

Enhancing Child Safety and Security in Nigeria: Strategies for Stakeholder Collaboration, Awareness, and Institutional Frameworks

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Abstract: *Child safety and security have become increasingly critical global and national concerns due to the rising exposure of children to abuse, trafficking, exploitation, violence, and cyber-related threats. In Nigeria, children face multidimensional vulnerabilities stemming from insecurity, poverty, weak institutional frameworks, and inadequate stakeholder coordination. Despite the existence of legal instruments such as the Child Rights Act and international conventions, implementation remains inconsistent, leaving many children unprotected. This study examines strategies for enhancing child safety and security in Nigeria through effective stakeholder collaboration, public awareness, and strengthened institutional frameworks. The study is anchored on Social Protection Theory, which emphasizes collective responsibility and institutional mechanisms for safeguarding vulnerable populations. It highlights major child safety challenges in Nigeria, including child trafficking, kidnapping, child labour, sexual abuse, insurgency-related violence, and digital exploitation. It also evaluates the roles of key stakeholders such as government agencies, schools, families, religious bodies, civil society organizations, and the media in promoting child protection. Furthermore, the study explores the effectiveness of awareness campaigns, advocacy programmes, and digital literacy initiatives in reducing child vulnerability. Findings from the study indicate that weak inter-agency coordination, inadequate funding, poor enforcement of laws, and low public awareness significantly undermine child protection efforts in Nigeria. The study further reveals that fragmented institutional responses and limited capacity for cyber protection have increased children's exposure to emerging threats, particularly in digital spaces. It therefore emphasizes the need for integrated and collaborative approaches involving all stakeholders to ensure sustainable child safety outcomes. The study concludes that enhancing child safety and security in Nigeria requires strong institutional reforms, improved stakeholder collaboration, and sustained public awareness. It recommends stricter enforcement of child protection laws, establishment of specialized child protection units, integration of child safety education in schools, increased community participation, and improved inter-agency coordination. Ultimately, protecting children is presented as a national security and development priority essential for Nigeria's long-term stability and progress.*

Keywords: child safety, child security, stakeholder collaboration, awareness, institutional frameworks

INTRODUCTION

Child safety and security have become major global concerns in contemporary society due to the increasing exposure of children to violence, exploitation, abuse, trafficking, and digital vulnerabilities. Child safety refers to the protection of children from physical, emotional, psychological, and environmental harm, while child security involves the establishment of legal, institutional, and social mechanisms that guarantee the survival, development, and well-being of children within society. Globally, international organizations such as the United Nations Children's Fund and the United Nations have emphasized that children constitute one of the most vulnerable groups requiring urgent protection from all forms of abuse and neglect. The adoption of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child established a universal framework for safeguarding children's rights to survival, protection, participation, and development. Despite these efforts, millions of children across the world continue to experience child trafficking, sexual exploitation, forced labour, cyber exploitation, kidnapping, and displacement resulting from armed conflicts and humanitarian crises (UNICEF, 2023). The increasing expansion of digital technologies has further exposed children to online predators, cyberbullying, identity theft, and harmful digital content, thereby making child protection an increasingly multidimensional security challenge in the twenty-first century (United Nations, 2022).

In Africa, the problem of child insecurity remains severe due to widespread poverty, weak institutional structures, armed conflicts, political instability, and socio-economic inequalities. Many African countries continue to witness alarming rates of child labour, early marriage, human trafficking, recruitment of child soldiers, and exploitation of street children. According to the African Union, the protection of children is essential for sustainable development and the realization of Africa's developmental aspirations under Agenda 2063. Across conflict-prone regions such as the Sahel, the Horn of Africa, and Central Africa, children are frequently exposed to insurgency-related violence, displacement, abduction, and sexual abuse (African Union, 2021). In addition, economic hardship and rapid urbanization have contributed significantly to the rise in the number of homeless and vulnerable children across African cities. The African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child was established to strengthen child protection mechanisms within African societies; however, implementation challenges, corruption, inadequate funding, and poor stakeholder coordination continue to weaken child protection systems in many African states (Aderinto, 2018).

Within the West African sub-region, child safety challenges have become increasingly complex due to cross-border trafficking, terrorism, communal conflicts, organized crime, and weak social welfare systems. Countries such as Nigeria, Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger have experienced persistent insecurity associated with insurgent groups and armed banditry, which disproportionately affect children. The activities of extremist organizations have led to school attacks, forced displacement, child recruitment into armed groups, and mass abductions of school children across the region (International Crisis Group, 2022). Furthermore, the Economic Community of West African States has repeatedly identified child trafficking and exploitation as serious transnational crimes threatening regional peace and human security.

Many children within the sub-region are subjected to forced labour in mining sites, domestic service, street hawking, and commercial sexual exploitation due to poverty and family instability (Adepoju, 2019). Consequently, there is growing recognition that enhancing child safety in West Africa requires collaborative efforts involving governments, civil society organizations, religious institutions, educational stakeholders, law enforcement agencies, and international development partners.

In Nigeria, child safety and security have emerged as pressing national concerns due to the increasing prevalence of child trafficking, kidnapping, child labour, sexual abuse, street begging, insurgency, and cyber-related exploitation. The rise of insecurity across different parts of the country has exposed many children to violence, displacement, abduction, and psychological trauma. The insurgency activities of Boko Haram in North-Eastern Nigeria have resulted in the abduction of school children, destruction of educational facilities, and forced recruitment of minors into violent activities (Okoli & Ugwu, 2019). Similarly, increasing cases of ritual killings, child abuse, domestic violence, and online exploitation have intensified concerns regarding the effectiveness of existing child protection mechanisms. The phenomenon of street children, particularly the Almajiri system in Northern Nigeria, further exposes children to criminal exploitation, homelessness, poverty, and social exclusion (Usman, 2020). Although the Nigerian government enacted the Child Rights Act to safeguard children's welfare and rights, implementation remains inconsistent across states due to inadequate institutional capacity, weak enforcement, poor public awareness, and socio-cultural barriers. Therefore, enhancing child safety and security in Nigeria requires effective stakeholder collaboration, improved public awareness campaigns, stronger institutional frameworks, community participation, and comprehensive policy implementation aimed at protecting children from all forms of abuse and exploitation.

Statement of the Problem

The increasing rate of child abuse, exploitation, and insecurity in Nigeria has become a major social and developmental challenge threatening the well-being and future of children across the country. In recent years, Nigeria has witnessed alarming cases of child trafficking, kidnapping, child labour, sexual violence, street begging, cyber exploitation, and insurgency-related abuses, particularly in conflict-prone regions. Reports by the United Nations Children's Fund indicate that millions of Nigerian children remain vulnerable to different forms of violence, neglect, and exploitation due to poverty, insecurity, weak social protection systems, and family instability. The increasing activities of criminal networks, armed bandits, and insurgent groups have further exposed children to abduction, displacement, forced labour, and psychological trauma (UNICEF, 2023). Despite the enactment of the Child Rights Act and other child protection policies, the implementation of these legal frameworks remains weak and inconsistent across many states in Nigeria. Consequently, many children continue to suffer violations of their rights without adequate protection, justice, or rehabilitation mechanisms (Alemika & Chukwuma, 2020).

Another major problem associated with child safety and security in Nigeria is the poor coordination among institutions and stakeholders responsible for child protection. Agencies such as the police, social welfare departments, schools, religious organizations, non-governmental organizations, and community leaders often operate independently with limited collaboration and inadequate information sharing. This weak

institutional synergy has reduced the effectiveness of child protection interventions and emergency response mechanisms in addressing child-related crimes and abuses. In addition, there is a low level of awareness among parents, guardians, and local communities regarding child rights, online safety, reporting mechanisms, and preventive child protection strategies. Studies have shown that many cases of child abuse and exploitation remain underreported due to ignorance, fear, stigmatization, corruption, and lack of trust in security institutions (Okoli & Nnaemeka, 2021). Furthermore, the inadequate provision of child-focused security mechanisms such as child-friendly policing units, rehabilitation centres, counselling services, and digital safety frameworks has significantly weakened efforts aimed at safeguarding children in Nigeria's rapidly changing socio-technological environment.

Previous studies on child protection in Nigeria have largely concentrated on specific dimensions such as child trafficking, insurgency, child labour, or sexual abuse without providing a comprehensive framework that integrates stakeholder collaboration, awareness creation, and institutional strengthening as collective strategies for enhancing child safety and security. For instance, studies by Aderinto (2018) and Usman (2020) examined street children and child vulnerability from socio-economic perspectives, while Okoli and Ugwu (2019) focused primarily on insurgency-related child abuses in North-East Nigeria. Although these studies contributed significantly to the literature on child protection, they paid limited attention to the role of inter-agency collaboration, public sensitization, and institutional effectiveness in addressing the broader challenges of child insecurity in Nigeria. Similarly, existing literature has not adequately examined the growing threats of cyber exploitation and online abuse against children in the digital era. This gap in knowledge necessitates a more holistic study that explores practical strategies for enhancing child safety and security in Nigeria through effective stakeholder collaboration, increased public awareness, and strengthened institutional frameworks capable of responding to contemporary child protection challenges.

Objective of the Study

The broad objective of this study is to examine strategies for enhancing child safety and security in Nigeria through effective stakeholder collaboration, public awareness initiatives, and strengthened institutional frameworks for sustainable child protection. The specific objectives of the study are to;

1. examine the major child safety and security challenges confronting children in Nigeria;
2. assess the roles and contributions of relevant stakeholders, including government agencies, security institutions, families, schools, religious organizations, non-governmental organizations, and community leaders, in promoting child protection and security in Nigeria;
3. explore the effectiveness of awareness creation, advocacy programmes, and community sensitization strategies in enhancing child safety consciousness and reducing child vulnerability in Nigeria; and
4. To recommend sustainable institutional and policy frameworks capable of strengthening child protection mechanisms and improving the safety and security of children in Nigeria.

Conceptual and Theoretical Background

Child Safety

Child safety refers to the protection of children from all forms of physical, emotional, psychological, sexual, and environmental harm that may threaten their survival, development, and overall well-being. It encompasses the creation of safe environments, policies, institutions, and social support systems designed to prevent abuse, exploitation, neglect, violence, and other forms of child vulnerability. Contemporary scholars view child safety as a multidimensional concept that involves legal protection, social welfare, education, healthcare, digital safety, and community responsibility in safeguarding children's rights and dignity. According to United Nations Children's Fund, child safety extends beyond physical protection to include preventive and responsive measures that ensure children grow in secure and supportive environments free from violence and exploitation. Wekerle (2024) argues that modern child protection emphasizes safeguarding children across all settings, including homes, schools, communities, and digital spaces, particularly in the face of emerging cyber risks and online exploitation. Similarly, Bruning and Doek (2021) maintain that an effective child safety system requires coordinated legal, institutional, and community-based mechanisms capable of preventing and responding to child abuse and neglect. Recent studies further emphasize that child safety is closely linked to national development because children who are protected from violence and insecurity are more likely to attain educational success, psychological stability, and social productivity (Mesthrie, 2025). In the Nigerian context, child safety has become increasingly important due to rising cases of child trafficking, kidnapping, insurgency-related abuses, child labour, and cyber exploitation, which continue to threaten the welfare and future development of children across the country (Brisibe et al., 2024).

Child Security

Child security refers to the protection of children from threats, risks, violence, exploitation, neglect, and conditions that undermine their physical, emotional, social, and psychological well-being within society. It is a broader concept that integrates child protection, human security, legal safeguards, social welfare, and institutional mechanisms aimed at ensuring that children live in safe, stable, and supportive environments. Contemporary scholars conceptualize child security as a multidimensional framework that encompasses physical safety, educational security, health security, digital security, and protection from conflict, abuse, trafficking, and socio-economic deprivation. According to Öztürk (2024), children's security should be understood within the broader framework of human security because children possess unique vulnerabilities that require specialized legal, social, and institutional responses. Similarly, Kolotkina and Yagofarova (2023) argue that comprehensive child security has become an important dimension of national security due to the growing exposure of children to violence, cyber threats, criminal exploitation, and social instability. Wekerle (2024) further explains that modern child security involves preventive and responsive systems designed to protect children across homes, schools, communities, and digital environments while promoting their rights, dignity, and developmental needs. Recent studies also emphasize that effective child security depends on coordinated institutional frameworks, risk assessment mechanisms, stakeholder collaboration, and public awareness strategies capable of responding to emerging threats such as online exploitation, conflict-related abuses, and child trafficking (Harnett, 2024;

Ratner & Elmholdt, 2023). In Nigeria, the concept of child security has gained increasing scholarly attention due to the rising incidence of kidnapping, insurgency, child labour, street children phenomenon, and cyber-related exploitation, all of which threaten children's survival and future development (Adewumi & Bwowe, 2024).

Stakeholder Collaboration

Stakeholder collaboration refers to the coordinated involvement, partnership, and collective participation of individuals, groups, institutions, and organizations in addressing social problems and achieving common developmental goals. In the context of child safety and security, stakeholder collaboration involves the joint efforts of government agencies, security institutions, schools, families, non-governmental organizations, religious bodies, community leaders, international organizations, and the media in protecting children from abuse, exploitation, violence, and neglect. Contemporary scholars emphasize that effective stakeholder collaboration is essential for policy implementation, resource mobilization, information sharing, decision-making, and sustainable problem-solving in complex social environments. According to Bryson et al. (2021), stakeholder collaboration promotes shared responsibility, institutional synergy, and collective action necessary for addressing multidimensional societal challenges. Similarly, Ansell and Torfing (2022) argue that collaborative governance enhances institutional effectiveness by integrating the expertise, resources, and capacities of diverse actors toward achieving common policy outcomes. In child protection studies, stakeholder collaboration is increasingly viewed as a critical strategy for strengthening child welfare systems, improving reporting and response mechanisms, and enhancing community awareness against child abuse and exploitation (Wekerle, 2024). Recent studies further reveal that societies with strong inter-agency cooperation and community participation are more successful in preventing child trafficking, violence, cyber exploitation, and other forms of child insecurity (Nissen et al., 2023). In Nigeria, inadequate collaboration among security agencies, social welfare institutions, educational bodies, and community stakeholders has been identified as a major factor undermining effective child protection and safety interventions (Alemika & Chukwuma, 2020).

Theoretical Framework

Social Protection Theory emerged prominently through the works of scholars and international development institutions such as the International Labour Organization and the World Bank during the late 1990s and early 2000s as a response to growing global concerns over poverty, vulnerability, inequality, and human insecurity. The theory was further advanced by scholars such as Devereux and Sabates-Wheeler (2004), who conceptualized social protection as a framework of public and private initiatives designed to reduce vulnerability and protect individuals and groups from socio-economic risks and deprivation. The central concept of Social Protection Theory is that governments and societies have the responsibility to establish institutional mechanisms, welfare systems, and protective interventions that safeguard vulnerable populations, particularly children, women, and marginalized groups, from social, economic, and environmental threats. Philosophically, the theory is rooted in the principles of social justice, human rights, welfare liberalism, and human security, emphasizing that the well-being and dignity of individuals should be protected through inclusive social policies and collective responsibility (Midgley,

2020). The theory assumes that vulnerability and insecurity are socially produced conditions that can be minimized through effective policy frameworks, institutional support systems, public awareness, and coordinated social interventions.

The major elements of Social Protection Theory include prevention, protection, promotion, and transformation. Prevention involves strategies aimed at reducing exposure to risks such as poverty, violence, abuse, and exploitation before they occur. Protection focuses on providing immediate support and safety mechanisms for vulnerable individuals facing threats or crises. Promotion entails empowering individuals and communities through education, awareness creation, healthcare, and socio-economic opportunities, while transformation emphasizes institutional reforms, social inclusion, and policy changes that address structural inequalities and social injustices (Devereux & Sabates-Wheeler, 2004). Recent scholars argue that social protection has evolved beyond economic welfare to include child protection, digital security, healthcare access, educational opportunities, and community-based safeguarding mechanisms (Roelen et al., 2023). According to García and Gruat (2021), effective social protection systems strengthen societal resilience by integrating government institutions, civil society organizations, families, and community actors in safeguarding vulnerable populations. The theory therefore recognizes collaboration, institutional coordination, and social awareness as critical instruments for achieving sustainable protection and security within society.

The relevance of Social Protection Theory to the study titled “Enhancing Child Safety and Security in Nigeria: Strategies for Stakeholder Collaboration, Awareness, and Institutional Frameworks” lies in its emphasis on collective responsibility, institutional support systems, and preventive social interventions for vulnerable groups such as children. The theory explains that child insecurity in Nigeria, including child trafficking, kidnapping, child labour, sexual abuse, street children phenomenon, insurgency-related abuses, and cyber exploitation, results largely from weak social protection mechanisms, poverty, inadequate institutional coordination, and insufficient public awareness. Applying this theory to the study suggests that enhancing child safety and security requires comprehensive social protection policies involving effective collaboration among government agencies, security institutions, schools, families, religious organizations, non-governmental organizations, and community stakeholders. The theory further supports the establishment of child-focused institutional frameworks, awareness campaigns, welfare programmes, and legal enforcement mechanisms capable of preventing child abuse and protecting children from emerging social and digital threats. Thus, Social Protection Theory provides a suitable analytical framework for understanding how coordinated protective systems and stakeholder participation can strengthen child safety and security in Nigeria (Roelen et al., 2023; Midgley, 2020).

Child Safety and Security Challenges in Nigeria

Child safety and security challenges in Nigeria have continued to intensify due to widespread poverty, insecurity, weak institutional protection systems, and socio-economic instability. One of the major challenges confronting children in Nigeria is child abuse and neglect, which manifest in forms such as domestic violence, sexual exploitation, physical assault, emotional abuse, and parental neglect. Many children experience violence within homes, schools, and communities, often resulting in psychological

trauma, depression, poor educational performance, and social maladjustment. Studies reveal that cultural silence, fear of stigmatization, and weak law enforcement contribute significantly to the persistence of child abuse cases in Nigeria (Alemika & Chukwuma, 2020). Sexual exploitation of minors, including rape, child pornography, forced prostitution, and incest, has also become increasingly alarming in both rural and urban areas. In addition, emotional abuse through intimidation, verbal assault, discrimination, and deprivation of affection negatively affects children's mental health and social development (UNICEF, 2023). Closely related to this challenge is the growing incidence of child trafficking and kidnapping across the country. Nigeria has remained a major source, transit, and destination country for internal and cross-border child trafficking involving forced labour, domestic servitude, sexual exploitation, and illegal adoption practices (Nwogu, 2021). The increasing rate of ransom-related kidnappings and school abductions by criminal groups and armed bandits has further exposed children to fear, displacement, psychological trauma, and denial of educational opportunities.

Another significant child safety challenge in Nigeria is child labour and street hawking, which are largely driven by economic hardship, unemployment, family instability, and widespread poverty. Many Nigerian children are engaged in hazardous economic activities such as street vending, domestic labour, mining, farming, scavenging, and commercial transportation in order to support family income. These exploitative activities expose children to accidents, sexual abuse, human trafficking, criminal recruitment, and health-related risks while depriving them of quality education and childhood development opportunities (International Labour Organization, 2022). The phenomenon of street hawking is particularly prevalent in major urban centres where children are forced to work under unsafe environmental conditions, making them vulnerable to exploitation and violence. Furthermore, the persistent insecurity across several regions in Nigeria has worsened children's vulnerability. The activities of Boko Haram in North-Eastern Nigeria have resulted in mass abductions of school children, attacks on educational institutions, displacement of families, and recruitment of minors into insurgent activities (Okoli & Ugwu, 2019). Similarly, banditry, communal clashes, and farmer-herder conflicts across different parts of the country have exposed children to displacement, hunger, loss of parental care, and psychological trauma. In some conflict areas, children are forcibly recruited as child soldiers, informants, spies, and domestic aides for armed groups, thereby violating their rights and undermining their future development (Human Rights Watch, 2022).

The rapid expansion of digital technology and internet access has also introduced new dimensions of child insecurity in Nigeria through cyber threats and online exploitation. Nigerian children increasingly face risks such as online grooming, cyberbullying, identity theft, sextortion, exposure to violent or pornographic content, and internet-based exploitation. Online grooming involves the manipulation of children by predators through social media platforms, gaming sites, and messaging applications for exploitative or abusive purposes. Cyberbullying has equally emerged as a serious threat affecting children's emotional well-being, self-esteem, and mental health, particularly among adolescents who actively engage in digital communication (Livingstone & Stoilova, 2021). In addition, unrestricted access to harmful digital content exposes children to violent materials, hate speech, pornography, and criminal ideologies capable of negatively influencing their behaviour and social orientation. Scholars argue that weak digital literacy, poor parental supervision, inadequate cyber laws, and limited institutional capacity

to monitor online activities have increased children's vulnerability to cyber-related crimes in Nigeria (Adewumi & Bwowe, 2024). Consequently, addressing child safety and security challenges in Nigeria requires a comprehensive approach involving stronger legal enforcement, stakeholder collaboration, economic empowerment programmes, public awareness campaigns, child-centred security policies, and effective digital protection mechanisms.

Existing Legal and Institutional Frameworks in Nigeria

Child safety and security in Nigeria is supported by a range of legal, institutional, and international frameworks designed to protect children from abuse, exploitation, and neglect. The most prominent legal instrument is the Child Rights Act, which domesticated the provisions of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and provides a comprehensive legal foundation for the protection of children's rights in Nigeria. The Act guarantees fundamental rights such as the right to survival, development, protection from abuse, access to education, and protection from exploitative labour. It also criminalizes child trafficking, child marriage, and various forms of abuse, while assigning responsibilities to parents, guardians, and the state to ensure child welfare. Despite its significance, the implementation of the Act remains uneven across states due to socio-cultural resistance and weak enforcement structures (Alemika & Chukwuma, 2020).

At the institutional level, several government agencies play critical roles in child protection and security in Nigeria. The Ministry of Women Affairs and Social Development is responsible for policy formulation, child welfare programmes, rehabilitation services, and coordination of child protection initiatives. The Nigeria Police Force is mandated to investigate and prosecute cases of child abuse, trafficking, kidnapping, and other criminal offences affecting children, while the Nigeria Security and Civil Defence Corps assists in the protection of critical infrastructure and the prevention of crimes such as human trafficking and child exploitation. In addition, the National Agency for the Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons plays a central role in combating human trafficking, rescuing victims, prosecuting offenders, and providing rehabilitation and reintegration services for trafficked children (NAPTIP, 2022). Nigeria is also a signatory to key international frameworks such as the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child, which collectively establish global and regional standards for child protection, survival, and development.

However, despite the existence of these legal and institutional frameworks, child safety and security in Nigeria continue to face significant challenges that undermine their effectiveness. One of the major constraints is inadequate funding, which limits the capacity of child protection agencies to implement programmes, conduct investigations, and provide adequate welfare services. Corruption within security and judicial institutions also weakens enforcement mechanisms and reduces public trust in child protection systems. Weak enforcement of child-related laws, particularly at state and local government levels, further contributes to the persistence of child abuse, trafficking, and exploitation. In addition, inadequate personnel training and lack of specialized child protection units hinder the ability of security agencies to respond effectively to child-related cases, especially those involving trauma, cyber exploitation, and complex trafficking networks (UNICEF, 2023). Consequently, these institutional weaknesses highlight

the urgent need for strengthened legal enforcement, improved funding mechanisms, capacity building, and enhanced inter-agency coordination to ensure effective child safety and security in Nigeria.

Stakeholder Collaboration for Child Safety

Effective child safety and security in Nigeria depends largely on the collaborative efforts of multiple stakeholders working together to prevent abuse, exploitation, and neglect of children. The government plays a central role through policy formulation, implementation, funding, and enforcement of child protection laws such as the Child Rights Act, which provides the legal foundation for safeguarding children's rights. Government institutions are also responsible for ensuring that child protection agencies are adequately funded and equipped to respond to cases of abuse, trafficking, and exploitation. However, scholars have noted that weak coordination, insufficient funding, and poor enforcement capacity continue to limit the effectiveness of government-led child protection efforts in Nigeria (Alemika & Chukwuma, 2020). Consequently, strengthening governance structures and inter-agency collaboration remains essential for improving child safety outcomes.

Families, schools, religious bodies, and traditional institutions also play crucial roles in ensuring child safety and security at the community level. Parents and guardians are the first line of protection, responsible for child monitoring, moral upbringing, emotional support, and early detection of abuse or vulnerability. Schools contribute through safe school initiatives, guidance and counselling services, and the creation of protective learning environments that safeguard children from violence and exploitation. Similarly, religious and traditional institutions provide moral education, value orientation, and advocacy against harmful practices such as child labour, early marriage, and abuse (UNICEF, 2023). Civil society organizations and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) complement these efforts by conducting advocacy campaigns, providing legal aid, offering rehabilitation services for abused children, and supporting victims of trafficking and exploitation. These community-based actors are essential in bridging the gap between formal institutions and grassroots realities in child protection systems.

The media and digital technology platforms further strengthen stakeholder collaboration by promoting public enlightenment, reporting abuse cases, and supporting digital safety campaigns aimed at protecting children from cyber threats. Traditional media outlets such as radio, television, and newspapers, alongside social media platforms, play a critical role in raising awareness about child rights violations and encouraging timely reporting of abuse cases to relevant authorities. In addition, digital platforms are increasingly being used to educate parents, teachers, and children on online safety, cyberbullying prevention, and responsible internet use (Livingstone & Stoilova, 2021). Despite these collaborative efforts, challenges such as weak coordination among stakeholders, inadequate communication channels, limited digital literacy, and insufficient institutional support continue to undermine effective child protection in Nigeria. Therefore, strengthening multi-stakeholder collaboration through integrated policies, improved communication systems, and capacity-building programmes is essential for achieving sustainable child safety and security in the country.

Awareness and Advocacy Strategies for Child Safety and Security

Awareness and advocacy strategies are essential components in enhancing child safety and security in Nigeria, as they help to bridge the gap between existing policies and public understanding of child protection issues. Community sensitization programmes, particularly grassroots awareness campaigns, play a critical role in educating parents, caregivers, and local leaders about child rights, early warning signs of abuse, and reporting mechanisms for child protection cases. Such programmes have been identified as effective tools for changing harmful socio-cultural practices that expose children to violence, exploitation, and neglect (UNICEF, 2023). By engaging community-based structures such as ward development committees, women associations, and youth groups, awareness initiatives can significantly improve community responsibility toward child protection. However, scholars argue that limited outreach in rural areas and low literacy levels continue to hinder the effectiveness of sensitization programmes in many parts of Nigeria (Alemika & Chukwuma, 2020).

Child rights education and media advocacy also constitute important strategies for promoting child safety and security. Integrating child rights education into school curricula helps children understand their rights, recognize abuse, and seek help when necessary, thereby empowering them to protect themselves. Schools serve as critical platforms for instilling values of safety, respect, and protection among learners. In addition, media advocacy through radio, television, newspapers, and social media platforms has been widely used to disseminate information on child abuse prevention, trafficking awareness, and reporting channels for victims (Livingstone & Stoilova, 2021). These media platforms are particularly effective in reaching large audiences and influencing public opinion on child protection issues. Despite their effectiveness, challenges such as misinformation, inadequate funding, and limited coverage in remote areas reduce the overall impact of media-based advocacy in Nigeria.

Furthermore, digital literacy and online safety education have become increasingly important due to the growing exposure of children to cyber threats such as online grooming, cyberbullying, and harmful digital content. Teaching children safe internet practices equips them with the knowledge to navigate digital spaces responsibly and avoid online exploitation. Capacity building for stakeholders, including teachers, security personnel, social workers, and caregivers, is also crucial for strengthening child protection systems. Training programmes enhance the ability of stakeholders to identify, respond to, and prevent child abuse cases effectively while improving inter-agency collaboration and service delivery (Wekerle, 2024). Nevertheless, inadequate training opportunities, poor institutional support, and limited access to digital resources continue to undermine the effectiveness of awareness and advocacy strategies in Nigeria. Therefore, a more coordinated, well-funded, and inclusive approach is required to ensure sustainable child safety and security outcomes.

Strategies for Strengthening Institutional Frameworks for Child Safety and Security

Strengthening institutional frameworks for child safety and security in Nigeria requires robust law enforcement mechanisms that ensure the effective prosecution of offenders involved in child abuse, trafficking, kidnapping, and exploitation. Law enforcement agencies must be adequately empowered through training, legal reforms, and improved investigative capacity to ensure swift justice and deterrence.

Effective prosecution not only punishes offenders but also strengthens public trust in the justice system and discourages future violations of child rights. According to Alemika and Chukwuma (2020), weak prosecution of child-related crimes in Nigeria has contributed significantly to the persistence of abuse and exploitation. In addition, inter-agency collaboration among security institutions is essential for coordinated response systems, information sharing, and joint operations, which enhance the efficiency of child protection efforts across different jurisdictions.

Another critical strategy is the establishment of specialized child protection units within security agencies, schools, and community structures. These units serve as dedicated centres for handling child-related cases, providing counselling services, emergency response, and referral mechanisms for victims of abuse and exploitation. Community and school-based protection centres also facilitate early identification of at-risk children and ensure timely intervention. Furthermore, increased budgetary allocation to child protection programmes is essential for improving infrastructure, training personnel, and supporting rehabilitation services for vulnerable children. Scholars argue that inadequate funding remains one of the major constraints limiting the effectiveness of child protection institutions in developing countries, including Nigeria (UNICEF, 2023). Without sufficient financial support, policies and programmes aimed at protecting children often remain poorly implemented and unsustainable.

The adoption of technology-based protection systems has also become increasingly important in addressing modern child safety challenges, particularly cyber-related threats. Emergency reporting systems, child tracking platforms, and digital surveillance tools can enhance rapid response to cases of abuse, trafficking, and kidnapping while improving coordination among stakeholders. Additionally, policy review and domestication across all states are crucial to ensure uniform implementation of child protection laws such as the Child Rights Act. Many states have yet to fully adopt or enforce the Act, leading to inconsistencies in child protection standards across the country. Strengthening policy harmonization will ensure that all children, regardless of location, benefit from equal legal protection and institutional support (Wekerle, 2024). Collectively, these strategies provide a comprehensive framework for enhancing institutional effectiveness and improving child safety and security in Nigeria.

Position of the Paper

Child safety in Nigeria is fundamentally a collective national responsibility that extends beyond the government to include families, communities, schools, religious institutions, civil society organizations, and the private sector. Children are among the most vulnerable groups in society, and their protection requires a coordinated response to address threats such as abuse, trafficking, kidnapping, exploitation, and exposure to violence. No single institution can effectively guarantee child safety in isolation, as the drivers of insecurity affecting children are deeply rooted in social, economic, and cultural systems. Therefore, a unified national commitment is essential to create safe environments where children can grow, learn, and develop without fear.

Effective collaboration among stakeholders is central to achieving meaningful progress in child protection. Government agencies must work in synergy with non-governmental organizations, security institutions,

schools, and community leaders to ensure timely reporting, intervention, and prevention of child-related abuses. Schools should function as early warning and protection centres, while religious and community institutions can reinforce moral guidance and community surveillance systems. Likewise, parents and guardians must play an active role in monitoring children's activities and fostering open communication. When these actors collaborate effectively, gaps in the protection system are reduced, and response mechanisms become more efficient and responsive.

In addition, awareness creation and institutional reforms are necessary for sustainable child protection in Nigeria. Many cases of child abuse persist due to limited awareness of child rights and weak enforcement of existing laws. Strengthening institutions such as law enforcement agencies, child welfare departments, and judicial systems is crucial for ensuring accountability and deterrence. Furthermore, child protection must be integrated into national security and development planning, recognizing that a nation's future depends on the well-being of its children. By prioritizing child welfare as a core element of governance and development policy, Nigeria can build a safer, more stable, and more prosperous society for future generations.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, enhancing child safety and security in Nigeria requires a holistic and sustained effort involving all segments of society. The major arguments of this position paper emphasize that child protection cannot be achieved by isolated actions but through coordinated policies, strong institutions, and active citizen participation. There is a clear need for collective responsibility where government, families, schools, security agencies, and civil society work together to safeguard children from all forms of harm. This collective approach must be supported by continuous awareness and capacity building.

Ultimately, sustainable institutional reforms and societal responsibility are essential for long-term impact. Strengthened legal enforcement, improved institutional coordination, and consistent public enlightenment will create a safer environment for children across Nigeria. Protecting children is not only a moral obligation but also a strategic investment in national development, as the future stability, security, and prosperity of the country depend on the well-being and protection of its younger generation.

Recommendations

The government should strengthen the enforcement of child protection laws across all states in Nigeria to ensure uniform compliance and deterrence against offenders. Existing legal frameworks such as the Child Rights Act must be fully implemented, while loopholes that weaken prosecution should be addressed through judicial reforms. In addition, adequate funding should be provided to child welfare institutions, rehabilitation centres, and relevant ministries to enhance their capacity to respond effectively to cases of abuse, neglect, and exploitation. This will ensure that legal protections are not only symbolic but practically enforceable.

Schools should play a more proactive role by integrating child safety education and digital literacy into their curricula. This will help children understand how to recognize, avoid, and report unsafe situations both offline and online. Security agencies, on their part, should establish specialized child protection desks or units trained specifically to handle child-related cases with sensitivity and professionalism. Such units would improve response time, reduce secondary victimization, and ensure child-friendly procedures in investigations and prosecutions.

Parents and communities must intensify their roles in monitoring children's activities and strengthening early warning systems for abuse and exploitation. Community-based reporting mechanisms should be encouraged to ensure that suspicious activities are promptly reported to relevant authorities. In the same vein, NGOs and media organizations should expand awareness campaigns on child rights and safety, using both traditional and digital platforms to reach wider audiences. Improved inter-agency coordination and data sharing among security and welfare institutions are also necessary to ensure a unified and effective response to child-related crimes.

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