

# Nigeria: A Case Study on Implementing the *Safe Schools Declaration*



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## Attacks on Education

Nigeria has emerged as a global leader in protecting education from attack. As one of the earliest endorsers of the **Safe Schools Declaration** (SSD) in 2015 and a designated Safe Schools Champion, Nigeria has made steady progress in transforming its commitments into concrete actions that enhance the safety of schools, students, and educators – particularly in areas affected by conflict and insecurity.<sup>1</sup> While it can be complex to directly measure impact, Nigeria's comprehensive policy reforms and multi-sectoral engagement reflect a strong, strategic shift toward ensuring the right to education is upheld for all.

At the heart of Nigeria's approach is a coordinated, systems-level strategy spanning local, state, and national levels. This approach prioritizes community engagement, legal and policy reform, and dedicated financing for school safety. In collaboration with civil society, Nigeria has revised national policies, trained security personnel on SSD principles, and strengthened early warning and prevention mechanisms.

Nigeria's commitment to the SSD gained momentum following the 2014 abduction by Boko Haram of 276 schoolgirls from Chibok. The global #BringBackOurGirls campaign brought attention to the urgent need for stronger protections and helped galvanize international support for the SSD. Through its response, Nigeria has become a leader in efforts to protect education and prevent the military use of schools.

## A Model for Implementing the Safe Schools Declaration

Nigeria's implementation of the SSD stands out for its consistency, ambition, and innovation. In 2018, the government established a **Safe Schools Declaration Technical Committee** – including representatives from multiple ministries – to implement its first SSD Action Plan.<sup>2</sup> This established a coordinated, cross-sectoral framework emphasizing shared responsibility and measurable results. In 2021, Nigeria adopted its second SSD Action Plan and released its **National Policy on Safety, Security, and Violence-Free Schools** (NPSSVFS), aligning national priorities with the **Guidelines to Protect Schools and Universities from Military Use**.<sup>3</sup> The policy mandates biannual safety assessments, including actions such as evaluating the vulnerability of infrastructure, mapping evacuation routes, and mitigation planning to protect schools.

Complementing this, the **Minimum Standards for Safe Schools** (MSSS) – developed in 2021 by the Federal **Ministry of Education** and the **Education in Emergencies Working Group** (EiEWG) – offer a comprehensive framework for prevention, preparedness, response, and recovery.<sup>4</sup> These standards help ensure a unified and inclusive approach to school safety at federal, state, and local levels of governance.

To further operationalize SSD commitments, the **Ministry of Defence** partnered with the EiEWG to develop a **Safe Schools Declaration Trainer's Guide and Participants' Manual** for Nigerian security agencies and human rights institutions.<sup>5</sup> These practical and context-specific tools are designed to train security and human rights personnel to help prevent attacks on education, avoid the use of schools for military purposes, and protect learners and educators.

*Established in 2012, the **Education in Emergencies Working Group (EiEWG)** and its SSD sub-committees have played a pivotal role in advancing the SSD. Their work includes support to national policy reform, monitoring and reporting attacks on education, joint needs assessments, and implementation of SSD commitments across multiple levels of partnership. It is composed of a diverse group of national stakeholders and government offices, led by the MoE and co-led by UNICEF and Save the Children.*

Nigeria showcased its progress on the global stage when it hosted in 2021 in Abuja the **Fourth International Conference on the Safe Schools Declaration**.<sup>6</sup> The event marked a major milestone for SSD implementation and strengthened international cooperation. During the conference, the Government of Norway launched the State-led **Implementation Network**, creating a platform for endorsing states to share good practices, receive expert technical support, and build collective momentum through confidential peer-to-peer exchanges.

Nigeria also made a landmark pledge to develop a national financing strategy for school safety. In April 2021, the Ministry of Finance convened the high-level forum **Financing Safe Schools: Creating Safe Learning Communities**, which brought together over 2,000 participants. This forum laid the groundwork for the **National Plan for Financing Safe Schools (2023–2026)**, launched in December 2022.<sup>7</sup> With a five-year commitment of 15 billion Naira, Nigeria became the first country to develop a financing plan of this scope under the SSD.

This plan supports a range of priorities, including:

- A National Schools Security Rapid Response and Coordination Infrastructure
- Resilience-building in school and host communities
- Capacity-building for security and law enforcement agencies
- Ongoing advocacy and community engagement

By mobilizing resources from all levels of government, development partners, and the private sector, Nigeria is translating SSD commitments into sustained, tangible action.

## Innovations in Monitoring and Data Collection

Nigeria is also setting the pace in data-driven approaches to preventing and responding to attacks. The **National Financing Safe Schools Unit** of the Federal Ministry of Finance, in collaboration with stakeholders, conducts regular school assessments to track adherence to the NPSSVFS, measure implementation progress, and strengthen accountability.<sup>8</sup> Through partnerships with UNICEF, GOALPrime Organization Nigeria, Education Cannot Wait, and the EiEWG, Nigeria has conducted school surveys across 40 local government areas to evaluate adherence to safety standards and monitor non-educational use of schools.

Reliable data is critical for effective planning. The **National Education Management Information System** (NEMIS) has adapted GCPEA's **Toolkit for Collecting and Analyzing Data on Attacks on Education** for Nigeria, and it is now being piloted in three states.<sup>9</sup> The toolkit tracks critical details – including the nature, location, and impact of attacks – while contributing to improved decision-making and risk mitigation.

Nigeria's innovations also include the establishment of the **National Safe Schools Response Coordination Centre** (NSSRCC) in February 2023.<sup>10</sup> Located at the Headquarters of the **Nigeria Security and Civil Defense Corps** (NSCDC), the center provides 24/7 monitoring and coordinates rapid responses to threats, working in partnership with the military, police, and civil defense forces. To date, more than 9,322 schools are monitored, and coordinators have been deployed to all 36 states. Another partnership example are the School Protection Squads established by the Nigeria Police Force that work closely with other security agencies and communities to ensure the safety and security of schools.

*The **National Safe Schools Response Coordination Centre** (NSSRCC) uses a range of innovative technologies to improve response times. Registered schools can send alerts via coded SMS or a pilot mobile app with a simple left swipe that activates live video. Hotlines and panic buttons are also being piloted. Security teams are dispatched immediately based on proximity and need, while NSSRCC works to harmonize standard operating procedures across agencies.<sup>11</sup>*

In high-risk areas, Nigeria has developed a number of tailored resources for local populations, including a handbook on emergency preparedness response for students in junior secondary school and training on personal safety for students and teachers.<sup>12</sup> Programs include guidance on topics from preventing kidnapping attempts to identifying suspicious items on campus. These localized efforts are complemented by national policies that promote peace education and conflict-sensitive curricula aligned with SSD principles.

Where attacks occur, Nigeria's policies include provisions for support to survivors. Guidance on assistance includes mental health services, documentation support, and access to compassionate care.<sup>13</sup> Recognizing the gendered nature of many attacks, Nigeria has incorporated gender mainstreaming into SSD training and implementation.<sup>14</sup> One promising example is the all-female security squad formed by the NSCDC in Kwara State, which focuses on preventing abductions and engaging traditional leaders to build local trust and ownership.<sup>15</sup>

## Safe Schools Champion

Nigeria's leadership extends beyond its borders. As a founding supporter of the State-led Implementation Network, Nigeria has helped shape the structure and priorities of the platform through participation in regional consultations and active technical engagement. Beyond the platform, Nigeria has supported both global and regional training on the *Safe Schools Declaration* and the *Guidelines to Protect Schools and Universities from Military Use*.

At the international level, Nigeria championed education protection through its co-sponsorship of key UN Security Council resolutions – **UNSCR 2427** (2018) and **UNSCR 2601** (2021). Nigeria remains a consistent advocate for safe schools in forums such as the UN General Assembly and Human Rights Council. It has contributed to joint SSD core group statements and has helped keep the issue of education in conflict high on the global agenda.

Domestically, Nigeria's comprehensive approach offers a blueprint for other countries. From its national financing plan and coordination center to its community-based safety initiatives and robust training programs, Nigeria has built a model rooted in national ownership, collaboration, and long-term vision. Above all, Nigeria's work stands as a powerful example of what's possible when political will, partnership, and innovation come together to protect the right to education for all.

## Notes and References

1. Before signing the Safe Schools Declaration (SSD), Nigeria was already a party to multiple international conventions, including the Rome Statute, Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), and the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights (ICESCR).
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5. Federal Republic of Nigeria Ministry of Defence, *Safe Schools Declaration (SSD) Trainer's Guide for the Training of Nigerian Security Agencies and Human Rights Organisations*, September 2021.
6. Federal Republic of Nigeria, [Outcome Report on the Abuja Conference on the Safe Schools Declaration](#), 2022.
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8. Nigeria Education in Emergencies Working Group (EiEWG), [Newsletter 2024 Oct-Dec: Issue 14](#) (Nigeria: Nigeria Education in Emergencies Working Group, 2024).
9. Baron M. and Calaycay L., 2024
10. Yabagi Zulkarnain, ["Safe Schools Initiative: NSCDC Maps Out Security and protection strategies, assures Public Safety of schools, Host Communities,"](#) National Safe Schools Response Coordination Centre, May 7, 2024,
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15. ["NSCDC female squad to secure schools nationwide,"](#) *Punch Nigeria*, August 16, 2022.

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