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Subject: Submissions for Open-ended intergovernmental working group on an optional protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child

Dear sir/ma

Kindly find the inputs of The Raymond Ofodu Foundation (TROF)

1. **Question**: What are the main barriers to public pre-primary education available free to all in law, policy, and practice in your country and what is their impact on the rights of the child? Please consider the specific situation of marginalized children and those in vulnerable situations in your response.

Answer: Despite Nigeria's commitment to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and child protection frameworks, several barriers hinder access to free public pre-primary education, particularly for marginalized and vulnerable children. These barriers exist in law, policy, and practice, directly impacting children's rights to education, protection, and development.

Legal and Policy Barriers

1. **Lack of Legal Enforcement**: While Nigeria's Universal Basic Education (UBE) Act provides for free and compulsory primary education, it does not explicitly cover pre-primary education. This gap leaves early childhood education underfunded and inconsistently implemented across states.
2. **Inadequate Budget Allocation**: Government spending on education remains below the UNESCO-recommended 15-20% of the national budget. The lack of funding results in insufficient infrastructure, teaching materials, and qualified educators for pre-primary education.

3. **Decentralized Education System**: The responsibility for education is shared between federal, state, and local governments, leading to inconsistencies in policy implementation and accountability gaps, further limiting access to quality early education.

Practical Barriers

1. **Insufficient Public Pre-Primary Schools**: Many public schools do not have dedicated pre-primary classrooms, forcing children into overcrowded and poorly equipped learning environments.
2. **Lack of Qualified Teachers**: There is a significant shortage of trained early childhood educators, particularly in rural areas, affecting the quality of learning and care provided to young children.
3. **Economic Hardship**: Many families, particularly in low-income communities, cannot afford associated costs such as transportation, uniforms, and feeding, making education inaccessible despite its nominally free status.
4. **Cultural and Gender Bias**: In some regions, particularly in Northern Nigeria, cultural norms prioritize boys' education over girls', while child marriage and domestic responsibilities often prevent girls from attending school.
5. **Conflict and Insecurity**: Insurgency, banditry, and kidnappings in regions like the Northeast and Northwest have led to school closures, displacement, and fear, further marginalizing children in vulnerable situations.

Impact on Children's Rights

These barriers directly violate children's rights as outlined in the Nigerian Child Rights Act and the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. Without access to quality pre-primary education:

- **Cognitive and Social Development Suffers**: Early childhood is crucial for brain development; lack of education at this stage limits lifelong learning potential.
- **Increased Child Labor and Exploitation**: Children who are out of school are more likely to be engaged in child labor, domestic servitude, or street hawking.
- **Higher Dropout Rates in Later Years**: Lack of foundational education increases the risk of dropping out of school in higher grades.
- **Continued Gender Inequality**: Girls are disproportionately affected, leading to lower literacy rates and reduced economic empowerment opportunities for women in the long run.

The Raymond Ofodu Foundation advocates for policy reforms, increased funding, and community-based interventions to address these barriers. Through partnerships with government agencies and international organizations, we work to ensure that every child, regardless of background, has access to quality early education, setting the foundation for a better future.

2. **Question**: What are the main barriers to public secondary education available free to all in law, policy, and practice in your country and what is their impact on the rights of the child? Please consider the specific situation of marginalized children and those in vulnerable situations in your response. One page

Answer: several legal, policy, and practical barriers hinder access to public secondary education, particularly for marginalized and vulnerable children. These barriers contribute to the violation of children's rights to education, equal opportunity, and personal development.

Practical Barriers on ground:

1. Hidden Costs of Education: While tuition is free in many public schools, students still face indirect costs such as uniforms, textbooks, examination fees, and transportation, making education unaffordable for low-income families.

2. Insufficient and Overcrowded Schools: Many public secondary schools are overcrowded due to high enrollment and limited infrastructure. In some rural areas, students must travel long distances to access a school, discouraging attendance.

3. Shortage of Qualified Teachers: Many public schools suffer from a lack of trained and adequately paid teachers, affecting the quality of education. This is more pronounced in rural and conflict-affected regions.

4. Gender Disparities and Cultural Norms: In certain regions, especially in the North, girls are more likely to be withdrawn from school due to early marriage, domestic responsibilities, or cultural beliefs that prioritize male education.

5. Insecurity and Conflict: The rise in insurgency, banditry, and kidnappings, particularly in the Northeast and Northwest, has led to school closures and increased dropout rates, especially among displaced children.

Impact on Children's Rights

These barriers negatively affect children's rights as outlined in the Nigerian Child Rights Act and international agreements such as the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Increased Dropout Rates: Many children abandon education due to financial constraints, contributing to child labor and early marriage.

Limited Economic and Social Mobility: Without secondary education, children face reduced opportunities for employment and economic advancement, perpetuating cycles of poverty.

Higher Crime and Exploitation Risks: Out-of-school children are more vulnerable to recruitment into criminal activities, trafficking, and exploitation.

Gender Inequality: Girls denied secondary education are more likely to experience early marriage and poor health outcomes, reinforcing gender disparities in society.

3. **Question**: What are examples of innovative and sustainable financial mechanisms to support the full and effective implementation of public pre-primary and secondary education available free to all children in your country?

Answer: To ensure the full and effective implementation of free public pre-primary and secondary education in Nigeria, innovative and sustainable financial mechanisms are essential. These mechanisms can bridge funding gaps, improve efficiency, and enhance educational access for all children, particularly marginalized and vulnerable groups.

1. **Education Trust Funds and Levies**

Universal Basic Education Commission (UBEC) Fund Expansion: Increasing allocations and ensuring proper utilization of UBEC intervention funds to support pre-primary and secondary education.

State and Local Government Education Levies: Mandating a fixed percentage of internally generated revenue (IGR) to be dedicated to education development at both levels.

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) Contributions: Encouraging private sector companies to contribute to an education trust fund through tax incentives.

2. **Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs)**

Infrastructure and Resource Development: Engaging private entities to build and maintain school infrastructure through build-operate-transfer (BOT) models.

Tech-Supported Learning Initiatives: Partnering with technology firms to provide digital learning tools, teacher training, and remote learning solutions.

3. **Education Bonds and Social Impact Investments**

Government-Issued Education Bonds: Raising capital for long-term education projects through bonds that investors can purchase.

Impact Investment in Schools: Encouraging socially responsible investors to fund education projects with measurable social returns.

4. **Dedicated Education Taxes and Funds**

Education Tax on Extractive Industries: Allocating a portion of revenues from oil, gas, and mining companies to education funding.

Micro-Contributions from Telecom and Banking Sectors: Introducing minimal levies on digital transactions to generate sustainable education funding.

5. **Community-Based and Philanthropic Funding**

School-Based Management Committees (SBMCs): Strengthening community-led financial contributions and school management oversight.

Alumni Networks and Diaspora Contributions: Encouraging former students and Nigerians abroad to donate to school development projects.

Religious and Cultural Organization Support: Partnering with faith-based and traditional institutions to support school funding initiatives.

6. **Conditional Cash Transfers (CCTs) and Scholarships**

Government-Funded CCTs: Providing financial support to low-income families to ensure children remain in school.

Scholarship and Bursary Programs: Expanding merit- and need-based scholarships for students at all levels.

7. **Efficient Budgeting and Anti-Corruption Measures**

Zero-Based Budgeting for Education: Ensuring funds are allocated based on actual needs rather than historical spending patterns.

Transparent Fund Management and Monitoring: Implementing digital tracking of education funds to prevent leakages and mismanagement.

To achieve sustainable and inclusive education for all Nigerian children, a multi-stakeholder approach combining government, private sector, communities, and international partners is necessary. By leveraging these financial mechanisms, Nigeria can overcome funding challenges and guarantee access to quality education for every child.

4. **Question**: What steps is the Government taking to remove barriers and make public pre-primary and secondary education available free to all, including through the allocation of adequate resources and cross-sectoral and international cooperation? Please provide examples of specific laws and regulations, measures, policies, and programmes.

Answer: The Nigerian government has undertaken several legal, policy, and programmatic steps to improve access to free public pre-primary and secondary education. These efforts aim to address both systemic and practical barriers, with a focus on reaching marginalized and vulnerable children through domestic policies and international partnerships.

1. **Legal and Policy Frameworks**

Universal Basic Education (UBE) Act (2004): This law mandates free and compulsory education from primary to junior secondary school. It established the Universal Basic Education Commission (UBEC) to coordinate education policy and funding across states.

National Policy on Education: Revised periodically, this policy promotes access to quality education at all levels and recently integrated early childhood care and development (ECCD) as part of basic education.

Child Rights Act (2003): Guarantees the right to free, compulsory, and universal basic education for all Nigerian children. It mandates states to domesticate the law for enforcement.

2. **Budgetary Allocations and Funding Mechanisms**

UBEC Intervention Funds: Federal allocations channeled through UBEC to state governments for infrastructure, teacher training, and school materials. States are required to provide matching grants to access these funds.

Tertiary Education Trust Fund (TETFund): Although focused on higher education, TETFund relieves pressure on national budgets, allowing more room for investment in lower levels of education.

Better Education Service Delivery for All (BESDA): A World Bank-supported program aimed at increasing equitable access, especially in out-of-school children hotspots.

3. Programs and Initiatives

National Home-Grown School Feeding Programme (NHGSFP): Provides meals to children in public primary schools, improving attendance and enrollment, and indirectly benefiting pre-primary and early secondary education.

Safe Schools Initiative: Developed in response to attacks on schools in conflict zones, it focuses on protecting students and teachers, especially in Northern Nigeria.

Girls Education Project (GEP3): In partnership with UNICEF and funded by the UK government, this program supports girls' education through advocacy, scholarships, and school improvement projects.

4. Cross-Sectoral and International Cooperation

Partnership with UNICEF and UNESCO: Nigeria collaborates with these organizations on teacher development, digital learning, and inclusive education strategies.

Global Partnership for Education (GPE): Nigeria has received GPE funding to support education sector planning and implementation.

African Union Agenda 2063 Alignment: Nigeria aligns its education policies with continental goals, promoting inclusive, equitable, and quality education.

5. State-Level Innovations

Lagos State's EKOEXCEL: A digital learning initiative aimed at transforming basic education through technology.

Kano State's Free Senior Secondary Education Policy: Provides tuition-free education for students in public senior secondary schools.

While challenges remain, Nigeria’s legal frameworks, funding structures, and collaborative programs reflect a commitment to improving access to free education. Continued investment, state-level ownership, and global partnerships are critical to realizing universal education