

False Generosity and the Out-of-School Children Conundrum in Nigeria: Assessing Media Strategies for Promoting Optimal School Enrolment

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Abstract

Education is a crucial human right, occupying the fourth spot in the Sustainable Development Goals. Despite efforts by governments and donor agencies, Nigeria's educational expectations have not yielded the desired outcomes. With approximately 10.5 million children out-of-school as of January 2022, Nigeria remains among the nations with the highest rates of out-of-school children. Leveraging a combination of a survey with 352 valid responses from diverse demographics, document analysis, and a critical review of extant literature, this study seeks to highlight the dangers of out-of-school children and evaluate the role of the family, government, donor agencies, and media in ebbing the tide of out-of-school children. The study argues that the efforts of governments and donor agencies to eradicate the challenge of out-of-school children are, at best, false generosity and highlights media strategies that are critical towards increasing the enrolment of children in schools. The study goes further to identify handbills, posters, and community radio as the most efficient channels for disseminating information about the importance of formal education and concludes that achieving optimal school enrolment in Nigeria requires a deliberate and sustained programme by the government and diverse donor agencies in which the media has a crucial role to play.

Keywords: out-of-school children, human development, quality education, false Generosity, formal education.

Introduction

“Man can only become man by education.” ...Kant (1996)

At the core of human development is education. The importance of education to life is evident when we consider the role it plays in enriching our culture, our spirit, our values, and everything that qualifies us as humans. Education is central to achieving optimal social welfare and economic growth, and more importantly, to levelling economic and social inequalities. It also helps in promoting the social mobility of the citizenry, assessing better levels of employment, expanding the opportunities available to the youth, and enhancing democratic progress, the rule of law, and innovation.

Etymologically, the term ‘education’ is believed to have emanated from the Latin word “educere,” which means “to bring forth”, “to nourish”, or “to bring up”. However, in some literature, the word “education” is believed to have been derived from two different words: ‘e’ and ‘duco’. ‘E’ means ‘from inside,’ while ‘duco’ indicates ‘to develop’. Combined, these words mean “to make something develop or grow from within.” A critical analysis of these interpretations reveals that education entails creating a nurturing environment for a child or learner that stimulates the emergence of previously hidden latent (Nwagwu et al., 2021). Consequently, education encapsulates the process of learning and involves the acquisition of new knowledge, values, skills, beliefs, morals, and habits that will empower the individual to live a good life. It occurs in diverse formal and informal settings, and any experience that can stimulate a formative effect on thought, feelings, and actions can be considered educational (Nwagwu et al., 2021).

The contemporary goals of education are so all-encompassing that they incorporate the ideas of ancient philosophers such as Plato and modern social thinkers, including John Dewey, Williams James, and others. According to Butler (1951), the purpose of education is to shape individuals in accordance with their racial heritage. James (1890) defines education as "the sum of acquired habits through which an individual adapts to his or her environment." Further, "education treats the individual as such by keeping him within a group or association and maintaining the individual's full development so that he also contributes his best to the development of social welfare and social progress." These definitions demonstrate that modern education focuses on the individual's growth so that he

can also contribute to the welfare of society.

The centrality of education to life and humanity is further emphasized in Sustainable Development Goals (SDG)(2019) number four (4), which aims to “ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all.” As one of the primary social institutions, education provides members of society with critical knowledge that facilitates economic development, and the creation of a better society through the elimination of poverty. Education has proven to be a contributory factor towards innovation and creativity, which occur when people are learned and skilled enough to operate with different machines, and thus be able to find solutions to diverse societal problems (Sharna, 2018). When education is lacking, diverse challenges emerge. These include domestic violence, poor living standards, inequality, superstition, poor health, and many others.

According to globalgoals.org, education...

“...liberates the intellect, unlocks the imagination and is fundamental for self-respect. It is the key to prosperity and opens a world of opportunities, making it possible for each of us to contribute to a progressive, healthy society (The Global Goals, 2022).”

Education and the Sustainable Development Goals

One of the critical goals of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals is to provide individuals with a high-quality education. Goal four seeks to ensure inclusive and equitable education and to promote opportunities for lifelong learning for all by 2030 (Demirbağ & Sezgin, 2021; Shiohira, 2021), and thus is viewed as the goal of pristine education (Ferguson et al., 2021). Inclusive education strives to provide equal and equitable education and opportunities for lifelong learning (Saini et al., 2022). Such inclusivity is critical in developing societies that are sustainable, inclusive, and resilient (Sustainable Development, 2019). Though the goals were reached via an extensive consultation process initiated by member nations, civil society, intergovernmental agencies, educators, regional organizations, research institutions, and the private sector were all involved (Elmassah et al., 2021).

Education for all has always been a critical component of the sustainable development agenda (Agbedahin, 2019; Leicht et al., 2018). According to Wals and

Kieft (2010), education for sustainable development is increasingly recognised as an essential component of high-quality education and a crucial enabler of sustainable development worldwide. While education is stated most explicitly as a distinct goal in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, it has correlative connections across the entire agenda. Sustainable Development (2019) states that all national development plans and strategies for achieving all the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) must incorporate education, as it is an integral component as well as a key enabler of sustainable development. The centrality of education in human and national development is well documented in UNESCO (2015), which states that:

“ ... links between education and society are strong, and each influences the other. Education can help change society by improving and strengthening skills, values, communications, mobility (linked with personal opportunity and prosperity), personal prosperity and freedom. In the short term, however, education usually reflects society rather strongly: the values and attitudes that inform it are those of society at large. Equally important is whether education takes place in the context of an affluent society or one where poverty is widespread. In the latter case, opportunities to increase resources for education are likely to be constrained.... ”

Gyimah-Brempong (2011) examined the influence of education on a variety of development outcomes in select African nations and found it to be significant and positive. Consequently, education at different levels has different impacts on development; for certain forms of development, primary and secondary education are much more important than tertiary education, whereas, for others, such as income growth rate, tertiary education is observed to be more vital.

The Menace of Out-of-School Children in Nigeria

UNESCO defines out-of-school children as children of official primary school age who are not enrolled in primary or secondary school (UNESCO, 2015). Governments and multilateral organizations are deeply alarmed by the rising trend of out-of-school children globally. According to the UNESCO Institute of Statistics (2022), this rate represents the "number of children and adolescents in the official age category for the given educational level who are not enrolled in pre-primary, primary, secondary, or higher education." Recent UNESCO statistics indicate that

244 million children and adolescents between the ages of 6 and 18 are not in school. The new estimates show that with about 98 million out-of-school children, Sub-Saharan Africa remains the highest, with the numbers on the increase (Azoulay, 2022). More worrisome is the fact that unless drastic measures are taken, 12 million primary school-age children will never experience formal school education (UNESCO, 2019). With such information, the United Nations' target of quality education for all by 2030 risks not being accomplished (Azoulay, 2022).

In collaboration with the Global Education Monitoring Report, a recent report by UNESCO revealed that the number of out-of-school children in Nigeria has increased to 20 million, up from 12.5 million the previous year (Tyohemba, 2022). This is the largest population of out-of-school children in the world, and represents 47% of the world's out-of-school-children population (Okoh et al., 2020). It is disturbing that approximately 40% of Nigerian children aged 6 to 11 do not attend school, with the Northern region having the lowest school attendance rate in the country. (Okoh et al., 2020). This disturbing rate of out-of-school children in Nigeria, particularly in the country's north, has remained a critical issue that requires the immediate attention of the government and other stakeholders. The results of the Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS) for 2021, which were recently released, have once again sparked concern over the threat. The report released last year by the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) as part of the broader MICS programme included data from 39,632 households in Nigeria, with assistance from the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF, 2023). Kebbi (65%), Zamfara (61%), and Bauchi (61%) have the highest rates of out-of-school youth, while Ekiti (2%) and Imo (1%) have the lowest.

Out-of-school children in Nigeria encompass children with special needs, nomadic groups made up of herdsmen and migrants, Almajiri students, and individuals displaced due to violent Nigerian conflicts, primarily in northern states like Borno, Yobe, and Adamawa. These states have a slew of closed schools, numbering around 802, with approximately 1,889 classrooms severely damaged or destroyed (Manzuma-Ndaaba et al., 2021). Consequently, the high number of out-of-school children in Nigeria is attributable to increased instances of insecurity, weak institutional and policy structures, people's customs and values, poverty, and the sheer exclusion of children with disabilities (Manzuma-Ndaaba et al., 2021). These views are consistent with those of Adam et al. (2016), who argue that non-

school factors like poverty and child labor, as well as school-related factors like low academic performance, distance to school, punitive measures from teachers, and poor school infrastructure, all contribute to the problem of out-of-school children in rural Ghana.

The severely high illiteracy rate and the recent rise in violent crimes committed by children across Nigerian states are the social consequences of children who are not in school (Alakwe & Ogbu, 2018) and the considerable cost associated with prosecuting or reforming these juveniles (UNICEF, 2015; BBC, 2017). Evidence also exists that out-of-school children form a ready pool of criminals and militants. The girls among them are subjected to all sorts of sexual abuse and, most times, end up as prostitutes (Alakwe & Ogbu, 2018). The growing number of these children on the streets of Nigeria is a significant concern, not only for the government but for the entire nation. With many children dropping out of school in the near future, there will be a scarcity of adequate and appropriate manpower. This deficiency will affect all aspects of human endeavor, as there will be vacancies in several fields that require formal education-based skills. This demonstrates the connection between education and development. If the consequences are this scary, then exactly what are the government and other stakeholders doing to ebb the tide of out-of-school children?

The Federal Government of Nigeria

Within a few decades of concerted action aimed at improving access to education for most Nigerian children, significant effort and resources have been expended in making education accessible and creating opportunities for schooling for all children and youth (Emezie, 2022). Evidence of diverse policies and institutional frameworks put in place by the government to tackle the challenge of out-of-school children in Nigeria exists. These policies and legal instruments aim to increase the number of enrolments across primary and secondary schools. Chapter 2, Section 18(3) (a) of the Nigerian 1999 Constitution focuses on children's participation in education. Specifically, sub-section three states that the government shall strive to eliminate illiteracy, and to that end, it shall, whenever possible, provide:

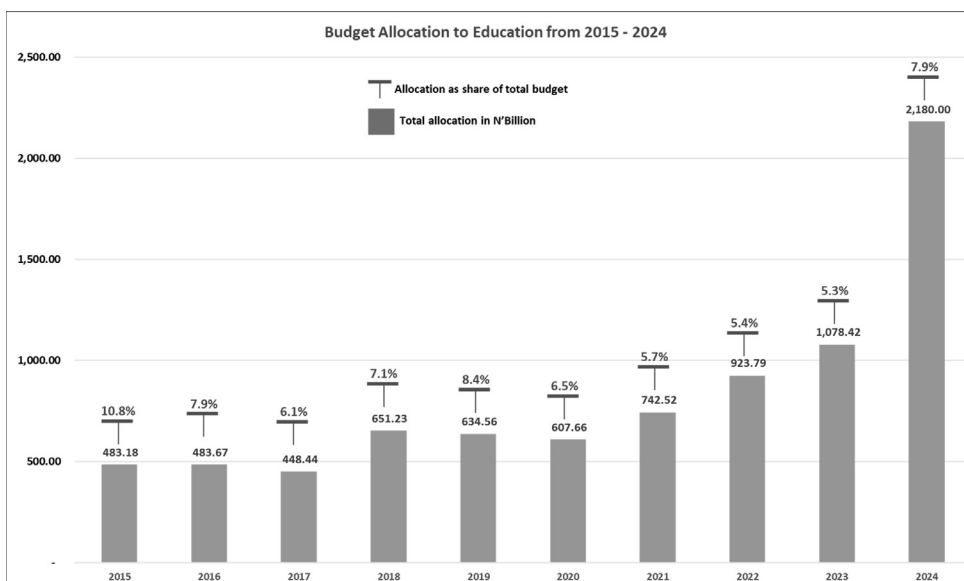
- a) Free, compulsory, and universal primary education.
- b) Free university education; and

- c) Free adult literacy programme, and
- d) Compulsory Free Universal Basic Education Act, 2004.

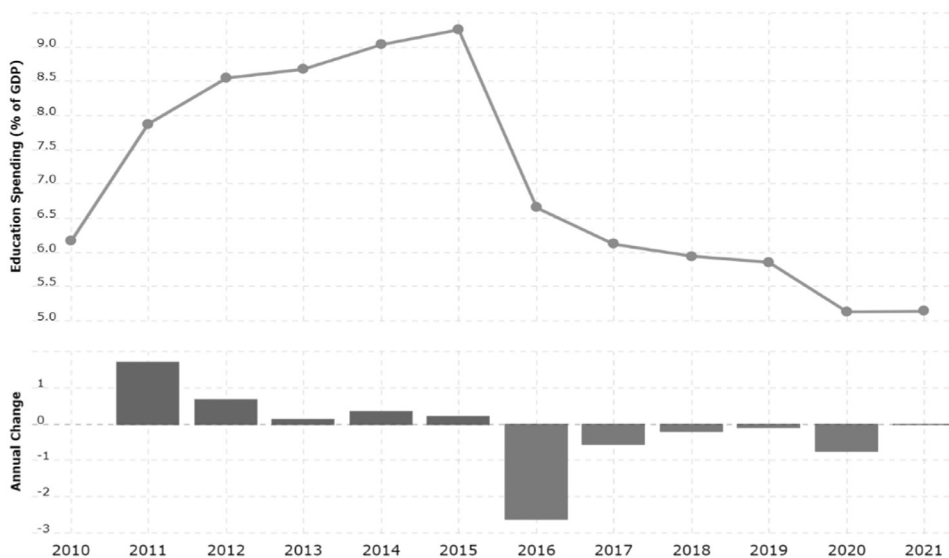
The Compulsory Free Universal Basic Education Act 2004 mandates that children attain a very basic education and the government provides the enabling tools to facilitate the actualization of this objective. Other legal instruments and frameworks instituted towards actualizing these education objectives include the Federal Ministry of Education, National Policy on Education (NPE), Universal Basic Education (UBE), Universal Basic Education Commission (UBEC), Nomadic Education Act, Cap N20 Laws of the Federation of Nigeria (LFN) 2004, and the National Commission for Nomadic Education (NCNE) (Ndanusa et al., 2021). In the past ten years 2010-2020, the government has allocated N5.1 trillion to education (see Figure 1 below). This demonstrates that the sector's allocation falls short of the UNESCO benchmark of 15 to 20 per cent of the nation's annual budget.

Figure 1

Budgetary Allocation to Education from 2015 - 2024



Further data also indicates that this amount falls far below international standards, especially when placed beside the nation's GDP.

Figure 2*Nigerian Educational Spending as a Percentage of GDP - 2010 - 2021*

Multilateral Donor Agencies

With a presence in over 190 countries worldwide, UNICEF, a primary agency with an absolute focus on the welfare of children, has played important roles in global economies. Since establishing an office in Nigeria in 1952, the organization has focused on saving children's lives, defending their rights, and assisting them in reaching their full potential from childhood to adolescence. The goal of UNICEF's education programme is to help the government achieve Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) 4 by 2030, by improving planning and addressing some of the systemic barriers that prevent an effective education strategy from being implemented (UNICEF Nigeria, 2022). This program, leveraging advocacy, priorities and targets children who are least likely to receive an education. The expectation is that all children will have access to high-quality education in a safe learning environment and gain the necessary skill set to ensure lifelong learning (UNICEF Nigeria, 2022).

UNICEF believes that by creating an enabling environment for education, improving quality, and increasing demand for education through strong and viable humanitarian assistance, it will actualize its objective of education for all. Through

its intervention programs, both the state and federal levels have strengthened their capacity to deliver quality education. Secondly, teachers have been empowered with the requisite skills, and finally, parents and communities have deepened their knowledge and commitment to contributing to enrolling their wards in schools (UNICEF Nigeria, 2022).

Speaking at the International Day for Education, 2023, Christine Munduate, the UNICEF Nigeria Representative, stated thus:

“I commit UNICEF’s support to the government of Nigeria to transform education and to prevent the loss of hard-fought gains in getting children into school, particularly poor, rural children and girls and ensuring that they remain in school, complete their education and achieve to their full potential (UNICEF, 2023).”

UNICEF also pledged to work with the government to reduce the number of out-of-school children, improve academic performance, and increase domestic spending on education to meet the global benchmark of 20 per cent by 2030 and to address the infrastructure and teaching backlog that is negatively affecting all children's rights to inclusive and quality education (UNICEF, 2023). The disturbing question, however, is why the nation still grapples with the menace of out-of-school children, sixty years after the arrival of UNICEF in Nigeria.

The Nigerian Media

Evidence exists of studies depicting the representation of children in the media worldwide (Adeniran et al., 2015). Several studies have documented findings indicating that the media almost always relegates stories about children to the background and outsources many of these stories, reflecting the media's tendency to be reactive rather than proactive (Media Institute of Southern Africa, 2013). One example is the Child Rights Alliance for England’s (CRAE) investigation into children's representations in the British media, which affirmed the negative portrayals of children as troublemakers, deviants, or victims (Child Rights International Network, 2009). A study by Korać and Vranješević (2003) demonstrated a “superficial and sensationalist approach” to children, who were represented negatively in the media. In this context, children were used as a means of drawing attention to, or emphasizing other themes.

Asemah (2011) and Wilson (1997) argue that media agents can positively influence audience attitudes and set public debate agendas. They play a crucial role in child education by mobilizing, informing, educating, entertaining, and disseminating information. The media plays a critical role in reducing the number of out-of-school children. Tsegyu (2016) argues that the media has a social responsibility to educate the public about education, especially in Nigeria's north, where gender gaps persist. This underscores the importance of the social responsibility role of the media in society. In acknowledgement of this crucial obligation, the Federal Government (2004) included the mass media in the educational support service system as a matter of policy. To achieve this, the government mandated that all state broadcast stations cooperate with education ministries and other affiliated agencies to educate the masses about government policies and programs on education.

Research Question

Based on the foregoing, it is clear that the government, multilateral donor agencies such as UNICEF, and the media have made concerted efforts to increase student enrolment in primary and secondary schools. However, despite society's expectations and the efforts expended thus far to stem the tide of out-of-school children, the outlook remains bleak. The number of out-of-school children remains on the increase. Curiously, extant literature on out-of-school children focuses more on causality and the role of government, with little or no attention to the fact that the media has a critical role to play. After examining the role of diverse stakeholders in the education sector, this study affirms that the efforts of governments and development organizations qualify as false generosity. We therefore ask, whose role will it be to liberate these children who have found themselves out-of-school? What individual and collective efforts do we need to make to ebb the tide of out-of-school children? Most importantly, what role should the media play in reducing the menace of out-of-school children, and what medium is most appropriate in communicating the need for enrolment in school to the citizens? This study therefore seeks to highlight the dangers of out-of-school children, evaluate the role of the family, government, and donor agencies in simulating optimal school enrollment, and examine the role of the media in ebbing the tide of out-of-school children.

Theorizing False Generosity: A Tool for Oppression and Subjugation

False generosity has been defined as the conflicted and ultimately

compromised nature of commitment to equity exhibited by people of dominant social identity groups who seek social justice for all people while maintaining an unfair advantage over members of non-dominant social identity groups (Clark & Stowers, 2016). The concept of false generosity was first proposed by Freire (2017) while explaining the liberatory approach to education. He reflected that aid, charitable giving, and welfare programmes are nothing but false generosity, and contended that outwardly generous acts of giving are frequently deceptive, serving to maintain unequal power structures and current economic status while keeping the oppressed in a position of subservience and manipulation (Renkert, 2022). Freire further stated that aid distribution by populist state actors is frequently marred with paternalistic false generosity, making it possible for politicians to garner undue profit from their positions of power (Renkert, 2022).

According to Freire (2017), false generosity is beneficence, which exploits the symptoms of an oppressive society. Examples include providing shelter for the homeless, setting up a foundation to combat malaria, and, in the context of this study, building schools without the requisite plan to educate the masses on the need for education. False generosity is not false because it does not help people; on the contrary, it can and frequently does save lives. Instead, it is “false” because it serves to maintain oppression by addressing symptoms as opposed to root causes. To continue to be able to express their “generosity,” these oppressors must also commit injustice. Thus, the perpetual source of this “generosity,” nourished by poverty, despair, and death, is an unjust social order.

Consequently, the dispensers of false generosity tend to become desperate at the slightest threat to their power source. Moreover, whereas false charity binds the fearful and subdued, the "rejects of life" to stretch trembling hands, genuine generosity strives for these hands - whether individual or communal - to extend less in subservience so that they should work towards transforming the world. Therefore, “true generosity consists precisely in combating the causes that sustain false charity” (Freire, 2017). It makes no difference whether donor agencies and governments give US\$10 billion or US\$1 towards education; what matters, according to Freire, is whether their generosity is true or false.

Keramatfar and Bavakhani (2019) demonstrate how apartheid, like other authoritarian regimes, frequently encouraged dependency to maintain its dominance

over South Africa's nonwhite population. Institutions were explicitly designed to foster a dependency culture and make subjects utterly reliant on the state. Reliant people are powerless, open to exploitation, and easily controlled; colonizers prefer these types of subjects. For instance, the black majority of South Africa lives a parasitic existence, completely dependent on the whims of their white Apartheid masters. This supports Freire's (2017) claims that false charity is a state strategy to perpetuate domineering relationships. According to Keramatfar and Bavakhani (2019), to undermine the fabric of dominance, the oppressed must reject the culture of dependency and parasitic subjectivity that results from the state's false charity. Being in communion with one another allows us to feel a kind of collective vibration reverberating in other parts of the world across and through our diverse positions and contexts (Aceves et al., 2022).

Materials and Methods

This study adopted a quantitative and exploratory approach, and leveraged a survey that utilized structured questionnaire questions to interrogate the research problem. A non-probabilistic (convenience) sampling technique was utilized, as respondents were sought from the entire Nigerian population of over 218.8 million (National Population Commission, 2022). The questionnaire was divided into three sections. Section one explores the diverse roles of stakeholders and approaches to managing the menace of out-of-school children. It incorporates queries on whose responsibility it is to educate the child and the role of parents, governments, and society, including the support of multilateral donor agencies such as UNICEF. The second section aims to validate the various media strategies that can effectively combat the issue of out-of-school children. These include advocacy, education, information, and investigation. The final section focuses on the most effective medium for executing and communicating the identified media strategies and thus increasing school enrollment. The mediums interrogated include town criers, face-to-face meetings in town halls, flyers and handbills, community radio, newspapers, television, and social media. The questions were designed using the 5-point Likert scale.

A questionnaire reliability check using Cronbach's Alpha was carried out on the questions. Google Forms was utilized in creating the questionnaire, and it was disseminated via emails and diverse social media platforms such as WhatsApp, Facebook, and LinkedIn. The completed questionnaires were collected over a six-

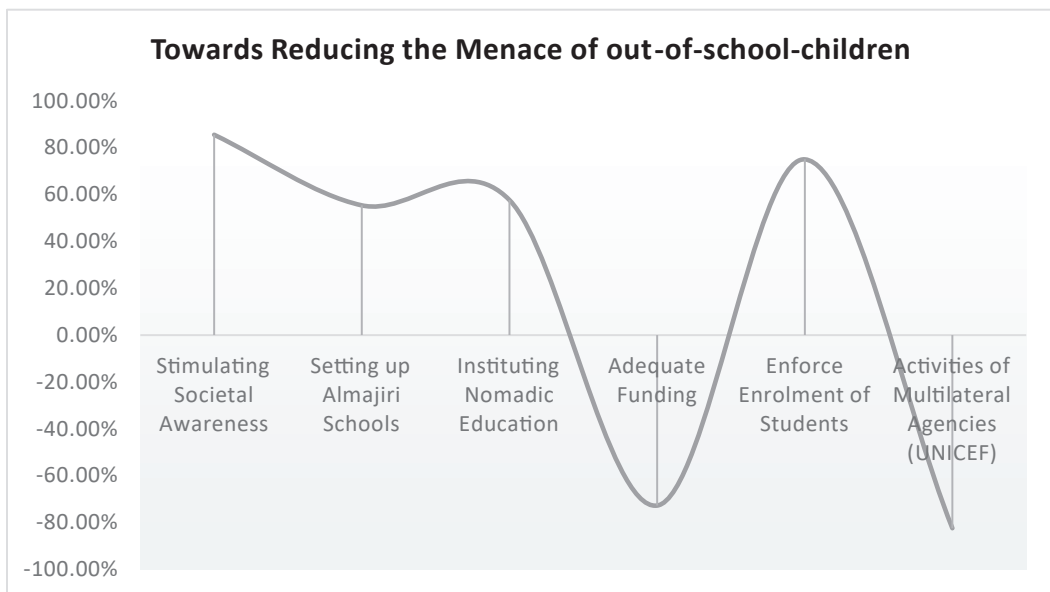
month period, from August 2022 to January 2023. Three hundred and fifty-two valid questionnaires were returned, coded into Microsoft Excel, and uploaded into a quantitative data analysis software (IBM SPSS). The data were then analyzed using Pearson Correlation and stepwise multiple regression. The results were then presented in tables and charts to provide a clear interpretation of the results.

Findings

A descriptive statistic of the first section of the questionnaire unearthed insight into how the respondents assess the diverse activities of parents, citizens, the government, and multilateral donor agencies such as UNICEF towards tackling the menace of out-of-school children.

Figure 3

Towards Reducing the Menace of Out-Of-School Children



From the chart above, a greater responsibility is placed on the parents and the society in ensuring the enrolment of pupils in academic institutions. As predicted, the respondents believe that the government and donor agencies have not done enough to ebb the tide of out-of-school children. Furthermore, respondents believe that stimulating societal awareness through the media will contribute positively to an

increase in school enrolment. In the same vein, enforcing enrollment in schools and setting up nomadic education and schools for Almajiri’s will contribute positively.

Section one of the questionnaire also highlighted media strategies that can be deployed towards increasing enrolment in formal education, as well as the position of the respondents on the strategies with the highest potential for addressing the educational challenges contextually.

Figure 4

Media Strategies for Ebbing the spate of Out-of-School Children

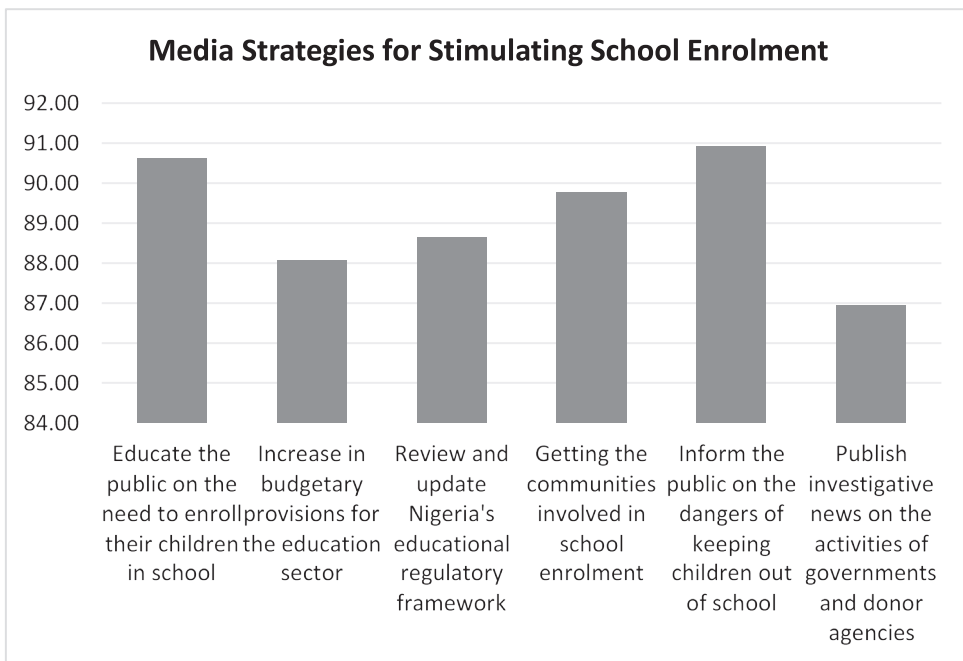


Figure 4 captures media strategies that can stimulate school enrolment and thus reduce the menace of out-of-school children. Data obtained here indicates that informing the public on the dangers of keeping children out of school is the most effective and confirms the effectiveness of using fear appeals for behavior change. This is followed closely by educating the citizens on the need for formal education and getting the communities involved.

We further analyzed the obtained data to determine which mediums (tools)

best facilitate the communication of the benefits of formal education, inform the public about the dangers of keeping children out of school, and further assist in addressing the strategies highlighted in Figure 3. Table 2 captures the outcome of the correlation analysis.

Table 1

Correlation Analysis between Identified Mediums and the Effective Measures (Strategies) for Curbing the Out of School Children Menace in Nigeria

Medium for Curbing Out-of-school children		
[Town Criers]	Pearson Correlation	.162**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.002
	N	352
[Face-to-face meetings in community town halls]	Pearson Correlation	.202**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000
	N	352
[Flyers and Handbills distributed in market squares]	Pearson Correlation	.225**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000
	N	352
[Community Radio]	Pearson Correlation	.222**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000
	N	352
[Newspapers (Dailies)]	Pearson Correlation	.156**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.003
	N	352
[Television]	Pearson Correlation	.212**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000
	N	352
[Social Media]	Pearson Correlation	.215**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000
	N	352
[All Mediums Together]	Pearson Correlation	.289**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000
	N	352

Note: **Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

As shown in Table 2, there is a positive correlation ($r = .289$, $P < .01$) between the identified mediums and the strategies (effective measures) for curbing the out-of-school children menace. Furthermore, Table 2 shows the level of the positive relationship between the variables (Town Criers, $r = .162$, $p < .01$; Face-

to-face meetings in community town halls, $r = .202$, $p < .01$; Flyers and handbills distributed in market places, $r = .225$, $p < .01$; Community radio, $r = .222$, $p < .01$; Newspapers (dailies), $r = .156$, $p < .01$; Television, $r = .212$, $p < .01$; Social media, $r = .215$, $p < .01$) and media strategies highlighted in figure 1. Thus, we can assume that, in relation to the recommended media strategies, flyers and handbills are the most effective by 22.5% of the recommended strategies for curbing out-of-school children. Community Radio follows closely behind, accounting for 22.2%. It becomes imperative, therefore, to further investigate the mediums that occupy the most significant position in facilitating the achievement of the recommended media strategies for reducing the incidence of out-of-school children. Table 2 presents the results obtained through stepwise multiple regression.

Table 2

Most Significant Predictor (Medium) on the Recommended Strategies (Effective Measures) for Curbing the Out-Of-School Children Menace in Nigeria

Model 1	R² change .051				
	B	Std. Error	β	t	Sig
(Constant)	19.01				
[Flyers and Handbills distributed in the market squares]	1.765	.409	.225	4.316	.01**
Final Model	R² change .021				
(Constant)	14.70				
[Flyers and Handbills distributed in the market squares]	1.272	.442	.162	2.880	.01**
[Community Radio]	1.423	.509	.157	2.80	.01**

Dependent Variable: the recommended effective measures for curbing the out-of-school children menace **. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Results indicate that in the first model, 5.1% of the recommended strategies for curbing the out-of-school children menace are achieved when flyers and handbills are deployed or distributed in the marketplace ($\beta = .225$, $P < .01$). However, in the final model, over and above the change in the 1st model, the R2 change, .021 is attributed to using community radio as a medium and is significant, $P > .01$. Thus, in the final model, 2.1% of the recommended effective measures for curbing the out-of-school

children menace is achieved when community radio is the medium deployed ($\beta = .157, P < .01$). As seen in the results, the variance attributed to flyers and handbills is greater or is a more significant predictor ($\beta = .225, P < .01$) compared to using community radio ($\beta = .157, P < .01$) on the recommended effective measures for cubing the out-of-school children menace. Consequently, even though the mediums (town criers, face-to-face meetings, newspapers, television, and social media) are associated with or related to the strategies for cubing the out-of-school children menace, their impact is insignificant compared to handbills, flyers, and community radio.

Discussion

The Role of Families, Donor Agencies and Governments

There is a strong consensus in existing literature regarding who is responsible for providing children with the fundamentals of education. At the center of this discourse is the role of parents and the government, and, to a lesser extent, the multilateral donor agencies. As the primary institution for education and socialization, the family remains critical to the early development of a child. The family instills in children the value of learning and the centrality of structured education. Results from the survey confirm the widely accepted notion that at the heart of the early education of the human person is the family, represented by parents. As the primary stakeholders in the educational process of children (Ceka & Murati, 2016), parents are the ones responsible for raising their children in response to their crucial role as the ones who reproduce the human species in every society (Okello, 2023). In every household, a child's upbringing begins at birth, and consists, to a large extent, of learning via experience, which is continually modified by ongoing learning (Okin, 2015). Thus, the family is an important agent through which the child can systematically know, learn, and develop moral values (Arunraj, 2016).

Generally, when parents are involved in their children's education, the outcomes are optimistic and uplifting (Okello, 2023). However, while parents are generally aware of efforts to improve their children's lives, they could benefit from more information about their children's guaranteed access to quality education (Papadakis & Kalogiannakis, 2017). However, this is not always the case, as evidenced by the large number of children who are not in school in Nigeria. There are a variety of factors that affect a family's capacity to foster a child's growth and

development. Family involvement is affected by diversity, communication, meeting preferences, resources, time, knowledge, and personnel. In the vast majority of studies on parental involvement, diversity concerns have been identified. Recent research has revealed that diversity is most frequently discussed in terms of race, socioeconomic status, parental education level, and family structure (Bruckman & Blanton, 2003). Other factors include perennial poverty, the prevalence of single parenting, drug abuse by the parents, and the absence of educational institutions in the community where the family resides. Poverty is one of the principal contributors to the menace in Nigeria. Instead of sending their children to school, parents expose them to child labour and engage them in street trading. In some instances, traditional beliefs compel parents not to send their daughters to school as they wait for suitors for marriage proposals. However, there are instances in which parents wish to send their children to school, but their communities lack the necessary facilities and infrastructure for basic education. This factor brings to light the critical role of governments in education.

Analysis of the results affirms that the government has a critical role to play if Nigeria is to reduce the menace of out-of-school children. At the centre of this intervention is funding. This is affirmed by the results, which indicate the importance of funding in achieving the educational objectives of the Sustainable Development Goals. Evidence exists that, over the years, the government has played lip service to the requisite funding for the education sector. As mentioned earlier, records clearly show that Nigeria's educational budget falls short of United Nations benchmarks. Even though there have been promises to revamp the sector, the activities of the government have yet to yield the desired results, as exemplified by the ever-increasing rate of out-of-school children. More disturbing is the fact that education in Nigeria at the primary level is free. This takes us back to certain socio-economic factors that might be contributing to the out-of-school children menace. Factors such as cultural practices, poverty, and inadequate infrastructure. Therefore, attention should extend beyond offering free education to educating the masses on the need for formal education, increasing the education budget to address the infrastructural deficit, and improving the livelihoods of the citizens.

Similarly, evidence exists in literature of diverse interventions by multilateral agencies such as UNICEF. These incorporate advocacy, funding, and education. However, results from the study indicate that these multilateral donor agencies

have not performed optimally in facilitating an increase in school enrollment and, by extension, eradicating the menace of out-of-school children. The general view is that the efforts of these agencies qualify as a false charity. In consideration of the number of years of active presence in Nigeria (since 1952), one would have expected their efforts to have yielded positive results, whether in funding, advocacy, or educating the citizens on the need for child education. The argument is that if they are truly desirous of tackling the menace and have been working over these years towards augmenting the efforts of the government towards eradicating the menace, there would have been a marked improvement, if not total eradication of out-of-school children in Nigeria.

Ebbing the Tide of Out-of-school Children: Media Strategies

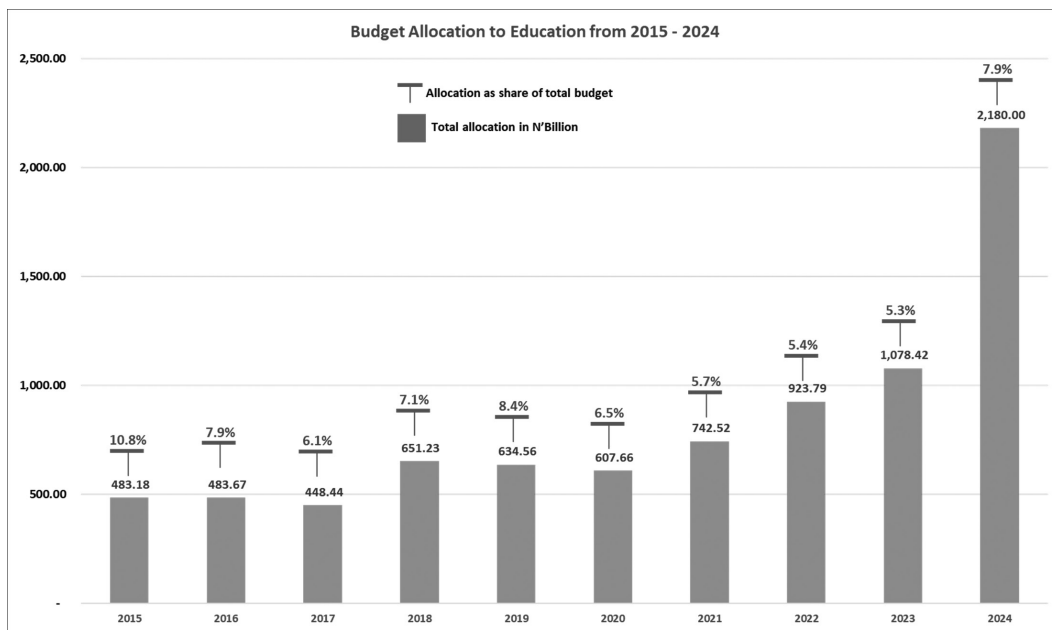
The media has an advantageous position to highlight the risks associated with the growing population of children who are not in school. As the watchdog of society, it is expected of the media to be the voice of the voiceless by constantly reminding not just the government but also families of their responsibilities in ensuring every child is given the opportunity to go to school. The role of the media in this regard should not end with plain reportage of government plans and activities—plans that are yet to yield the desired results—but must extend to being a watchdog on the activities of families, governments, and donor agencies and advocating for strategies that aim at improving the enrolment of schoolchildren. These encapsulate the provisions of social responsibility theory.

The expectation is that the media should focus more on educating the citizens on the need for and benefits of formal education and how they all relate to poverty eradication and better standards of living. In addition, the media should leverage the powers it has to seek a continual review of extant laws that will promote sound education in line with global best practices and standards. Also of great importance is deploying communication strategies to get governments, donor agencies, and communities involved in the quest for a reduction in the population of out-of-school children. This will be in addition to informing the public about the dangers of keeping children out of school and publishing investigative news on negative activities that contribute to the incidence of out-of-school children. Finally, there is a need to create awareness and advocate for an increase in budgetary allocation to the education sector. This is because, for the past decade, Nigeria has struggled to achieve the desired level of budgetary allocations for education, which according to

UNESCO should fall between 15 and 20% of the total budget (see Figure 2).

Figure 5

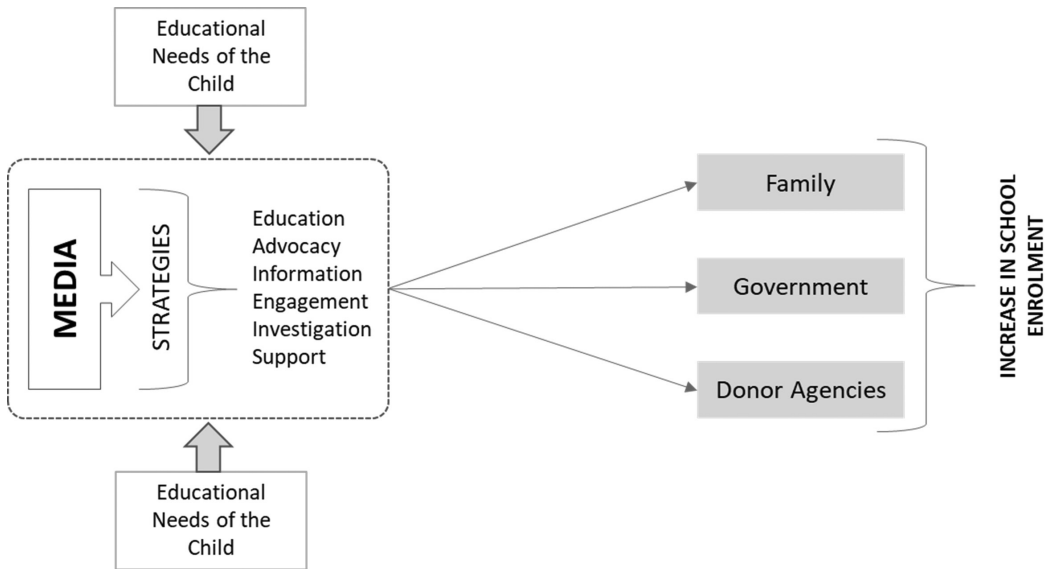
Budgetary Allocation to Education from 2015 - 2024



A cursory check across diverse media platforms shows that the common practice is simply to report what the government and the donor agencies say without probing for the factors responsible for the perennial challenge of out-of-school children. It is believed that extensive advocacy in the areas of children’s enrolment in schools, a review of educational policies to stimulate school enrolment, community engagement, educating the masses, and information dissemination, in addition to publishing investigative reports on the causal factors, will facilitate a reduction in the menace. The advocacy function of the media is based on the fact that the media can draw the attention of the masses to critical issues in society and can serve as a veritable platform to bring to the fore the menace of out-of-school children.

Figure 6

Advocacy Role of the Media in Tackling the Menace of out-of-school children



Channel Strategies for Media Interventions on Out-of-School Children

Communicative acts always leverage diverse mediums to reach the desired audience. In the context of this study, different mediums of communication were identified as having the potential to contribute to communicating the centrality of formal education in the development of the child, and consequently, addressing the out-of-school conundrum. These include social media, television, newspapers, town criers, town halls, flyers and handbills, and community radio. However, an analysis of these mediums indicates that the most effective are the distribution of flyers and handbills and the use of community radio.

The emergence of community radio as an effective medium of communication in this context aligns with a study in Tanzania (Sungu & Kopoka, 2019) and Nigeria (Alakwe & Okpara, 2022) on the role community radio plays in the development of rural communities. The study states that community radio significantly influences citizens to participate in community development, with an emphasis on education. Community radio can play a significant role in development and democratization by facilitating local communities' sharing of their own insights and critical examination of social issues, practices, and policies affecting their lives and livelihoods (Khan

et al., 2017). It also facilitates educating and empowering communities regarding development initiatives and strategies that will result in a better life for the audience (Mtimde et al., 1998). According to Johnson & Rajadurai (2020), community radio entrenches the democratic process in which freedom of communication and speech play a central role. Since they are usually established to facilitate communication within communities and with the government, it implies that community radio is an acceptable medium for disseminating vital information and educating people on the need for enrolment in schools. More importantly, the pluralistic nature of the Nigerian nation, where every region is endowed with a unique cultural and indigenous identity, makes it imperative to have community radios to address the specific needs of communities as it pertains to education, taking into cognizance of their cultural differences.

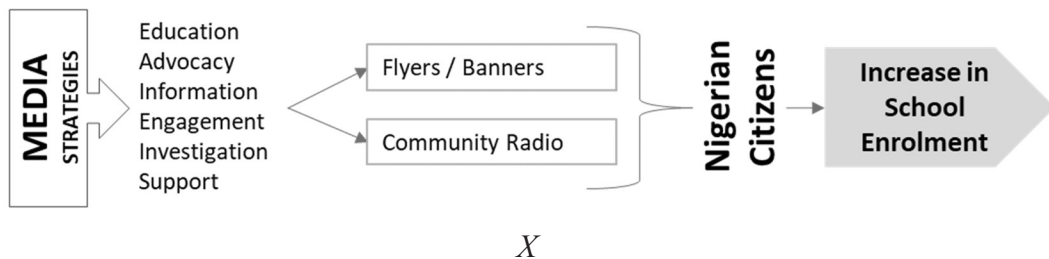
This study has confirmed that the rapid evolution of communications technology has not rendered traditional forms of media unnecessary or irrelevant. In fact, traditional media may play a crucial role in bringing the 'larger' community-based audience together to share ideas and act (Ramsey & Moss, 2009). Given the age, distance from urban centers, and infrastructure deficiencies, traditional forms of media continue to play a role in the capacity-building of Canadian rural communities (Ramsey & Moss, 2009). Studies affirm the effectiveness of the traditional medium of flyers, handbills, and posters in societies that have gone digital. Barik et al. (2019) determined that the use of traditional media (flyers and posters) for health promotion is effective, particularly among adults in Indonesia. The study suggests that promotional flyers, handbills, and posters are effective communication tools in rural communities, particularly for illiterate populations who lack access to vital information. Residents, particularly those with lower literacy levels, are likely to understand these materials designed with appropriate texts, which are believed to facilitate effective communication with citizens.

Curiously, face-to-face discussion, which, according to media richness theorists, is the most effective means of communication, did not emerge as an effective medium in driving the reduction in out-of-school children. This might be attributable to the fact that, unlike flyers, handbills, and community radio, the desired frequency of engagement that will result in a positive behavior change towards children's enrolment in schools might be difficult to achieve. What this means is that to achieve the desired outcomes, there is a need for a strategic and

sustained communicative plan. The importance of these two mediums (flyers/posters and community radio) underscores the fact that the incidence of out-of-school children is more prominent in rural areas where the low literacy level makes it difficult to communicate with people via television (which requires electricity that is lacking), newspapers, and social media.

Figure 7

Advocacy Role of the Media in Tackling the Menace of Out-Of-School Children



Through community radio, people can be exposed to carefully designed messages on a more frequent basis, which will compel parents to send their children to school. The same goes for the distribution of flyers and handbills in village squares during traditional festivals, marketplaces, churches, mosques, and other religious centers. Thus, the emergence of community radio, flyers, and handbills as potent mediums of communication emphasizes the centrality of the frequency of communication, which in this context is critical.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Specifically, the only way an average Nigerian can measure the efforts of families, governments, and multilateral donor agencies is by the outcome of such efforts. Formal education, especially at the primary level, should be a right for all Nigerian children and should be viewed as the primary vehicle for supporting children's development and socialization. The fact that existing data on out-of-school children looks worrisome is a strong indication of the failure of the family, governments, donor agencies, and media to ensure the child is given a chance to live a life. Clearly, these efforts, which I believe qualify as false generosity, do not translate to a reduction in the menace. For there to be a significant increase in enrolment in schools and a consequent reduction in out-of-school children, the

family, government, donor agencies, and media must work in unison. It is therefore crucial that the foundation for these partnerships be established early in a child's educational career.

This study concludes that there is an urgent need to raise public awareness of the risks associated with children who are not in school, enforce school enrollment through the enactment of necessary regulations, and enhance funding for the sector. The donor agencies must adopt a results-driven strategy when assisting the government in contributing to the quest for an increase in the rate of student enrolment.

The media should implement advocacy strategies that emphasize the significance of education in a child's life and the family's role in sending children to school. More important is the need to act as a watchdog on the activities of the government and the multilateral donor agencies in the education sector. In disseminating the necessary information to the public to achieve this objective, flyers, handbills, and posters should be used effectively. Finally, more emphasis should be placed on community radio as an effective means of communicating the significance of a child's educational foundation. These, it is believed, will contribute positively towards reducing and maybe eradicating the menace of out-of-school children in Nigeria.

For the media industry, there is an immediate need for a change in approach and strategy, from simple reporting to educating the masses on the values of formal education and advocating for ways through which the nation can improve in the global out-of-school children indices. Consequently, for there to be a significant reduction in the menace of out-of-school children, a communicative and symbiotic relationship between the media, the citizens (especially at the local level), and the government is recommended. At the heart of this relationship is the mediating role of the media, where the responsibilities of families, the innate needs of the child, and the role of the government connect.

Additionally, there is a need to increase education funding in line with UNESCO standards and strengthen education laws to mandate parents to send their children to school. Community radios, flyers, and handbills should be adopted as the most effective means of disseminating information regarding strategies and

initiatives designed to increase the enrolment of children in schools. It is believed that this will enhance the effective distribution of information to the general public, particularly citizens at the grassroots level who, coincidentally, bear the greatest burden of the issue of out-of-school children.

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