

A young girl with braided hair is carrying a baby on her back. They are in a community setting with wooden structures in the background. The girl is wearing a colorful patterned garment.

# PROTECTING VULNERABLE CHILDREN IN CRISES

## A REPORT ON **THE STATUS OF CHILDREN'S RIGHTS IN LAGOS COMMUNITIES**

**A SPEAK UP STAND OUT (SUSO) PROJECT**

### **Contributors**

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# INTRODUCTION TO SUSO

The SUSO Program aims to empower young people with media and information knowledge and grassroots mobilization skills to participate meaningfully in the socio-political development of their communities, by maximizing digital platforms for social mobilization, amplifying youth voices, and developing people-led campaigns on critical issues and influencing policies that affect youth and communities.

Each activist receives direct funding to implement project ideas along the 5 cardinal pillars of peace and security, Education, Governance, and Employment while working with advocates for support. The SUSO team is a consortium of the Nigerian youth SDGs Network, Afrika Youth Movement, and the Center for Advocacy and Youth Development as implementing partners.

Sponsored by:



Implementing Partners:



Other Collaborators:



# THE TEAM

A total of 11 advocates were selected to work on this project by mapping out communities for survey in Lagos State

Emediong is a member of the UNICEF-AU Youth Reference Group on Ending Child Marriage, a human rights and gender activist working at the intersection of child protection, gender equality and policy reforms to reduce inequalities and the impact of climate change on vulnerable groups.



**Emediong Akpabio**  
Lead Activist

**Idorenyin Onwineng** is a Community Development Strategist working to amplify the voice, rights and safety of children in vulnerable communities while broadening the spectrum of inclusion through advocacy for all gender in Africa.

**Franklin Udeme** is a humanity-levitated fellow with a medical background in Physiology and Public Health, skilled in volunteer management, and experienced in graphics design, content, and social media management. He serves on the advisory board of three NGOs that promote health equity and fairness, social justice, and human capacity development.

**Osayomwanbo Temitope Josephine** is an aspiring leader who is deeply conscious of the gender stereotype in her immediate environment, and critical issues that border on social justice for women and children in vulnerable communities. She is a passionate activist in humanitarian and volunteer programs like the SUSO program.

**Theresa Ukam** is an Information Technology Specialist. She is a tech enthusiast with relevant skills including Data Analytics. She is currently utilizing her tech skills to augment human abilities and streamline seamless processes in the development sector and beyond.

**Boma Da-ala** is passionate about issues involving women and children, she is willing to use all resources available to ensure a better space and environment for children in Africa. She has a degree in International Relations and a Diploma in Law, and is currently pursuing a Master in International Law and Diplomacy

**Ozuluoha Chioma Cynthia** is a pharmacist working in the public health sector to improve health access to people in under-served communities in Nigeria and across Africa. She currently volunteers for Trinity Health Foundation; a Nigerian based NGO that focuses on improving health access in line with the SDG 3

**Titilayo Jaiyesimi** is a graduate of French and International Relations. She is a youth leader, community mobilizer and a Sustainable Development Goals advocate. She's passionate about child advocacy, youth development, partnerships and gender equality promotion. This is evident in her participation as a ONE CHAMPION and a SUSO Advocate.

**Saba Abdbasit Olanrewaju** is an advocate for the SDGs, a serial volunteer and also a personality who prioritizes self development as a means of giving back to his community. He's a Global Youth Ambassador (TheirWorld UK), and a Lagos State Youth Ambassador, a Volunteer with the United Nations and the Lagos State Volunteer Corps.

**Prince Kossy Nwankwo** is a public health enthusiast who doubles as a fitness trainer with a degree in biochemistry. He has been a part of several health awareness campaigns. His dream is to have a functional society that promotes the health and social well-being of African men, women and children.

**Aderemi Bamgboye** is a Young Professional for Sustainable Development Goals(YPSDG) and Young African Leaders Initiative(YALI) Fellow, with many years in non-profit organizations focused on education, health and well-being.

**Dr Chikaodi Chukwukere-Egbujor**, is Doctor of Optometry and a primary eye care advocate. She's currently the chief optometrist and clinic manager for Pentecost medical eye centre and the convener of Sight For All Initiative. She's also an advocate working on the SUSO Program

# PROJECT BACKGROUND

As our spaces become volatile, more children are at risk of child violation caused by factors not limited to, climate change, family poverty, lack of parental care, and access to basic amenities. As a result, 1 in 7 children and adolescent girls suffer from mental health with no adequate support according to the [State of the World's Children \(SOWC\)](#)<sup>(1)</sup> report.

This puts children from under-served communities and low-income families at even higher risk, killing at least 1 child every 11 minutes globally (ages 15 -19), coupled with existential problems of access to education, health, hunger, and harmful cultural practices that have culminated to gross violation of the rights of children and women in Nigeria.

However, given the pillars of action (Participation, Protection, Prevention, and Partnership) provided by the [UNSCR 2250](#)<sup>(2)</sup> and consolidated in the [UNCRC](#)<sup>(3)</sup>

This project seeks to assess the status of children's rights in communities in Lagos, with the aim of engaging relevant actors on the review and implementation of policies to protect vulnerable children in crises.

# COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF CHILDREN IN CRISES IN NORTHERN AND SOUTHERN NIGERIA



While the peculiarities of children in both Northern and Southern Nigeria are different, the condition of children in Northern Nigeria captures holistically, the reality of Nigerian children's rights by many indicators.

Save The Children, in a recent report on their child's rights and safety project carried out in northern Nigeria, clearly shows that many children in the north are victims of armed conflicts leading to the displacement of many families. The crisis in Northern Nigeria reflects humanitarian emergencies on key human rights elements like education, healthcare, nutrition, and security, with an alarming increase in out of school children, and those without parental care (Almajiris)

Frequent attacks on families by insurgent groups like the Boko Haram group has contributed significantly to violations of children's rights and displacement. These incessant attacks has forced even more children into make shift settlements as IDPs. In Southern Nigeria, children are mostly affected by lack of basic amenities due to government negligence.

***“Whether these attacks are direct or asymmetric, children everywhere deserve protection from all forms of aggression”***



Whether these crises are asymmetric or not, children everywhere deserve protection from every form of aggression and violation guaranteed under the African Charter on the Rights of Children (AFCRC) and the Child Rights Act of 2003. These cyclical problems in these regions, together with cultural beliefs and religious influences has sponsored child and early marriage for girls, increased gender based-violence, hunger, forced recruitment, and child poverty.

There is also a problem with the availability of accurate [data](#)<sup>(1)</sup> on the state of children, especially in southern Nigeria, this has made it difficult for government to respond to children in these emergencies. Our team spoke to a 13-year-old girl on the condition of anonymity, and she disclosed how they desperately needed something as basic as clean water in her community.

1: <https://www.savethechildren.net/blog/gender-matters-children-conflict>

# METHODOLOGY

We selected 7 communities of Lagos State that were adjudged as under-served to interact with their residents, community leaders, women, youth, and children.

Our target groups were primarily children between the ages of 7 - 19, teenage mothers, single parents, and adolescent girls.

To avoid issues of infringement and disclosure owing to stigmatization, we obtained ethical consent for our questionnaires and also developed guiding questions for children who could not communicate in English.

In assessing the status of children’s rights, we looked out for the following output indicators for ranking as poor, fair, and good

1. Education
2. Health
3. Environment and Housing
4. Standard of living
5. Parental care
6. Security

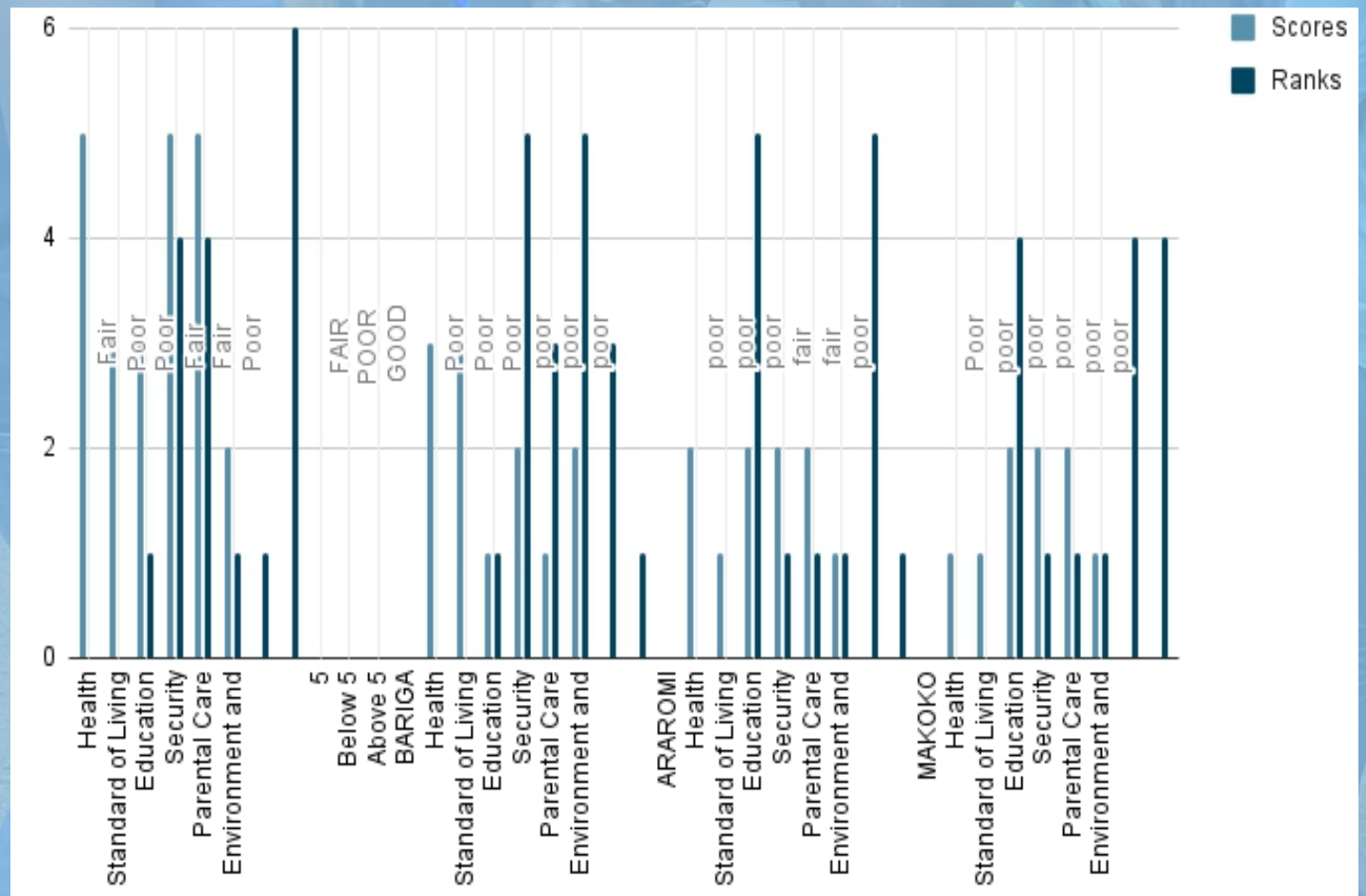


Fig.1.0: Chart showing indicators ranking for the communities



## OBSERVATIONS

From the 7 communities initially earmarked for assessment, we successfully surveyed only 5 which are; Bariga, Makoko, Araromi, Festac, and Ifesowapo communities .

**HOUSING:** Most of the houses are poorly built and inhabitable with more than 8 children living in one single room built on water and pile of refuse

**WASH:** We could not sight any source of clean water except for a river that serves as the source of fishing, drinking and means of transportation of goods and services. This lack of edible water in turn, compromises the sexual and reproductive health needs of the inhabitants of these communities.

**HEALTHCARE:** There are no properly equipped medical facilities or center in these communities or at close range to service medical needs and emergencies. This lack has forced people in these communities to rely on traditional medicine and self medication to survive.

**EDUCATION:** These communities due to their vulnerable location, lacked proper schools. The few ones available were ill equipped and could not cater for the learning needs of children. In most cases, there is just a small building which serves as a school with very few children attending. This lack, has created a huge gap and setback for early childhood education and development for these children

**OCCUPATION:** These areas are riverine settlements so the major occupation is petty and fish trading while the men are mostly fishermen or dredgers paid meager wages. The children are often without parental care, and most of them resort to becoming house helps and maids, especially those who cannot trace their origin. This in turn, has increased the margin of abuse and domestic violence on children.

There is clearly no government presence or intervention in the form of social amenities as they lamented. Conversely, their large numbers are usually useful for election campaigns and political purposes. We also observed pockets of teenage pregnancies. The average age of the children we spoke with was 8 years. Abuses like child labor, sexual harassment, gender-based violence, and street intimidation was recorded from the personal accounts of those we interviewed.

There is a huge commonality in all these communities. Aside from the fact that they are slums, the children suffer from the same threats to their rights. The variation is also very insignificant which might make it go unnoticed in many cases.

### **BARIGA**

Bariga is a district formerly under Somolu Local Government Area of Lagos State before it was upgraded by the State government to a Local Council Development Area. It was also mapped out for study because it ostensibly lacks key social infrastructure



### **MAKOKO COMMUNITY (Ago-Egun)**

This is best described as a floating slum and has its peculiarities. From the indicators, the following ranked in order of assessment;



### **ARAROMI(Ajegunle) COMMUNITY**

Ajegunle, popularly known as "AJ City" or simply "AJ", is a neighbourhood located in the Ajeromi-Ifelodun Local Government Area of Lagos. It's also a popular shanty town in Lagos that houses thousands of people primarily involved in informal activities.



### **FESTAC**

In Festac, we spoke to over 40 children, teenage mothers, and women. Some of them which could not communicate in English properly. The settlement is situated by the edge of a lagoon with over 5000 people living in the community according to the community head. They have been living there for almost all their lives and most children have not left there for any other location.

**Common abuse in the communities range from child labor to sexual harassment.**



# SURVEY ANALYSIS

The analysis of challenges facing children in a typical Lagos community using a sampling data collection method, reveals that approximately **74%** of children are affected academically due to their background and environment which would have been better off if their living conditions were improved

**A high number of children have to deal with low self-esteem arising from bullying, and intimidation**



The survey indicates that the number of children on the street is highest among children aged **15–22** years due to the lack of financial support, while some don't know why they are on the street, most of which are caused by parental neglect. These predisposes them to risk - fighting back with limited resources, being endangered, and exposed to violence.

Children of ages **10-15** face more abuse because they are more vulnerable. A high number of children have to deal with low self-esteem arising from bullying, and intimidation.

A further assessment shows that **67.5 %** of children face monetary poverty by living in households with expenditures less than \$1 a day – the national poverty line, which can have long-term impacts on the well-being of children, even into adulthood.

We've discovered from the data collected that **7.75%** of the children are roadside traders, **7.70%** are apprentices and a large number are **enrolled but not regular** in school.

# CAMPAIGNS AND OUTCOMES

Online campaign was one of the key strategies adopted for this project. The objective was to use this scheduled online campaigns to create multi-sectoral awareness and draw attention of all relevant stakeholders and agencies to the table to reconsider a more realistic and inclusive approach to child protection.

These campaigns were launched on Twitter, Facebook, and LinkedIn with @EmedongAkpabio's handle serving as the main account and retweeted by advocates from their personal handles.

Relevant organizations like UNICEF, Save The Children, AU-Youth Office etc., were tagged in the posts during the campaign period, and the following hash tags were used for engagements:

#SpeakUpStandOutNG,

#everychildmatters #childrights

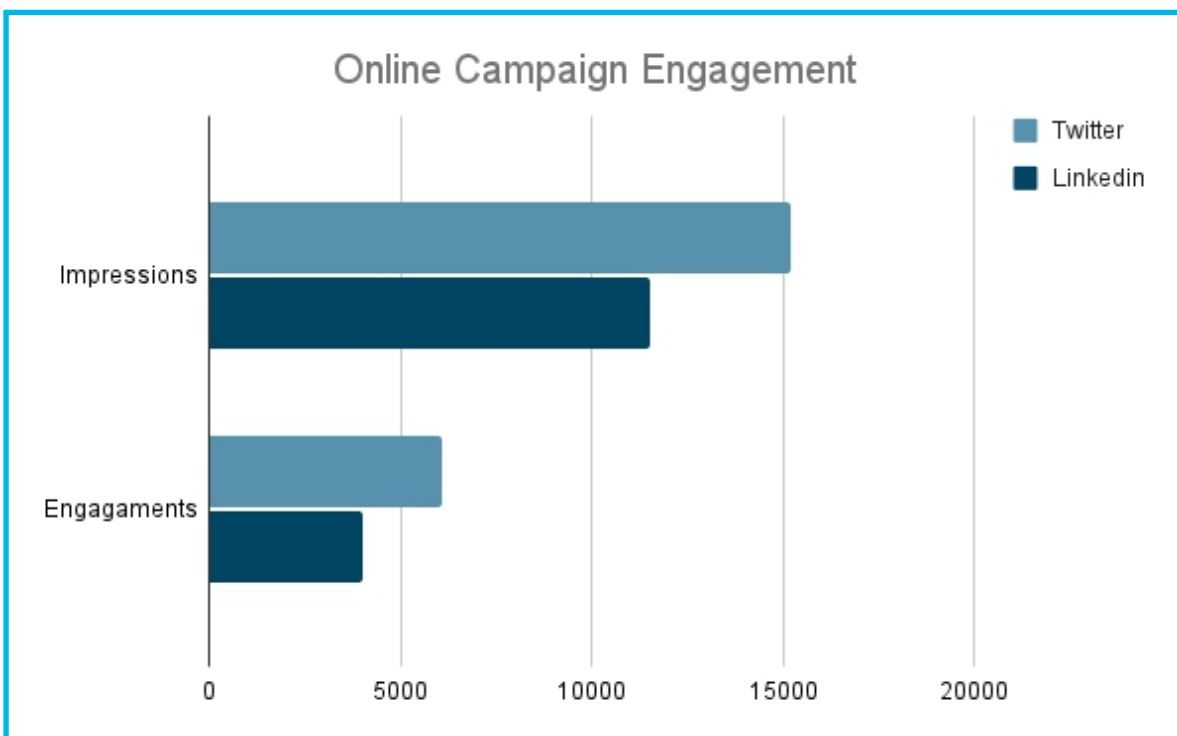


Fig.1.1: Chart showing online campaign analytics from Twitter and LinkedIn

## COLLABORATIONS

All the surveys carried out in each of these communities indicated problems, hinged primarily on violations of fundamental rights of children. To provide solutions, the multi-sectoral strategy was adopted due to its effective response.

The following organizations:

CeceYara Foundation, American Corner, ChessinSlumsAfrica, YouthEvolve, CivicHive, Safety Chic, Life Fount Foundation, and Learners Corner, were instrumental and amplified our engagements.



Tunde Onakoya, Founder of Chess in Slums Afrca speaking at the Stakeholders Consultation Forum

## STAKEHOLDERS CONSULTATION

50 key stakeholders were invited to be part of the consultation on “protecting children in vulnerable communities of Lagos state”. The findings of the survey was, unanimously adopted from three main standpoints;

- 1 There is a humanitarian crisis for children in many communities of Lagos State.
- 2 Charity will NOT protect vulnerable children.
- 3 We cannot effectively protect children if women are not safe.



In a partnership meeting with the Cece Yara Foundation Team, at Lagos

Do you agree that Children are in Humanitarian crisis? Mentimeter



Results from a live poll during the Stakeholders Consultation Workshop held at Ikeja, Lagos



At BudgIT Office with Mr Iyanu Bolarinwa, Assistant Manager, International Growth

## POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE PROTECTION OF CHILDREN IN VULNERABLE COMMUNITIES OF LAGOS STATE



Separation of existing departments of child welfare/protection from the ministry of women affairs, for better resource allocation and accountability.

Establishment of a Lagos State Child Protection and Enforcement Agency responsible for protecting children in emergencies.



Community-to-community validation and database management for displaced children for better response and compliance with extant laws.

Forensic interview should be encouraged and children police officers should be trained and mobilized to handle cases of child violations.



Creation of specialized courts to try violators of children's rights and to accelerate access and dispensation of justice.

Support for social and behavioral change programs in under-served communities by adapting models with proven outcomes



Presidential assent on the National Child Protection and Enforcement Agency Bill, 2015.

# SOCIAL AND BEHAVIORAL CHANGE MODEL FOR CHILD PROTECTION

In the course of carrying out this project, we have seen how a few SBC models have brought transformation for children in low income communities which we would like to show.

Firstly, from our survey, we noticed that the environment plays a critical role in children's development and from our one-on-one interaction, many children confirmed that they could do better academically and socially, if they had a good and safe environment to express themselves.

The toxicity of those environments douses their capacity and aptitude. It also would mean that these children do not only need education but rehabilitation through the introduction of social and behavioral change concepts in these communities.

Two models we find workable are the Chess In Slums Africa and The Safety Chic Models.

## Chess in Slums Africa:

This model embraces gamification as key to the development of critical thinking and problem solving abilities in children. By learning how to play Chess the children picked what's potentially possible about the King or Queen on the chess board.

These games built back the confidence of children and enabled them take high targeted and informed decisions not only for games but for education as well



Photo credits:

<https://www.facebook.com/chessinlums/photos/1457133368122396>

<https://www.facebook.com/thesafetychic/photos/pb.100063540012066.-2207520000./2481132915547596/?type=3>

## The Safety Chic:

This model proposes a self-paced learning approach that teaches children how to protect themselves from harm so that when they find themselves in unsafe situations they will know how to act. This can be done by developing and providing safety education resources like books that children can take home and safety posters that can be placed in schools.

In addition, a learning program can be designed where these resources are used for an academic year so that all through the session, children are learning about different aspects of safety. This model could potentially reduce domestic accidents for children and make the children more self-aware

THE Safety Chic

f @thesafetychic

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# CONCLUSION



As a nation, we still have a long way to go towards ensuring that the well being of children and families in Nigeria are protected, with access to proper education devoid of financial constraints.

The analysis from this report indicates the need for improved social infrastructure and protection measures to ensure that children are protected from risks, along with an expansion of access to much-needed social services and education.

The findings in this report are carefully curated from field research and analysis hence, it is important and relevant to adopt these models and observations to drive social change in communities.

This report also offers useful guidelines that should be adopted by the Nigerian government and agencies, as well as not-for-profit organizations looking to embark on children and women-focused interventions in these communities, and similar communities within and beyond Nigeria.

This adoption will bring clear directions, strategies, structures and funding necessary for the implementation and realization of children's rights in Nigeria.