

# INCREASING PRIMARY SCHOOL ATTENDANCE IN THE WAKE OF VIOLENT CONFLICT IN BORNO

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**EDOREN**   
Education Data, Research and Evaluation in Nigeria

The education system in north-east Nigeria has been devastated by nearly eight years of armed conflict between Boko Haram and the Nigerian government. Targeted attacks on schools and teachers, multiple forced displacements and a protracted food security crisis have further weakened a school system in Borno that was already struggling to attain significant school attendance and learning outcomes at the primary school level before to the onset of conflict.

Less than  
**1 in 5** 

primary- school-aged children were estimated to attend primary school in Borno State in 2015

As a result, it was estimated that only 17% (less than one in five) of primary-school-aged children attended primary school in Borno State, the epicentre of the conflict, in 2015 (National Population Commission (NPC) and RTI International 2016a).

If Nigeria is to have a chance of achieving the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4 on education (“ensure inclusive and quality education for all and promote lifelong learning”), the education system in Borno must be adequately supported as part of a broader post-conflict recovery programme.

## Research Outline

The UK Aid funded EDOREN project conducted two case studies of communities in and near Maiduguri to understand the main reasons for low school



Nigeria faces a major opportunity to increase primary school attendance in Borno

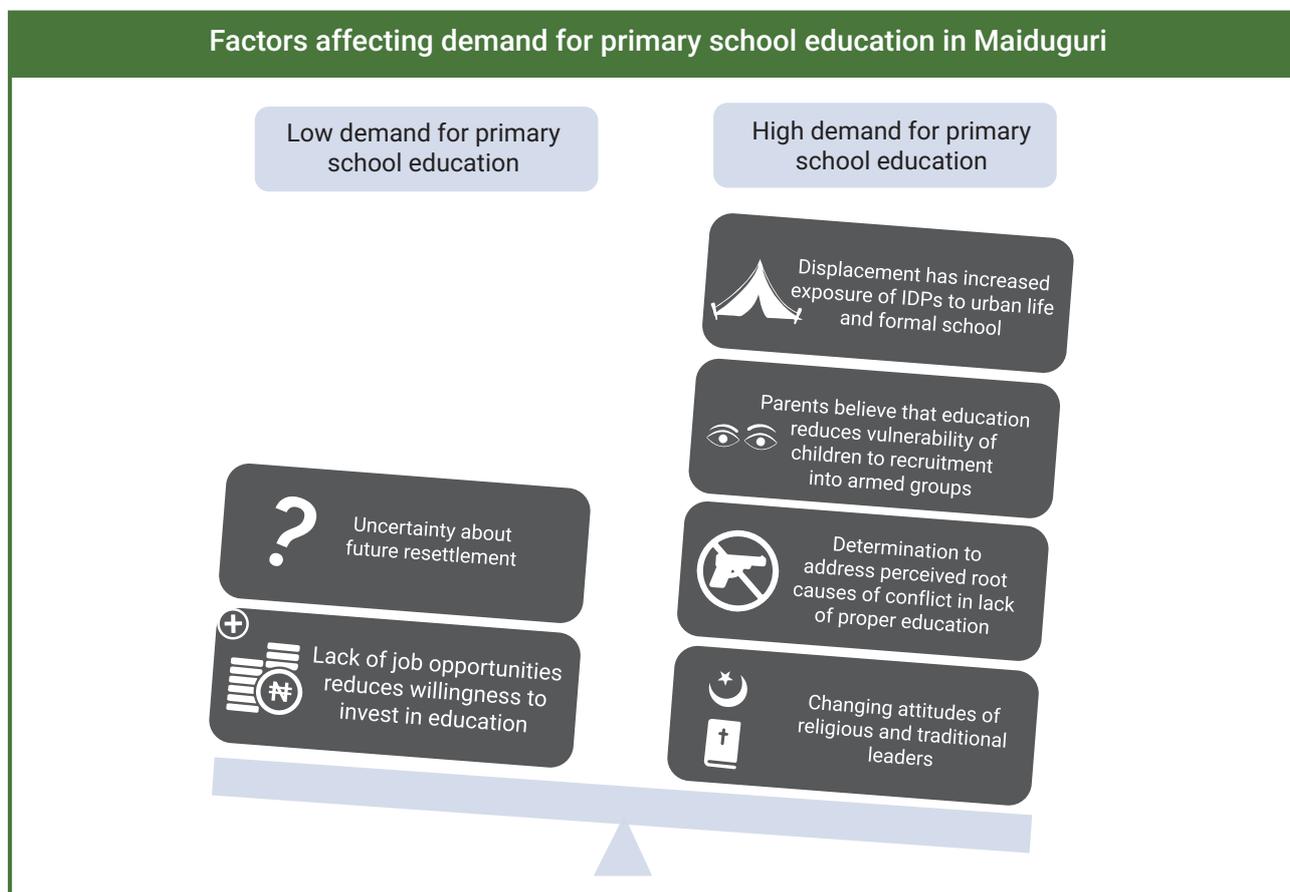
attendance after the end of violent conflict, and to identify gaps to support and improve primary school attendance. Both communities suffered a high intensity of violence and received large inflows of internally displaced people (IDPs) but have experienced a significant improvement in security over the past year. The research draws on participatory rural appraisals with 104 community members and 69 interviews carried out in January and February 2017. The studies were not designed to generate findings representative of Borno or north-east Nigeria as a whole, but they may be applicable to other urban and peri-urban communities in Borno that experienced similar reductions in violence.

The conflict has presented a critical juncture for primary education in Borno State. While ‘western education’ was widely resisted before the crisis according to community members, the situation has now radically changed. The conflict has increased demand for formal primary education and this presents a window of opportunity for decision-makers and funders seeking to improve school attendance in Borno.

## Demand for formal primary education has increased...

There is overwhelming demand for formal primary education. North-east Nigeria has an image of being a hotbed of resistance to formal education, and this view has been perpetuated by the dissemination of Boko Haram's agenda, but EDOREN's study suggests

that this is not true. In fact, the conflict appears to have increased people's demand for formal education compared even to the situation before the crisis. The scales below illustrate the factors increasing demand for primary school education.



## ... but financial factors continue to prevent access to primary education ...

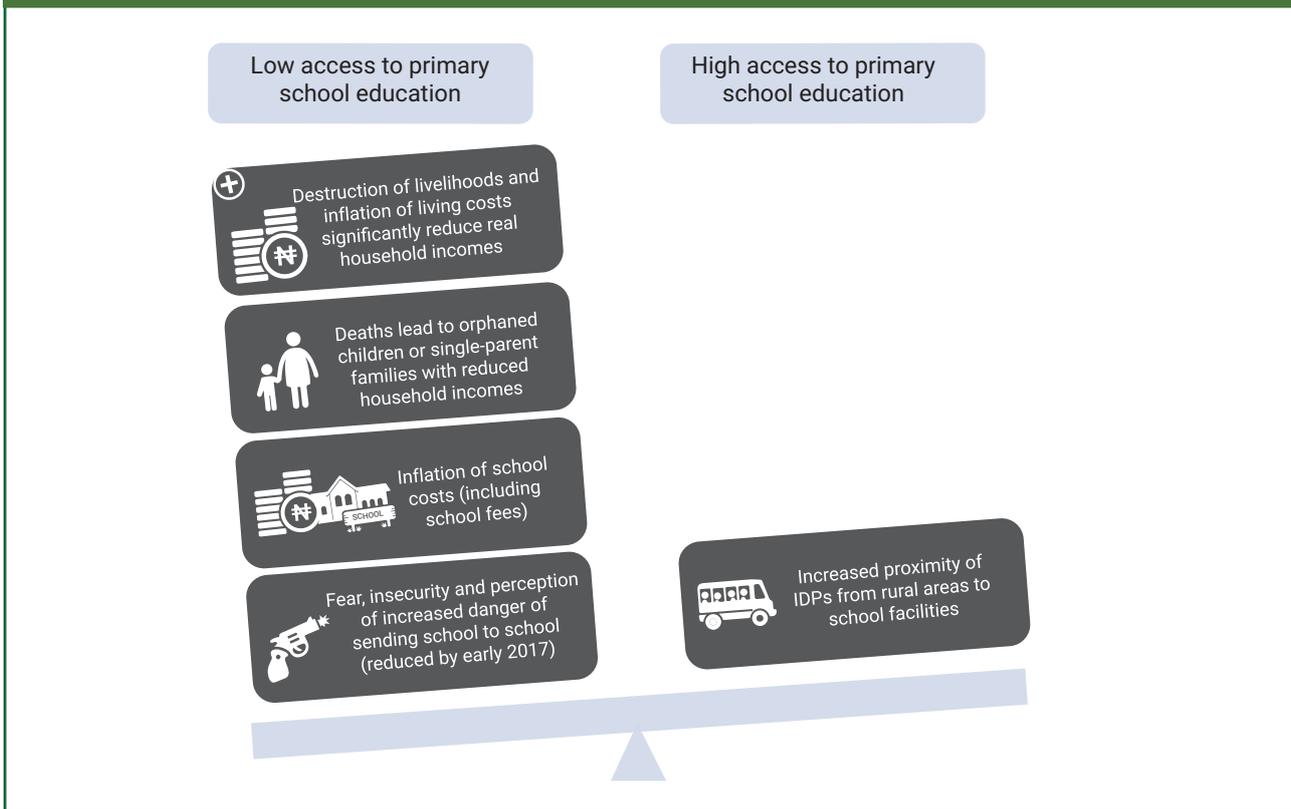
Despite massive increases in school attendance compared to mid- and even pre-crisis levels, financial barriers are by far the most widespread and significant reason why children do not attend primary school. The direct costs of attending government schools account for some of this. The cost of uniforms, schooling materials, packed lunches and unofficial school fees all add up to deter or prevent parents from investing in their children's primary education.

At the same time, household incomes have been sharply reduced due to the destruction of local markets, restricted access to farmland, insecurity of trade routes and mass displacement. The rising demand and more limited supply, particularly of food, have all led to inflation that has further eroded

parents' purchasing power and reduced the available money they have to cover the costs of expenses such as education.

Deaths resulting from the conflict have also further cut incomes for some households and increased the number of orphaned and vulnerable children, who are sometimes taken in by relatives, but represent an additional burden on households and communities' limited resources. In the face of these hardships, many parents or guardians choose to send their children to cheaper religious schools where they are not taught basic literacy or numeracy but do benefit from a 'moral' education that is still valued by communities.

## Factors affecting access to primary school education in Maiduguri



### ...and sharp increases in school attendance threaten to overwhelm the school system

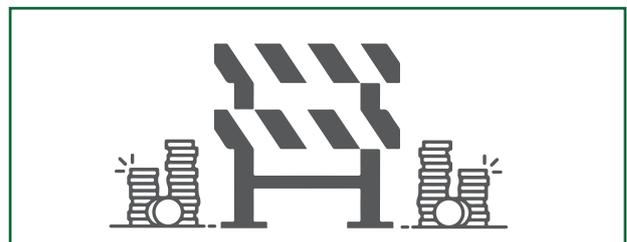
The primary school system is struggling to absorb the sudden increase in parents wanting to send their children to primary school. In part this is due to limited capacity that stems from even before the conflict, but many school facilities were destroyed and government school teachers were attacked and moved away. This has increased the challenges to providing quality primary education even more. While these problems are at the top of the government agenda for strengthening the capacity of the education system, additional challenges remain. These include the introduction of measures to address the trauma experienced by both teachers and children during the conflict, as well as concerns about the competence and attendance of teachers in government schools.

### Policy recommendations to increase primary school attendance in Borno

The armed conflict in Borno has opened a short-lived window of opportunity for increasing primary school attendance in the state, but it is about to close. There is a danger that newly increasing government primary school attendance will overwhelm schools, and undermine the chance for better learning. Furthermore, parents' new willingness to send children into primary education may disappear if this

education ends up being too low-quality. Finally, people who have now discovered the high value of formal education may turn back in the face of bad experiences when engaging with the formal education system, and if no real, widespread changes in attitudes and behaviours take place for the long term.

Harnessing and maintaining the increased demand for education therefore requires a rapid expansion in both access and quality of education. EDOREN's research concludes with three recommendations for government, INGO and donors working in the education sector.



#### 1. Reduce financial barriers to access through cash transfers or other support to boost household incomes:

There is strong evidence that cash transfers increase school attendance in other contexts, and would meet a major need in Borno.

Benefits of cash transfers relative to in-kind or livelihoods support include: ability of recipients to invest directly in education; increased flexibility; lower transaction costs; and easily scalable.

Support to income-generating activities would boost incomes most effectively if they take a multi-level approach by promoting the enabling environment, regional market linkages, community access to markets, and human and financial capital at the household level.

The federal and state governments already have plans for cash transfers which have yet to be fully implemented and could be supported.



## 2. Use non-formal education to build the absorptive capacity of the primary school system in the short-term

Strengthen non-formal, INGO-run primary schools in the short term through (i) an increased focus on teaching literacy and numeracy skills, (ii) setting a minimum subject knowledge competency for non-formal teachers (or 'facilitators') and provision of appropriate incentives to attract qualified staff, and (iii) training 'facilitators' in accelerated learning courses.

Adopt small-scale experiments to provide basic education through existing religious schools and generate lessons that can inform a more widespread policy regarding integration in the long-term.



## 3. Create and communicate clear transition pathways between non-formal education and formal education

Students graduating from non-formal primary schools should be enabled to enter the formal secondary school system through greater harmonisation of curricula and the increased issue and recognition of school certificates.

Temporary teachers (or 'facilitators') hired for non-formal schools should be considered for additional training and integration into the formal system in the medium-term.

Other recommendations included in the report that do not relate as directly to school attendance include the urgent need for teacher recruitment and training, increased provision of psycho-social support and training, and the adoption of a conflict-sensitive curriculum in the wake of violent conflict.

The full report is available on <http://www.nigeria-education.org/> and provides a list of key questions for decision makers to consider when designing these interventions<sup>1</sup>.



1. Coinco, E. and Morris, R. (2017) Primary school attendance in the wake of conflict in Borno, Nigeria: Case studies from two communities in Maiduguri. Abuja. EDOREN/Oxford Policy Management

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