African Girls Summit Niamey 2021

Date: 13th – 18th November 2021

Location: Niamey, Republic of Niger

Name of Reporter: Mohammed Mujtafa Muazu & Aminu Suleman

Section A: Report of dRPC/Ford Foundation Panel at the Pre-summit of the 3rd African Girls Summit, Niamey 2021

Date: 13th November 2021 | Venue: Mahatma Ghandi International Conference Center, Niamey, Niger Republic

Objective(s):

1. To disseminate key findings, recommendations and best practices from the International Safe School Conference for the safety of girls in schools to a broader community of educationists who will convene at the Africa Girls Summit in Niger Republic, November 2021.

2. To listen to girls feeling and concerns vis a vis their safety in their quest for education, answer their questions and to provide a chance for them to make their appeals and recommendations to leaders during the 3rd African Girls Summit.

Participants profile:

1. Zeinabou Lawal Ma'adji is the Coordinator Monitoring and Evaluation, Lumière des Filles et des Femme (LFF) Maradi Niger. She holds Professional Baccalaureate in Computer Management, University Diploma of Technology (DUT) in Computer Management and Professional degree in Computer Management fom Institute of Technology, University of Tahoua (IUT). She also holds Master 1 in ICT Management and MBA in Information Systems Management and Security from University of Dakar. She worked as data collection consultant for COOPI, ACTED, OXFAM, UNICEF and CRS in Diffa Region of Niger.
2. Alhaji Sani Umar Jabbi is the District Head of Gagi Sokoto State. He is the Chair BoT Community Awareness and Development Initiative (CADI), State President General NAG/JNI. He is the representative of His Eminence, the Sultan of Sokoto in the Northern Traditional Leaders Committee on Primary Health Care Delivery (NTLC) and (JNI), Sultanate Focal Person on UNFPA Activities State chair, Sokoto Social Mobilization Committee on Immunization and Reproductive Health and Association for the Advancement of Family Planning (AAFP), Member NEI USAID funded State Basic Education Steering Committee and Sokoto State Girl Child Education Steering Committee, UNICEF GEP III Project. Alhaji Sani Umar Jabbi holds HND in Public Administration from Birnin Kebbi Polytechnic and is an alumnus of United States' International Visitor Leader Program (IVLP). He is married with children.
3. Ms. Abiola Sanusi is the Senior Policy and Strategy Adviser at GCPEA. Abiola has over twenty years' experience working in development and humanitarian settings focusing on advocacy, public policy, education, security, gender and youth. She holds teaching qualifications and is a Prince2 Certified Project Manager. She has a B.A and M.A in Politics, Development Studies and International Relations from the University of

London and Warwick respectively. She also obtained a PGCE in Post Compulsory Education, from the Institute of Education, University of London. Her professional experience includes developing and implementing system reform in both the public and private sector. She has worked on projects for the Riplington Education Initiative (REI), UNICEF, PLAN International, Victims Support Fund, Open Society Initiative for West Africa (OSIWA) and Save the Children International.

4. Amb. Ahmed Shehu doubles as the chairman the Northeast Nigeria Regional Civil society network and Regional Coordinator Lake Chad Basin Civil Society Network. He worked as student trainer and entrepreneurial instructor at the College of Agriculture Maiduguri. He holds B.sc. Agriculture from University of Maiduguri and M.sc innovation and entrepreneurship and project management from Portsmouth University. He was pioneer program manager with the British Council Nigeria Stability and Reconciliation Program in the epicenter of Boko Haram, Maiduguri. He pioneered a community based NGO known as Peace Ambassadors Centre of Humanitarian Aid and Empowerment that specializes on capacity development, peace building and empowerment. . He has made several high level advocacy and presentations and participated as panelist in Oslo, Geneva, Ouagadougou, Dakar and Berlin. He is married with children.



Fig 1: organizations that supported the pre-summit

Methodology: Panel discussion

Overview: Report of dRPC/Ford Foundation Panel at the Pre-summit of the 3rd African Girls Summit, Niamey 2021

Considering the importance of Safe schools and safe education in West Africa – the development Research and Projects Centre (dRPC) Nigeria supported the leadership of Northeast Civil Society Network, Community Awareness and Development Initiative Sokoto, Lumiere des Femmes et des Filles (LFF) Maradi, and an education security expert to

participate and disseminate key findings from the 3rd International Conference on Safe Schools which took place in Nigeria between 25-27th October 2021.

About 40 girls and 12 teachers and parents including the Head of an Association of Imams which comprises of 9 West African nations attended the session.

The session commenced with discussion on the safety of girls in schools. Madame Zeinabou Lawal Ma'adji of ONG Lumiere des Femmes et des Filles (LFF), a Maradi based NGO, interacted with the girls from some selected Secondary schools in Niger about whether they feel safe in school and whether their parents would consider removing them from school due to the increasing attacks against schools.



Fig 2: A cross section of the panel

Most of the girls answered that they feel safe at school, but that might be married off before finishing school due to factors such as poverty, cultural norms. Poverty makes them vulnerable to all sorts of GBV which leads to teenage pregnancy. Most of the girls in public schools cannot afford learning materials like textbooks, Mathematical set and calculator.

They also face problem of lack of teachers, lack of effective transport system to convey them from their homes. They are considered as burden because their slimmer chances of getting employed.

After the session with the Girls, the panel discussion on the Safe Girls, Safe Schools - Implications of School Attacks for Girls' Education in West Africa commenced with Alhaji Umar Sani Jabbi (Sarkin Yakin Gagi and the District Head of Gagi in Sokoto), Ms. Abiola Sanusi (Senior Policy and Strategy Adviser at Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack), Ambassador Shehu Ahmed (Chair Northeast Civil Society Network) and Madam Zeinabou Lawal Ma'adji of ONG Lumiere des Femmes et des Filles (LFF) as panelists. The moderator of the session started by informing the audience that the session is supported by Ford Foundation West Afrca Office and organized by dRPC Nigeria. He went on to introduce the dRPC and its work around Safe School Initiative and the Community based Nursery School

Program which aims at ensuring easy and safe access to school for early grade learners. The panel discussed the frequency of attacks against schools in West Africa, short and long term impact of attacks against schools and learning centers across the region and beyond and the Safe School Declaration initiative. GCPEA's research has found that an alarming 11,000 reported attacks on education or incidents of military use of education facilities occurred between 2015 and 2019 in at least 93 countries.. In addition, over 22,000 students, teachers, and other education personnel were also deliberately targeted. 7,300 cases in which schools were bombed, set on fire, raided, or looted. Attacks on education have persisted during the pandemic and vacant schools have been used for military purposes.

In 2020 alone, GCPEA identified more than 2,400 reported incidents of attacks on education and military use of schools and universities, a 33 percent increase over 2019. GCPEA recorded the highest numbers of reported attacks on education in Mali and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). GCPEA recorded the highest numbers of students and educators harmed in attacks on education in India and Nigeria.

Central Sahel (Burkina Faso, Niger, and Mali):

According to GCPEA's Education under Attack 2020 report, over 430 attacks on education occurred in the Central Sahel between 2015 and 2019. Between January and July 2020 alone, GCPEA identified over 90 reported attacks on education in the region, despite challenges to monitoring and reporting during the pandemic

While commenting on the increased attacks against schools, a Muslim Scholar from Niger and head of Alliance des Religieux de l'Afrique de l'Ouest pour la Promotion de la Santé et le Développement(ARAO/SD) (Alliance of West African Religious for Health Promotion and Development) stated that bad interpretation due ignorance and intentional distortion of religious texts to manipulate young people are some of the key factors that give rise of extremist views which culminate in violence in which education is the soft target.



Fig 3: A participant from Niger making a contribution

The moderator allowed the audience to ask questions and the panelists responded.

Questions

One of the participant asked whether there is specific age for marriage for girls according to Islamic law and Cheikh Elhadj Oumarou Mahaman Bachir (Head of Alliance of West African Religious Leaders for Health Promotion and Development (l'Alliance des Religieux de l'Afrique de l'Ouest pour la promotion de la Santé et le Développement (ARAO-SD) responded that Islam does not specifically mention age for marriage.

Another participant asked what they should to do to make sure that funds meant for girl child education is released and judiciously utilized for that purpose of the panelist suggested advocacy for accountability to the organizations and agencies involved.

A participant asked for suggestion on the best way to respond to verbal abuse and other form of GBV by teachers. A panelist suggested reporting anonymously to the relevant school authorities or traditional leaders.

Evaluation Findings
Outcome:

The panel held successfully and the participants were actively involved all through. After the panel discussion, the participants became aware of the existence of the Safe School Declaration and what it entails.

Having learned the importance of the safe school declaration and the importance of synergy, information sharing among the countries of the sub region and involving religious and traditional leaders in tackling insecurity and ensuring safety in schools, the participants decided to follow up the recommendations of panel to organizers and made sure that they appeared in the final communiqué and report of the pre-summit

Conclusions/ Recommendation:

The panel recommended:

1. That here should be equal education opportunity for boys and girls.
2. That whistle blowing for all form of gender based violence should be enhanced.
3. That priority survey vis a vis girl education be done before implementing projects
4. That follow the money policy should be applied by civil society organizations to ensure transparency and accountability on funds for projects
5. That the political leaders need to engage traditional and religious leaders in conflict resolution and how to detect plans to attacks school instead of using military force all the time.
6. The Head of the association of Imams called for more cooperation between CSOs and Religious/ Traditional leaders in order to detect and counter misinterpretation of religious texts by extremist groups
7. That there is need to build secondary schools close to communities or with primary school in order to enhance retention and reduce the difficulty of travelling to other

towns to attend secondary school for girls

8. That the incidence of attacks against schools should be reported to the school authorities and traditional leaders of such communities

9. That there should intelligence sharing and synergy between African nations facing attacks on education and those who do not in order preempt and ensure vigilance

10. That the mechanism be put in place to assist and accompany survivors and victims of attacks on education.

The dRPC delegation paid an experience sharing visit to the office of the convener organization of the pre-summit conference End child Marriage in Niger (ECFM NIGER). The objective of the visit was to follow up on the final draft to ensure best practices presented by the dRPC panel and issues raised by the girls during the pre-summit were captured right and included in the final recommendation to be presented at the summit main.

The delegation attended the main summit and made contributions to different sessions too.

Milestone Recorded By dRPC Delegation during main Summit

1. The team advocated for increased in funding of education by all African countries in line with the UNESCO declaration and international best practices.

2. The participants were mentored on holding their leaders accountable especially on aspect of tracking funds allocated to educational project this is aimed at ensuring transparency and accountability and effective service delivery to the sector.

3. Advocacy was conducted to the ministries of Education and governments of the various African countries present on the need to follow the steps of Nigeria and develop a National Policy on safety, security, and violent free school.

4. The summit was used by the civil society to commend the Federal ministry of education and government of Nigeria for signing and endorsing the safe school declaration, side meeting were held with delegates that showed keen interest on further understanding documents and its benefits were shared.

Recommendations from dRPC Delegation to the main Summit

1. School safety for Girls should be a criteria for establishment of schools

2. School safety plan should form part of criteria for education sector plan.

3. School safety must be included as criteria for school assessment.

4. Involvement of traditional, religious and political leaders to champion the cause of Girls and Boys.

5. Language barrier has continued to be a stumbling block to effective communication between countries in the Sahel hence the need for deliberate effort towards mitigating the challenge.

Next Steps: Given the need to follow up on the commitments, the girls who participated in the 3rd summit in Niamey, decide to set up a collective of African girls for this purpose.

dRPC in collaboration with the Education in Emergencies Working Groups Nigeria (EiEWGN)

conducted a 3 day CSO Step-Down Training on School Safety, Security and Resilience Systems Building in Abuja Nigeria from 6th-8th December 2021 during which panel shared experience from the pre-summit and the AU Girls Summit which took place in Niamey, Niger in November 2021

Other Pre-Summit Sessions:

Below are the remaining sessions that held during the pre-summit and their organizers

1. **The Girls' voice in Decision-making to End Child Marriage and Female Genital Mutilation:** The session was organized by the World Vision, OPE, Ministry of Women Promotion and Child Protection. The session provided a platform for girls to discuss innovative ways to get involved in decision-making processes on issues that affect them and highlighted the importance and benefits of including girls' voice in decision-making to end harmful practices by addressing the challenges of gender inequalities and human rights perspectives for their participation and development and formulate recommendations on their role in promoting the participation of young people in decision-making that concern them.

2. **The Role of the Creative arts in accelerating the End of Harmful Practices:** The session was organized by UNICEF, Girls in ICT, Ministry of Women Promotion and Child Protection. The panel held chat with girls, young women and key figures in creative art and social media influencers about the role of the film and theater industries, including cultural arts and other innovations, to help put end to harmful practices (HP) and explored ways in which young people can mentor and encourage each other to use their creative talents to mentor those at risk of harmful practices.

They made recommendations to AU Member States on their role in supporting young people including artists, influencers and other activists in the fight for the elimination of (HP).

3. **From Language to Action; Combating Negative Stereotypes and Norms that Perpetuate Harmful Practices:** The session was organized by CARE International and COJEFIL. The session discussed what approaches and innovations related to norms and values have worked and what lessons can be learned. They reviewed the commitments made at the 1st and 2nd Girls' Summit and reviewed the actions that have been implemented and how to ensure that the outcomes of the 3rd Girls Summit include the 1st and 2nd Summits and made recommendations.

4. **Putting Girls' Education at the Service of the Africa We Want:** The session was organize d by Girls Not Brides, CARE international, Foundation Noor, COJEFI with the Ministry of Women Promotion and Child Protection. The session discussed the promotion of girls' rights to quality education and the link with the Africa we want and the main means of reaching the Africa we want by examining the gaps due to gender inequalities and harmful practices and made recommendations.

5. **Impact of COVID 19 on Girls and Women: An Integrated Response:** The session was organized by Plan international, Foundation Noor and Ministry of Women Promotion and Child Protection. The session discussed the negative effects of COVID 19 on girls and women and what interventions are in place at national and regional levels and made recommendations on an integrated response at continental, regional, national and decentralized levels to protect girls at risk of GBV and promote education and

livelihood opportunities.

6. **Improve Funding and Partnership to End Harmful Practices:** The session was organized by Organizer: Save the Children, co-organizers: OPE, Ministry of Women Promotion and Child Protection: The session discussed the importance of having an adequate national budget allocation to end harmful practices, how to establish a strategic partnership to fund programs that tackle the acceleration of the end of harmful practices and discussed which are the strategies to mobilize more funds internally with less dependence on donors.

7. **Young People Engage with Member States on Action / Responsibility to End Harmful Practices:** The session was organized by SongES, CONIDE, New Challenge and the Ministry of Women Promotion and Child Protection. During this session young people discussed their involvement and how they engage with Member States for responsibility for their rights and protection and the work that young people do to help their communities and peers against harmful practices and how member states can create wider opportunities for young people to be more productive on issues that affect them. They also made recommendations.

Section B: African Girls Summit

Date: 16th – 18th November 2021

Goal: Provide platform for sharing good practices, evidence and data to shift and galvanize action towards the elimination of harmful practices in Africa.

The African Girls' Summit is a leading platform that brought together stakeholders from across Africa working for the rights and well-being of girls. The first African Girls 'Summit was organized by the government of the Republic of Zambia in 2015 and the second in Ghana in 2018. The third African Girls' Summit was held in November 2021, in Republic of Niger. The 2021 Summit was themed "Culture, Human Rights and Accountability – Accelerating Elimination of Harmful Practices".

The Summit brought together representatives from 35 African Union Member States, more than 100 Young Adolescent Girls and more than 1,500 stakeholders.

It was declared opened by President of the Republic of Niger, Bazoum Mohammed. In his speech, he hailed the choice of Niger to host the summit as extremely judicious because Niger is one of the countries in the world where practices opposed to the rights of girls are prevalent.

He stressed that fight for the social emancipation of girls is not a moral question which must be the business of the feminist activists or even of the women in a general way, but the business of the whole society and the leaders in the first place. This fight, we are obliged to lead it not for the girls but for the future of our society which needs the full involvement of all its components for its development. The president also asserted that its success will be strictly dependent on our ability to ensure that girls enjoy all their rights and mainly their right to education as education is the surest way to get girls away from the violence of early marriages and dangerous childbearing.

"This is why we have decided to promote a program to build boarding schools for young girls

in rural schools in order to increase their chances of success in school" he added

He equally commended t he theme of the summit "Culture, human rights and responsibility: accelerating the elimination of harmful practices" as it is in perfect resonance with the general theme of the year 2021 of the African Union which is: "Arts, culture, heritage: levers to build the Africa we want.

The president ended his speech by affirming that Niger is firmly committed to the 2040 Program "Africa Fit for Children", in which the African Union commits to eliminating gender-based violence and harmful practices.

On her part the Minister of Women Promotion and Child Protection of the Republic of Niger Madame Allahoury Aminata Zourkaleini who gave the welcome expressed hope that this Summit would lead to in-depth reflections on the identified themes. "We also expect strong recommendations whose implementation will enable the Ministries in charge of girls' issues in our different countries to move forward resolutely for a significant reduction of harmful practices against girls" she added.

On her part the Representative of the UN Secretary-General's Special Envoy on Violence against Children, Ms. Najat Maalla M'Jid, during her speech shared a strong message: "We must keep in mind that Africa's children and youth are Africa's capital, Africa's richest source of wealth, with a population that is growing and is expected to reach 830 million by 2050".

After the opening ceremony, the summit split into four parallel sessions throughout over the 3 days that the summit held. Below are the topics discussed in each of the sessions.

Day 1.

1. Girls' Voices in Decision-making to End Child Marriage and Female Genital Mutilation
2. The Role of the Creative arts in accelerating the End of Harmful Practices
3. From Language to Action: Combating Negative Stereotypes and Norms that Perpetuate Harmful Practices
4. Intersection: cultural traditions, norms and opinions of religious, traditional and communitarian leaders

Day 2

1. Adapting the Culture and Strengthening Girls' Rights to Eliminate Harmful Practices in Africa. What Have We Learned? What Has Worked And What Can Be Done Differently?
2. Ending Harmful Practices as a Human Rights Program - The African Union Context
3. The impact of icavid-19 on girls and women: an integrated response
4. Harnessing Girls' Education to Build the Africa We Want.

Day 3

1. Ensuring Quality Data and Evidence Generation for Enhanced Coordination of Transformative Actions and Better Programming for Change

2. National Funding and Partnership to End Harmful Practices.

3. Youth Engagement with Member States on Action And Accountability To End Harmful Practices

4. Intervening in Humanitarian, Emergency, Cross-Border and Conflict Settings to Prevent and Eliminate Harmful Practices

At the end of the end of the Summit, the Niamey call to action was put together based on the recommendation and issued discussed during the pre-summit session and the main summit. The document can be accessed here (Niamey Call to Action)