing education, especially for girls, as a threat to their ideology. This has instilled fear in communities and led to significant interruptions in the educational processes.

Insecurity is also a dynamic condition which involves the relative ability of a state to counter threats to its core values and interest and their primary beneficiaries are the citizens (Onifode, Imhonop and Uorim, 2013). According to Olanosu (2000), insecurity is a state or condition in the life of a social unit, system, organization or society in which the existence of a problem assumes a critical dimension to the extent that the survival stage of conflict, threats to human security, and intense violence characterized by fighting, death, injury, etc. Abraham Maslow, Onifode, et al (2013) stated that an insecure person perceives the world as a life-threatening jungle, feels unsafe, unhappy, rejected, hostile, pessimistic, shows a sign of tension, conflict and guilt, and tends to be neurotic and generally egocentric. Insecurity leads to fear (Ogunode & Chijindu 2022; Ogunode, Umeora, & Olatunde-Aiyedun, 2022).

Basic Education

Basic education in Nigeria comprises the first nine years of formal education, including primary and junior secondary education. It is crucial for laying the foundation for lifelong learning and development. The Nigerian government has recognized basic education as a

right, yet access to this essential service is increasingly compromised by insecurity. The Federal Ministry of Education has implemented various policies to promote universal access; however, the persistent threat of violence undermines these efforts.

Context of Insecurity in Nigeria

Nigeria's security landscape is characterized by a complex interplay of various threats and challenges that differ across its geopolitical zones. Each region faces unique security issues influenced by local dynamics, socio-economic conditions, and historical contexts. The interplay of insurgency, organized crime, ethnic conflict, and resource competition underscores the need for comprehensive strategies that address the root causes of insecurity. Efforts to enhance community engagement, improve governance, and promote socio-economic development are essential for fostering lasting peace and stability across the country. Below is an overview of the security landscape in Nigeria, with examples from the North, East, West, and South-South regions.

North East

The North East region of Nigeria is primarily known for the insurgency led by Boko Haram and its offshoot, the Islamic State in West Africa (ISWA). Since the emergence of Boko Haram in the early 2000s, the region has experienced significant violence, leading to the deaths of over 50,000 people and the displacement of millions, Ogunode, N, J, Umeora, M. & Olatunde-Aiyedun T. G. (2022). The group initially focused on opposing Western education and promoting a strict interpretation of Islamic law, but it has since evolved into a violent insurgency that conducts attacks on military and civilian targets.

Borno State, in particular, has been the epicenter of this violence. The insurgents have utilized the rugged terrain of the Sambisa Forest and the Lake Chad region to launch attacks, kidnap individuals, and disrupt agricultural activities, leading to a humanitarian crisis characterized by food insecurity and lack of access to basic services. The Nigerian military's

response has included the establishment of "super camps," which, while intended to consolidate forces, have sometimes allowed Boko Haram and ISWA to operate more freely in rural areas.

North West

In the North West, the security landscape is dominated by organized criminal gangs, often referred to as "bandits." These groups have been responsible for a surge in kidnappings for ransom, particularly targeting schools and rural communities. States like Zamfara, Katsina, and Kaduna have witnessed mass abductions reminiscent of the Chibok schoolgirls' kidnapping in 2014 (Onifode, Imhonopol & Uorim (2013)). The proliferation of these gangs is partly attributed to the region's economic challenges, including poverty and unemployment, which have driven many young men to join these criminal enterprises.

The conflict between farmers and herders is also prevalent in the North West, exacerbated by competition for land and resources (Abubakar A. (2021)). This has led to violent clashes, further complicating the security situation and contributing to a cycle of violence that affects both agricultural productivity and community relations.

North Central

The North Central region, often referred to as the Middle Belt, is characterized by ethnic and religious diversity, which has fueled conflicts between different groups. The farmer-herder clashes are particularly pronounced here, as the region has fertile land that attracts both sedentary farmers and nomadic herders (Adebayo A. (2021)). The competition for land has led to the formation of ethnic militias and vigilante groups, which have engaged in violent reprisals against perceived aggressors. Additionally, the region has seen the rise of separatist movements and ethnic tensions, particularly among the various groups vying for political power and resources. The politicization of these conflicts has further complicated efforts to achieve lasting peace and stability.

South East

The South East region has been marked by the resurgence of Biafran separatist

sentiments, particularly through the activities of the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) and its paramilitary wing, the Eastern Security Network (ESN). These groups have engaged in violent confrontations with Nigerian security forces, leading to significant unrest in the region. The IPOB's calls for secession and the enforcement of bans on grazing have heightened tensions, particularly with the Fulani herders, leading to clashes that threaten the stability of the region.

South South

In the South South region, particularly in the Niger Delta, insecurity is largely driven by issues related to oil production and environmental degradation. Militant groups have emerged in response to the perceived neglect and exploitation of the region's resources by the federal government and multinational corporations (Adebayo A. (2021)). These groups often engage in sabotage of oil infrastructure, kidnappings, and protests against environmental degradation.

The region has also experienced conflicts between various ethnic groups, exacerbated by competition for political power and control over oil resources. The government's response has included military operations, which have sometimes led to human rights abuses and further alienation of local communities.

Terrorism and Insurgency

Terrorism and insurgency have significantly impacted Nigeria especially from year 2000s and also from 2015 to 2025, affecting various regions differently. The security landscape in Nigeria is complex, characterized by multiple actors and motivations, leading to widespread violence and instability. These acts of terrorism have profoundly affected parents' willingness to send their children to school, resulting in decreased enrollment rates. Below is an overview of the situation in the North, East, West, and South-South regions of Nigeria.

North-East Nigeria

The North-East region has been the epicenter of terrorism and insurgency, primarily due to the activities of Boko Haram and its splinter group, the Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP). Since 2015, Boko Haram has

continued its violent campaign against the Nigerian state, targeting military installations, civilians, and humanitarian workers. The group has been responsible for thousands of deaths and the displacement of millions, exacerbating the humanitarian crisis in the region.

In 2021, the death of Boko Haram's leader, Abubakar Shekau, marked a significant turning point, leading to a resurgence of ISWAP, which has since focused on attacking military targets and establishing control over territories in Borno and Yobe states Abubakar A. (2021). The Nigerian military has launched several operations to combat these groups, but challenges such as inadequate resources, corruption, and internal conflicts within the military have hindered progress.

North-West Nigeria

The North-West region has witnessed a rise in banditry, kidnappings, and violent clashes between herders and farmers. Armed groups, often referred to as "bandits," have engaged in mass abductions for ransom, targeting schools and communities. The situation has been particularly dire in states like Zamfara, Katsina, and Kaduna, where these groups operate with relative impunity.

The Nigerian government has struggled to contain the violence, leading to calls for community-based solutions and increased military presence Abubakar A. (2021). The banditry crisis has resulted in significant loss of life and property, with many communities displaced and livelihoods destroyed.

North-Central Nigeria

In the North-Central region, the security landscape is marked by conflicts between herders and farmers, often fueled by competition over land and resources. States like Benue and Plateau have experienced violent clashes, leading to numerous deaths and displacements. The emergence of militia groups has further complicated the situation, as these groups often retaliate against perceived aggressors, creating a cycle of violence. The government has attempted to mediate these conflicts, but underlying issues such as poverty, unemployment, and ethnic tensions continue to drive insecurity in the region.

South-East Nigeria

The South-East region has faced its own security challenges, primarily due to the activities of separatist groups advocating for the independence of Biafra. The Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) has been at the forefront of this movement, leading to clashes with security forces. The region has experienced increased violence, including attacks on police stations and government facilities World Bank (2021). The government's response has included military operations and the designation of IPOB as a terrorist organization, which has further escalated tensions. The situation remains volatile, with fears of a resurgence of violence as the quest for self-determination continues.

South-South Nigeria

The South-South region, particularly the Niger Delta, has historically been affected by militancy related to oil resource control. While the intensity of violence has decreased since the peak of the Niger Delta insurgency in the mid-2000s, issues such as oil theft, pipeline vandalism, and environmental degradation continue to pose security challenges. In recent years, there have been reports of renewed militancy Adebayo A. (2021), with groups demanding a greater share of oil revenues and addressing environmental concerns. The government's efforts to engage with local communities and provide development initiatives have had mixed results, and the potential for renewed violence remains a concern.

Banditry and Kidnapping

In addition, banditry and kidnapping have become significant security challenges across Nigeria from 2000s and from 2015 to 2025, affecting various regions differently Abubakar A. (2021). This phenomenon has been fueled by a combination of socio-economic factors, weak governance, and porous borders, leading to widespread violence and insecurity.

Northern Nigeria

In Northern Nigeria, particularly in states like Zamfara, Katsina, and Kaduna, banditry has escalated dramatically. Armed groups, often engage in cattle rustling, kidnappings for ransom,

and violent attacks on communities. The cases of mass abduction, such as the kidnapping of over 300 schoolgirls in Chibok in 2014, have gained international attention and highlighted the urgent need for security measures in schools. Parents are increasingly reluctant to allow their children, especially daughters, to attend school due to the threat of abduction. The situation worsened in 2018 when over 1,100 people were reported killed in six northern states due to banditry-related violence Abubakar A. (2021). By 2020, the Nigerian government acknowledged the severity of the crisis, with thousands displaced and many schools forced to close due to safety concerns. The bandits often operate in rural areas, exploiting the lack of security presence and the vast ungoverned spaces in the region.

Eastern Nigeria

In the Eastern region, particularly in the Southeast, the security landscape has been influenced by the activities of various militant groups and the resurgence of separatist sentiments. While banditry is less prevalent than in the North, there have been instances of kidnappings for ransom, often linked to organized crime Ogunode, N. J. & Chijundu O. E (2022). The Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) and its armed wing, the Eastern Security Network (ESN), have also been involved in violent confrontations with security forces, leading to a rise in insecurity in the region. The government's response has often been heavy-handed, resulting in clashes that further exacerbate the situation.

Western Nigeria

Western Nigeria has also experienced its share of banditry and kidnappings, particularly in states like Oyo and Ogun. The rise of armed groups in these areas has led to increased incidents of kidnappings, targeting both individuals and groups, including schoolchildren. The government . The involvement of local vigilante groups such as Amotekun has emerged as a response to the inadequacies of state security forces, although this has raised concerns about the potential for vigilante violence and the possibility of using the organization as a tool to settle scores.

Southern Nigeria

In Southern Nigeria, particularly in the

Niger Delta region, the focus has shifted from traditional banditry to issues related to oil theft and militancy. While kidnappings for ransom do occur, they are often linked to the broader context of resource control and environmental degradation Adebayo A. (2021) . Groups like the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND) have historically engaged in violent actions against oil companies and government installations, although their activities have decreased in recent years. However, the region remains vulnerable to criminal gangs that exploit the socio-economic challenges faced by local communities. This often leads to disruption of school calendar.

Communal Conflicts

Communal conflicts, often driven by competition for resources such as oil and other minerals of high value s, have also contributed to insecurity in Nigeria. These conflicts can disrupt educational activities, as schools may be forced to close or relocate due to violence. Displaced children from conflict-affected areas often struggle to access education, further exacerbating the crisis. Communal conflicts in Nigeria have been a persistent issue, particularly from 2000s to 2025 Abubakar A. (2021). These conflicts are often rooted in ethnic, religious, and resource-based tensions, leading to violence and significant loss of life. The nature and dynamics of these conflicts vary across different regions of the country.

Overview of Communal Conflicts

1. **Ethno-Religious Conflicts:** These conflicts are primarily driven by cultural, ethnic, or religious identities. They often manifest in violence between Christian and Muslim communities, particularly in the Middle Belt region of Nigeria, which includes states like Plateau, Benue, and Taraba. The violence has been exacerbated by historical grievances and competition for resources.
2. **Herder-Farmer Conflicts:** A significant aspect of communal conflicts in Nigeria involves clashes between nomadic Fulani herders and sedentary farmers, particularly in the Middle Belt. These

conflicts arise from disputes over land and water resources, especially as climate change has intensified competition for arable land. The migration of Fulani herders from the North to the Middle Belt and beyond has led to increased tensions with local farming communities, resulting in violent confrontations.

Regional Dynamics

North Central Nigeria: This region has witnessed some of the most intense communal conflicts, particularly between the Fulani herders and various ethnic groups such as the Berom, Tiv, and Jukun. The violence peaked in 2004 and 2011, with thousands of fatalities reported during these years. In 2015 alone, over 700 people were killed due to these conflicts.

North East Nigeria: While the North East is primarily affected by the Boko Haram insurgency, there are also communal conflicts, particularly among ethnic groups competing for resources. The ongoing violence has displaced many communities and disrupted traditional livelihoods affecting school enrollments.

South West Nigeria: In the South West, conflicts have emerged between Yoruba farmers and Fulani herders. The perception of the Fulani as aggressive and the historical context of their migration have fueled tensions. Incidents of violence have been reported, particularly in states like Oyo and Ekiti.

South South Nigeria: The South South region has experienced communal conflicts, particularly among ethnic groups over land and resource control. The Itsekiri and Ijaw communities in Delta State have had notable clashes over oil resources and land rights.

Recent Developments (2020-2025)

As of 2023, the intercommunal violence in Plateau State has resulted in the displacement of over 80,000 people, with a reported death toll of around 300. The conflict primarily involves clashes between Muslim nomadic herders and

Christian farming communities, posing a significant security challenge for the region. Other minor clashes which occurred between 2024 and 2025 have equally claimed not less than 20 lives. The Nigerian military has been involved in efforts to restore stability, but the underlying issues remain unresolved.

Implications of Insecurity on Basic Education

1. **School Closures:** Insecurity has led to the closure of numerous schools, particularly in northern Nigeria, where Boko Haram and other armed groups operate. This results in significant interruptions in students' learning and development. According to UNICEF, millions of children have been out of school due to insecurity, which hampers their educational progress and future opportunities.
2. **Displacement of Students:** Many families have been forced to flee their homes due to violence, leading to the displacement of children and the disruption of their education. Internally displaced persons (IDPs) often find it challenging to access quality education. The lack of stable educational environments means that many children miss out on essential learning experiences and social interactions.
3. **Psychosocial Effects:** Insecurity can have profound psychological impacts on students, including trauma, anxiety, and fear. These effects can hinder academic performance and overall well-being. Children who have experienced violence or witnessed traumatic events may struggle with concentration and motivation in school, leading to a decline in educational outcomes.
4. **Gender Disparities:** Insecurity disproportionately affects girls, who may be more likely to be withdrawn from school due to safety concerns. Cultural norms in some regions further limit girls' access to education, making them more vulnerable to the impacts of insecurity. This exacerbates existing gender inequalities in education, as boys may be prioritized for schooling in times of crisis.

5. **Quality of Education:** The ongoing insecurity has implications for the quality of education. With schools under threat, teachers may be reluctant to work in affected areas, leading to shortages of qualified personnel. Furthermore, the curriculum may be disrupted, with a focus on emergency preparedness rather than comprehensive learning.
6. **Economic Consequences:** The impact of insecurity on education extends beyond individual students. A less educated population can hinder national development, as fewer individuals are equipped with the skills needed for economic growth. The long-term consequences of educational disruption can perpetuate cycles of poverty and instability.

Recommendations

1. **Enhanced Security Measures:** The Nigerian government should prioritize the establishment of secure environments for schools, including the deployment of security personnel and community policing initiatives. Partnerships with local communities can enhance security and foster trust between citizens and law enforcement.
2. **Strengthening Community Engagement:** Engaging local communities in school governance and security can foster a collective responsibility towards safeguarding educational institutions. Community-based initiatives that involve parents, local leaders, and students can create a safer environment for learning.
3. **Emergency Education Programs:** Implementing flexible education programs for displaced children can ensure continuity in learning. This could include mobile schools, online learning platforms, and alternative learning methods that adapt to the needs of affected communities.
4. **Psychosocial Support Services:** Providing mental health support and counseling services for students affected by insecurity is crucial for their recovery and reintegration into the educational system. Schools should incorporate psychosocial support into their programs to address the emotional needs of students.
5. **Policy and Advocacy:** The government and NGOs should advocate for policies that address the root causes of insecurity, including poverty, unemployment, and social inequality. A comprehensive approach that tackles these underlying issues can contribute to long-term stability and improved access to education.
6. **International Collaboration:** Collaborating with international organizations and NGOs can bring additional resources and expertise to address the challenges faced by the education sector in Nigeria. Programs that focus on conflict resolution, peacebuilding, and educational support can be beneficial.
7. **Curriculum Adaptation:** The curriculum should be adapted to include topics on conflict resolution, peacebuilding, and resilience. Educating students about these issues can empower them to contribute positively to their communities and promote a culture of peace.
8. **Investment in Infrastructure:** Investing in school infrastructure, including safe buildings and learning materials, is essential for creating a conducive learning environment. Government and private sector partnerships can facilitate the necessary funding and resources.

Conclusion

Insecurity poses a significant threat to basic education in Nigeria, undermining the right to education for millions of children. The multifaceted nature of the crisis demands a comprehensive and coordinated response from the government, communities, and international partners. By prioritizing the safety and well-being of students, Nigeria can work towards ensuring that all children have access to quality education, even in the face of adversity. Addressing insecurity in education is not only a matter of

safeguarding the future of individuals but also essential for the broader development and stability of the nation.

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