

Girls Education in Jigawa

Background

Educational access, quality and inequality for girls remain a problem in Nigeria. In 2010, it was estimated that only 35% of girls attend school in Jigawa state. Girls who are hardest to reach, such as nomadic girls, hawkers, married girls, migrants, and girls in more remote areas, are even more likely to drop out of school or never attend.

Why are girls in Jigawa not attending school? Poverty, and especially lack of resources and power in the hands of women, contributes directly to girls' ability to attend and succeed in school. Additionally, poor quality of schooling, including lack of separate toilets, few female teachers and poor teaching standards among other issues, further erode parents' and girls' commitment to education. Finally, strongly enforced gender roles in society encourage early marriage and teenage pregnancy, as well as limiting women's participation in decision making and planning in their communities.

However, commitment to and action on education is strong at the highest levels of Jigawa State government and an enabling policy environment invites innovation and action. The State has a notable track record of girls' education inputs and investing in improving outcomes in education.



Above:
JSS students in a
GEI School in Jigawa
(Jacobson & Fraser, 2014)

ESSPIN has been working in Jigawa since 2008, providing technical assistance to the State Universal Basic Education Board (SUBEB). Since March 2011, ESSPIN has worked with stakeholders in Jigawa state on the Girls Education Initiative (GEI) to support the government's aim of achieving universal access to education for all children especially girls.

The Girls Education Initiative (GEI) in Jigawa

The GEI is a project in Jigawa state that seeks to improve girls' access to and retention in education through a combination of four key areas of work:

Provision of school materials, including uniforms, books and sanitary materials to girls from poor families to help the girls go to school

Capacity building for women leaders to help them counsel and campaign for girls' education

Sporting activities for girls to increase girls' participation in sports in school

Media engagement to change the stereotypes and associated barriers to girls' education

There is also a fifth piece of work that supports this work:

Gender and Social Inclusion (GSI) Committee: a space for all stakeholders (SUBEB, SBMCs, media, CSOs, etc.) to come together to sit and plan jointly.

Scaling up the GEI across Jigawa

The pilot was tested in 48 schools in three Local Government Areas (LGAs), Roni, Birnima and Miga, from March to July 2011. As a result of ESSPIN support in the three pilot LGAs, a 2013 assessment found that 3,096 girls were retained in Primary 4, 5, 6 and supported with transition to Junior Secondary School 1. The pilot also reached wider communities, such as girls' families, who are targeted to come and watch their daughters play at sporting events.

Following the findings of the GEI pilot, Jigawa state approved an increase in budget allocation for the Girls Education Programme to 15% with a value of 218 million Naira (₦872,000). ESSPIN expanded support to 9 LGAs and SUBEB rolled out most of the elements of the ESSPIN model to cover all the 27 LGAs in Jigawa, such as working closely with communities, providing school uniform and sanitary pads to encourage girls' enrolment and retention.

From the initial 48 pilot schools, the GEI now covers a total of 330 schools in all LGAs (as of March 2016). The schools selected for the roll-out are rural schools with a low enrolment of girls. The schools have existing, but weak, SBMCs, women's committees and children's committees; therefore plans have been put in place to increase awareness through the SBMCs.

Provision of school materials

School materials such as uniforms, sandals, hijab, and sanitary pads have been identified by girls as material items that will help them stay in school, particularly at Primary 4, 5 and 6. This schooling period coincides with the age when parents begin to think about marrying out girls. Many parents see this as a time to collect dowry on the girls as against spending money to buying them school materials.

To help with the cost of attending and staying at school, girls from poor families are provided with essential items like uniforms, books and sanitary materials. All the 2,800 girls directly supported with school materials/uniform in the pilot activity were retained in school. An additional 296 girls were enrolled, associated with the monitoring/ counselling works of the women leaders, sporting activities and media programmes. Net attendance is higher in the ESSPIN-supported schools, helping to close the gender gap compared to other schools of the same status.

School and sanitary materials are distributed through SBMC members, using material provided by ESSPIN as well as through SBMC fundraising or individual members' own personal contributions. Women leaders in Miga say that girls particularly appreciate the sanitary pads and learning materials. Parents are pleased their daughters had received school materials and that they planned to support their daughters to stay in school. Importantly, women leaders say that being able to provide these materials has given them recognition and legitimacy in their leadership role in their community.

Capacity building for women leaders

Women leaders have been trained and mentored to support the programme in counselling and campaigning for girls' education. The women leaders have demonstrated strong enthusiasm for girls' education in their communities and for individual children.

Women leaders are engaged in a range of community sensitisation to encourage girls' education in Jigawa, including on issues around the importance of girls' education, early marriage, hawking, and seasonal absenteeism. Women leaders target community members at existing community events—e.g. naming ceremonies—and through more targeted household visits to families they know are facing problems.

Research in 2014 identified cases of women leaders successfully convincing parents, uncles and husbands-to-be to take actions to enable girls to continue their education, including: waiting to marry until after finishing a certain level of education; hawking in the afternoon after school; and allowing children to help with seasonal farming during non-school hours

Sport activities for girls

Sporting activities are recognised by Jigawa state as a means of attracting more girls to school. The programme has expanded sporting activities for girls by training CSOs to deliver school sporting activities and holding regular sports days in each LGA. By 2014, the GEI had piloted girls' sporting activities in 48 schools in three LGEAS in Jigawa, targeting 1,200 girls in primary schools, 200 out-of-school girls ages 14+ in rural areas, and 2,000 people in the community who attend community sport days to watch their children play. Now, sport is played in all of the LGA schools.

Various assessments have confirmed that girls enjoyed a variety of sports including athletics (relay races), football, handball, rope-skipping and volleyball and agree these sporting activities can help retain girls, as well as attract out-of-school girls in the community.

While it is clear that girls are enjoying these sports and see them as an attraction, until recently, sporting activities have mainly consisted of 'ad hoc one-off events'. SUBEB made commitments to further girls' sport opportunities, but limited budget stalled these efforts for several years.

Girls' sports encouraging out-of-school girls to enrol

The head of the Gender and Social Inclusion Committee told about one of her proudest moments, a sporting event in Miga, at which out-of-school girl hawkers came to observe the students playing sports. The next day, the Education Secretary called her to say that many girls were waiting outside the office for her—when she arrived, these girls were chanting her name! The Secretary said that, inspired by the sporting event, these girls asked their parents to enroll them, their parents said it was okay, and the girls were now waiting for her to enroll them in school. She went to their parents houses to get their permission, they all said yes, and so she bought the girls uniforms (and the Secretary bought the other school materials) and enrolled them.

Source: Jacobson and McAslan Fraser (2014) Practice Paper: Gender and Girls Education



Above: One of the beneficiaries of the GEI pilot project presented with school uniforms and books at Miga (ESSPIN, 2011)

A progress report in February 2016 found that 8,179 girls participated in school sports across Jigawa state. Girls sport has strong support and recognition by the Universal Basic Education Commission (UBEC) and is now part of the SUBEB action plan. Sporting activities will be offered to all schools in the State, and as a result of ESSPIN intervention for the first time girls from Jigawa state will take part in national sports competitions.

Media engagement

A key strategy for addressing gender disparities in Jigawa is the use of media campaigns to change stereotypes and associated barriers to girls' education.

Most recently, a radio programme was broadcast on Jigawa Radio in March 2016 to celebrate International Women's Day. CSO women representatives encouraged women to come out and celebrate the day, and voice their demands to education stakeholders and service providers.

The programme discussed the need for parents to encourage their children to go to schools and that only when a girl goes to school will she be able to get better recognition by society and equal rights with boys.

Gender and Social Inclusion (GSI Committee)

The GSI is a place for dialogue between government, CSOs and the community about the importance of girls' education and social inclusion. Many of the GSI committee members also work with SBMCs and women's committees, or are members of SBMCs themselves.

The GSI Committee has been involved in a range of work in Jigawa including reviewing the state Gender and Social Inclusion Policy, procuring and distributing school learning materials, and monitoring the work of SBMCs and Gender desk officer.

Achievements to date

The most notable achievement is the increase in girls' enrolment and retention at school. Analysis of data from Jigawa State's Annual School Census shows that while the percentage of girls enrolled in primary school has stayed constantly at 43% at the State average level, it has slowly increased in the three pilot areas: Miga (36% -> 40%), Roni (43% -> 47%), and Birniwa (44 -> 49%), suggesting an increase of 4-5% over the 5 years from 2009/10 to 2014/15.

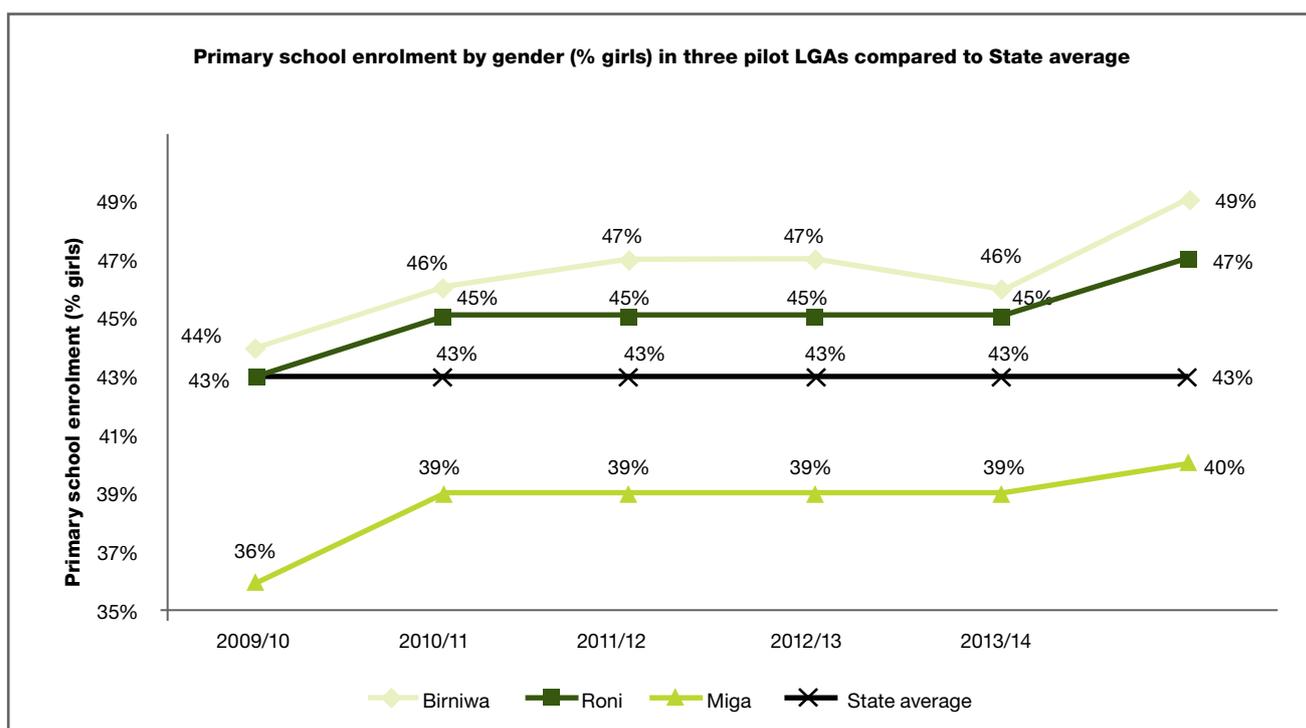
School attendance records showed significant improvement in retention in lower basic education and transition to upper basic in the pilot schools. The 2013 Mid-term Assessment found all girls supported with school materials had been retained in school, and additional girls had enrolled, attributed to women leaders, sporting activities, and media. 2016 data for the 330 roll-out schools shows girls' attendance levels at primary school of 80% (and 90% for JSS1).

The 2014 analysis of Jigawa data also showed some promising trends in girls' retention in school, but this was not consistent across the three GEI LGAs, with promising increases in girls' retention in Roni, but a concerning decline in Birniwa. Both assessments noted the challenge for schools in keeping appropriate records of such girls and the secondary schools they are enrolled.

Other achievements include the strong community involvement, with communities identifying needs for alternative learning opportunities and promoting the participation of all relevant groups. There had also been an increase in girls' participation in sports in school, with over 8,000 girls participated in school sports across Jigawa and 30 girls taking part at a national level.

The distribution of school uniforms and materials is also a key achievement of the programme. Qualitative research in the pilot LGAs found that women leaders attribute the enormous gains in girls' enrolment in primary school (they say from two to three girls per class to 60-80 girls in the school) to school uniform distribution – some of which came from ESSPIN, and some of which they supplemented through raising additional funds for girls who did not benefit from initial distribution.

Over 250 women leaders had been trained and mentored to support the programme. In the three pilot LGAs, women and girls demonstrated strong enthusiasm for girls' education in their communities.



Challenges

Challenges faced over the course of the programme include:

Coordination: The GSI committee faced some challenges at the outset, particularly around remit and how to work as one 'organisation' when the members come from a range of institutions. ESSPIN has helped to address this by reviewing and simplifying the GSI's TORs, and organisational development training to strengthen the committee's understanding of how to work better together and with SUBEB. ESSPIN supported the GSI to create a subcommittee of Girls Education state working group, Inclusive Education working group, and the Islamiyya, Qur'anic and Tsangaya Education (IQTE) state working group.

Monitoring and evaluation: Regular school monitoring was slow to get started, with a lack of adequate tools and strategies to monitor and follow up the activities of women leaders. A monitoring tool was developed to track girls' progress but this was not always used effectively. Monitoring of schools is part of the Gender Officer's role, and the Education Secretaries will provide transport allowances to enable them to visit rural schools for monitoring visits.

Knowledge management: Some of the historical data on school attendance records for the GEI is missing – an issue picked up in a 2014 briefing note and practice paper. Some of the records and monitoring reports are also not sourced or dated.



Above:
Students in a GEI
School in Jigawa
(Jacobson & Fraser, 2014))

Media engagement: The 2014 practice paper highlighted the need to strengthen GEI's media engagement, through building relationships with media outlets and journalists. It also recommended directly engaging religious leaders, many of whom have radio programmes, on which they could discuss issues around the girl child (protection, education, violence). This would help because one of the key problems is the religious misconception around girls' education, and positive deviant religious leaders could help debunk this.

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