

**COMMUNITY PERSPECTIVE ON THE CONTRIBUTION OF UNICEF IN THE  
PROMOTION OF CHILD RIGHT IN THE FEDERAL CAPITAL TERRITORY, (FCT),  
2015-2023**

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**Abstract**

*The protection of child rights is a critical global issue, particularly in developing countries like Nigeria, where systemic challenges disproportionately affect children. Despite the enactment of the Child Rights Act (CRA) in 2003 and various government initiatives aimed at safeguarding child rights, persistent issues such as child labor, violence, and limited access to quality education and healthcare continue to affect Nigerian children. Cultural beliefs, poverty, weak law enforcement, and political instability exacerbate these challenges. Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) such as UNICEF have implemented various programs focused on improving education, healthcare, and safeguarding children from abuse. However, the effectiveness of these interventions, particularly in terms of community awareness and engagement, remains insufficiently explored. This study examines community awareness and perceptions of UNICEF's child rights initiatives in the Federal Capital Territory (FCT) of Nigeria from 2015 to 2023, with a focus on their impact on education, health, and child safety. The research also explores the challenges faced by communities in accessing UNICEF-supported programs and evaluates the effectiveness of these interventions. A descriptive survey design was adopted, targeting community members in urban, peri-urban, and rural areas of the FCT, including parents and caregivers with direct or indirect exposure to UNICEF's initiatives. Stratified random sampling was used to ensure representation across various community types, with a sample size of 384 respondents determined using the Krejcie and Morgan formula. Data was collected through structured questionnaires and analyzed using simple percentages and frequency distributions in SPSS version 25. The results revealed that all 384 respondents (100%) were aware of UNICEF's child rights initiatives, indicating effective communication strategies and extensive outreach. However, the study also identified gaps, particularly in raising awareness about child abuse prevention and safety. Based on these findings, the study recommends strengthening targeted awareness campaigns on child protection and abuse prevention. Additionally, UNICEF could collaborate with local influencers, schools, religious leaders, and media platforms to enhance information dissemination, especially through social media and mobile technology, to improve visibility and engagement among younger populations. These measures are crucial for enhancing the effectiveness of UNICEF's programs and ensuring they address the critical needs of children in the FCT.*

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**Keywords:** *Community, Community Perspective, Child's Right, Child Abuse, Welfare*

## **Introduction**

The history of child rights in Nigeria reflects an evolution from traditional and colonial systems to a structured legal framework aligned with international standards. Despite legislative progress, the effectiveness of child rights remains dependent on governmental and non-governmental efforts to address persistent challenges (UNICEF, 2020). Child rights include survival, development, protection, and participation, yet Nigerian children face poverty, conflict, limited education and healthcare, and various forms of exploitation, necessitating stronger protection measures (Adelekan, 2019). Historically, Nigerian children were integral to their communities, with rights and responsibilities defined by ethnic customs. Before colonial rule, child welfare was managed through customary laws and extended family systems that ensured collective responsibility for child-rearing (Fapohunda, 2013). British colonial rule introduced a Western legal system that focused on juvenile delinquency but neglected broader child welfare concerns (Olowu, 2020). Following independence in 1960, early legislation such as the Children and Young Persons Act (CYPA) addressed juvenile justice but failed to comprehensively protect child rights (Abubakar, 2016).

A major milestone in Nigeria's child rights framework was the Child Rights Act (CRA) of 2003, influenced by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), adopted in 1989. The CRC articulates children's rights to education, health, and protection from abuse (UN, 1989). Nigeria reinforced its commitment by ratifying the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACRWC) in 2001, recognizing the unique challenges African children face (African Union, 1990). Advocacy from national and international stakeholders led to the passage of the CRA under President Olusegun Obasanjo in 2003, despite initial resistance from religious bodies (Adeleke, 2017). While the CRA extends constitutional protections to children, its effectiveness is limited due to uneven state-level implementation. Nigeria's federal system requires state assemblies to domesticate the Act, but many states have yet to do so, creating regional disparities in child protection (Ogunyemi, 2020). The absence of uniform enforcement has left children vulnerable, particularly in regions where socio-cultural and religious factors influence legislation. Despite legislative commitments, violations of child rights persist. Child labor, early marriage, lack of education, and inadequate healthcare continue to impact millions (UNICEF, 2020). Widespread discrimination and exploitation further compound their vulnerabilities, necessitating stronger enforcement and social interventions (Adebayo, 2018). The ratification of the CRC in 1991 spurred increased advocacy from non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and international bodies, raising awareness about issues like trafficking and abuse (Olowu, 2020). However, implementation challenges continue to hinder the full realization of children's rights. Children's vulnerability underscores the need for special protection measures. As the future generation, they require nurturing and support to reach their potential and contribute to society (Adebayo, 2018). UNICEF has played a crucial role in advocating for child rights in Nigeria. Established in 1946, UNICEF has evolved into a global institution focused on long-term developmental assistance (UNICEF, 2021). In Nigeria, it has promoted the CRA, improved healthcare access, and fought malnutrition and educational disparities (UNICEF, 2020). Protecting child rights in Nigeria demands collaboration among governments, international organizations, and civil society. While legislative progress has been made, enforcement gaps persist due to socio-cultural barriers and resource constraints. The CRA represents a significant step, but further advocacy and reforms are necessary. Against this backdrop, this study examines community perspectives on NGOs' contributions, particularly UNICEF, to child rights protection in Nigeria from 2015 to 2023.

## **Statement of the Research Problem**

Child rights protection remains a critical issue in Nigeria, where systemic challenges such as inadequate education, poor healthcare, and widespread abuse persist (UNICEF, 2020). Despite the enactment of the Child Rights Act (CRA) in 2003 and various government initiatives, children continue to face issues such as child labor, violence, and lack of access to essential services (Adelekan, 2019). Factors such as traditional beliefs, poverty, weak law enforcement, and political instability further hinder the recognition and protection of children's rights within communities (Ogunyemi, 2020). Governmental and non-governmental organizations, including UNICEF, have made efforts to address these challenges. UNICEF has implemented various programs aimed at improving access to education, healthcare, and child protection services (UNICEF, 2021). However, the effectiveness of these interventions and their reception within communities remain underexplored. Socio-cultural barriers, systemic weaknesses, and limited community engagement continue to hinder the success of these initiatives (Adebayo, 2018).

Additionally, deficiencies in the judicial system and law enforcement agencies weaken the enforcement of child rights laws. Insufficient training, inadequate funding, and low awareness of the CRA leave many children vulnerable to rights violations (Fapohunda, 2013). Widespread illiteracy and lack of sensitization among children, parents, and stakeholders further complicate efforts to protect child rights, raising concerns about the impact of UNICEF's initiatives (Olowu, 2020). This study examines community awareness and perceptions of UNICEF's child rights programs from 2015 to 2023, focusing on their impact on education, health, and child safety. It assesses the effectiveness of these interventions while identifying obstacles communities face in accessing them. Addressing these gaps will provide insights to enhance child rights protection initiatives in Nigeria (Adeleke, 2017).

### **Research Aim and Objectives**

The aim of this study is to examine the community perspectives on the contribution of Non-Governmental Organizations UNICEF in particular to Child Rights Protection in Nigeria from 2015 – 2023. Thus, below are specific objectives of the study:

1. To assess community awareness of UNICEF's child rights initiatives in selected communities in Nigeria.
2. To evaluate the perceived impact of UNICEF's programs on child rights protection within the community, focusing on areas such as education, health, and child safety.
3. To explore community members' views on the effectiveness of UNICEF's interventions in addressing key child rights challenges, including child labor, abuse, and access to basic services.
4. To identify challenges and limitations experienced by the community in accessing UNICEF-supported child rights programs and resources.

### **Literature Review**

#### **Concept of Rights**

The concept of rights is foundational in legal, philosophical, and political discourse, representing entitlements or freedoms inherent to individuals. Rights are commonly categorized into natural rights, legal rights, and human rights. Natural rights, as posited by Locke (1689), are intrinsic to human existence and include life, liberty, and property. These rights, according to Locke, exist independent of government and must be safeguarded by the state. In contrast, Bentham (1843) dismissed natural rights as “nonsense upon stilts,” advocating for a positivist approach where rights exist only within established legal frameworks. Legal rights, unlike natural rights, derive from laws, constitutions, and judicial decisions. Legal positivism, championed by Hart (1961),

argues that rights are valid only if recognized by legal systems. This perspective contrasts with Kant's (1785) moral philosophy, which asserts that human dignity bestows inalienable rights. The intersection of natural and legal rights is evident in modern legal instruments such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR, 1948), which codifies fundamental human entitlements while seeking universality.

A key debate in rights discourse is the universality versus cultural relativism argument. Donnelly (2013) contends that human rights should be universally applied, whereas Mutua (2002) critiques this view, arguing that human rights frameworks often impose Western-centric norms on non-Western societies. This tension is particularly pronounced in socio-economic rights discussions. Sen (1999) emphasizes the importance of recognizing economic disparities in shaping rights, advocating for a more inclusive understanding that considers diverse socio-political contexts. Furthermore, contemporary human rights debates address emerging concerns such as digital rights, environmental rights, and LGBTQ+ rights. With increasing digitalization, scholars argue for recognizing internet access and data privacy as fundamental rights (Floridi, 2016). Similarly, environmental rights have gained prominence, with scholars such as Atapattu (2019) asserting that environmental degradation threatens fundamental human rights. These evolving dimensions of rights demonstrate the dynamic nature of rights discourse, necessitating continual adaptation to societal changes.

### **Concept of Child Rights**

Child rights, as a subset of human rights, emphasize the unique vulnerabilities and developmental needs of children. Historically, children were regarded as parental property, possessing limited autonomy (Archard, 2004). The evolution of child rights gained momentum in the 20th century, culminating in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC, 1989), which remains the most comprehensive framework for child protection and empowerment. The UNCRC (1989) established four fundamental principles: non-discrimination, the best interests of the child, the right to survival and development, and respect for the child's views. Freeman (2011) highlights these principles as transformative, shifting the perception of children from passive recipients of care to active rights-holders. However, the implementation of these rights varies across legal and cultural contexts. Lundy (2007) argues that Western legal traditions prioritize individual autonomy, whereas collectivist societies often emphasize communal responsibilities over individual child rights (Boyden, 1997). A significant challenge in child rights enforcement is the persistence of harmful practices such as child labor, child marriage, and lack of access to education. The International Labour Organization (ILO, 2017) reports that 160 million children are engaged in child labor, despite international prohibitions. UNICEF (2020) identifies economic constraints, political instability, and cultural resistance as major barriers to child rights implementation. These challenges underscore the necessity of integrating child rights into national policies and strengthening enforcement mechanisms.

Furthermore, technological advancements have introduced new dimensions to child rights, particularly regarding online safety and digital literacy. Livingstone and Third (2017) argue that children's rights in the digital age require new frameworks to address risks such as cyberbullying and online exploitation. The growing recognition of digital rights for children highlights the need for continuous policy adaptation to emerging global challenges. Thus, while the UNCRC provides a strong foundation, the dynamic nature of child rights necessitates ongoing advocacy and legal reform.

### **Concept of Multilateralism**

Multilateralism, defined as cooperation among multiple states and institutions to address global issues, has shaped international relations since the 20th century. Traditional multilateral frameworks, including the United Nations (UN), the World Trade Organization (WTO), and the International Monetary Fund (IMF), facilitate economic and political cooperation (Keohane, 1984). The post-World War II period saw the establishment of rules-based institutions to promote peace, security, and economic stability (Ikenberry, 2001). A core feature of multilateralism is its emphasis on collective decision-making and international norms. Krasner (1982) posits that multilateral institutions reduce transaction costs and enhance cooperation by establishing norms and mechanisms for dispute resolution. However, contemporary scholars highlight the limitations of traditional multilateralism in addressing modern global challenges, such as climate change, pandemics, and economic inequality (Nye, 2020). The rise of unilateralism and regionalism, particularly with shifting global power dynamics, has challenged established multilateral institutions (Acharya, 2014).

One of the most significant multilateral efforts in recent years is the Paris Agreement (2015), which exemplifies global cooperation in combating climate change. Despite broad participation, enforcement mechanisms remain weak, with major economies such as the United States and China facing criticism for inadequate climate commitments (Falkner, 2016). Similarly, the World Health Organization's (WHO) response to the COVID-19 pandemic demonstrated the strengths and weaknesses of multilateral cooperation in global health governance (WHO, 2021). The future of multilateralism depends on states' willingness to engage in collective problem-solving and adapt institutional frameworks to contemporary geopolitical realities. As globalization accelerates, multilateral institutions must evolve to remain effective. Scholars such as Hurrell (2007) argue for a more inclusive multilateralism that integrates emerging economies and non-state actors. Furthermore, the increasing role of technology in global governance suggests that digital diplomacy and cyber regulations may become central to future multilateral efforts (Sikkink, 2020). While multilateralism remains a cornerstone of global governance, its continued relevance requires adaptability and reform. Addressing contemporary challenges such as climate change, public health crises, and digital governance necessitates strengthening multilateral frameworks and fostering greater international cooperation. As the global order becomes increasingly multipolar, multilateral institutions must balance inclusivity, efficiency, and legitimacy to navigate evolving international dynamics.

### **Empirical Review**

The issue of child rights in Nigeria has been a focal point of scholarly attention, largely due to the country's large child population and the multifaceted challenges that children face, such as poverty, limited access to education, child labor, and abuse (Ezeanya, 2019; Agaptus et al., 2022). As Nigeria grapples with these issues, both governmental and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have become key players in advancing child rights. These organizations, particularly international ones such as UNICEF (United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund), have partnered with the Nigerian government to address these concerns (UNICEF, 2021; Okonkwo & Akande, 2020). This empirical review seeks to synthesize various studies on the role of these organizations, particularly in the areas of education, child protection, and the socio-cultural challenges affecting the realization of child rights in Nigeria (Ikechukwu & Nnamdi, 2020; Alabi, 2018).

Education plays a critical role in advancing the rights of children. Several studies have highlighted how socio-economic and cultural barriers hinder access to education, which in turn impedes the

fulfillment of child rights. Agaba (2007) noted that factors such as poverty, gender norms, and power imbalances limit children's access to education, particularly in rural regions. Similarly, in Nigeria, issues like poverty, preference for male children, early marriage, and child labor are persistent obstacles to educational access, especially for girls (Agaba, 2007; Ezeanya, 2019; Nwabueze, 2021). These barriers have led to a substantial number of children, especially girls, being excluded from formal education, thereby violating their fundamental rights.

Research by Ihedioha and Abimbola (2020) also corroborates these findings, showing that socio-economic disparities in Nigeria contribute to unequal access to education. These disparities are evident in the significant differences between rural and urban regions in terms of school infrastructure, teacher quality, and available learning resources (Ihedioha & Abimbola, 2020; Okorie & Adewale, 2019). This inequality exacerbates the vulnerability of children in marginalized communities and perpetuates a cycle of poverty. Furthermore, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC, 1989) has shaped national policies, but implementation remains inconsistent across different states in Nigeria (UNCRC, 1989; UNICEF, 2022). Adebayo and Yusuf (2020) argue that Nigeria's Child Rights Act (CRA) aligns with international standards, but enforcement has been slow, particularly in states that have yet to domesticate the law, leading to varying levels of child protection (Adebayo & Yusuf, 2020; Akinwale, 2021).

Non-governmental organizations have been instrumental in addressing gaps in child rights protection, particularly in areas where government intervention is limited or absent. Okeke and Onuoha (2017) explored how NGOs, in collaboration with UNICEF, have implemented community-based programs aimed at reducing child labor and promoting education, particularly in marginalized areas. These initiatives have been pivotal in combating child trafficking and abuse, particularly in Nigeria's border regions (Okeke & Onuoha, 2017; Olanrewaju, 2019). Olaniyi (2021) further documents the role of NGOs in rescuing children from trafficking networks, providing them with rehabilitation services, and reintegrating them into communities.

One of the significant barriers to the protection of child rights in Nigeria is the persistence of socio-cultural practices that conflict with the principles of child rights. Cultural norms and traditional beliefs often dictate child-rearing practices, leading to situations where children's rights are violated. Studies like those of Adesina and Taiwo (2019) have highlighted how traditional gender roles and early marriage practices impede children's access to education and expose them to various forms of abuse, particularly girls (Adesina & Taiwo, 2019; Fatima & Ibrahim, 2020). For instance, early marriage, which is prevalent in some Nigerian communities, prevents girls from pursuing their education and subjects them to lifelong disadvantages (Osagie & Chukwuemeka, 2018). These cultural practices, rooted in patriarchal traditions, remain a significant challenge to achieving gender equality and promoting child rights in Nigeria.

The socio-cultural environment in Nigeria has significant implications for the realization of child rights. Socio-cultural beliefs and practices are often a source of resistance to the implementation of child rights frameworks, particularly in rural and traditional settings. Studies by Osagie and Chukwuemeka (2018) have highlighted how certain practices, such as the preference for boys over girls, early marriage, and child labor, are deeply entrenched in Nigerian society and continue to undermine efforts to promote child rights. These practices not only affect girls' access to education but also perpetuate gender-based violence and exploitation. While international frameworks like the UNCRC advocate for gender equality and the protection of children from abuse, these cultural practices create significant barriers to the effective realization of child rights in the Nigerian context. Furthermore, the persistence of child labor in Nigeria is another area where cultural beliefs and economic pressures play a critical role in limiting the enforcement of child rights. In many

Nigerian communities, children are expected to contribute to household income through labor, which often leads to their exploitation. Ezeanya (2019) documented how child labor is normalized in certain parts of the country, with children working in markets, farms, and domestic settings. This practice violates their right to education and exposes them to physical, psychological, and emotional harm.

NGOs and international organizations like UNICEF have played a significant role in addressing child rights issues in Nigeria, particularly in areas such as education, child protection, and healthcare. UNICEF's involvement in Nigeria has been central to the development of programs aimed at reducing child mortality, improving access to education, and protecting children from abuse and exploitation (UNICEF, 2020). UNICEF's Community-based Education Program, for instance, has been particularly effective in providing alternative learning pathways for marginalized children in rural areas, especially girls (UNICEF, 2020). However, despite the successes of these programs, the lack of sufficient funding, political will, and infrastructure in many regions has hindered the full realization of child rights.

Chege et al. (2016) evaluated the Girls' Education Project (GEP), a collaboration between the Nigerian government, DFID Nigeria, and UNICEF, which targeted the enrollment of girls in schools in Bauchi, Niger, and Sokoto states. The study found that GEP's focus on girl-friendly policies, collaboration between government and NGOs, and community involvement significantly improved educational access for girls in these regions (Chege et al., 2016). However, Agaptus et al. (2022) argued that the success of such projects is limited by deep-rooted socio-cultural norms that continue to prioritize boys' education over girls, particularly in northern Nigeria. This highlights the importance of addressing cultural beliefs alongside policy interventions to ensure that child rights programs are more effective. The challenge of child trafficking has also garnered significant attention in the literature on child rights in Nigeria. Abion (2015) conducted a study on child trafficking in Nigeria, identifying the role of poverty, unemployment, and corrupt practices by officials as key factors that enable child trafficking networks to thrive. Abion's research emphasized the need for stronger enforcement of anti-trafficking laws and greater collaboration between government agencies, NGOs, and international organizations like UNICEF to address this issue (Abion, 2015). While UNICEF has been actively involved in advocacy and policy formulation, the study highlights the inadequacies in enforcement mechanisms, which remain a significant barrier to the protection of children from trafficking and exploitation (Agaptus et al., 2022).

### **Gaps in the Literature**

Several gaps remain that limit a comprehensive understanding of the issue. One critical gap is the lack of empirical research on the adaptation of universal human rights frameworks to local contexts. While many studies focus on international standards such as the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), they often fail to explore how these frameworks can be tailored to fit Nigeria's complex socio-cultural landscape. Research is needed to explore how traditional cultural practices, such as early marriage and child labor, intersect with the enforcement of child rights laws and how these conflicts can be resolved to ensure better compliance with child rights standards (Agaba, 2007; Ezeanya, 2019).

Another gap concerns the effectiveness of multilateral approaches in addressing child rights violations in developing countries like Nigeria. Existing literature on multilateralism frequently overlooks the power imbalances between developed and developing nations, which can skew resource allocation and policy formulation. These imbalances often result in child rights initiatives that do not fully align with local needs, which in turn limits their effectiveness (Mohanty, 2003;

Huzeru, 2012). Further research is needed to examine how global agendas intersect with local realities and how these power dynamics influence the design and implementation of child rights programs, particularly in Nigeria.

Longitudinal studies examining the long-term impact of interventions by NGOs and international organizations like UNICEF are also lacking. While many studies document short-term outcomes, such as increased enrollment in schools through programs like the Nigeria Girls' Education Project (Chege et al., 2016), there is little research on whether these interventions result in sustainable improvements in child welfare. Tracking the long-term effects of these programs is essential for understanding their true impact and identifying areas for improvement (Chege et al., 2016). While the role of NGOs in promoting child rights in Nigeria is well-documented, there is limited research on the systemic barriers these organizations face. Challenges such as political instability, financial constraints, and societal resistance to change often impede the effective implementation of child rights programs. Research that explores these barriers in greater depth would be crucial in identifying the factors that hinder the success of child rights initiatives and proposing solutions to overcome these obstacles (Huzeru, 2012).

### **Theoretical Framework**

The study of child rights in Nigeria, particularly in collaboration with UNICEF, requires a robust theoretical framework to analyze the complex interactions between state institutions, international organizations, and children's rights. This framework includes three key theories: Human Rights Theory, Social Constructivism, and Liberal Institutional Theory.

**Human Rights Theory** emphasizes that all individuals, including children, are entitled to inherent rights by virtue of their humanity, advocating for universality, indivisibility, and interdependence of rights (Donnelly, 2013). This theory is foundational in international documents like the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989), which set the standards for the protection of children's rights. In Nigeria, the Child's Rights Act (CRA) of 2003 was enacted to domesticate the principles of the CRC, ensuring rights such as education, protection from exploitation, and participation in decision-making (Kilkelly, 2001). Despite this, enforcement remains weak due to institutional inadequacies, corruption, and political resistance, particularly in northern Nigeria where local customs challenge the implementation of such laws (UNICEF, 2016). Cultural practices like child marriage and child labor continue to undermine children's rights, with millions of children, particularly girls, being subjected to harmful practices that violate their rights to protection and education (Oduyoye, 2017). Addressing these issues requires strengthening legal frameworks, enhancing enforcement, and fostering community engagement to shift harmful cultural norms (UNICEF, 2020).

**Social Constructivism** offers a lens for understanding how local cultural norms and values shape the perceptions of child rights. This theory highlights the role of social interactions in constructing knowledge and meaning, stressing that local customs often conflict with international child rights norms (Wendt, 1999). In Nigeria, practices like child labor and early marriage are ingrained in many communities, and social constructivism suggests that UNICEF's success depends on recognizing and engaging these local beliefs. By involving community leaders and stakeholders in discussions about child rights, UNICEF can create culturally sensitive programs that promote behavior change, as seen in initiatives focused on girls' education (Chege et al., 2016). Local agency and active participation in decision-making also empower communities to advocate for children's rights, leading to more sustainable and effective change (Ojogbo, 2020).

**Liberal Institutional Theory** focuses on the role of international cooperation and institutions in promoting human rights. According to this theory, global norms and the collaboration between

international organizations like UNICEF and national governments can lead to improved practices (Keohane & Nye, 1989). In Nigeria, international institutions like the UN, through the CRC, have influenced child rights policies, such as the CRA, by providing technical, financial, and policy support (Okonkwo & Akande, 2020). Despite these positive influences, liberal institutional theory has limitations, particularly in weak states where domestic political, cultural, and economic factors can undermine the implementation of international norms (Waltz, 1979). In Nigeria, the challenge remains in ensuring that international commitments are effectively translated into actionable domestic policies, especially when local governments resist changes due to cultural and religious reasons (Alabi, 2018).

### **Methodology**

This study investigates the community perception of the contributions of Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), with a particular focus on UNICEF, in promoting child rights in Nigeria. The research is specifically centered on the Federal Capital Territory (FCT) of Nigeria, spanning the years 2015 to 2023. To achieve a comprehensive understanding of the study objectives, a quantitative research approach is adopted, which is well-suited to obtaining measurable, objective data that can evaluate the community's awareness of UNICEF's programs, the perceived impact of these initiatives, and the challenges faced by communities in accessing these programs. The quantitative approach is selected for its ability to generate large amounts of numerical data, which can be objectively analyzed and compared across different community groups. This method allows the researcher to examine community perspectives on UNICEF's child rights interventions in a clear and systematic manner. A structured questionnaire is used for data collection, and statistical sampling ensures that the findings are representative of the broader population in the FCT, enabling the research to cover a wide array of communities and their experiences with UNICEF's child rights programs.

The research is conducted in the Federal Capital Territory, a region where UNICEF has carried out various child rights initiatives. The FCT faces numerous challenges related to child rights, such as poverty, limited access to education, and harmful cultural practices, making it an ideal context for this study. The FCT represents a mix of urban, peri-urban, and rural communities, each experiencing distinct socio-economic conditions that may affect their awareness and perceptions of child rights interventions. By examining both urban and rural communities within the FCT, the study provides a more nuanced understanding of the regional dynamics surrounding child rights advocacy in Nigeria.

The target population includes community members in the FCT who have direct or indirect exposure to UNICEF's child rights programs. These individuals include parents, caregivers, educators, health workers, social workers, and community leaders. Since parents and caregivers are key beneficiaries of child rights initiatives, their perspectives on the impact and accessibility of these programs are central to the study. Ethical considerations prevent surveying children directly; however, their experiences and outcomes are captured indirectly through interviews with parents, caregivers, and other stakeholders involved in child welfare. A stratified random sampling technique is employed to ensure that the sample reflects the diversity of the population in the FCT. The population is divided into three strata: urban, peri-urban, and rural communities, each representing different socio-economic and infrastructural conditions. A proportional allocation method is used to select respondents from each stratum, ensuring that all relevant groups are adequately represented. The sample size is calculated using the Krejcie and Morgan (1970) formula, which provides a sample size of 384 respondents based on a 95% confidence level and a

5% margin of error. This sample size strikes a balance between statistical reliability and practical feasibility, allowing for meaningful analysis without overwhelming logistical demands.

Data analysis will be carried out using simple percentages and frequency distributions, which offer clear and interpretable results. The data will be coded using a codebook to ensure consistency and minimize errors during entry. The analysis will be conducted with the help of the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS), which will generate frequency distributions, percentages, and identify any correlations between variables. This approach enhances the reliability and depth of the analysis, providing valuable insights into the effectiveness of UNICEF's child rights interventions and the challenges communities face in accessing them. The study aims to contribute to broader discussions on child welfare in Nigeria by offering data-driven insights into the reach and impact of UNICEF's programs.

### **Overview Of UNICEF Activities in Nigeria and Child Rights**

UNICEF (United Nations Children's Fund) was founded in December 1946 to address the immediate needs of children affected by World War II. Originally known as the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund, it provided emergency food and healthcare. Over time, its mission expanded to include long-term development goals focused on child welfare. In 1953, UNICEF became a permanent part of the UN system, evolving its focus to encompass holistic child development and protection (UNICEF, 2019). UNICEF operates with five core functions: child survival and development, basic education and gender equality, HIV/AIDS prevention, child protection, and advocacy for children's rights.

Child Survival and Development remains a priority for UNICEF, focusing on reducing child mortality through immunization, nutrition programs, and maternal healthcare services. Programs aim to combat preventable diseases like polio, measles, and pneumonia. Efforts also include providing safe drinking water and improving sanitation to reduce waterborne diseases (UNICEF, 2020).

Basic Education and Gender Equality is another key function, with UNICEF working to eliminate barriers to education, particularly for marginalized groups such as girls. The organization implements programs like the Girls' Education Project, which promotes girls' enrollment and retention in schools (Adelekan, 2019). UNICEF supports educational infrastructure, teacher training, and child-friendly teaching methods to ensure inclusive learning environments (Olowu, 2020).

HIV/AIDS Prevention has been a central issue for UNICEF, with initiatives aimed at reducing the transmission of HIV from mothers to children and providing antiretroviral treatment. UNICEF also promotes awareness campaigns to reduce stigma and educate communities about prevention (UNICEF, 2020).

Child Protection focuses on safeguarding children from violence, exploitation, and abuse, including trafficking, child labor, early marriage, and gender-based violence. UNICEF works with governments to implement child protection policies, build legal frameworks, and provide training for law enforcement agencies (Adelekan, 2019). It also engages in community-based programs to change harmful social norms.

Advocacy for Children's Rights is essential in UNICEF's work to influence policies and mobilize resources to protect children's rights. The organization raises awareness and advocates for legislative changes to ensure the well-being of children globally (UNICEF, 2020).

UNICEF also plays a critical role in emergency response, providing immediate relief and long-term recovery support during crises such as conflicts, natural disasters, and pandemics. Its programs during emergencies focus on addressing immediate needs such as healthcare, food, and education while building resilience for the future (Kopinski, 2016).

In Nigeria, UNICEF's focus is on key areas such as health and nutrition, where it addresses high child mortality rates due to diseases like pneumonia, malaria, and diarrhea. Through immunization campaigns, nutrition programs, and the provision of ready-to-use therapeutic foods (RUTF), UNICEF supports the reduction of malnutrition and improves maternal and child health (Adelekan, 2019; World Health Organization, 2019). In addition, UNICEF works to combat education inequality, with efforts aimed at addressing the high number of out-of-school children, especially in Northern Nigeria. Programs target improving access to quality education and empowering marginalized groups, including girls (UNICEF, 2020).

Child protection remains an ongoing challenge in Nigeria, with children facing issues such as abuse, trafficking, and harmful traditional practices. UNICEF collaborates with the government to implement the Child Rights Act (CRA) of 2003, which outlines the rights of children and criminalizes practices like child labor and early marriage (UNICEF, 2020). Through community-based programs, UNICEF works to shift cultural practices that violate children's rights (Adeleke, 2017).

Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene (WASH) programs address the critical need for clean water and proper sanitation in Nigeria, especially in rural areas where access to safe drinking water is limited. UNICEF's WASH initiatives, such as the construction of boreholes and the promotion of hygiene education, aim to reduce preventable illnesses like diarrhea (UNICEF, 2020). In addition to these programs, UNICEF provides humanitarian assistance to communities affected by conflict, particularly in Nigeria's Northeast. The Boko Haram insurgency has caused widespread displacement and disrupted essential services. UNICEF's humanitarian response includes providing food, healthcare, and education support to displaced persons (Chege et al., 2016). Despite these efforts, ongoing conflicts and socio-cultural resistance continue to present challenges in reaching all vulnerable populations.

In the Federal Capital Territory (FCT) of Nigeria, UNICEF addresses urban challenges such as overcrowded classrooms, inadequate healthcare, and socio-economic disparities. Health initiatives focus on improving maternal and child health, while education programs aim to provide quality education and increase community involvement in schooling (Adeleke, 2017). UNICEF also works on child protection in the FCT by strengthening the capacity of social welfare and law enforcement agencies to address cases of child abuse and rights violations (Abubakar, 2016). The Child Rights Act (CRA) of 2003 serves as the legal framework for child protection in Nigeria, promoting children's rights to survival, development, and protection. While the CRA has strengthened child rights protection, its enforcement is inconsistent across the country, with socio-cultural factors impeding its full implementation. These include practices such as early marriage, which remains prevalent in some parts of Nigeria, despite being illegal under the CRA (Adeleke, 2017; UNICEF, 2020).

### **Discussion of Findings**

The first objective of the study is to assess community awareness of UNICEF's Child Rights Initiatives. The results indicate that all 384 respondents (100%) are aware of UNICEF's child rights initiatives in the Federal Capital Territory (FCT). This finding highlights the extensive outreach and recognition that UNICEF has garnered within the community. The unanimous awareness suggests that UNICEF has successfully implemented communication and advocacy strategies that

have ensured its child rights programs are well-known among the local population. This likely reflects UNICEF's efforts to maintain visibility through both traditional and modern communication channels, enhancing exposure to its activities.

Research by Matsuura (2019) on UNICEF's communication strategies emphasizes that raising awareness about child rights programs is crucial for community engagement in development initiatives. Similarly, Ochoa et al. (2020) argue that effective public awareness campaigns, such as media outreach, community engagement, and direct advocacy, are fundamental for improving understanding and participation in child rights programs.

Regarding specific programs, UNICEF's child education and health initiatives, including immunization and nutrition efforts, are the most universally recognized, with 100% of respondents acknowledging awareness of these programs. This suggests that UNICEF has effectively positioned these initiatives as core elements of its mission in the FCT. Education and health are widely viewed as foundational to child rights, and UNICEF's consistent efforts in these areas have generated significant visibility. However, awareness of campaigns focused on child abuse and exploitation (50.8%) and child safety programs (49.7%) is somewhat lower. While these figures still indicate substantial recognition, they suggest that further outreach is necessary to increase awareness of these critical issues. Zhang et al. (2021) observe that while health and education programs generally receive more attention, specialized initiatives addressing abuse and safety require additional communication efforts to enhance public understanding and participation.

The second objective of the study is to evaluate the perceived impact of UNICEF's programs on child rights protection within the community, focusing on areas such as education, health, and child safety. The results reveal a significant positive perception of UNICEF's impact on child education in the FCT. Research by Bajracharya et al. (2020) supports this finding, noting that UNICEF's educational programs have been consistently linked to improved learning outcomes in areas where the organization operates. These educational initiatives, particularly in terms of accessibility, quality, and inclusiveness, align with findings from global studies on child rights and education (Shah & Sadaf, 2018).

Regarding UNICEF's health-related programs, the majority of respondents rated them positively, with more than three-quarters acknowledging their effectiveness. This suggests that UNICEF's health interventions, such as immunization campaigns, nutritional support, and maternal healthcare programs, have significantly improved child health outcomes in the FCT. However, 16.9% rated the programs as fair, and 5.7% rated them as poor, indicating that there is still room for improvement. These findings mirror global evaluations of UNICEF's health programs, where the organization's successes are recognized but challenges remain, particularly in reaching marginalized populations (UNICEF, 2020).

In terms of child safety, nearly half of the respondents (45.3%) believe that UNICEF has significantly improved child safety in the FCT. Only a small proportion (3.1%) believe that UNICEF has made no contribution in this area. These results highlight general acknowledgment of UNICEF's efforts to enhance child safety, likely driven by its child protection programs, awareness campaigns, and advocacy. This finding supports McAlpine et al. (2019), which notes that UNICEF plays a significant role in improving child protection systems globally, through initiatives designed to prevent child abuse, trafficking, and exploitation.

Additionally, a large majority of respondents feel that the situation of child rights in the FCT has greatly improved due to UNICEF's initiatives since 2015. This is consistent with global assessments of UNICEF's impact, which emphasize the organization's role in advancing child rights (UNICEF, 2019). Despite these positive outcomes, 41.7% of respondents reported only

slight improvements, indicating that UNICEF's programs may still face challenges in achieving their full potential. These challenges could include resource constraints, policy barriers, or limited community engagement, particularly in certain areas.

The third research objective explores community members' views on the effectiveness of UNICEF's interventions in addressing key child rights challenges, including child labor, abuse, and access to basic services. The results show that UNICEF's initiatives aimed at tackling child labor in the FCT are widely regarded as successful. This finding is supported by global research, which highlights that UNICEF's anti-child labor campaigns, encompassing community education, advocacy, and policy support, have led to significant reductions in child labor rates worldwide (Sunderland & Holvoet, 2020). Nevertheless, persistent issues such as poverty, inadequate enforcement of labor laws, and cultural norms continue to hinder complete success in some regions, which could explain why a small number of respondents rated UNICEF's efforts as less effective.

Similarly, UNICEF's role in preventing child abuse and exploitation is widely recognized, though challenges remain in reaching marginalized children and addressing deeply ingrained social practices. Bai et al. (2019) argue that while UNICEF has made considerable strides in advocating for child protection laws and implementing preventive programs, addressing the most vulnerable populations remains an ongoing challenge. This could explain why a significant portion of respondents viewed these interventions as only "somewhat effective" rather than "very effective."

One of the most notable findings is the unanimous agreement (100%) among respondents that UNICEF-supported basic services, such as education and healthcare, are accessible in the FCT. This is consistent with global trends, where UNICEF has worked to ensure that children, especially in underserved regions, have access to essential services. UNICEF's initiatives, including building healthcare clinics, supporting immunization campaigns, and constructing schools, are often cited as critical components in improving the accessibility of child rights services (UNICEF, 2020). This aligns with UNICEF's broader approach to child rights, which emphasizes long-term capacity-building, community empowerment, and policy advocacy (Guthrie et al., 2019).

The final research objective examines challenges and limitations experienced by the community in accessing UNICEF-supported child rights programs and resources. One significant challenge identified is the geographic barrier to accessing UNICEF's programs, particularly in rural or remote areas. This issue reflects a common global challenge, where social services are often concentrated in urban centers, leaving rural communities with limited access. Nwoke (2021) notes that geographic isolation remains a critical issue in accessing social services, with transportation challenges exacerbating the problem for communities in remote locations.

Over half of the respondents identified lack of awareness as a key challenge. This suggests that communication gaps may hinder access to UNICEF's programs, reducing participation and limiting the programs' effectiveness. Tisdell et al. (2020) argue that improving communication strategies is crucial to raising awareness and enhancing participation in child rights protection programs.

Financial barriers were also identified by 52.2% of respondents, indicating that even when programs are geographically accessible, additional costs—such as transportation, healthcare fees, and lost income from time off work—pose significant obstacles. This financial strain disproportionately affects low-income households, limiting their participation in UNICEF programs. Research indicates that cost is a common deterrent for vulnerable populations in accessing essential services (Bai & Mukherjee, 2019).

Cultural issues were reported by 30.7% of respondents, highlighting that traditional beliefs, norms, or practices may conflict with the goals of UNICEF's programs. Such cultural barriers can impede the acceptance and effectiveness of interventions, especially when the community does not fully align with the objectives or methodologies of the programs. Dube (2021) emphasizes the importance of culturally sensitive programming to enhance community buy-in and ensure that interventions resonate with local populations.

## **Conclusion**

This study provides valuable insights into community perspectives on the role of Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) in child rights protection in Nigeria, focusing on UNICEF's programs from 2015 to 2023. The findings highlight UNICEF's success in achieving high awareness levels regarding its child rights initiatives, particularly in education and health. Universal recognition of these programs suggests that UNICEF's extensive outreach efforts have effectively engaged the public. However, awareness of child abuse prevention and safety initiatives remains relatively lower, indicating a need for more targeted communication strategies.

The study also reveals that UNICEF's interventions in education and health are widely perceived as having a positive impact, consistent with global evaluations of the organization's contributions to child welfare. While most respondents view UNICEF's health programs favorably, some rate them as fair or poor, suggesting that improvements are needed, particularly in reaching marginalized populations. Similarly, child safety interventions are generally acknowledged, but their impact remains uneven, emphasizing the need for more consistent efforts in this area.

Regarding key child rights challenges, the community largely considers UNICEF's initiatives in reducing child labor and improving access to basic services as effective. However, efforts to combat child abuse and exploitation continue to face obstacles, particularly in reaching vulnerable populations and addressing deep-rooted social practices. Notably, respondents unanimously agree that UNICEF-supported services such as education and healthcare are accessible, reflecting the organization's commitment to ensuring fundamental child rights.

Despite these achievements, several challenges hinder community access to UNICEF programs. Geographic barriers, particularly in rural and remote areas, present a major obstacle, reflecting broader global trends. Financial constraints also limit participation, with costs related to transportation, healthcare, and time off work posing significant difficulties for economically disadvantaged families. Additionally, a lack of awareness and cultural barriers further restrict community engagement with UNICEF's programs. Addressing these challenges is crucial for enhancing the effectiveness and reach of child rights interventions.

## **Recommendations**

### **1. Enhance Awareness Campaigns for Child Protection Programs**

While awareness of education and health initiatives is strong, UNICEF should intensify efforts to promote child abuse prevention and safety programs. This can be achieved through community-based outreach, local media engagement, and collaborations with schools and religious leaders. Leveraging social media platforms and digital content, such as animations and interactive materials, can also improve engagement among younger populations.

### **2. Expand Health and Safety Interventions in Underserved Areas**

UNICEF should strengthen its presence in rural communities by deploying mobile health clinics and outreach teams to deliver essential services such as immunization and maternal care.

Collaborating with local health authorities and NGOs can enhance service delivery, while investments in healthcare infrastructure and workforce development will ensure long-term impact.

### 3. Improve Geographic Accessibility

To address location-based barriers, UNICEF should establish mobile service units and temporary learning spaces in remote areas. Partnerships with local governments can help improve transportation networks, and technology-driven solutions like telemedicine and online learning platforms can extend access to essential services.

### 4. Promote Cultural Sensitivity in Program Delivery

Engaging community leaders and integrating traditional communication methods, such as storytelling and drama, can enhance the acceptance of child rights initiatives. Tailoring program messaging to align with cultural values will help foster community buy-in and improve participation rates.

### 5. Strengthen Stakeholder Collaboration and Advocacy

Increased collaboration with government agencies, NGOs, and private-sector partners will enhance resource-sharing and coordination. UNICEF should advocate for greater government investment in child protection programs and work to integrate child rights priorities into national development strategies.

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