

# Project Briefing

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## Key points

- Although social protection programmes increasingly reflect lifecycle vulnerabilities, attention to child protection deficits remain weak
- Despite widespread child protection vulnerabilities, social protection efforts in Nigeria have largely overlooked child protection concerns
- Linkages in social transfer programmes, social insurance, health and education subsidies, and better enforcement of social equity measures could promote synergies between child and social protection systems

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## Strengthening linkages between child protection and social protection systems in Nigeria

Nicola Jones

**B**uilding social protection to reduce risks related to developmental and life-cycle vulnerabilities is increasingly reflected in social transfer programmes globally and in many of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). However, social protection strategies and policy frameworks have often neglected children's vulnerability to violence, exploitation, abuse and neglect. In Nigeria, where child protection is a key concern, important gaps also exist in relation to national policy on social assistance for vulnerable children.

This Project Briefing summarises findings from a longer report which aimed to identify policy and programming gaps and offer recommendations on how Nigeria can implement its national development strategies to be more responsive to children's protection vulnerabilities. Drawing on secondary literature along with primary qualitative data collected from four states (Adamawa, Benue, Edo and Lagos), the report focused on linkages between child protection and social protection services regarding three key deficits – child trafficking; harmful forms of child labour; and child domestic abuse. These three issues were selected on account of the international evidence base documenting linkages between social protection initiatives and these child protection challenges.

### Child protection vulnerabilities

In mapping out policy and programming challenges and opportunities, it is first critical to understand the pattern of child protection vulnerabilities. Nigerian children are highly vulnerable not only to income poverty but also to a wide variety of other economic and social deprivations. We summarise these in Figure 1 (overleaf) and then go on to review the key drivers of trafficking, child labour and domestic abuse.

### Child trafficking

Child trafficking occurs largely within national boundaries, although some children are trafficked to southern Europe and the Middle East. Poverty is the single largest factor, but HIV, religious and traditional customs, and unequal gender relations are also important determinants. Girls are trafficked primarily into domestic service, street trading and commercial sexual exploitation, and boys typically into street vending, agriculture, mining, petty crime and the drug trade.

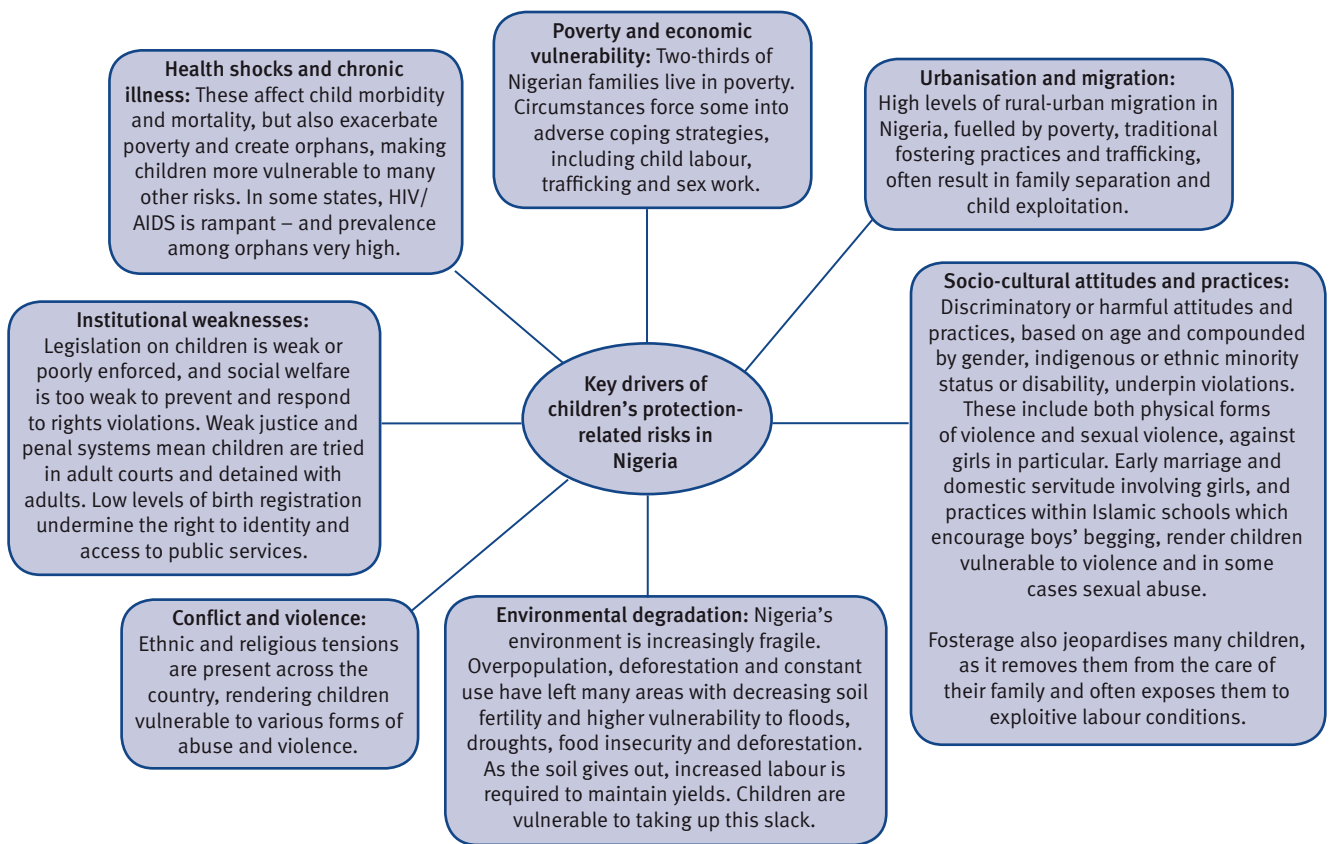
In Edo state, one in three families is estimated to have experienced some form of trafficking. As one key informant noted, *'Children are taken [trafficked] from rural communities by their extended family in pretence that they will be adequately taken care off. A promise of better living can be irresistible'*. Stark poverty and high rates of rural–urban migration in Benue mean this state experiences high levels of fosterage, with consequent risks of trafficking, especially for girls. Lagos is more of a destination than a source state.

### Harmful forms of child labour

An estimated 15 million children work in Nigeria, most of them in the informal sector. Children are often forced to work long hours in dangerous situations that are not appropriate to their stage in the life-cycle. In particular, they are more exposed to accidents, violence, sexual exploitation, trafficking and HIV. As a youth focus group in Benue noted, *'Some girls sell their body to make money and go to school, others work in hotels, though is not their wish to go and work there but they cannot help it'*.

Domestic workers, mostly girls, work long hours, are denied education and often their freedom of speech. They are also vulnerable to physical and sexual violence, as they are invisible to the larger community and wholly dependent on a single family. Boys who attend

**Figure 1: Poverty and inequality across states**



Almajiris (Koranic schools) are frequently forced into child labour (especially begging), abuse and even trafficking. In Adamawa, key informants noted that perpetrators were seldom held accountable and that such practices 'deprive children of other life-changing opportunities' and expose them to a range of social and economic risks. Orphans and vulnerable children (OVC) and children from poor, rural, northern Nigeria are significantly more likely to work. OVC often have nobody to care for them, and are consequently also more likely to be engaged in the worst forms of child labour.

### Child domestic abuse

Child domestic abuse is often regarded as part of the socialisation process in Nigeria, and children cannot speak out, given their subordinate position in the home. Abuse can be physical, physiological or psychological, and can result from economic hardship and/or the breakdown of the traditional family unit. Girls, especially OVC and those fostered out, are increasingly vulnerable to sexual abuse.

One non-governmental organisation (NGO) key informant gave an example of an orphan abused sexually by her uncle which underscores the gender and age power dynamics often at play: *'[she said] "Uncle why do you want to do this, knowing that I do not have any parents and it is you I look up to as my parents?" [Yet, her uncle insisted] "If you have a tree you have been taking care of over the years, when*

*the fruits begin to ripen, will you not want to be the first to take of it?"'*

Meanwhile, early marriage denies girls access to education, is detrimental to their mental and physical development and deprives them of control over their reproductive health. Children with disabilities may also suffer emotional and educational neglect within the home as well as other forms of psychological abuse. Finally, children suspected of witchcraft may be beaten publicly, ejected from their home and left to fend for themselves.

### Policy and programming responses

Although the Nigerian federal government has passed a comprehensive Child Rights Act (2003), a number of state governments have not implemented it at state level and overall financial and human resourcing has been very limited, hampering its effectiveness. Along with often poor enforcement and insufficient documentation on rights violations, this means the principle of the child's best interests is often not embedded in government institutions and society. These deficits are reflected in the country's social protection systems and programmes, as we discuss further below.

### Governmental responses

Overall, government has made efforts to improve social equity measures related to child protection,

but many limitations remain in terms of programme coverage, human resourcing and financial support. The Trafficking in Persons (Prohibition) Law Enforcement and Administration Act was passed in 2003, leading to significant progress, especially in terms of prosecution and awareness raising. It was led by the National Agency for the Prohibition of Traffic in Persons in partnership with UN agencies and other government institutions at both federal and state levels. However, enforcement, awareness and prosecution all remain a challenge.

In terms of child labour, although education is free in Nigeria, costs associated with it often prove prohibitive for poor families, meaning children are still forced to work, either to attend school or to support the family full-time. The Nigerian Federal Ministry of Employment, Labour and Productivity Inspectorate Department, which includes the Child Labour Unit, coordinates efforts to combat child labour, including training, awareness raising and inspections in high-risk areas, such as agriculture and mining. However, inspection has largely been ineffective, primarily because of resource and capacity constraints and also because it is often limited to the formal business sector, where the level of child labour is relatively low. In addition, the labour law specifies merely that children should not be engaged in work activities that are 'illegal or immoral' – particularly hazardous work forms have not been added to the list.

While high-level policy indicates a commitment to preventing child domestic abuse, enforcement and public awareness leave much to be desired. However, small-scale efforts have been initiated: the police and other law enforcement agencies now have units to deal exclusively with violence against children, and the Federal Ministry of Women's Affairs and Social Development operates a number of shelters for female victims of abuse, offering them counselling, basic medical care and access to legal assistance. In addition, the ministry works with the police, trying to shift the perception that domestic abuse is a private affair and to instil an understanding that legal action, not 'thicker doors', is urgently needed. Federal and state governments work through the media, local communities and churches and mosques to sensitise parents on their responsibilities regarding their children.

### Non-governmental and international agency responses

Given limited government initiatives, national and international non-governmental organisations' (INGOs) work on trafficking in Nigeria is also important. Public education interventions are the most common, with some NGOs also rescuing and repatriating victims. UN agencies foster agreements/partnerships between the Nigerian and other national governments. Despite good overall relationships, coordination remains an issue, with duplication and fragmentation sometimes ending up with trafficking merely being displaced from one area to another.

A number of partnerships between government and NGOs aim to reduce child labour. The majority build on the relationship between trafficking, sex work and labour. International agencies, particularly the International Labour Organization and the UN Children's Fund, have been very involved, in partnership with government and national NGOs, in rescuing children, running shelters, providing vocational training and mobilising communities.

NGOs and INGOs are arguably less involved in efforts to combat domestic child abuse. National NGOs' efforts include generating public sensitivity and supporting the rehabilitation of abused children, although state-level NGOs are more visible. NGOs and INGOs are working to end child marriage: sensitisation campaigns seem to be having some success. Other INGO programming is dedicated to capacity-building for organisations on the ground in the community and to awareness-raising, including around the Child Rights Act.

### Child protection and social protection linkages

As the above indicates, more strategic and comprehensive action is urgently needed, especially if Nigeria is to achieve the child-focused MDGs. One potential approach relates to the overlaps between child protection and social protection systems and services: if these were to be promoted actively, significant synergies could be realised, especially in the context of the pronounced resource constraints facing Nigeria's social sector agencies.

Indeed, at the policy level, these linkages have been recognised to an extent in a number of key policy and strategy documents, including the 2004 Social Protection Strategy, the 2003-2007 National Economic Empowerment Strategy and the 2010-2013 National Implementation Plan for Vision 20:2020. However, the limited policy traction of social protection at both federal and state levels weakens programme links – as Table 1 highlights (overleaf). Synergies are evident only in donor-run conditional cash transfer programmes and NGO-run school subsidy/fee waiver programmes for OVC, but even here coverage is very limited. If synergies between the two systems are to become a reality, going to scale will require a clear strategy, stronger political commitment and increased resourcing.

### Conclusions and policy implications

The extreme weakness of child protection services in Nigeria, and the fact that social protection is marginal to the current policy agenda mean that building a child-sensitive social protection system will undoubtedly be challenging – especially given the broader governance concerns in the country. In order to address the key social and economic drivers of child protection deprivations, partnership efforts between government departments, donors and international agencies, NGOs and INGOs need

**Table 1: Existing and potential linkages between social protection and child protection systems in Nigeria**

Type of social protection	Description of programme	Potential child protection link	Evidence of linkages in Nigeria
Social assistance	In Care of the People cash transfer	1. Birth registration 2. Awareness-raising in community educational forums 3. Non-involvement in harmful forms of child labour	No direct linkages but indirect linkage by helping prevent families resorting to adverse coping strategies which could result in child protection deficits
Social assistance	Other conditional cash transfers in Kano, Bauchi and Katsina states funded by UNICEF, World Bank and DFID	4. Compulsory educational and health clinic attendance 5. Promotion of linkages between complementary services (e.g. remedial services for victims of child protection deficits)	Specific recognition of risk of deficits among girls; programmes support households to retain girls in school and, in Katsina, refer participants to complementary services
Social insurance	Community-based health insurance	Cross-referral of children between health and child protection services	No linkages in policy documents. Focus still on scheme management (re. community control), financing
Health subsidies/fee waivers	Maternal and Child Health Scheme	Cross-referral of children between health and child protection services. Could also promote linkages with early child marriage, child trafficking, hazardous forms of child labour, etc.	No linkages in policy documents. No linkages identified in primary research
School subsidies/ fee waivers	No national school subsidy but state, donor and NGO-run programmes, including as part of HIV/AIDS programmes for OVC	Cross-referral of children to child welfare and health services; could raise awareness among girls on risks of trafficking, early marriage, etc.	Small-scale programmes in some states with such linkages
Productive transfers, works and subsidies	National Job Creation Scheme	Public works labour could be used to support awareness-raising at local levels on deficits; to serve as assistants to under-staffed social welfare agencies in delivering child protection services	No linkages in existing policy documents
Social equity/ transformative social protection measures	Anti-discrimination and affirmative action legislation	Legislation regarding intra-family violence, sexual violence and trafficking, child labour, birth registration, etc.	Passage of Civil and Political Rights Covenant, Economic, Social and Cultural Rights Covenant; 2003 Child Rights Act. 2007 CEDAW bill failed



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to be concentrated on:

1. strengthening awareness and enforcement of relevant legislative and policy frameworks
2. supporting more effective inter-agency and inter-sectoral institutional arrangements, including state-specific capacity-building for effective programme planning, financing, delivery, coordination and monitoring and evaluation
3. strengthening information systems and knowledge-sharing in order to improve the evidence base on vulnerabilities, underlying drivers and the impact of formal and informal responses
4. investing in awareness-raising, prevention and response services to address vulnerabilities,

in partnership with schools, health facilities, police, the justice system, civil society (including traditional and religious leaders) and the private sector

5. promoting synergies between small-scale child protection initiatives and broader social protection and poverty reduction programmes (cash transfers, social health insurance, school fee waivers and public works schemes), to enhance the reach of child protection interventions and tackle the multi-dimensionality of child vulnerabilities more effectively.

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### Project Information:

This Project Briefing is part of a UNICEF Nigeria funded project on child-sensitive social protection entitled 'Social Protection Diagnostic and Forward Agenda for UNICEF'. The project aims

to support the Government of Nigeria in realising its overarching development strategy (*The Vision 20:2020*) and the development of a national social protection strategy. The project has five thematic sub-components: social protection mapping and effectiveness; cash transfers; HIV/AIDS; child protection; and fiscal space. The study has been commissioned by UNICEF Nigeria and the National Planning Commission and funded by UNICEF Nigeria and UNFPA. It was carried out by ODI in partnership with Gender and Development Action (GADA) and the Centre for Women's Health & Information (CEWHIN).

For more information visit: <http://bit.ly/social-protection-nigeria>

