



INITIATIVE FOR RESEARCH,
INNOVATION AND ADVOCACY
IN DEVELOPMENT



IRIAD-THE ELECTORAL HUB Celebrates Children's Day 2021

The Initiative for Research, Innovation and Advocacy in Development (IRIAD) and The Electoral Hub celebrates all Nigerian children as the country commemorates Children's Day today, with the theme: "Unite to reverse the impact of COVID-19 pandemic on children".

Children's Day is celebrated to increase awareness on the rights, education and welfare of children. Firstly, established by the United Nations to commemorate the Declaration of the Rights of the Child on 20 November 1959, various countries have chosen different dates to celebrate Children's Day. For example, it is celebrated in the UK on the second Sunday of May, in the United States on the second Sunday of June, and in South Africa on the first Saturday of November. In Nigeria, May 27 is traditionally the day set aside for children.¹

It is worthy to note that children are very important in any country because they are the future of that country. Without them, the hope of building a youthful and productive workforce will shrink and the basic family structure will appear uneven.

To make any country great, moral instructions and fundamental education must be imbibed in the children to make them productive in life. If this is not done, they can evolve into individuals that will be capable of destroying the country.

In Nigeria, children have been through a lot especially with the COVID-19 pandemic ravaging the country, which has affected their wellbeing and education. Many were unable to go to school due to the lockdown placed by the federal government and this exacerbated the risk of having more out-of-school children. There is a saying that when children stay away from school for a long time, the possibility of them returning back to school drops drastically.

¹ <http://www.yourcommonwealth.org/uncategorized/may-27-is-traditionally-the-children%E2%80%99s-holiday-in-nigeria/>

However, the Ministry of Education revealed that out-of-school children now stand at 6.95 million from the previous rate of 10.1 million out of school children.² This indicates that even with the pandemic, progress is being made.

Nevertheless, 6.95 million is still a high figure that needs to be reduced drastically. Even though the government is trying their best to reduce the number of out of school children through school feeding programmes and free education, their efforts have not been sufficient to address the issue.

In addition to the COVID-19 lockdown, insecurity in the Northern part of the country has posed serious challenges to sending children to school.

From December 2020 to March 2021, more than 600 school children in separate incidents were kidnapped while in school.³ This will affect the turnout of children in schools in that regions because of fear of insecurity.

Also, orphaned and vulnerable children (street children, *almajiris*, child refugees, orphans, children in conflict-torn regions, children with disabilities) in the country are not left out as they have been abandoned by the government thereby making them nuisances in the society. Without being guided and shown the right path, these sets of children with great potentials can become problems to the society later in life.

In recent times, Nigeria has recorded an increase in cases of rape and sexual exploitation of young children. As a result of these acts, the psychological wellbeing of these children has greatly reduced, leading to mental problems ranging from stress to anxiety, depression and sleep disorders.

Unfortunately, the Nigerian government has not made enough efforts in solving the problems connected with children's right violation and flawed system of education.

As we commemorate this Children's Day celebration, we wish to use this avenue to call for an upscale of the education system. The importance of education cannot be overemphasized, so we call on the federal government to scale up the feeding programme from primary one to three and include all primary school classes as beneficiaries of the programme. This will help to increase the number of children in schools. Also, there should be free education for all students from primary to secondary school.

The federal government should also tackle the insecurity situation in the country especially with the high rate of kidnapping of school children. Insecurity can affect the turnout of children in schools and tackling it early will help increase the number of children going to school thereby securing their future.

² <https://www.vanguardngr.com/2021/01/out-of-school-children-drops-from-10m-to-6m-in-2020-fg/>

³ <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/education-plus-development/2021/04/19/student-kidnappings-threaten-collapse-of-nigerian-education-system/>

Also, the federal government should pay attention to orphaned and vulnerable children as they are also the future of the country. We recommend that the federal government should establish Child Protection Units across the country to attend to the welfare of these children.

We also reiterate that violence against children is a violation of human rights, and we advocate for its elimination. We call on all state assemblies all over the country to work towards domesticating the Child Rights Act and the Violence Against Persons (Prohibition) (VAPP) Act in their states. 18 years after the passing of the Child Rights Act, 11 states have still not adopted the Act.⁴ Similarly, only 18 states out of the 36 states in Nigeria have adopted the VAPP Act.⁵ The remaining states should therefore adopt both the Child Rights Act and the VAPP Act in order to create a safer atmosphere where the dreams and aspirations of young children can be actualized.

To ensure the happiness and wellbeing of Nigerian children, we all have to make conscious efforts today to achieving that goal. Therefore, while celebrating all children in Nigeria today, we call for the federal and state governments, civil society organizations, members of the private sector, and other interested stakeholders to take action to promote the safety and wellbeing of Nigerian children. In line with the theme of this year which urges us to “unite to reverse the impact of COVID-19 pandemic on children”, these different stakeholders should collaborate to achieve maximum impact on the rights and welfare of the child.

Signed

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Knowledge + Innovation + Inclusion

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⁴ <https://theconversation.com/why-the-childs-rights-act-still-doesnt-apply-throughout-nigeria-145345>

⁵ <http://www.wi-her.org/sexual-assault-in-nigeria-and-the-vapp-act/>