



# What Works for Girls' Education?

Inputs and Recommendations  
for Transforming Education in  
Oyo State, Nigeria.

Girls' Manifesto on Educational Priorities ahead of the 2023 Elections.

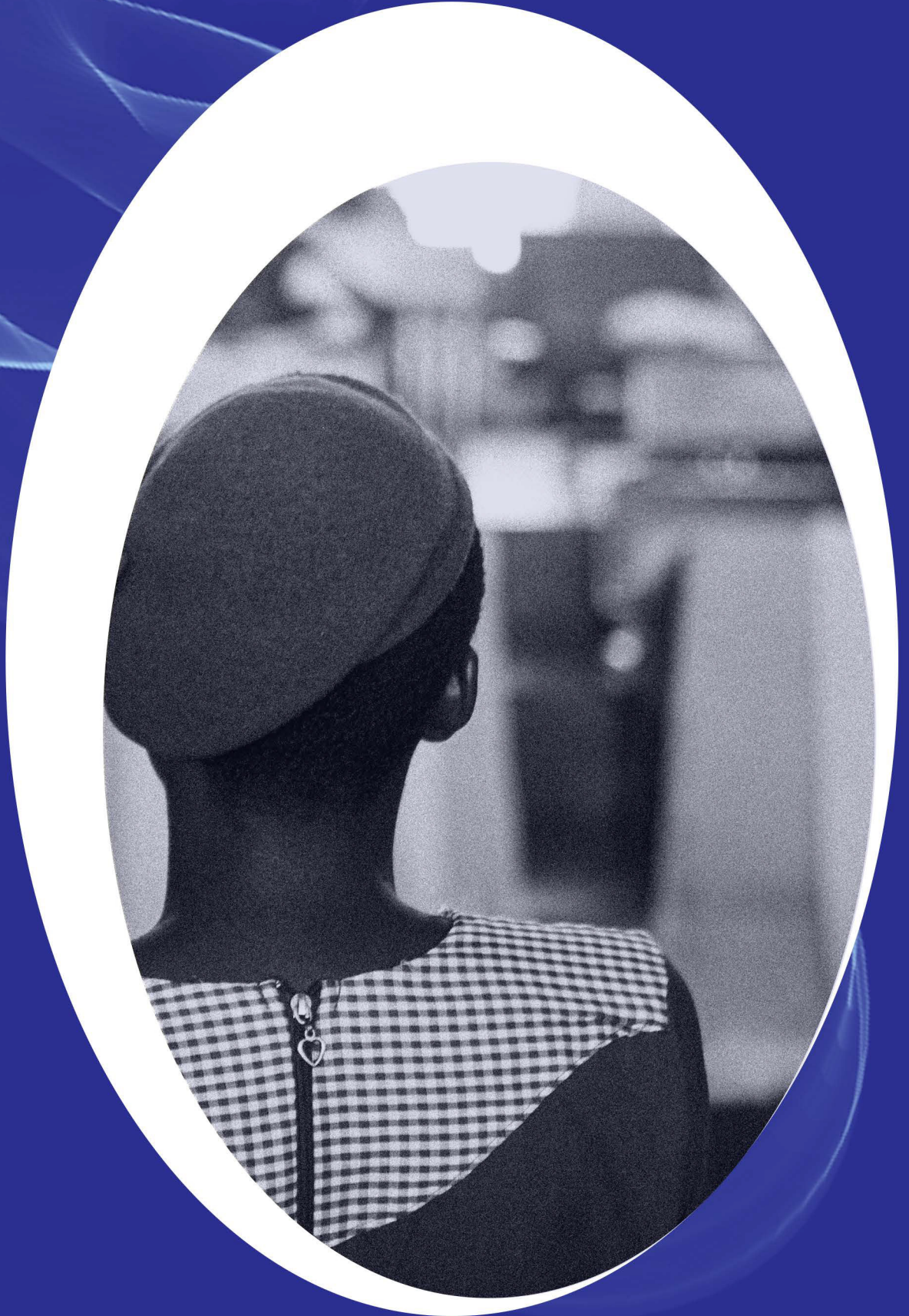
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## Synopsis

This document was developed and produced as an output material from two consultative events hosted by the Aid for Rural Education Access Initiative (AREAi) in collaboration with Youth Hub Africa and One Life Initiative and funded by Malala Fund under its Joint Action Grant program.

These events, convened with the central objective of galvanizing and mobilizing adolescent girls as active participants and contributors in shaping the educational agenda within Oyo state, provided an opportunity to deliberate, refine and present actionable inputs for policy considerations within the education sector ahead of the 2023 elections.

In addition, a cross-section of political and educational stakeholders represented by political parties and educational institutions from across Oyo state attended a town hall presentation and were presented with copies of policy recommendations synthesized from the open-day consultations with the female student representatives.



## Acknowledgments

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# 1. Provision of Menstrual Health Education and Personal Hygiene Policy

Access to clean water, basic toilets, and good hygiene practices keep children thriving and girls in safe school environments. Unfortunately, this is not the case, especially in developing countries like Nigeria.

For instance, nine out of ten schools in Nigeria have no place for children to wash their hands, and this indicates a downward trend in the fight against infectious diseases and keeps girls away from school (UNICEF, 2021).

All around the world, 1.8 billion people menstruate monthly, and with the onset of menstruation comes a new phase and new vulnerabilities in the lives of adolescent girls, with many of them facing stigma, harassment, and social exclusion during their cycle (UNICEF, 2018).

In many societies like Nigeria, menstrual hygiene is still considered taboo, with inadequate knowledge and misconceptions as a significant challenge as access to adequate facilities. According to UNICEF (2018), even though menstruation is a normal and healthy part of life for women, as most women menstruate each month for about two to seven days, it is still stigmatized globally. The ignorance and limited information surrounding menstruation have birthed misconceptions and discrimination and can further result in girls being deprived of normal childhood experiences and activities. Furthermore, these stigmas, taboos, and myths hinder adolescent boys and girls from the opportunity to learn about menstruation and develop healthy habits (UNICEF 2018).

Finally, the continued silence around menstruation, combined with limited access to information at home and in schools, results in millions of girls having very limited knowledge of what is happening to their bodies when they menstruate and how to deal with it. Limited access to affordable and hygienic sanitary materials and disposal options within schools has left many students to manage their periods in ineffective, uncomfortable, and unhygienic ways. In Oyo state and several states across Nigeria, many schools do not support adolescent girls or female teachers in managing menstrual hygiene with dignity.



## Implications

On average, a woman menstruates for about seven years during their lifetime. The first period can be met with either celebration, fear, or concern. For every girl, this signifies an important transition to womanhood (UNICEF, 2018).

However, when girls and women do not have access to safe and affordable sanitary materials to manage their menstruation, it increases their risk of infections. This can have cascading effects on overall sexual and reproductive health, including reducing teen pregnancy, maternal outcomes, and fertility. Poor menstrual hygiene, however, can pose serious health risks, like reproductive and urinary tract infections, resulting in future infertility and birth complications.

The lack of means for hygienic management of menstruation continues to cause discomfort and psychological stress for adolescent girls across Oyo state. This also adds to the shame and sometimes depression that girls experience because of menstruation-related taboos and stigma (World Bank, 2022). Finally, the lack of WASH facilities also results in school absenteeism, either by the girls intentionally missing school because of the poor facilities or as a consequence of frequent episodes of WASH-related ill-health. Research has shown that if a child misses school for even a short time, there is only a low chance, only about 25 percent, that the child will ever return (UNICEF, 2018).



## Recommendations:

In order to keep Oyo girls in school and improve our life chances and our school experiences, then Menstrual Hygiene Management (MHM) within our schools must be improved.

1. We demand that the state government provide adequate facilities, products, training, and support necessary for school girls to manage their menstrual periods while away from home.
2. We urge our policymakers to prioritize menstrual health and hygiene management as a crucial component of basic healthcare in order to enable school girls to manage their menstruation with dignity and safety.
3. We demand that the Ministry of Education make provisions for girls to have access to menstrual attention and medical support at school and within school clinics to help them manage pain associated with their menstruation.
5. We demand that our leaders prioritize providing adequate water, sanitation, and hygienic facilities, including disposal options for all schools in Oyo state.
6. We demand the recruitment, capacity building, and engagement of qualified teachers to facilitate periodic training on different components of Menstrual Health Management.





# 2023 ELECTIONS

What Works for Girls' Education?

INPUTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR TRANSFORMING EDUCATION.



VENUE: House of Chief, House of Assembly complex, Agodi Secretariat, Ibadan

DATE: 6th of February 2023  
TIME:



## 2. Promotion of Gender-Responsive and Inclusive Education Policies

Gender Inequality takes diverse shapes and forms, ranging from child marriage and other forms of gender-based violence to lack of participation of women and girls at the policy level and, most importantly, gender bias in education.

According to a 2021 UNICEF report, around the world, 129 million girls are out of school, including 32 million that are of primary school age and 97 million of secondary school age. While enrollment rates may have increased at primary and secondary levels, completion rates are still low, especially in developing countries. When a girl is educated, she is empowered and can make her decisions, raise the standard of living of her family, create more job opportunities, and reform society as a whole (UNESCO, 2022).

Nigeria ranks a lowly 139 out of 156 countries in the World Economic Forum's Gender Gap Index (World Bank, 2021). Although the constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria makes provisions for gender equality and non-discrimination, women continue to be victims of injustices and marginalization. This is usually a result of discriminatory laws, religious and cultural norms, gender stereotypes, low education levels, and poverty's disproportionate effect on women (Human Rights Watch, 2022).



Around the world, Nigeria inclusive, despite progress in increasing access to education for girls, several societal, traditional, and cultural limitations continue to enable governments to prioritize boys' education, and as a result, girls are often denied their right to an education and the opportunities that come with it. In other words, in many states across Nigeria, including Oyo state, gender inequality and discrimination continue to be a major bane to the quality of girls' education.

This disparity is not far-fetched from the following reasons: child marriage and poverty, which results in families often favoring boys when investing in education (UNICEF, 2018).

When governments such as the Oyo state government invest in girls' education, it has a long-term benefit. Girls will be equipped as change agents to lead transformation in their communities, country, and the entire world.

Furthermore, girls who receive education stand a chance to lead healthy and productive lives, earn higher incomes, participate in the decisions that most affect them, and build better futures for themselves and their families, and, most importantly, they are less likely to marry at a young age.

However, it is equally pivotal to note that education for girls is about more than access to school. It is also about girls feeling secure in classrooms and supported in the subjects and careers they choose to pursue, including those in which they are often under-represented. (UNICEF, 2018).

## **Implications**

Ignoring the girls' education crisis could pose grave immediate and long-term consequences. A 2018 World Bank report revealed that "limited educational opportunities for girls and barriers to completing education cost countries between \$15 trillion and \$30 trillion dollars in lost lifetime productivity and earnings".

The report finds that primary education is not enough, and there is a need to ensure that girls transition to secondary and even tertiary institutions, as benefits from primary education, are limited. Thus, it is safe to assert that we all lose when girls miss out on education.

Therefore, the Oyo State government and its educational and political stakeholders must work together to create an educational system where gender does not become a yardstick for school enrolment.

## Recommendations:

Here are our recommendations on how to give girls equal access to education

1. We demand that all forms of discrimination, laws, policies, and practices that directly or indirectly block girls' access to education be eradicated.
2. We urge that policymakers ensure adequate funding and budgets are given for girls' education.
3. We demand that decision-makers ensure that school curriculums, textbooks, and teaching methods in schools and classrooms across Oyo state are reviewed and revised to reflect girls' equal access to education.
4. We urge our leaders to invest in key infrastructure within all schools in Oyo state, such as access to safe drinking water, separate toilets, and resources for menstrual hygiene – with attention to disabled girls.
5. As a key priority, we call on all education stakeholders in Oyo to ensure education is safe and physically accessible, including for girls in rural and remote areas (including safe transportation).
6. We demand that all school-aged pregnant girls in and across Oyo state be allowed to learn – and have access to childcare, breastfeeding facilities, and counseling on school premises.
7. We demand that policymakers invest in social protection systems within schools and communities to support the educational journeys of all children and youth, particularly girls and young women, while also ensuring that effective and efficient strategies for re-enrolling out-of-school vulnerable girls – such as teenage mothers and pregnant teens are implemented.



### **3. Provision of New and Strengthening Existing Educational Infrastructure**

According to the model for quality education by UNICEF (2000), one of the important components for quality educational processes is “healthy, safe, protective, and gender-sensitive environments and the provision of adequate resources and facilities.”

Hence as students show up to school every week to be exposed to salient educational and social skills that will be imperative for future ambitions, there is an urgent need for emphasis to be placed on educational infrastructure as it possesses the potential to improve instruction, improve students outcomes, and increase school enrolment and attendance.

Therefore, as schools in Oyo state constantly improve their curriculum to meet educational standards/best practices, attention should be given to infrastructure, as classroom ergonomics are pivotal for learning environments. For instance, fully equipped libraries in Oyo state will facilitate the classroom teacher's work and ensure each student has equitable access to resources, irrespective of home opportunities or constraints.

Similarly, the provision of equipped and fully functional ICT centers and science laboratories will guarantee that students/learners can perform experiments and research or get exposed to new knowledge through internet facilities. This will enhance students' learning as it helps them remember the studies more efficiently by conducting their experiments. In other words, it provides an avenue for experiential learning.

#### **Implications**

On the other hand, the absence of basic infrastructure will be detrimental.

For instance, the absence of separate toilets with doors and the lack of bins to safely dispose of used sanitary pads and water to wash hands still prevent girls from adequately managing their monthly cycle with dignity, safety, and privacy, resulting in school absenteeism either by the girls intentionally missing school because of the poor facilities or as a consequence of frequent episodes of WASH-related ill-health (CDC, 2022).

## **Recommendations:**

As educational institutions across Oyo state continue to improve their curriculum to meet national or global standards; there is an urgent need to earmark and harness resources to enhance the physical infrastructure of our secondary schools. Based on these realities, we, therefore, call on our educational leaders and political stakeholders to commit to and ensure the implementation of OUR following demands:

1. We demand that funds be allocated for periodic maintenance, repairs, and refurbishment of school infrastructure, and the State Ministry of Education, tasked with overseeing this process, to ensure that renovations and constructions are uniform and periodic.
2. We demand access to clean water, basic toilets, and good hygiene practices to ensure girls thrive in safe school environments. Provision of new and renovation of existing safe and separate accessible toilets for girls and boys as well as for male and female teachers with locks will ensure safety and privacy.
3. To ensure that infrastructures within the school system are safeguarded, we urge the government to work with school administrators and school governing boards to ensure a maintenance policy to avoid excessive repetition of routine maintenance efforts.
4. We demand the construction of fully equipped libraries to facilitate access to quality learning and teaching materials and ensure all students in Oyo state, particularly girls, have equal access to resources, irrespective of home opportunities or constraints.
5. We urge policymakers to guarantee the provision of equipped and fully functional ICT centers and science laboratories to ensure students learn what they are taught to promote the inclusion of girls in STEM fields.





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# ELECTIONS

*What Works for Girls' Education?*



INPUTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS  
FOR TRANSFORMING EDUCATION.

VENUE: House of Chief, House of Assembly  
complex, Agodi Secretariat, Ibadan

DATE: 6th of February 2023  
TIME 10:00 AM



## 4. Recruitment and Deployment of Trained and Qualified Counselors

The complexity of the changing world poses a challenge to many young learners in secondary schools as they need help making informed decisions on evolving career paths.

In other words, the secondary education years of schooling are a period of academic, social, personal, emotional, and intellectual growth for many girls. Adolescent girls at this stage have yet to understand what maturity entails fully and, in most cases, do not have adequate social support to help them navigate this phase, thus, the need for counselors.

Findings by the Center for School Counseling Outcome Research and Evaluation have shown that school counselors play a significant role in the total development of students concerning career choices as they support the provision of information to guide them to make well-informed choices. Because teenage girls have an important role in society, counseling is important for them to develop aptitude, behavior, and action according to democratic ideals. Therefore, there is a growing need for guidance and counseling for girls across schools in Oyo state.

### Implications

Ineffective guidance and counseling services can be a threat to students' adaptation leading to poor academic performance, unruly behaviour, and even dropping out.



An absence of the required counseling services and instructional materials in schools in Oyo state may also hinder the inability of the girl-child to think critically, contribute meaningfully, and become functioning members of the ever-changing society.

## Recommendations:

1. We demand that counseling and guidance programmes be established in secondary schools to enhance meaningful personal and career choices for girls and bridge the gender gap in boys' academic achievement and attainment.
2. We urge our school leaders and education stakeholders to ensure access to training for school counselors on gender-responsive advocacy and curriculum changes, including techniques such as role-playing and psycho-drama, which can address key gender issues.
3. We call on the state government to ensure access to mandatory and continuous professional training for intending and in-school counselors.
4. We recommend that close monitoring and feedback mechanisms be set up in schools to help the professional counseling units increase educational outcomes for the girl-child.



## Further readings

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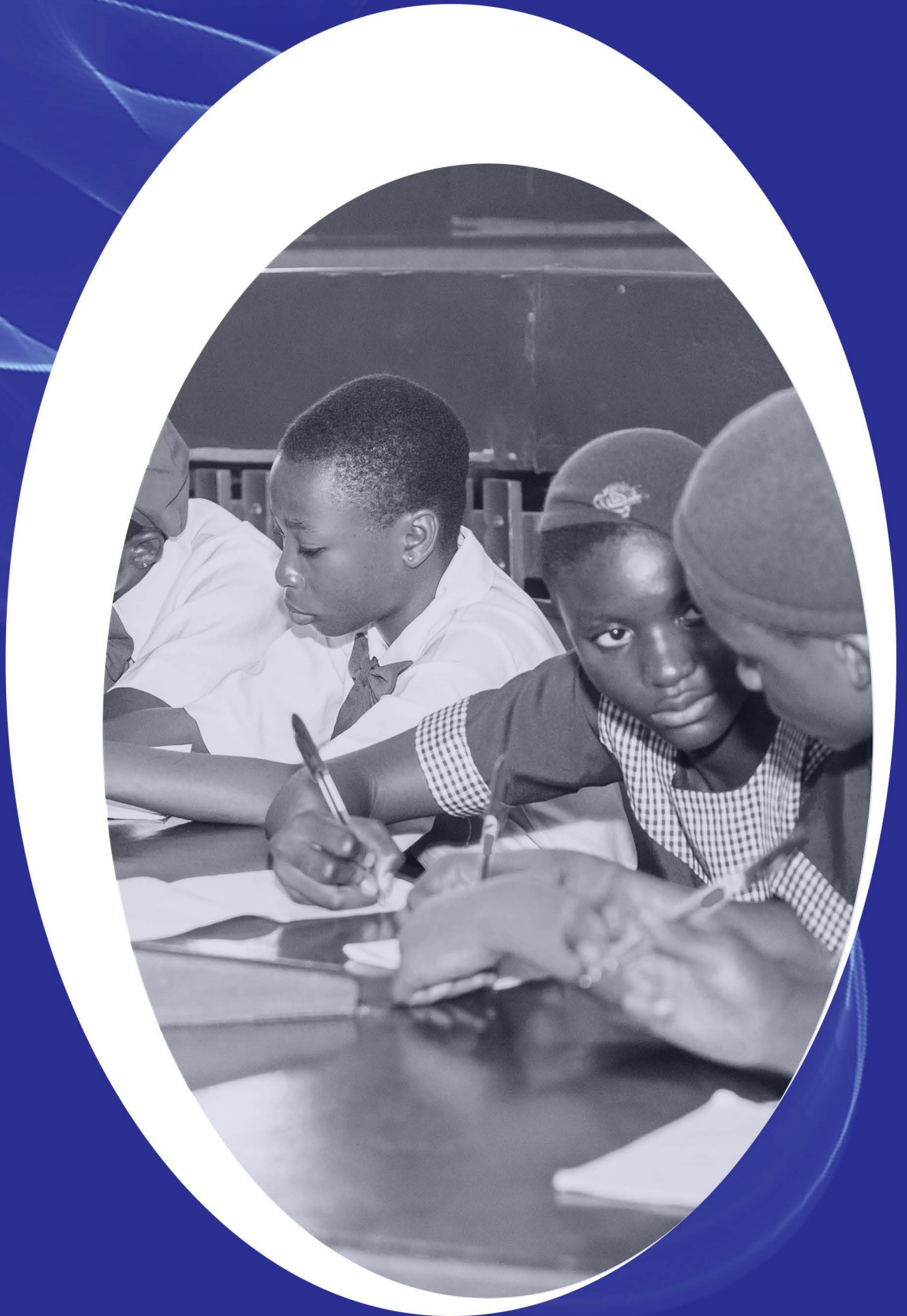
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## NOTICE

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