

## **Basic Education for Children in Alternative Care: In the North-Eastern Zone Of Nigeria**

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**Abstract:** *This paper discusses the concept of Alternative Care for children outside their immediate or natural homes. They are those that may be living in foster homes, adoptive families, refugee camps or orphanages. Children that may need alternative care and the reasons for this are discussed. The paper also highlights the relevance of Basic Education to these children and effects of its provision on them. It also examines the short and long term effects of lack of this level of education on the children, their families and communities. The roles of local Education Authorities, State Ministries of Education, and Federal Ministry of Education, Non-Governmental Organizations, private individuals and International Development Partners in ensuring the provision of quality Basic Education for these children are also considered.*

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### **I. Introduction**

Basic Education is the form of education given to children aged 0-15 years. It encompasses the Early Childhood Education or Pre-primary Education (0-4 years) and 10 years of formal schooling. This level of education to be provided by government shall be free, compulsory, universal and qualitative (FRN, 2013).

The North Eastern zone of Nigeria comprises of six states Adamawa, Bauchi, Borno, Gombe, Taraba and Yobe. These States are the worst hit by the Boko Haram insurgency which has led to hardships, displacement and death of many people. The National Policy on Education (NPE) which is the National guideline for effective administration, management and implementation of education policies states the intention of Nigeria to provide quality education to all children. Some children in this country however, do not have access to Basic Education or may have had their education disrupted due to some circumstances.

Some children in this category may therefore be receiving alternative care from foster homes, adoptive families, refugee camps or special community settings such as orphanages. Many do not enjoy the protection of any responsible adult and may lack access to the basic requirements of living. The situation of these children required them to have special attention (UNICEF, 2008).

The goals of Basic Education as stated by the National Policy of Education (NPE, 2013) are to:

- a. Provide the child with diverse basic knowledge and skills for entrepreneurship, wealth generation and educational advancement.
- b. Develop patriotic young people equipped to contribute to social development and in the performance of their civic responsibilities.
- c. Inculcate values and raise mostly upright individuals capable of independent thinking and who appreciate the dignity of labour.
- d. Inspire national consciousness and harmonious co-existence, irrespective of differences in background; and
- e. Provide opportunities for the child to develop manipulative skills that will enable the child function effectively in the society within the limits of the child's capacity (FRN, 2013).

### **II. Levels of Focus of Basic Education**

Education is an essential process of self realization and effective citizenship in sustainable human development. It is a universal practice that embraces the society's cultural reproductive system thereby keeping the society alive (Oyekan, 2000). It fosters the development of the intellectual capabilities of people and improves their reasoning powers. This is done through the impartation of knowledge of principles which aid the development of the intellect. It promotes desirable physical development and students learn to appreciate those practices and habits that can lead to envious status of physical health. The effective dimension of education is concerned with the building of right attitudes, values and norms (Bello, 2006). The present education policy aims at fostering the acquisition of appropriate skills, abilities and competencies for an individual to live in and contribute to society. It further emphasizes the training of the mind for better understanding of the world around us (Adejumobi, 1990).

The first level of Basic Education is the Early Childhood Education. This form of education focuses on children schooling very early in life. It assists in early monitoring and sustenance of intellectual moral and physical abilities of children. This level of education also avails working class parents an opportunity to have a safe place to keep their children in the wake of high cost and risks associated with housemaids.

Primary education is the next level after the early childhood education. These levels are the key to the success or failure of the educational system since the rest of the system is built on them. The Junior Secondary School or Upper Basic is the final level of basic Education and is of three years duration. Students sit for the JSS examination before being awarded the Junior Secondary Certificate.

Secondary education is expected to expose children to diversified curricula, professional training and industrial experiences. The comprehensive education and learning are intended to equip students with necessary professional competence and value-orientations that will prepare them sufficiently for useful and pleasant leaving. It is a means of producing literate, healthy, self reliant citizens that would create wealth and harmony for sustainable development.

Oyekan (2000) further explains that when students become self employed, then secondary education might have imparted marketable skills and creative knowledge required to provide employment generation opportunities for self reliance. This could make the graduates adopt some strategic human survival instincts to reduce diseases, hunger and poverty. These factors are some of the reasons given for corrupt practice among people. Students with the entry requirements, financial assistance and interest could however proceed for higher education.

### **III. Children in Alternative Care**

Alternative care is an available option or another choice of welfare or protection. Children in alternative care are those living and growing up in environments other than their natural or usual environment. They could be orphans who have lost one or both parents or children who have had to leave their homes or settlement due to different types of natural or manmade disasters. They also include street children who are either born on the streets by mentally retarded mothers, beggars, abandoned babies or children who have left home for personal reasons such as domestic violence, physical, sexual or emotional abuse.

Save the children, (2012) explains that chronic poverty and destitution, illness stigma or discrimination, HIV and AIDS and the increasing numbers of natural disasters along with ongoing conflicts in many countries, mean that more to be able to stay together in healthy, happy and safe environments. Many children remain in families unable to offer them adequate care because they are poor and lack adequate support. Some end up in poor quality alternative care or on the streets. This phenomenon has become common in Nigeria as a result of the death of one or both parents especially the breadwinner, flooding, inter-tribal and religious clashes. Some of these people are referred to as Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs).

The term Internally Displaces Persons (IDPs) is commonly used to describe those who have left their natural environments for safer places. They could be found in camps set up by governments at all levels, homes of family members friends, well wishers, Non-Governmental Organizations, orphanages or at the mercy of people that use them for commercial purposes.

Regarding the situation in some parts of Nigeria, Matazu (2015) explains that years into the incessant Boko Haram crises, access to food, education and basic health services remain a serious challenge. Camps have been established in secure environments for IDPs in order to respond to their needs. Modern facilities have been put in place, but more may be needed as the population increases.

Children in Alternative Care outside camps also need Basic Education. They attend regular schools from the homes in which the live and could be orphans or vulnerable children who are disadvantaged due to their conditions and circumstances. Their situations have made them to require special attention because many of them are challenged in the area of shelter, care, food, education, hygiene, environmental sanitation and child rights.

The wellbeing of these children falls within the social services domain and requires coordination among agencies, care workers, foster or adoptive parents or guardians and school representatives. Some agencies that provide social welfare include Federal Emergency Management (FEMA), Non Governmental Organizations, Ministry of Education, Ministry of Social Welfare and others. The goals of these services are to explore alternative family and care environments for children and how education services can offer holistic support that enhance learning and life outcome for this vulnerable population (ACEI, 2015).

### **IV. Conclusion**

The goals of Basic Education in Nigeria as stated by the National Policy on Education are to provide means of developing all-round education of Nigerian children irrespective of their circumstances. Children in Alternative Care all over the country have equal right to free and compulsory basic Education just like any other child. This could pave a way for self reliance, employment and ability to fit into the ever changing society. It prepares them for a better future and helps to reduce poverty.

Provision of Basic Education to these children will also make them have a sense of belonging and reduce the risk of being enticed into some corrupt practices and crimes. These include both academic and financial fraud, academic fraud; in terms of forgery of certificates, robbery, tribal, religious and political

intolerance, child trafficking, insurgency, kidnapping, lack of commitment towards one's job and so many vices that children are exposed to. Poor educational foundation affects the future of children, the immediate and larger societies.

### **V. Recommendations**

The Global Guideline for Education, (2015) states that children are both the present and future of every nation. They have needs, rights and intrinsic worth that must be recognized and supported. Every child needs to have the opportunity to grow up in a setting that values children, provides conditions for a safe and secure environment and respects diversity. Based on these guidelines, it is recommended that functional Basic Education for Children in Alternative care is achievable through:

- i. Provision of schools, teachers and necessary equipment in camps and locations close to their settlements by government and other stakeholders
- ii. Provision of adequate assessment and supervision by Local Government Education Authorities and State Ministries of Education
- iii. Liaison and communication among the school, parents, guardians and social services, especially for attending school from fosters homes
- iv. Provision and training of counselors for the children, parents and guardians by schools, professionals, Local Government Education Authorities and relevant agencies
- v. Moral and religious instruction of these children should be given serious consideration.

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