

## **POLICY BRIEF:**

**Drivers of (in)coherence in the  
delivery of education in  
Northeast Nigeria**

## **The Education Research in Conflict and Protracted Crisis (ERICC) Research Programme Consortium is a global research and learning partnership that strives to transform education policy and practice in conflict and protracted crisis around the world – ultimately to help improve holistic outcomes for children – through building a global hub for a rigorous, context-relevant and actionable evidence base.**

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This policy brief presents a variety of examples of misalignment between key education sector actors with respect to the goals and outcomes of education in conflict-affected areas in Northeast Nigeria. It draws on the findings of a longer ERICC working paper<sup>1</sup> based on key informant interviews conducted in 2022 by ODI and the Common Heritage Foundation alongside a broad literature review. We treat these examples of misalignment as expressions of *incoherence* in the education system, drawing on concepts of ‘coherence for learning’ (Pritchett, 2015) and ‘humanitarian-development coherence’ (INEE, 2021), as well as the ERICC Conceptual Framework (Kim et al., 2022). In addition to identifying some of the sources of incoherence, we provide suggestions on how to improve *coherence*. By doing this, the brief enhances our understanding of education systems in protracted crisis settings, which we hope to further refine in future research.

## B. Education access and continuity in Northeast Nigeria

The education system in Northeast Nigeria has faced severe disruptions as a result of persistent clashes between militia groups and government security forces since the late 2000s. This protracted conflict has resulted in the displacement of teachers and students, widespread school closures, and physical and psychological harm to children. The states<sup>2</sup> of focus for this brief exhibit significantly high, albeit variable, rates of out-of-school children (OOSC). In Borno, between 51% and 70% of children do not attend any form of schooling; this makes it the state with the highest OOSC ratio in Nigeria, against an already considerable national average of 25.6% (EiEWG, 2020; NBS and UNICEF, 2022). In Kaduna and Adamawa, as many as 18% and 30% of children, respectively, are out of school.

For children living in boarding houses and internally displaced person (IDP) camps across the northern states of Nigeria, access to education is also limited. Typically, the locations to which IDPs relocate lack educational facilities (Edema, 2021) and are far from the existing school infrastructure in local host communities. Official camps hosting displaced populations and/or refugees are rare; those that exist are severely congested, lack basic services and are prone to cyclical cholera outbreaks and fires (OCHA, 2022). At the same time, state governments are under pressure from the national government to show that the conflict is over. In practice, they demonstrate this through the closures of camps, as has happened in Borno since 2017 (HRW, 2022; Sida, 2022). This practice puts a halt to the provision of education to children through camps while there is little certainty of service provision in proposed areas of relocation, which are often situated close to or in areas of conflict.

The protracted nature of the conflict has drawn multiple actors from across the humanitarian and development spheres into the education system in northeast Nigeria. These actors have different ways of working and varying priorities, which leads to misalignment between different segments of the education system.

## C. Drivers of education system (in)coherence in Northeast Nigeria

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<sup>1</sup> Sarwar, M., Homonchuk, O. and Nicolai, S. (May 2024). Drivers of (in)coherence in the delivery of education in northeast Nigeria. ERICC Working Paper.

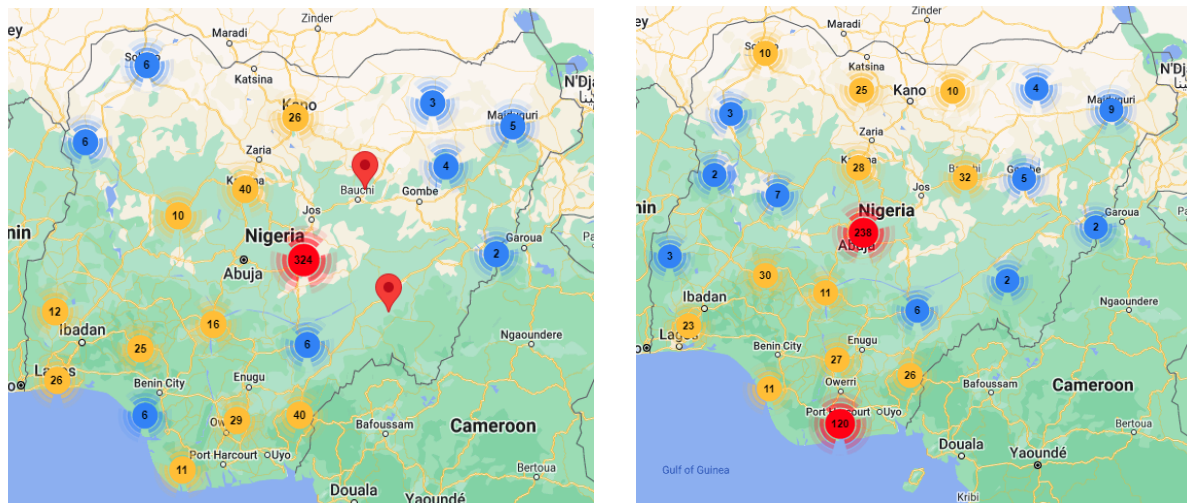
<sup>2</sup> Nigeria is a federal republic divided into 36 states and a federal capital territory.

**Education is not a top priority for government stakeholders.** A lack of normative commitment to education as a crucial intervention for conflict-affected children exists against a background of de-prioritisation of primary education in Nigeria in general. Government expenditure on education as a percentage of gross domestic product has been on the decline since 2014 (UNESCO and World Bank, 2021) and is one of the lowest shares seen among African countries (UNICEF, 2022). Practitioners do not seem to use or be familiar with the federal government’s National Policy on IDPs – which highlights education as a core response in emergencies. The Commission for Refugees, Migrants and IDPs is technically responsible for education provision for IDPs. However, interviewees, including government officials and non-government actors, were unable to confirm whether it played any active role in supporting displaced, refugee or migrant youth, indicating a potential lack of commitment to the issue.

**Humanitarian actors have continued to work within an ‘emergency’ framework during more than a decade-long insurgency,** with project funding that lasts between nine months and a year. Very recently, the Education in Emergencies Working Group (EIEWG) as well the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA)-led Humanitarian Country Team have acknowledged the need to shift from short- to longer-term planning (OCHA, 2023). It is not yet clear whether actors within the humanitarian sphere have access to longer-term funding or are able to work in project cycles appropriate to longer-term development efforts. Interviews revealed some resistance from humanitarian actors with regard to moving into what they consider a development space.

**Moreover, the humanitarian sector still treats education as a latter-stage priority and is averse to taking a position of leadership in education.** Humanitarian sector needs assessments always rank education lower in terms of priority than shelter, nutrition and livelihood needs (REACH, 2023), assuming that the government will provide ‘increased leadership in [the] coordination of education-in-emergency responses’ (OCHA, 2023, p. 85). In 2021, only 2.4% of humanitarian aid in Nigeria was allocated to education; in comparison, food security, nutrition and health take up 26.6% of the humanitarian budget (OCHA, 2021). Within the broader trend of de-prioritisation of education, there is some reluctance in both the development and the humanitarian sectors to increase their focus on the northeast. Figure 1 shows the number of humanitarian and development education projects across Nigeria between 2006–2015 (left) and 2016–2023 (right) (pre- and post-conflict). It shows no substantial increase between the two periods.

**Figure 1.** Heatmap of humanitarian and development education projects (<https://d-portal.org/ctrack.html#view=search>, accessed 18 April 2024)



This de-prioritisation of education is set against a background of contestation and negotiation among national and state-level governments and humanitarian and development actors regarding the status of IDPs and the places where they can temporarily settle, including official camps, informal camps and temporary boarding houses.

**The underlying drivers of conflict between the insurgents and the government, including regional inequalities and non-recognition of Qur’anic education that date back to colonial times, remain unaddressed.** Executive-level leaders (at the federal and often the state level) are wary of admitting that the insurgency is ongoing and consequently have not championed frameworks for education delivery in protracted conflict settings (i.e., adapted in terms of either delivery mode or curriculum). Instead of addressing underlying grievances or adapting their mode of education delivery, government stakeholders emphasise the need for the Safe Schools Policy (also known as the National Policy on Safety, Security and Violence-Free Schools), which prioritises the securitisation of school infrastructure and the presence of security forces on school premises. There is no evidence to suggest that such measures have improved access or outcomes in education for children attending schools; families report unwillingness to send children to school given such military presence (GCPEA, 2018).

**Federal and state officials and parents often have divergent normative positions on the role of Qur’anic education in the northeast.** Federal-level government norms see religious schools as inimical to national development. Meanwhile, a significant number<sup>3</sup> of children that the Education Management Information System identifies as OOSC in reality attend religious schools. Taken together, Islamiyya, Qur’anic, Tsangaya and Almajiri schools often outnumber registered state-funded schools in the northeast (NBS and UNICEF, 2022). International humanitarian actors may be unintentionally contributing to this

<sup>3</sup> Around 20.8% of OOSC in the northeast were attending non-formal education as of 2022, with 36.6% of this number enrolled in Qur’anic/Madrassa/Islamic schools.

normative incoherence by supporting non-formal schools, including religious schools, in line with a global mandate to leave no children behind and focus on areas with the greatest needs.

**Responsibilities for primary education at the federal, state and local levels are not clearly delineated and often overlap, which can push actors into stalemate.** Responsibility for the implementation of basic education strategies is usually divided between the Universal Basic Education Commission, Universal Basic Education Boards and Local Government Education Authorities. In some instances, responsibility for secondary education policy implementation is shared between State Ministries of Education and State Education Boards. The National Mass Education Commission and State Agencies for Mass Education also have the power to articulate and implement basic education policies. Numerous entities, such as the Teacher Registration Council of Nigeria, the Teachers Service Board and the National Teachers' Institute, have similar or adjacent mandates, all involved with or focused on teachers. Such fragmentation is not uncommon in bureaucratic systems with multiple actors, and can lead to discord between prescribed and actual responsibilities.

**Against this background of weak vertical and horizontal coordination, state governors sometimes play a crucial role in driving forward reforms.** This influence translates into diverse outcomes, ranging from swift progress in certain programmes to occasional challenges and cherry-picking in the implementation of federal-level strategies. Some initiatives articulated at the national level, such as teacher training and direct school funding, have not materialised because governors have had the discretion to implement particular aspects, rather than the integrated whole, of the school improvement package (Ogbonna, 2016). The importance of state governors is visible also in the health sector. For example, policy advocacy with the state governor of Anambra was crucial to achieving progress on maternal and child health care (Uzochukwu et al., 2020).

**Mechanisms for the disbursement of funds from federal to state level put regions that are most in need at a disadvantage, and constrain state officials' capacity to respond to crises.** The main vehicle for decentralising funds – the Universal Basic Education Intervention Fund – provides conditional grants to state governments to cover costs related to school feeding and capital projects, as well as standing operational costs. To access these funds, states must provide matching contributions. Conflict-affected and poorer states often face difficulties meeting this requirement. These allocations are granted on a flat level, ignoring the fact that conflict-affected states may need more support. If state officials want to channel funds from other budget lines in the federal pot into emergency education, they struggle to do so in the absence of permissive federal regulations.

**Operational incoherence is visible in humanitarian and development sector teacher training programmes, which are often short-term, lacking clear links for sustained impact.** Both sectors have programmes that aim to address gaps in teacher proficiency. Humanitarian programmes typically focus on the delivery of accelerated learning programmes and alternative modalities of teaching, whereas development programmes prioritise delivery within the publicly funded system. Short-term teacher-focused programmes raise questions about the sustained impact of teacher training, especially when teachers equipped with conflict-sensitive pedagogies relocate away from environments where students require such approaches. The literature and interviews show that often both humanitarian and

development programmes, frequently unintentionally, provide training to individuals who are not educators. Non-teachers in the area, motivated by stipends offered by training organisations, participate in sessions but do not subsequently contribute to the teaching workforce. In the long term, a more targeted and strategic approach is needed to ensure training efforts align with the actual needs of the education sector.

## D. Opportunities for strengthening education system coherence in Northeast Nigeria

The above analysis shows that humanitarian and development actors are already sensitive to the government's position on the conflict, as limited donor investment in the northeast region demonstrates. Despite the challenging environment, however, there is scope to expand and deepen conflict-sensitive education planning and implementation via established and recognised government channels. To strengthen education system coherence, humanitarian and development actors could:

- **Develop relationships between government (North East Development Commission – NEDC) and humanitarian (EiEWG) coordination groups to create explicit and collective objectives for the education of conflict-affected children.** At present, these coordination groups operate in silos, lacking meaningful synergy. While both entities in principle involve state and/or local non-state actors, it is unclear to what degree the government can or wants to take a greater role in setting the direction on the status of education in emergencies. Improving alignment here would involve actively working to shape a collective objective and milestones for education in emergencies in conflict-affected states. As a starting point, there is a clear advantage to using NEDC and EiEWG for regular information-sharing and joint decision-making along both the horizontal and the vertical axes of the education system, at least at the state level.
- **Prioritise coordination and advocacy at the state level, through and with state-level governors.** In Nigeria, state-level executives play a pivotal role in determining the level of support and protection afforded to actors in executing their designated functions within the education system. Their support is often essential to overcoming the fragmentation of actors in the education sector. For humanitarian actors and development donors, engaging at the state level represents a clear opportunity to develop and advocate for integrated education in emergencies budget lines and overarching implementation goals. This is particularly relevant in the BAY states (Borno, Adamawa and Yobe), where state governors are directly affected by the conflict and, like humanitarian sector actors, frequently advocate for the financing and integration of religious schools. At the state level, a combination of political negotiation and joint capacity assessment is most likely to produce clear objectives for both the humanitarian and development sectors to lead to system-level improvements.
- **Transition to a state-level funding model for education in emergencies (in both conflict-affected and IDP-receiving states) that is predictable and recognises the protracted nature of conflict and climate-induced displacement.** This means focusing on the needs of ministries of education within these states and creating integrated funding budgets across the humanitarian and development sectors at the state level. In the past, integrated funding models at the state level – such as the EU-funded programme for Borno, which funded educational initiatives through Plan International and

Save the Children – have shown some success in placing OOSC in mainstream schools (Perret, 2019; Haruna, 2022).

- **Share information across sector actors before launching education programmes at the state level.**  
For example, in relation to teacher training programmes in conflict-affected states, donors and implementing partners should disclose data on (i) the nature of the training and how it will respond to gaps in current training; (ii) the geographical area of focus and any previous similar trainings undertaken; (iii) the planned deployment of teachers once they are trained; and (iv) clear impact indicators of training, moving beyond recording only ‘numbers of teachers trained.’ Existing groups such as NEDC and EiEWG are a good place to start in gathering and sharing this type of information.



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