



Advancing Inclusive Education in Northern Nigeria

Story of
Change

TWO LEARNERS INTERACTING IN A PRIMARY SCHOOL CLASSROOM IN KADUNA

Through sensitisation and capacity-building efforts supported by the UK-funded Partnership for Learning for All in Nigeria (PLANE) programme, education administrators in Jigawa, Kaduna and Kano states are increasingly integrating gender and social inclusion (GESI) principles into basic education planning and delivery. This reflects a growing commitment to building a more inclusive and equitable learning environment across the three states. New initiatives are emerging, such as support for children with disabilities to attend school, policy reforms, measures that enable married girls to continue their education, gender-sensitive recruitment and deployment of teachers, and a more deliberate involvement of women, girls and persons with disabilities in education. These efforts are helping to ensure that no Nigerian child is left behind in accessing basic education.

In Nigeria, especially in the north and most rural areas, many children face significant barriers to accessing basic education due to factors such as gender, disability, geographic location, and cultural practices like early marriage. However, with increased awareness and collaboration among government partners and support from PLANE, education stakeholders in three northern states of Jigawa, Kaduna and Kano are ensuring that children in the region get access to quality education regardless of their social background or the prevailing situations.

Leading Stakeholders to Action

The UK-funded PLANE Programme is showing how a combination of targeted capacity building, mentoring and coaching can transform education access, particularly for children who are often marginalised or disadvantaged. Working with stakeholders, including gender and disability desk officers, headteachers and teachers, the programme is making efforts to improve awareness around gender and social inclusion (GESI), and this awareness is leading to positive transformations in education delivery.



“Even though pupils were being cared for, it wasn’t done in the way it is now with PLANE”, recalls Salamatu Bashir, Gender Desk Officer, Jahun local government area, Jigawa State, as she describes how much her awareness level has changed since she attended a PLANE-supported training in her state. Salamatu further added: “Before PLANE was introduced, as Gender Desk Officers, whenever we visited schools for monitoring, we only focused on

administrative activities. We didn't pay attention to the pupils' well-being or whether they were doing okay. We didn't consider what might be happening to them, whether they were in trouble or needed help. Honestly, we didn't prioritise this. But with the introduction of PLANE and the training we received, our capacity increased, and we now understand that school inspections shouldn't only focus on pupils' academic performance. We were taught about all of these issues, and even the teachers received training."

Stakeholders are not only becoming more conscious, but they are also leading change in their respective communities. Officials like Jamila Garba, 45, a Safeguarding Officer with the Kano State Universal Basic Education Board (SUBEB) are helping vulnerable children attend and enjoy school despite their disabilities. One inspiring example Jamila proudly recalls is about Halima, a schoolgirl with a disability who, thanks to community support encouraged by SUBEB, received a wheelchair that eased her daily journey to school.

Still wanting to make schooling much easier for Halima, Jamila and Halima's head teacher came up with an idea. According to Jamila, the head teacher announced at the school assembly that henceforth everyone should treat Halima as the queen of the school; she should be hailed by everyone who sees her and escorted to and from school by prefects and schoolmates who live close to her house.



JAMILA GARBA, 45, A SAFEGUARDING OFFICER WITH THE KANO STATE UNIVERSAL BASIC EDUCATION BOARD (SUBEB)

"So that's how everyone in the school started hailing Halima. And when they get to her house, the entire household would come out to greet her. People in the community are now motivated to bring in their children who have special needs to school," Jamila noted, that the support for Halima was opening learning opportunities for more children with disabilities.

She was happy that her participation in a Gender Equality and Social Inclusion (GESI) training had been put to good use.

Empowering Women and Girls

Besides being aware that a disability should not stop learning, Nura Ibrahim, 49, the Director of Special Duties in Kano SUBEB, confirmed that he also learned so much about inclusion and ensuring all children, particularly girls, remain in school and complete their education.

"Because of this knowledge and training received on gender inclusiveness, we conduct advocacy, enlightening the society, telling people in the community that everybody should be engaged in learning, especially the girls. Girl-child education is very, very important. Most of them are responding to that, and most of the parents agree," Nura said.

He added that even though there are still challenges with cultural practices such as early marriage, his organisation, SUBEB, also puts in a lot of work in ensuring behaviour change. **"SUBEB is doing everything possible to ensure that the advocacy and sensitisation reach everywhere. Sometimes we even go into communities with a projector and showcase some scenarios that will motivate parents to allow their children to continue with their education."**

Since 2021, PLANE has been supporting Kano, Kaduna and Jigawa states as well as the Federal Government to improve access to quality education for Nigerian children, especially girls and children with disabilities. PLANE's GESI interventions have benefited education officials across the states, empowering them with skills to help marginalised children access quality education regardless of their social identities, and to position women and girls among decision-makers, even down to community levels.

"We ensure that women and girls are included in the School-Based Management Committees (SBMCs). Before now, we hardly find women as SBMC chairmen, but I have a good number of them now as SBMC chairmen. From the last meetings we had, more women came out for the programmes than men. I'm happy with the participation of women in the SBMC," said Esther Jibji, 57, Kaduna SUBEB's SBMC Desk Officer.

It is expected that women's continuous involvement in education even in local communities will lead to a more inclusive decision-making process and more importantly, improved enrolment of children, particularly girls.



ESTHER JIBJI, 57, KADUNA SUBEB'S SBMC DESK OFFICER

Mainstreaming GESI into Policy

In addition to the GESI training for education officials in Jigawa, Kaduna, and Kano states, the PLANE programme also supported the states in developing and implementing policies for mainstreaming GESI across the education ecosystem. The support includes ensuring GESI considerations in policies such as the Teacher Recruitment Policy, Girls' Education Policy, and Non-State School Policy, all of which are now approved in Kano State.

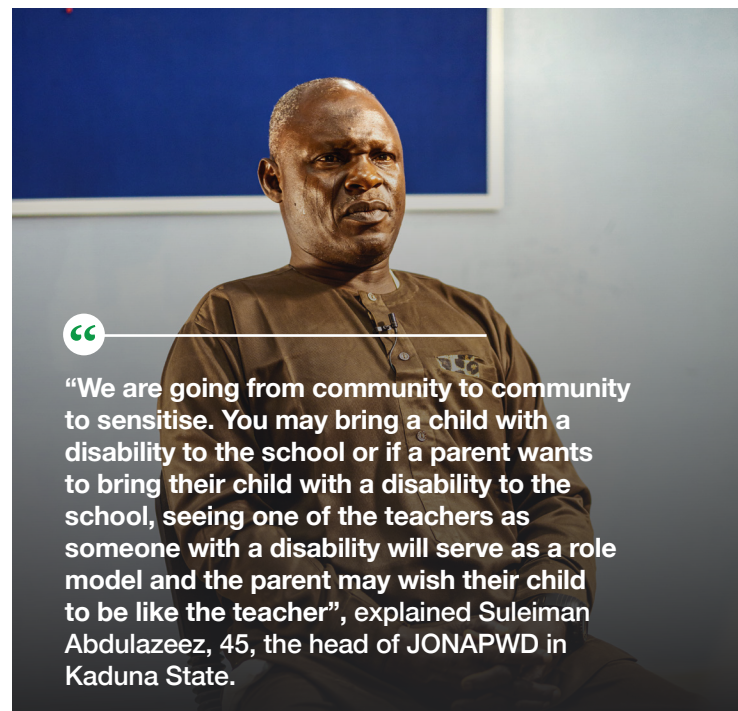
Furthermore, PLANE provided technical support for the review of Kaduna State's Gender Policy and Kano State's Inclusive Education Policy. A focus group discussion and key informant interviews were conducted to identify gaps and shortcomings in the Kano State IE policy. The outcomes included low stakeholder awareness of the inclusive education policy, leading to poor policy implementation; a significant shortage of trained Special Educators and insufficient training programmes for mainstreaming teachers in inclusive methodologies and practices; lack of accessible school infrastructure (ramps and assistive learning materials); limited community involvement fostering stigma towards children with disabilities; and insufficient financial resources hindering policy enforcement and progress. In response, PLANE is working with relevant stakeholders to address these gaps and ensure measures for policy compliance in the state.

To effectively support states' implementation of the Teacher Recruitment, Deployment and Replacement Policy, both Jigawa and Kano states are conducting a survey on the status of female teachers in the states. Evidence from the study will guide the states in addressing any gender imbalance and ensuring equity and inclusion in the recruitment and deployment of teachers in the states.

Furthermore, the Jigawa State House of Assembly has now appointed a Gender Desk Officer, following advocacy by PLANE, to help the legislative body make its law-making, budgeting and other oversight functions more gender-responsive and inclusive.

Working with Organisations of Persons with Disabilities and Supporting Agencies

PLANE has also been supporting both the organisations of persons with disabilities (OPDs) and agencies working on disability issues to strengthen the disability landscape across Jigawa, Kano and Kaduna states. The OPDs include the Joint National Association of Persons with Disabilities (JONAPWD), which has been leading advocacy for different categories of persons with disability, such as teachers with disability.



“We are going from community to community to sensitise. You may bring a child with a disability to the school or if a parent wants to bring their child with a disability to the school, seeing one of the teachers as someone with a disability will serve as a role model and the parent may wish their child to be like the teacher”, explained Suleiman Abdulazeez, 45, the head of JONAPWD in Kaduna State.

SULEIMAN ABDULAZEEZ, THE HEAD OF JONAPWD IN KADUNA STATE

With respect to teachers with disabilities, PLANE facilitated collaboration between the National Commission for Persons with Disabilities and Kaduna SUBEB in assessing the unique challenges and needs of teachers with disabilities in the state. Findings from the assessment led to the government providing assistive devices and infrastructure upgrades like the installation of ramps and accessible toilets in several schools. This has helped teachers and students with disabilities with the tools and facilities they need for effective teaching and learning.



A GROUP OF FEMALE LEARNERS STUDY TOGETHER DURING A PLANE-SUPPORTED HOLIDAY CAMP

Improving Education Access for the Underserved

Maryam Hassan Jibrin, a Gender Officer with Jigawa SUBEB, used skills from PLANE-supported GESI training to tackle low school attendance in Sundimina village, Birnin Kudu LGA. On visiting the school, she saw more children selling wares outside than in class and discovered that teachers lived 23 kilometres from the school, visiting only occasionally. So, parents preferred to let their children hawk rather than letting them go to school and meet no teachers. Fresh from the GESI training, Maryam knew she could help improve the situation in Sundimina.

“Instead of returning to Birnin Kudu, I went to the village head and introduced myself to him and the men in his court. I outlined what I had observed, told them that in a few years’ time they would have a large number of illiterates in the community while other communities are progressing. So, I pleaded with them for cooperation to come up with a solution,” Maryam recalled.

She returned to Sundimina a few days later to mobilise the school community to go to SUBEB to formally complain about the shortage of teachers in the school. Her action resulted in the recruitment of 13 local teachers and transport support for 20 others.

Now, with 574 pupils enrolled and families receiving uniforms and books, Maryam proudly shares, “The people of Sundimina are very happy with me and even gave me a [chieftaincy] title.”

At the federal level, additional efforts are being made to ensure that gender equality and social inclusion in education contexts are fostered nationally. A Community of Practice comprising education ministries, the National Commission of Persons with Disability, and the Ministry of Women Affairs, has already been formed, again with support from PLANE, to promote learning and knowledge sharing on GESI among education ministries, departments and agencies across the country.



MARYAM HASSAN JIBRIN, 47 GENDER OFFICER WITH JIGAWA SUBEB

Sustaining Inclusion through Systemic Change

The GESI efforts in Jigawa, Kaduna and Kano states, along with initiatives at the federal level, are all playing a vital role in ensuring that no child is excluded from learning because of their gender, disability or other forms of marginalisation. These efforts are supported by PLANE because they align with the programme’s broad objective of supporting Nigerian governments at all levels to improve access to quality education, particularly for girls and children with disabilities.

PLANE’s GESI support also complements a wider set of interventions designed to strengthen foundational learning. These include teacher training that prioritises the use of Hausa as the language of instruction for early grade learners, the provision of inclusive teaching and learning materials, head teacher mentoring, the strengthening of school monitoring mechanisms, and targeted community mobilisation interventions. Together, these interventions are laying the groundwork for a more inclusive, equitable, and sustainable education system in Nigeria.

* The opinions expressed in this publication are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the views of the UK Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office.