



Education and Systematic Group Inequalities in Nigeria

Peace Research Institute Oslo (PRIO)
PO Box 9229 Grønland, NO-0134 Oslo, Norway
Visiting Address: Hausmanns gate 3

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On the night between 14 and 15 April, 2014, 276 girls were kidnapped by Boko Haram from their school in Chibok in Borno State in Northeastern Nigeria. The Islamist terrorist group does not believe that girls should attend school, and these girls were targeted precisely because they were in school. However, conservative views on gender and education is only one reason why many girls in Northern Nigeria are missing out on education. Due to large systematic inequalities related to religion, ethnicity and region, many girls are suffering from a triple disadvantage when it comes to educational inequality. This policy brief provides an overview of the types and magnitudes of educational inequalities in Nigeria and offers some policy recommendations on how to respond to these inequalities.

Brief Points

- Nigeria is one of the countries with the sharpest educational inequalities in Africa.
- Girls receive far less education than boys.
- Northerners receive far less education than Southerners.
- Muslims receive far less education than Christians.
- The above group inequalities tend to reinforce each other.
- If anything, educational inequalities in Nigeria have been increasing over the years.
- Policy makers should strive to reduce systematic educational group inequalities.
- There is a need for better data on educational quality and performance in developing countries.

Siri Aas Rustad
Gudrun Østby

Peace Research Institute Oslo (PRIO)
Peace Research Institute Oslo (PRIO)

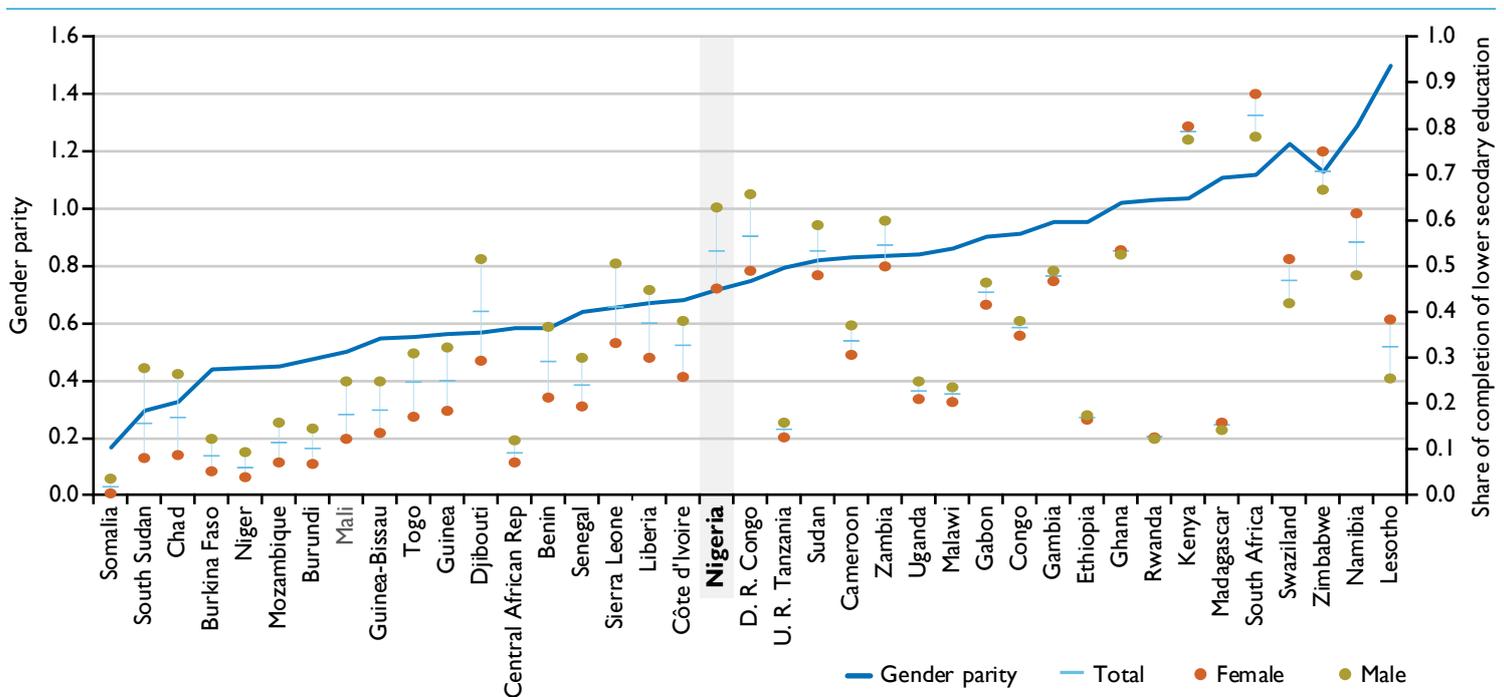


Figure 1: Lower secondary education completion in sub-Saharan Africa, by gender (2006–2014).
Source: Authors' calculation based on data from the World Inequality Database on Education WIDE (using the most recent year available for each country).

Inequality and Education

Withholding education from someone is a tragedy not only on the individual level, but also for society at large. Research shows that increased levels of education have an overall pacifying effect, while educational inequalities between groups increase the likelihood of conflict. While, inequalities are often understood and measured as inequalities between individuals, a large academic literature has found that inequalities between groups increase grievances and the likelihood of conflict. Group identities could be linked to cultural aspects such as religion and ethnicity, geographical and regional differences, as well as groups defined by gender or age.

Nigeria is one of the most socioeconomically unequal countries in Africa. Survey data indicate that in 2013, approximately 80% of boys at the age of 15–17 (i.e. 3–5 years older than expected primary education graduation age) had completed primary school, while the corresponding share for girls was 66%. Further, women from the Yoruba tribe have more than five times as many years of schooling than Hausa women. Finally, Muslim women living in predominantly Christian areas in the south have a considerably higher level of school completion than Muslim women living in predominantly Muslim areas in the north. In sum, many girls living in Northern Nigeria suffer from multiple sources of disadvantage, not just because they are girls, but also due to systematic cultural and regional inequalities.

Patterns of Educational Inequalities in Nigeria

Below we elaborate on the various types of educational inequalities in Nigeria.

Gender-based inequalities

Figure 1 provides an overview of the levels of completion of lower secondary education and gender parity in 39 countries in sub-Saharan Africa. The completion rate is indicated on the right-hand axis, and the difference between girls and boys is indicated by the distance between the green (boys) and orange (girls) dots for each country. The horizontal line in-between shows the overall completion level. Compared to many other African countries, the average level of education in Nigeria is relatively high. However, Figure 1 indicates that Nigeria has one of the largest differences between boys and girls. Only two countries (South Sudan and Djibouti) have a larger difference. On the left-hand axis, the gender parity, meaning the female-to-male ratio of school completion, is measured. For Nigeria, the gender parity is 72; this indicates that 72 girls complete school for every 100 boys doing the same.

Differences between boys and girls could be attributed to levels of poverty, forcing parents to prioritize their investments between their children, potentially pulling more daughters than sons out of school. Also, safety and security issues may pertain to girls to a larger degree than to boys, with girls having

high risks of sexual and gender-based violence when moving outside the home. Boko Haram's view that girls should not attend school may explain why many of their attacks have been directed towards girls, such as the abduction in Chibok.

Regional inequalities

While the completion rates for both girls and boys are fairly high in Nigeria compared to many other African countries, there are large regional differences. The differences between the North and the South can be dated back to the early 1900s.

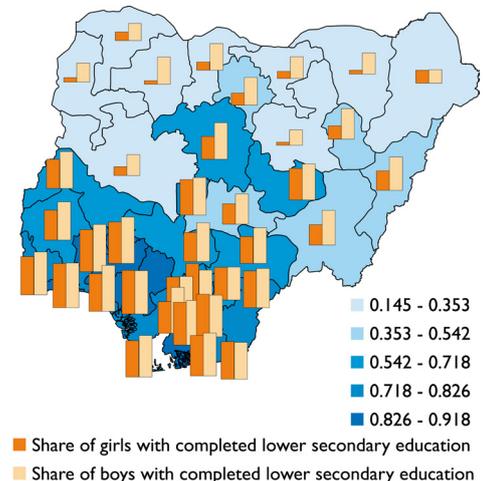


Figure 2: Lower secondary education completion rate, by gender. Source: WIDE (2011).

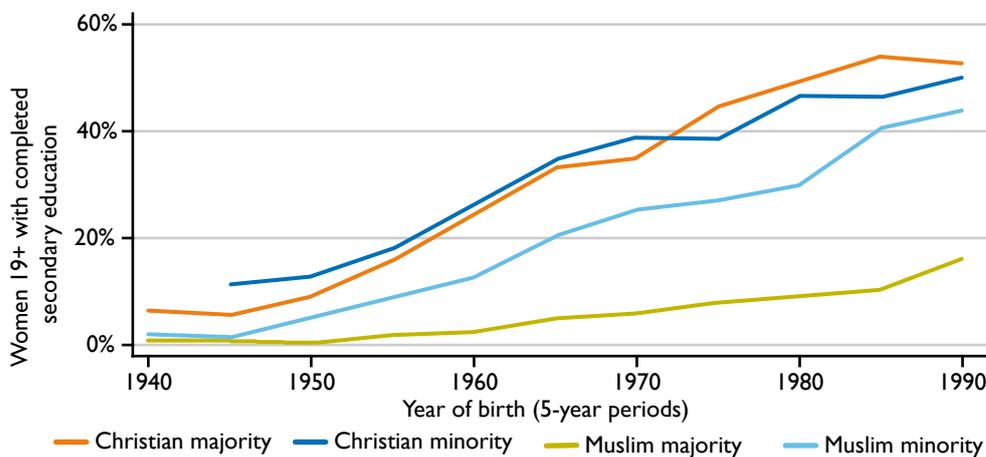


Figure 3: Share of women who completed secondary education in Nigeria, by religion and cohort. Source: DHS (1999, 2008, 2011 and 2013).

During the colonial period, the British practiced indirect rule, which implies that they essentially ruled through the agency of the existing rulers, thus under the restriction of the colonial government. In the North, the indirect rule policy allowed for the continuation of the traditional Emirate system, i.e. a Caliphate with local emirates. In the South, on the other hand, there were few existing political entities, thus the locally warranted chiefs leaned more towards the British educational and economic systems. These differential paths to social mobility and nobility largely account for the contrasting responses of Northern and Southern peoples to Western modernity, and especially to education. In the North, a large share of children was sent to Muslim schools, while in the South, schools offering Western education became more important. Already in 1914, the South had 13 times as many schools offering Western education as the North had.

What about contemporary regional educational inequalities in Nigeria? Figure 2 displays the total completion rate of lower secondary education for each federal state in Nigeria (with darker colors indicating a higher completion rate), as well as the completion rates for girls and boys. The map clearly shows that the southern regions perform much better than the northern regions. It also seems that the lower the overall completion rate is, the lower is the share of girls compared to boys. This can be seen in Zamfara in the Northwest for instance, where the total completion rate is 35%, yet boys are five times more likely to finish lower secondary education than girls. The exception is the state of Borno, where both boys and girls suffer, with a total completion rate of 27%. This is the stronghold of Boko Haram: an area where schools have been destroyed or closed down, and teachers have been killed. Human Rights Watch has indicated that

more than one million school children have fled from violence in northeastern Nigeria. Regional educational differences between the North and South in Nigeria are not unique. There are indeed similar patterns of regional inequalities with regard to economic welfare, health and infrastructure.

Cultural inequalities

In Nigeria, there is a considerable gap in the average levels of education between Muslims and Christians, with the latter having approximately twice as many years of education than Muslims. This fits well with the regional picture of a predominantly Muslim North and predominantly Christian South. We can observe the same trend when we compare Christian and Muslim women. Figure 3 shows the difference in the share of secondary education between women who belong to a religious minority/majority in the area they live, i.e. Muslim women living in predominantly Christian areas, and vice versa. Christian minority women have a slightly lower level of education compared to Christian women living in Christian dominated areas. Thus, it seems that for Christian women it makes very little difference where they live with regard to their educational prospects. On the other hand, Muslim minority women have a much higher likelihood of achieving secondary education than Muslim women living in Muslim-majority areas.

While religion is an important identity-marker in Nigeria, it is also interesting to look at ethnic affiliation, particularly since ethnicity and religion (as well as region) do not fully overlap. While the Hausa-Fulani is predominantly Muslim and the Igbo predominantly Christian, the Yoruba ethnic group is mixed, and mainly situated in the Southeast. It is thus included in what we define as the South. Figure 4 indicates the development of mean years of schooling over time for women

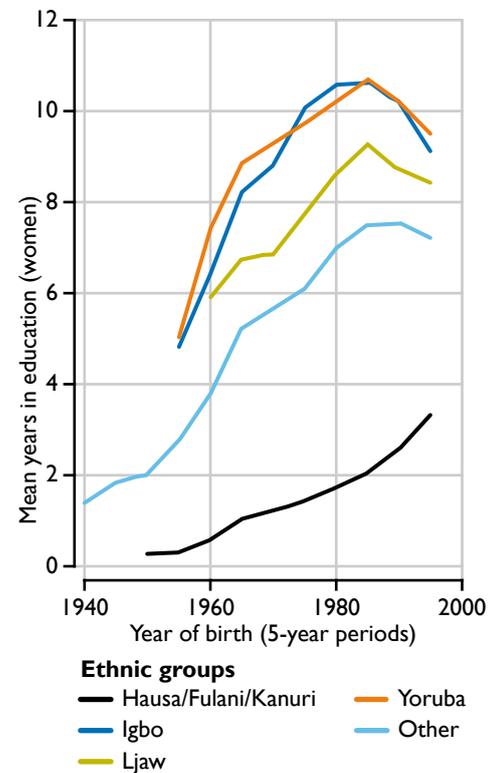


Figure 4: Mean years of education for women in Nigeria over time, by ethnic affiliation. Source: DHS (1999, 2008, 2011 and 2013).

broken down by ethnicity. We see that the Igbo and Yoruba perform much better than other groups, while the Hausa-Fulani are lagging behind, and have had a slower development than most other groups. This could possibly explain the finding that Muslim women in predominantly Christian areas perform better.

Educational inequalities have increased over time

In both Figures 3 and 4 we see that the development for both Hausa-Fulani and Muslim women living in predominantly Muslim areas has been much slower compared to all others. This provides two important insights. First, the inequalities that were established in the colonial period have not diminished since independence, but rather increased. Second, political attempts at reducing inequalities by either national educational reforms or by donors through development aid have not been successful.

Education and Reinforced Cleavages

Previous cross-national research has found that ethnically mixed societies and countries with Muslim majorities have higher levels of gender inequality in education, everything else being equal.

Figure 5 indeed shows that the gender parity of education varies by religion, and much more so in Nigeria than in many other African countries. In about half of the countries there seems to be a larger difference between Muslim boys and girls compared to gender inequalities among Christians.

In Nigeria, the mean average of attained school years for Christian women is 10.2 years, compared to 11.08 years for Christian men. However, the gender inequalities are much more pronounced among Muslims. The mean years of schooling for Muslim women is 3.8, while Muslim men have almost twice as much education (7.3 years on average).

Summary and Policy Recommendations

This policy brief has shown that educational inequalities in Nigeria are reinforced by regional, cultural, and gender-based cleavages. In short, the North is less educated than the south, Muslims receive less education than Christians, and girls suffer from a gender-bias in favor of boys. Hence, we need to consider all these in concert in order to capture the full picture of educational inequality in Nigeria. It also seems that the various cleavages tend to reinforce each other. For example, the difference in girls' and boys' educational level varies by region, with the Northern part of the country displaying the sharpest gender inequalities (Figure 2).

Furthermore, policy makers need to take into account the complex patterns of educational inequalities when planning interventions to make sure that they target the most marginalized groups and help to reduce the most severe education gaps in Nigeria. Committing to reduce systematic educational inequalities between cultural groups can contribute to reducing the risk of armed conflict, as well as reducing gender-based inequalities.

A broad, cost-effective way of getting more girls to attend school is to enhance the quality of schools. Previous research has shown that the quality of education and of educational facilities affects girls more than boys. Girls are less likely to enroll in,

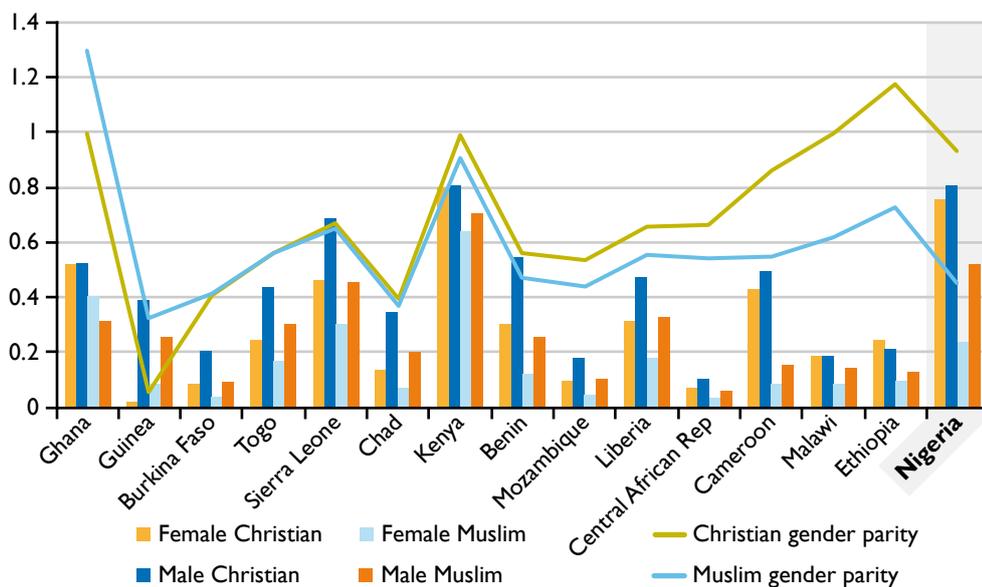


Figure 5: Gender parity in terms of lower secondary education in selected countries, by religion (2005–2014). Source: WIDE (Most recent year available for each country).

and more likely to drop out of, poor quality schools and schools that are lacking teachers and adequate school materials such as textbooks.

Finally, it is important to stress that in addition to understanding what affects gender- and culturally based inequalities in education attainment, we need to better understand the causes of systematic inequalities in terms of education quality and student performance. Such studies exist for e.g. OECD countries, but to our knowledge there is a lack of such data for developing countries at large. Hence, a final recommendation is to facilitate and prioritize the collection of data on educational quality and performance in developing countries. ■

Further Reading

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THE AUTHORS

Siri Aas Rustad is Senior Researcher at PRIO and leads the Conflict trends and DEAFIN projects. She is a Nigeria expert, her research interests include conflict, aid and inequalities. Gudrun Østby is Senior Researcher at PRIO and Editor of the Journal of Peace Research. Her research interests include the relationship between conflict and maternal health, education and inequality.

THE PROJECT

The Conflict Trends project aims to answer questions related to the causes of, consequences of and trends in conflict through quality-based analysis. The DEAFIN project aims to investigate Inequalities in Conflict-Affected Societies and the effectiveness of development aid. The Norwegian MFA and the research council have funded this research.

PRIO

The Peace Research Institute Oslo (PRIO) is a non-profit peace research institute (established in 1959) whose overarching purpose is to conduct research on the conditions for peaceful relations between states, groups and people. The institute is independent, international and interdisciplinary, and explores issues related to all facets of peace and conflict.