

Report on Undergraduate Orphans in Nigeria



Introduction

Nigeria is the most populous country in Africa, with an estimated 223 million inhabitants, of which about 70% of its population are under 30 years old. Thus the country is known to have the largest population of youth in the world. Among its young population, many face challenges related to poverty, insecurity, lack of access to quality education and lack of jobs. One particularly vulnerable group is undergraduate orphans—those who have lost one or both parents and are pursuing tertiary education in Nigerian universities, polytechnics, or colleges of education. Orphans in this category often face significant emotional, financial, and social hardships, which may hinder their academic performance and limit their potential for success.

This report explores the current state of undergraduate orphans in Nigeria, highlighting the challenges they face, the support systems available, and the potential for policy and programmatic interventions to improve their well-being and educational outcomes.

1. Context and Overview

Nigeria has an estimated 17.5 million orphans, according to UNICEF, largely due to poverty, diseases such as HIV/AIDS, and conflicts, particularly in the northeastern region, which has been heavily affected by Boko Haram insurgency. While the focus is often on primary and secondary education for orphans, a significant number of those who reach higher education face unique challenges that are often overlooked.

The Nigerian higher education system comprises universities, polytechnics, and colleges of education. However, despite access to these institutions, undergraduate orphans face significant barriers to completing their education. These barriers range from financial struggles, emotional trauma, and a lack of social support to difficulties accessing government scholarships and financial aid programs.

2. Challenges Faced by Undergraduate Orphans

Undergraduate orphans in Nigeria face multifaceted challenges that affect their ability to succeed in their studies and transition to a stable adult life. Key challenges include:

2.1. Financial Constraints

A lack of financial support is one of the most significant barriers for undergraduate orphans. Many orphans depend on extended family members, religious organizations, or charitable institutions to fund their education. However, with the rising cost of tuition, accommodation, and living expenses in Nigerian universities, many orphans are unable to afford basic necessities, let alone educational materials such as books and laptops. As a result, many are forced to drop out, engage in unsavory acts or engage in part-time jobs that disrupt their studies.

2.2. Emotional and Psychological Trauma

The loss of parents, particularly in a cultural context where family structures provide crucial emotional and financial support, leaves many orphans struggling with trauma and psychological stress. Many of them suffer from depression, anxiety, or a sense of abandonment, which affects their academic performance and social interactions. This trauma is often compounded by the stigma attached to being an orphan in many Nigerian communities.

2.3. Lack of Access to Scholarships and Financial Aid

Though the Nigerian government and several NGOs offer scholarships, many undergraduate orphans either lack awareness of these opportunities or are unable to meet the complex eligibility criteria. Some scholarships are merit-based and do not consider the specific needs of orphans, while others are too few in number to accommodate the large population of orphans requiring assistance. Additionally, bureaucratic delays in disbursing scholarships often result in prolonged financial strain.

2.4. Inadequate Social Support Systems

In the absence of their parents, many undergraduate orphans lack adequate social support systems that can provide guidance and mentorship during their academic journey. The absence of such networks often leaves orphans feeling isolated, and they may struggle to integrate fully into the academic environment. Social support from peers, family, and mentors plays a vital role in helping students navigate the emotional and academic challenges of university life.

2.5. Gender-Based Challenges

Female undergraduate orphans face additional gender-specific challenges, such as gender discrimination and vulnerability to exploitation. In some cases, female orphans may be coerced into transactional relationships to support their education. Gender-based violence and harassment also present major threats to the educational experiences of female orphans in Nigerian universities.

3. Current Support Systems for Undergraduate Orphans

Several efforts have been made by both government and non-governmental organizations to support orphans in tertiary institutions, though these interventions are often limited and insufficient.

3.1. Government Interventions

The Nigerian government has introduced some financial aid programs and scholarships aimed at supporting vulnerable populations, including orphans. For example, bursary programs administered by federal, state and local governments have provided some relief to orphans in universities.

However, these programs are often plagued by bureaucratic inefficiencies, limited reach, and inconsistent disbursement of funds. The lack of a comprehensive national database for tracking and supporting undergraduate orphans means that many fall through the cracks.

3.2. Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs)

A number of local and international NGOs offer support to undergraduate orphans, ranging from scholarships to mental health services. Organizations such as the Tony Elumelu Foundation, MTN Foundation, and UNICEF offer educational support to orphans and vulnerable children, although their focus is often on primary and secondary education.

There are also smaller community-based organizations that provide direct financial support, mentoring, and guidance to undergraduate orphans. However, due to limited resources and operational capacity, many of these NGOs are unable to provide sustained support throughout the orphan's academic journey.

3.3. Religious Institutions and Community Support

Religious institutions, especially churches and mosques, are key providers of support for undergraduate orphans in Nigeria. Many orphans rely on religious organizations for scholarships, food, accommodation, and emotional support. However, such assistance is often sporadic and not sufficient to cover the full spectrum of an orphan's needs.

4. Policy Recommendations

To improve the welfare and academic success of undergraduate orphans in Nigeria, there must be accurate data on the number of orphans that are present in the country. The following policy and programmatic interventions are recommended:

4.1. Expansion of Scholarship Programs

The government should expand scholarship programs specifically designed for orphans and vulnerable children in tertiary institutions. These scholarships should not only cover tuition fees but also provide living stipends, textbooks, and other necessary educational materials.

4.2. Creation of Comprehensive Support Systems

Universities and polytechnics should establish dedicated support centers for orphans and vulnerable students. These centers can provide financial aid information, mental health counseling, and mentorship programs to help orphans succeed academically and emotionally.

4.3. Strengthening Social Safety Nets

Community-based organizations and NGOs should collaborate to create more sustainable social safety nets for undergraduate orphans. This includes offering long-term financial support, access to counseling services, and job placement programs to help orphans transition smoothly into the workforce after graduation.

4.4. Increased Awareness of Existing Programs

Government and NGOs should work to raise awareness about the existing scholarships and financial aid opportunities available to undergraduate orphans. Simplifying the application process and increasing transparency in the disbursement of funds would ensure that more eligible orphans benefit from these programs.

4.5. Special Focus on Female Orphans

Special provisions should be made to address the unique challenges faced by female undergraduate orphans, including protection from gender-based violence and exploitation. Scholarships and mentorship programs should be tailored to empower female orphans to complete their education and enter the workforce without fear of harassment.

5. Mordecai Care Foundation of Nigeria Sustainability Way-Out

After this report and evaluation of the hope of the undergraduate's orphan in Nigeria, it becomes imperative to us to take it as our responsibilities to create an initiative project to address the marginalized population who are underserved and deprived of human rights on quality education, it's therefore a clarion call for all stakeholders to rise up to needs of the OVA (Orphan and Vulnerable Adult) in Nigeria

Conclusion

Undergraduate orphans in Nigeria are a vulnerable population that requires focused attention and tailored interventions. Although several support systems are in place, the current efforts are insufficient to fully address the financial, emotional, and social challenges that these students face. Expanding scholarship programs, providing comprehensive social support, and creating awareness about existing resources can help ensure that more undergraduate orphans in Nigeria are able to complete their education and break the cycle of poverty

FOR COLLABORATION ON THIS PROJECT:

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