

Perspectives on agency from girls who are out of school in Oyo and Kano States, Nigeria

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY¹

For adolescent girls living in highly marginalized contexts, agency is part of an everyday struggle. Girls make decisions about their lives while navigating social structures, norms, and systems. Yet the agency of girls and young women living in marginalized contexts is often misunderstood, unrecognized, underdeveloped, and/or actively stifled, making it vital that efforts to promote agency in marginalized contexts start with girls themselves.

The current report shares the results of participatory, collaborative, and action-oriented research conducted by members of the Learning and Action Alliance for Girls' Agency (LAAGA) with girls who are out of school in Yar Gaya and Nassarawa GRA in Kano state and Iseyin in Oyo. We outline the context of these communities, describe our girl-centered methodological approach, share what we have learned with girls, and propose priorities and strategies to mobilize actors to transform systems with and for girls' agency.

Agency was generally defined by the girls in Kano and Oyo as the ability to make decisions about their lives, particularly in relation to education, work, and marriage, within social and economic constraints. Girls associated agency with being respected, being able to stay in school, and having some control over their future paths. The expression of agency was dynamic and contextual, shaped by interacting individual, relational, and systemic factors.

- **At the individual level:** Financial autonomy was foundational for girls in Oyo state, and skills and beliefs such as critical thinking, communication, interpersonal skills, confidence, and commitment reinforced agency. Across all communities, spirituality sustained girls in pursuit of their goals amid adversity.
- **At the relational level:** Family was the most visible shaper of girls' agency, both as a support and sometimes a constraint on girls' life choices. Women—mothers, sisters, peers, and mentors—were pivotal to expanding space and possibility for girls, and safe and reflective spaces served as key catalysts for girls' ability to dream, decide, and take action.
- **At the systems level:** Girls reported that systemic factors largely constrained the exercise of their agency, especially those that excluded girls from formal education. Poverty was a limitation not only for girls but also for families and schools looking to support them. Entrenched patriarchal norms were seen to structure decisionmaking and restrict opportunity. Finally, early pregnancy was identified as a system-produced barrier to girls' agency.

¹ This report is part of a series of LAAGA research with girls in communities across eight countries. As such, parts of the executive summary and introduction, as well as the "why explore agency" and "concluding remarks" sections of this report are common across LAAGA's 2026 case reports and have been adapted from LAAGA case reports originally published in Kinyanjui et al., 2025; Mhongera et al., 2025; Siddiqa and Rosado-Viurques, 2025; and Tran and O'Donoghue, 2025.

It is key that efforts to promote girls' agency with and for girls who are out of school in Kano and Oyo states, and similar contexts in Nigeria (and globally), take an (eco)systemic approach, working with girls, their peers, and the key adults around them to strengthen their shared ability to co-construct aspirations, make expansive decisions, and take strategic action in their lives and the lives of their communities. At a minimum, this means:

- Girls strengthening skills, knowledge, beliefs, and leadership for agency.
- Families strengthening skills, knowledge, beliefs and practices for co-agency with girls.
- Educators, community, religious, and business leaders and program implementers strengthening skills and practices to be girls' agency champions and build networks for girls' agency.
- National and local policymakers and authorities working to ensure flexible and relevant educational pathways, economic livelihoods, and equitable gender norms.
- Global researchers and funders promoting girl-centered approaches to research, programming and policy that incorporate individual, relational, and systemic components of agency.

Achieving this will require collaboration and coordinated efforts across diverse local and global education systems. We all have something to learn (and do) to more effectively engage adolescent girls in marginalized contexts, strengthen their agency to resist exclusion, and work together toward more equitable societies.





1. INTRODUCTION¹

Agency—or the capacity to recognize and voice one’s hopes, make decisions about one’s life and take action freely (see Box 1)—is fundamental to full and equal participation, emotional well-being, educational achievement, and improved life outcomes (Friedrich et al., 2021; Richardson et al., 2019; Schoon et al., 2021). Agency is not a static quality that one “has” (or can be given), but something practiced, expressed, and negotiated within shifting sociocultural structures, relationships, and power dynamics (O’Donoghue, 2025).²

Young people face complex challenges—the climate crisis and increased conflict, displacement, and political uncertainty are two examples—that intersect with historical injustices and legacies of colonialism, including gender-based violence and discrimination, economic inequality, ableism, and racism (Barford, 2023; UN, 2018). However, too few education systems around the world prepare children and youth to not only navigate these challenges but to be agents of positive change in their own lives, in their local communities, and on the global stage (NORRAG, 2023; OECD, 2018; Anderson & Winthrop, 2025). Agency can be a generative force that moves young people not only in reaction to challenging situations but also to constructively create their own possible worlds (Sulkunen, 2012).

Box 1. LAAGA’s definition of girls’ agency

Agency refers to a girl’s power to identify and voice her hopes, make decisions, and take action to shape her own life and that of her community. Agency is practiced, not possessed, and involves recognizing oneself as capable of thinking and acting independently in a network of relations. Agency is individual, relational, situational and environmental, bringing a broad set of skills, knowledge and beliefs to play in situations informed by social and cultural norms that may bolster, allow or constrain its exercise in specific contexts. Agency is a fundamental component of full and equal social participation and may require negotiating structural barriers to create opportunities for exercising freedom.

1 The introduction and “why explore agency” sections of this report are common across LAAGA’s 2026 case reports and have been revised from the 2025 LAAGA case reports by LAAGA round 2 case study teams, including: Adefunke Ekine, Ganga Gautam, Dasmine Kennedy, Armene Modi, Sumbal Naveed, Jennifer L. O’Donoghue, Jamila Razzaq, and Zoe Simpson.

2 For more detail from specific country cases, please see Kinyanjui et al., 2025; Mhongera et al., 2025; Siddiqi and Rosado-Viurques, 2025; Tran and O’Donoghue, 2025.

Overly individualistic understandings of agency, for example, may miss the ways in which it is embedded in families, learning institutions, and communities (Khurshid, 2015), which themselves are situated within larger social structures and relations of power impacted by class, caste, religion, race, and gender, among other factors (Haslanger, 2024). Efforts (and social narratives) that advance individualized versions of agency can place the responsibility on girls to “lift themselves out of poverty,” while relieving communities and governments—key actors in the ecosystem around girls—of their responsibilities (Chawansky, 2012; Hauge and Bryson, 2014; Koffman and Gill, 2013).

In LAAGA’s framework for transforming systems with and for girls’ agency, girls are “co-creators of knowledge and drivers of change” in intergenerational efforts to catalyze sustainable change with diverse actors at family, community, school, subnational, and national levels (O’Donoghue, 2025, p. 18). This brief represents the first step in this transformation process, presenting the results of participatory, collaborative, and action-oriented research conducted by LAAGA members with adolescent girls who are out of school in Nigeria, seeking to identify, with girls, the structures and dynamics that shape their agency, as well as possible solutions to address these challenges. The goal of this work is to help guide girls, families, educators, community and religious leaders, policymakers, and others looking to create more just futures with and for girls.





2. WHY EXPLORE AGENCY WITH ADOLESCENT GIRLS IN MARGINALIZED CONTEXTS

Today's young people exercise agency as they navigate complex challenges. Climate-related disruptions and crisis events, expanding conflict and displacement, political volatility and polarization, and widening inequalities following a global pandemic intersect with historical injustices and legacies of colonialism, including gender-based violence and discrimination, economic and geographic inequality, ableism, and racism (Barford, 2023; UN, 2018). Add to this the profound shifts—and significant risks—brought by growing up in an increasingly digital and generative AI world, which is reshaping how young people learn, think, interact with others, and communicate (Burns et al., 2026). Together, these forces can intensify the constraints placed on young people's agency, especially for those in marginalized contexts (UNICEF, UN Women, and Plan International, 2025).


However, too few education systems³ around the world prepare children and youth to not only navigate these challenges but to be agents of positive change in their own lives, in their local communities, and on the global stage (NORRAG, 2023; OECD, 2018; Anderson and Winthrop, 2025).

Since the 2010s, agency has become increasingly central to global education and development research, programming and funding (see for example, Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, 2019; OECD, 2018; World Bank, 2014). United Nations initiatives like Generation Unlimited and Generation Equality, launched in 2018 and 2021, respectively, are further examples of global efforts to center young people “at the forefront of creating a better, more equitable world.”⁴ The widespread focus on “building,” “boosting,” or “enhancing” agency has been particularly true in relation to adolescent girls (JPAL, 2024; Sidle et al., 2020). UNICEF's Gender Equality Action Plan 2026-2029, for example, calls for a global commitment to and cross-sector investments in adolescent girls' agency, prioritizing “achieving positive change for adolescent girls, with adolescent girls” (UNICEF, 2025, p. 2).

Spanning ages 10 to 19 (WHO, n.d.), adolescence is a critical transition period, marked by significant biological, cognitive, psychosocial, and emotional changes (Beckwith et al., 2024). Adolescents take

3 We understand “education systems” to encompass the full and interconnected range of opportunities focused on developing skills, knowledge, beliefs, relationships and opportunities throughout a person's lifetime, whether they are provided or financed by State or nonstate entities. This includes formal institutions like schools or training institutes, as well as nonformal learning programs and opportunities. Education ecosystems, thus, comprise a host of actors across community, subnational, national, regional, and global levels related to these activities. These actors engage in a range of education work, including defining purpose, designing and implementing policies and practices, providing resources, ensuring accountability, and promoting ongoing learning and the development and use of evidence.

4 This was the stated mission of Generation Unlimited (“GenU”) as of March 2025. GenU has since updated their mission statement for 2026-2029 to “skill the world's young people and connect them to opportunities for employment and entrepreneurship.” See more at: <https://www.generationunlimited.org/our-work>.



on—or are pushed into—social roles that bring new expectations and responsibilities; decisions made during these years impact young people’s futures as well as those of their families and communities. For girls, who often carry the weight of family honor and reputation (Bhatia et al., 2024), this transition has long been accompanied by intensified gender-based constraints, deepening discriminatory attitudes, and limiting choices related to education, livelihoods, marriage and family, mobility, and how to interact with the wider world (Bharadwaj, 2024; Edmonds, et al., 2020; Kumar et al., 2021). Today’s adolescent girls also face digital harassment, a growing backlash against girls’ and women’s rights, as well as disproportionate impacts of climate-related events, compounding the barriers they navigate during this formative stage (Apiot Okudi et al., 2024; Khan et al., 2023; Siddiqua and Rosado-Viurques, 2024; UNICEF, UN Women, and Plan International, 2025).

Box 2. LAAGA’s framing of marginalization

From its inception, LAAGA has sought to work with “the most excluded girls,” a group we came to refer to as “girls in highly marginalized contexts.” This focus guided our efforts to center girls living in high-poverty, rural communities in our initial research and has shaped our decision to work with adolescent girls who are out of school in the current study.

We chose to center marginalization in our framing to move away from narratives that depict girls and women as passive victims in need of help or protection or as dependents reliant on external intervention for their “empowerment” (de Wit, 2021; Estrada Ávila, 2023; Schneider and Ingram, 1993). Unlike more commonly used terms like “vulnerable” or “disadvantaged,” marginalization acknowledges the structural and systemic barriers that shape their experience, without diminishing their agency.

While the concept of marginalization is not free from critique (Varghese and Kumar, 2022), in our work it refers to social, cultural, and economic exclusion based on imbalances of power and denial of basic human rights. We focus on marginalized contexts to explore how girls experience and navigate intersecting forms of oppression and privilege (gender, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, religion, ability, and more) as it helps us to identify, examine, and address the systemic forces that girls may face within a given context (UN Women, 2020). We argue that marginalization is the result of discriminatory and exclusionary social norms, practices, policies, processes, and structures (Fluit, et al., 2024) that are dynamic and can be changed.

Understood in this way, marginalization challenges the notion that all girls experience exclusion (or agency) in the same way; instead, it urges us as a collective to ask: which girls, in what ways, and why?

Adolescence also represents a window of opportunity for the development of skills and the modification of beliefs, expectations, and aspirations about the future (Ballard et al., 2022; Novella et al., 2018). Efforts to strengthen individual knowledge, skills, and attitudes in support of girls' agency have yielded some promising results (Amin et al., 2023; Erulkar et al., 2017; Kwauk et al., 2018; Sidle et al., 2022). However, evidence of the impact of girl-focused interventions on promoting concrete action—the exercise of agency—is more limited as they may not shift power dynamics or address systemic causes of marginalization (Lwamba et al., 2022).

For adolescent girls living in highly marginalized communities, agency is lived as part of an everyday struggle (Khandaker, 2023). LAAGA's initial research with girls across five countries highlighted the ways that girls and young women develop aspirations, make decisions, and take action in their lives while navigating social structures, norms, and systems that both expand and constrain their agency (O'Donoghue, 2025). Yet the agency of girls and young women living in marginalized contexts often goes misunderstood, unrecognized, underdeveloped, and/or actively stifled (Oyinloye et al., 2023; see Box 2)

The current report brings a critical lens to research on agency, putting LAAGA's girl-centered methodology (GCM; O'Donoghue et al., 2025) to work to co-create understandings of agency with girls who are out of school⁵ in Nigeria through their lived experiences and on their own terms.



5 In this brief we use the phrase "girls who are out of school" to refer to girls who have never been to school ("left out") as well as those who have been but are no longer in school/formal education, often as a result of systemic or structural failures ("pushed out," "pulled out," or "opted out"; Singh and Mukherjee, 2018). We opt for the "girls OOS" phrasing to avoid framings that can label or stigmatize the person (e.g., "out-of-school girls") rather than describe the situation.

3. CONTEXT: KANO AND OYO STATES

This research engaged adolescent girls who are out of school in three distinct communities in two states of Nigeria (see Figure 1):

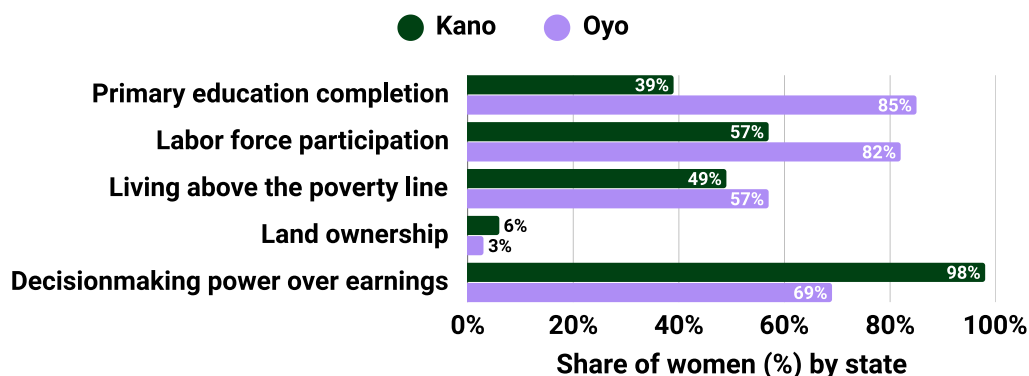
- **Yar Gaya, Kano State:** a predominantly rural and traditional community, home to Hausa and Fulani ethnic groups, with Hausa being the primary language spoken. Situated near a major highway linking the northwest and northeast regions of the country, most people engage in commerce. The community faces important infrastructure challenges, and access to educational and entrepreneurial opportunities is limited, which has resulted in significant migration from the community.
- **Nassarawa Government Residential Area (GRA), Kano State:** an urban community in the northwest region, although predominantly Hausa and Fulani, the population comprises a mix of people from different parts of the country, including Igbo, Yoruba, and other minority ethnic groups. Near the administrative center of Kano, the people of Nassarawa GRA are involved in commerce and trade, administrative, professional, and education services.
- **Iseyin, Oyo State:** Located in Nigeria's southwest and partly bordering the Republic of Benin on the west, Iseyin is known for its fertile land (Rilwan, 2026) and rich cultural heritage (AFP, 2026). The community is characterized by high population mobility, in part due to its location along a major highway as well as high rates of under- and unemployment. The majority of Iseyin's inhabitants are of Yoruba origin, with a small but long-standing population of Fulani. In an agrarian area, most of the population relies on farming, with trade serving as an important secondary livelihood activity (ICERMediation, n.d.).

Figure 1. Research settings in Oyo and Kano States



Sources: Esri, TomTom, Garmin, FAO, NOAA, USGS, (c) OpenStreetMap contributors, and the GIS User Community.

Figure 2. Key socioeconomic indicators for girls and women in Kano and Oyo




Source: Authors, with data from <https://mindthegap.kingmakers.com.ng/>

These communities with differing geographies, histories, and socioeconomic contexts (see Figure 2) were selected because of their high numbers of girls who are out of school. Nigeria struggles with high out-of-school rates, with nearly one in four children aged 6 to 14 and 36% of those aged 15 to 17 not in school (GEM Report Team, 2026). Indeed, Nigeria is home to the second-largest population—18.85 million—of young people who are out of school in the world. While some reports estimate that girls make up 60% of children who are not in school (Ben-Hirki, 2018), more recent data suggest that the population of children out of school is roughly split 50-50 between girls and boys, with important variations as geographic and socioeconomic factors intersect with gender (UNICEF Nigeria, 2023).

Multiple factors contribute to Nigeria’s high rates of children who are either left out or pushed out of formal education. Inadequate government funding remains a major barrier, resulting in teacher shortages, deteriorating infrastructure, and insufficient resources, particularly in rural and conflict-affected regions (UNESCO, 2022). For the country’s girls, barriers to accessing formal education and low school retention result from deep-seated and intersecting challenges related to poverty, insecurity, social and gender norms, and systemic inequalities. Many schools lack safe facilities and basic amenities like gender-separated toilets and sanitary facilities, creating unsafe environments that discourage girls’ attendance (UNICEF, 2022). Armed conflict and attacks on schools have further disrupted education and forced more girls out of school (Ekine, 2020).

While Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) offers alternative educational pathways, access remains severely limited. Technical colleges regularly achieve less than 10% of their target enrolment, and girls face additional socio-cultural barriers, including the perception that TVET is for boys or men and family pressure for early marriage (UNESCO-UNEVOC, 2019; Onyeocha et al., 2023).



Nearly half of the country's girls who are not in school live in the northwest and northeast, where households often prioritize boys' education, viewing girls primarily as future wives and mothers (Oyelude, 2022). Beliefs that emphasize domestic roles for girls over education pressure girls to abandon schooling and academic aspirations in favor of domestic responsibilities (Abdullahi, 2022).

Early marriage is a significant factor leading to girls being out of school, as 30% of girls nationally marry before age 18, and 12% before 15 (NPC and UNICEF, 2022). Child marriage rates vary widely between rural (48%) and urban (16%) communities as well as regionally; in Kano and Oyo states, 39% and 17% of adolescent girls, respectively, marry before 18 (Child Marriage Data, n.d.). Early marriage pushes girls into adult roles prematurely, curtailing their education and autonomy (Oyelude, 2022).

For the girls in this study, these dynamics play out in similar yet contextually nuanced ways. Kano State is home to an estimated 1.89 million children who are not in school, the highest number in the country, with adolescent girls making up a significant portion of this population (Ogunyale 2024).⁶ This is due in large part to limited educational access in rural communities like Yar Gaya, where barriers extend beyond the mere availability of schools to include long distances to the nearest learning facility, inadequate infrastructure, poverty-driven child labor, and deeply entrenched gender and cultural norms that prioritize early marriage over girls' education (Federal Ministry of Education, 2019; NBS, 2022). Girls in urban Nassarawa GRA, on the other hand, have greater access to infrastructure. Yet, as reported by the girls in this study, issues such as family neglect, drug use, and homelessness frequently keep them out of school.

Further south, in Oyo State, one out of every five young people is out of school—over 670,000 children, accounting for the largest share of children out of school in the southwest part of the country (Badru, 2026). School leaving in the state is often associated with early marriage and teenage pregnancy, which interrupt girls' educational trajectories (Oyewole 2023; Adisa et al. 2024). Iseyin's border location and high mobility further contribute to low school retention (Kenechi, 2025).

⁶ While the specific number of adolescent girls within this population is not disaggregated in available data, the severity of gender disparity in Kano is reflected in the state's female literacy rate of only 46%, compared to 73% among their male counterparts, suggesting that girls constitute a disproportionately larger share of those excluded from education (Federal Ministry of Education, 2019).

4. METHODOLOGY: EXPLORING AGENCY WITH GIRLS

This study sought to explore with girls how they define, interpret, negotiate, and exercise agency within their specific sociocultural contexts. Guided by the research questions in Box 3, the research engaged girls directly to capture their own definitions, understandings, and practice of agency and explore the individual, relational, and systemic dynamics that shape these.

Box 3. Research questions

- How do girls understand and define agency?
- What knowledge, skills, and beliefs do girls identify as necessary to exercise agency?
- In what situations do girls feel free to exercise their agency?
- How do girls see others in their community exercising agency? How does this impact their own sense of agency?
- What do the girls perceive as challenges to their agency? What do they identify as supports?

Between November 2024 and January 2025, researchers engaged with 65 girls in Oyo and K states (see Figure 3). A purposive sampling strategy, in collaboration with community leaders, was employed to identify eligible participants: girls aged 13 to 19 who were out of school. In addition to being out of school, participating girls lived in conditions characterized by economic marginalization, restrictive cultural norms, and domestic instability; many participated in unpaid care work and/or informal economic activities (e.g., hawking).

Figure 3. Girls participating in the research

| STATE | COMMUNITY | NUMBER OF GIRLS |
|-------|---------------|-----------------|
| Oyo | Iseyin | 30 |
| Kano | Yar Gaya | 25 |
| | Nassarawa GRA | 10 |
| TOTAL | | 65 |

Following LAAGA's girl-centered methodology (see O'Donoghue et al., 2025), which outlines a mosaic of participatory methods, researchers engaged girls in community mapping, focus group discussions (FGDs), the bridge model, and storytelling. Activities were carried out in Yoruba in Iseyin and Hausa in Yar Gaya and Nassarawa GRA. Participation in the study was voluntary, and informed assent and consent were acquired from all the participating girls and their families, respectively, as well as from community leaders. To ensure strict confidentiality, all data collected during this study were anonymized (de-identified). All activities were audio-recorded and subsequently transcribed verbatim for analysis. Thematic content analysis was conducted to identify themes and sub-themes related to the study's research questions. This approach enabled the identification of recurring patterns related to agency.

Community mapping

The community mapping exercise was conducted in small groups comprising four to nine girls. Facilitators provided guidance on the mapping process and the use of materials. Participants collaboratively created visual representations of their communities, collectively deciding on the layout and content of each map. They identified and marked key locations where they felt safe and comfortable, as well as individuals with whom they had positive or negative associations, using different colors to distinguish between these categories.



Focus Group Discussions (FGDs)

The mapping activity was followed by a focus group discussion, during which girls reflected on and discussed the maps they had created. These discussions enabled the research team to capture nuanced feelings, experiences, and perspectives, and to understand the social, economic, affective, relational, and spatial characteristics of environments where girls felt free to exercise their agency as well as where they did not.



Bridge model

This method was employed to support girls in identifying their current experience of agency, especially to understand what might be limiting their agency, their aspirations for their future, and strategies to bridge the gap between the two. The approach utilized three key dimensions—place, time, and setting—to assess and contextualize the exercise of agency. Participants identified specific locations, moments, and environments that either facilitated or constrained their sense of agency. They also articulated their own definitions of what enhanced agency meant to them. Facilitators used these definitions to work with girls to collaboratively construct a visual “bridge” representing potential solutions to enhance their agency. Each stage of the exercise was documented by creating a map on plain cardboard, allowing the girls to visualize both the barriers to and enablers of their agency. The activity was enriched by the sharing of personal narratives, which provided further depth and context to the bridge models created (this method was developed in LAAGA’s work in Vietnam; see Tran and O’Donoghue, 2025, for more).

Storytelling

Storytelling was conducted in girls' homes and places of work and explored key dimensions of girls' agency. This method facilitated the sharing of personal life experiences by the girls.



Proverbs and sayings analysis

Participants were asked to identify local expressions, sayings, or proverbs used frequently in the community that might relate to agency and gender roles. They then reflected on how these sayings made them feel. These discussions created space to explore how community beliefs and norms might support or limit girls' agency. (This method was developed in LAAGA's work in the Karamoja region of Kenya and Uganda; see Kinyanjui et al., 2025 for more).



Community dialogues

Aligned with the second principle of LAAGA’s framework to transform systems with and for girls’ agency (O’Donoghue, 2025)—“co-construct localized understandings of agency, challenges, and solutions”—researchers brought together the girls and the adults they pointed to as impacting their sense of agency in dialogue around the research findings. Forty-one community members, including girls, community and religious leaders, parents, and private sector and local civil society (CSO) actors, participated in the first such dialogue held in Iseyin in November 2025.

The dialogue provided an opportunity to share initial research findings, engage the community in intergenerational conversations, and establish community-driven actions in support of girls’ agency. At this first event, the group formed a “Community-Based Girls’ Empowerment Supervision Committee” to support follow-up engagements, liaise with households and local authorities, and provide quarterly updates on key girls’ agency supports. The terms “supervision” and “empowerment” were later identified as inadvertently positioning girls as subjects to be overseen rather than agents whose voices and opinions should drive decisionmaking. In response, the committee was renamed the “Iseyin Girls Committee,” with a renewed focus on ensuring girls’ voices are heard and their opinions meaningfully inform community actions, reflecting an understanding that girls’ agency must be structurally enabled, not administered by adults. Members include community leaders, parents, one of the girls, and a project focal person from a local CSO who offers technical guidance.





5. FINDINGS

Research with girls who are out of school in Kano and Oyo revealed how girls' understandings and experiences were shaped by local realities as the girls interacted with the people and places closest to them, as well as by larger structural and systemic factors. In all three communities, the exercise of agency was described as a dynamic process, influenced by financial autonomy, personal drive, family relationships, cultural norms, safety, and access to resources.

In this section, we first discuss how girls defined and expressed agency across Yar Gaya, Nassawara GRA, and Iseyin and then explore how agency was supported or constrained at individual, relational, and systemic levels. While we will note some areas where findings differed from place to place, overall, our analysis did not find that these geographic and contextual differences substantially altered the core patterns emerging around agency. Taken together, these findings highlight the multifaceted nature of agency as understood by girls who are out of school in Kano and Oyo states.

5.1 Agency through girls' eyes (and words)

The girls in this study defined agency as the ability to make choices and act with moral courage and self-confidence, to protect oneself and others from harm, and to pursue one's goals, including, for several of them, returning to school. For them, this understanding of agency was deeply rooted in spirituality, ethical principles, emotional strength, and interpersonal values that supported them to set goals, make decisions, and take action within adverse circumstances.

Participants emphasized agency as grounded in personal choice, safety, and resistance to exploitation. In Kano, for example, girls' narratives reinforced the importance of personal strength and social awareness, with participants emphasizing courage and moral clarity as integral to exercising agency. As one girl explained, "I'm brave enough to do what is right." Practical forms of self-assertion were also described, such as resisting exploitation during hawking: "I do not let anybody cheat me or try to take goods forcefully," underscoring the everyday enactment of agency through active defense against harm.

Speaking out, especially against injustice, emerged as a recurring theme in girls' understandings of agency. As one girl affirmed, "When something wrong has been done, we must speak out." As expressed in this same quote, social responsibility was a significant dimension of girls' understandings of agency, with girls expressing a duty to support others, defend rights, and work for justice. This relational aspect of agency positioned girls not only as self-advocates but also as contributors to collective well-being.



5.2 At the individual level: Economic autonomy, skills, beliefs, and spiritual grounding

» **Financial autonomy was foundational for girls in Oyo state**


In Iseyin, economic empowerment was regarded as fundamental for exercising agency and achieving future success. As one participant stated, “You cannot exercise agency without money.” Another stated, “I should work and get money to be empowered.” These reflections highlight the perceived foundational role of financial independence in enabling personal autonomy within a context marked by border issues and high levels of poverty.

Girls’ pursuit of economic autonomy illustrates the ways in which agency is shaped and expressed across levels: It reflects individual aspiration and structural necessity in contexts of persistent poverty. Moreover, girls’ prioritization of financial independence was often shaped from an early age by the experiences of their mothers and grandmothers (as discussed below). In this sense, financial independence was about a girl’s ability to exercise her own agency and also about the impact of poverty or economic strain on family decisionmaking in relation to girls’ lives.

» **Skills and beliefs reinforced agency, sustaining girls in pursuit of goals**

Girls across contexts emphasized that exercising agency required enacting vital skills, knowledge, and beliefs, including critical thinking, foresight, and reasoning. Communication and interpersonal skills were also viewed as central, as expressed by one participant, “I know how to talk to people, and that gives me confidence.” Additionally, personal attributes, such as calmness, fearlessness, confidence, and commitment, were frequently mentioned. Girls in Oyo identified internal motivation as a specific driver of agency; in addition to economic empowerment, they said, traits such as perseverance, determination, and focus were regarded as instrumental (and indeed, key to achieving financial autonomy). As one participant stated, “My decision makes me focus on my goal and keeps me going forward.” These traits reflect cognitive, social, and emotional competencies associated with resilience, decisionmaking, and adaptive functioning.

Education was seen as a key enabler across contexts, reinforcing the link between skills, knowledge, confidence, and informed decisionmaking. As one participant explained, “When I know something, I can decide better.” Another emphasized how formal education intersects with the setting and achievement of aspirations, a key component of agency: “[I want to] go back to school and start working in the bank.” For girls in Oyo, focused on financial independence, vocational skills and training were also seen as central to achieving their autonomy.



Finally, girls associated moments of positive emotion—such as “a happy moment”, “a mood of excitement,” or calmness—with a heightened capacity to act, suggesting that emotional health plays a vital role in the exercise of agency.

» **Spirituality and faith served as a foundational source of agency**

Spirituality featured prominently for the girls in this study. For many, their spiritual or religious beliefs provided grounding for their moral convictions about right and wrong and their sense of responsibility toward others, as seen in their definition of agency above. Spirituality was also felt to promote agency as well. Several identified their faith as a central source of guidance, resilience, and motivation in exercising their agency to effectively navigate socio-economic adversity. For instance, one girl’s response to the question of who or what most supports her agency—“My God”—reflects the extent to which spirituality functioned as a coping mechanism as well as a driver of purposeful action in resource-constrained and conservative contexts.


In sum, these insights across all three communities suggest that the exercise of agency for these girls was deeply rooted, at the individual level, in the ability to take charge of one’s economic life, which in turn was mediated by the development of key skills, knowledge, and beliefs, which were sustained by their faith. Yet as will be seen in the sections that follow, agency also interacts in critical ways with relational and systemic factors.

5.3 At the relational level: Women and safe spaces expand girls’ sense of agency

» **Family was the most visible shaper of girls’ agency**

Family played a critical role in shaping the agency of girls who were out of school in both Oyo and Kano, serving as the most frequently cited source of encouragement and guidance. Girls described how parental attitudes and effective familial involvement significantly enhanced their self-confidence and autonomy, improving girls’ mobility, self-efficacy, goal-setting, decisionmaking, and well-being. While family was most often described as a support, this influence was also described by some girls or in some situations as a constraint. For example, girls shared how some family members actively encouraged continued education or vocational training, yet others discouraged certain pursuits, such as hairdressing, due to prevailing social stigma.

Within the household, women were seen as key figures in safeguarding and promoting girls’ autonomy. While fathers were associated with broader household decisionmaking, it was mothers who provided direct and consistent support in everyday life. Through the types of support they provided to their daughters as well as their household management approaches, women were perceived as subtly resisting patriarchal norms (that themselves placed women in these positions) and fostering



girls' aspirations and agency. Mothers in particular were described as protectors who resisted early marriage and encouraged independence, often drawing from their own lived experiences of disempowerment.

Male influence was sometimes expressed as a constraint, primarily through fathers restricting vocational choices, limiting mobility, and controlling decisions about education, or husbands who appeared as gatekeepers of women's economic autonomy, with girls noting that women could not start businesses or take on work without male approval. More frequently, however, girls positioned male family members as a source of support, albeit featuring less prominently than mothers and other female family members.

» **Women mentors and peers are pivotal to girls' agency**

Across all three communities, participants consistently identified women and other girls as their primary source of encouragement and foundational to their capacity to exercise agency. In contexts where formal institutional guidance was absent or inadequate, mothers and extended family members, especially grandmothers, provided critical resources that allowed girls to access vocational training.

"My grandmother supported me to learn the trade."

"My mum is the only one who has supported me."

"Our mothers helped us start vocational training, buy equipment, and guide our choices."

"My elder sister helped me download YouTube."

Beyond the family, female religious and spiritual leaders emerged as influential figures in promoting girls' agency. These leaders offered guidance on education, reproductive health, and economic independence, helping to shape aspirations and life trajectories. Women leaders in churches and mosques were said to provide moral encouragement as well as tangible forms of support. Their influence extended beyond religious instruction, as demonstrated in Iseyin, where women leaders encouraged girls to participate in the study itself.

Professionals also served as key role models and influential mentors. As one girl explained, "When I am at the hospital where I am learning, and I see how the doctors and nurses are working, it helps me to make decisions." Observing skilled professionals in action provided concrete examples, helping to transform abstract ambitions into tangible goals, enhancing both confidence and clarity of purpose.

Girls frequently admired women who facilitated access to education, such as a woman who “gives free education and supports enrolment,” signaling how visible role models shape girls' perception of agency by exemplifying leadership and social responsibility. Women who held respected community leadership positions were also regarded as embodying agency, particularly attributes such as fearlessness and responsibility. As one participant observed, “Any woman who is not strong and fearless will not be listened to.”

Peer relationships also played a role in fostering confidence, resilience, and mutual support and featured prominently as important sources of emotional and motivational support for girls. Participants highlighted how friends served as sources of encouragement, advice, and aspiration-setting, with one girl noting, “I tell my friends because they tell me about their interests too, and we advise and encourage ourselves on what to do.” Moreover, several girls described agency in terms of actively supporting peers, particularly through “teaching and correcting vulnerable girls,” illustrating how agency is not solely an individual capacity but is shaped and sustained within social relationships. Notably, boys as peers featured minimally, appearing mainly in the context of commercial exploitation during hawking, where girls described actively resisting attempts to cheat them or take goods forcibly.

These everyday acts of support among girls and women increased girls' self-confidence and promoted girls' decisions to expand their skills and networks. They reflect how intergenerational female relationships, particularly in low-resource or patriarchal contexts, fill critical gaps left by systemic shortcomings and function not only as survival mechanisms but also as vital pathways to empowerment.





» **Women's leadership practices have expanded space for girls' agency**

Girls' narratives highlighted the ways in which women in their communities exercised agency in everyday familial, social, and community contexts, often through collective action, leadership, and mutual support. Examples included organizing or participating in community meetings and pooling resources to assist others, which were perceived as important spaces for women's voices and collective decisionmaking. These were also examples of ways that women, in exercising their own agency, have expanded space for the agency of others.


A recurrent theme in girls' narratives concerned the breaking of gender norms, particularly through women's participation in economic activities traditionally associated with men. Girls expressed admiration for women who engaged in farming or established businesses, with one participant observing, "In Iseyin now, women work more than men, ... women now have companies and businesses, ... and they have husbands at home." However, participants also acknowledged persistent constraints, as with one girl who noted that women "want to do something new but they have no support," highlighting that some women's aspirations remained unrealized.

» **Safe and reflective spaces serve as catalysts for girls' agency**

Findings from Kano and Oyo demonstrate that girls' capacity to exercise agency was closely tied to the spaces they occupy and the sense of emotional and physical security those spaces afforded. Girls emphasized that agency is only possible "in a safe space" or "anywhere, ... that is safe," underscoring the fundamental role of physical and emotional safety as a prerequisite for exercising autonomy and engaging in decisionmaking free from threat or harm.

In Oyo, solitude and reflective moments were frequently described as times when girls felt most able to think clearly and make decisions. These moments tended to occur outside of working hours, as one girl explained, "at night, because if one is at work one doesn't have the time to reason," suggesting that the cognitive space for agency emerged only once the economic and domestic demands of the day had lifted. These moments of introspection provided critical opportunities for girls to assert agency, especially in sociocultural contexts where their voices may be marginalized in public or communal spheres.

In Kano, emotional safety within the household was identified as foundational to decisionmaking. Girls shared that they felt most able to exercise agency "when I'm at home," with another adding, "when people are around me," underscoring the role of emotionally secure environments. Autonomy within the family context also featured prominently, with another girl noting, "when I am left alone with no interference from my parents." This points to the importance of parental trust and non-interference, which can encourage independent thinking while preserving familial connection.



Religious settings also emerged as empowering spaces across faith traditions. Girls reported that the presence and encouragement of spiritual leaders fostered a sense of freedom, belonging, and purpose. As one participant expressed, “I am free in the church, and I can make decisions.” Muslim girls similarly identified the mosque as a space of encouragement and agency, noting that “our Imam uses encouraging words in the mosque” and that female religious leaders also played a supportive role: “I like going to the mosque on Sundays because our alfas and women leaders encourage me.” These findings suggest that faith-based spaces—whether church or mosque—functioned similarly as sites where the girls in this study felt affirmed and able to think and act with greater freedom.

Cultural and communal celebrations, such as International Women’s Day or Eid, also played a role, functioning as public affirmations of girls’ value, reinforcing self-esteem and encouraging self-expression. One girl shared that “During International Women’s Day, I felt more recognized and proud.” Interestingly, some participants described negative experiences, such as “when someone humiliated me,” as turning points that compelled them to assert themselves and reclaim agency, illustrating how resistance to injustice or shame can catalyze empowerment.

Overall, these findings underscore the situational and relational nature of agency, which is shaped by a complex interplay of safe physical and emotional spaces, opportunities for reflection, and personal and cultural affirmation.

5.4 At the systems level: Structural barriers overwhelm supports to girls’ agency in Nigeria

Findings from Kano and Oyo reveal that girls’ agency is shaped by both enabling and constraining systemic factors. Religious institutions emerged as structured spaces where girls felt affirmed. Accessible vocational and apprenticeship systems provided meaningful, if informal, pathways to economic independence. Girls also noted incremental shifts in community-level gender norms: “In Iseyin now, women work more than men; what women do, some men cannot do.”

However, these enabling factors exist within and are frequently overwhelmed by profound structural constraints that undermine the agency of girls who are out of school. Barriers within the education system, together with entrenched poverty and patriarchal norms, shaped the conditions within which girls understand, negotiate, and express their agency.⁷ Teenage pregnancy, which emerged as a particularly significant barrier for the girls in this study, is reinforced by these systemic forces. Taken together, these interconnected systems perpetuate gender inequality, producing intersectional marginalization that severely restricts girls’ autonomy and life opportunities.

⁷ This section focuses on the systems that were discussed by girls. Additional factors like weak health systems and ineffective social protection most certainly impact girls’ agency as well but did not emerge through this research.



» **Systemic barriers exclude girls from formal education**

The girls in this study were all out of school, which means that they are less likely to develop the types of skills and beliefs that they themselves identified as key to the exercise of agency and the achievement of their aspirations.

As discussed in the context section, many girls are left out or pushed out of school because of inequitable patterns of resource allocation in public schools that systematically disadvantage girls (Abdullahi, 2022). In particular, the absence of gender-sensitive facilities at schools exacerbates girls' exclusion. Many of the girls in this study reported missing school during menstruation due to the lack of safe and private sanitary facilities, a challenge compounded in contexts where menstruation remains a taboo subject.

Poverty and patriarchal social norms further constrained educational access for these girls. While some participants emphasized financial incapacity, others pointed to a lack of parental awareness or value placed on girls' education: "They don't know the benefits of girls' education," or simply, "parents don't support" them.

The psychosocial consequences of education exclusion were evident. Several participants expressed feelings of inferiority when comparing themselves to peers in school. One noted, "I am not happy when other of my mates see me, they are in school and can speak English better," reflecting diminished self-esteem. These internalized perceptions of inadequacy are common among adolescent girls with limited schooling and risk perpetuating cycles of marginalization by eroding confidence and self-worth.

» **Poverty constrains agency for girls, families, and schools**

Economic deprivation emerged as a key structural barrier. A significant number of girls attributed their constrained agency to a lack of economic autonomy or family financial support. They frequently cited poverty as a reason for delayed or disrupted education, for example: "I want to complete my schooling, but there is no one to assist me," and "we cannot afford the school fees."

Girls explained that their parents and siblings simply "have no money" or "don't have the means". These accounts illustrate the extent to which the challenges of structural poverty not only limit access to education but also the broader exercise of autonomy and decisionmaking, leaving girls feeling unsupported and marginalized.

» **Entrenched patriarchal norms structure decisionmaking and restrict opportunity**

In Oyo, participants emphasized the pervasive influence of patriarchal norms, which position men as primary decisionmakers within households and communities, thereby constraining women's capacity to exercise autonomy, even in situations where they contribute economically.

"If a woman wants to start a business and she informs her husband, her husband will not allow her."

"If a woman wants to build a house, she will be asked, can a woman build a house and a man move in? It is not possible."

Another participant recounted being "scolded" by her uncle for expressing a desire for education; he told her she should focus instead on marriage.

These reflections demonstrate how entrenched gender norms and cultural expectations function as direct inhibitors of girls' agency. Familial and societal resistance—often rooted in tradition, upbringing, or long-standing beliefs that devalue female ambition—reinforce restrictive norms. Several girls reported explicit prohibitions against pursuing education, with statements such as, "My father doesn't want me to go to school," and references to "family tradition." Such examples illustrate how patriarchal authority and cultural expectations converge to curtail girls' aspirations and opportunities, shrinking the space for agency.

» **Early pregnancy is a system-produced barrier to girls' agency**

The effects of these intersecting systemic failures become especially visible in girls' experiences of early pregnancy. The girls in this study described how early pregnancy interrupted their educational trajectories within systems that offered limited pathways for return:

"My decision was to complete secondary school, but I became pregnant when I was in SS1."

"I was told there was no money to return to school."

Teenage pregnancy became a significant barrier to girls' agency through the inadequate response of education and social support systems.⁸ The adolescent mothers in this study described encountering compounding obstacles, including social stigma, institutional exclusion, and the weight of childcare responsibilities that intersected with poverty, to make re-entry to school particularly difficult. Although many expressed a strong desire to resume their education, inadequate re-entry mechanisms and limited financial and institutional support made re-entry to school largely unattainable for them, further entrenching patterns of marginalization.

⁸ Research by (Salami et al. 2014) supports these accounts, revealing that 43% of pregnant adolescents lacked financial or material parental support, and 51% could not continue their education post-pregnancy due to poverty and the absence of reintegration pathways.



6. RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings of this study show that girls who are out of school in Oyo and Kano already exercise agency through everyday acts of decisionmaking, resilience, and collective support, within circumstances constrained by education exclusion, poverty, entrenched gender norms, and institutional gaps. They do this on their own and through a web of support from key allies—women mentors in particular—who themselves navigate similar challenges.

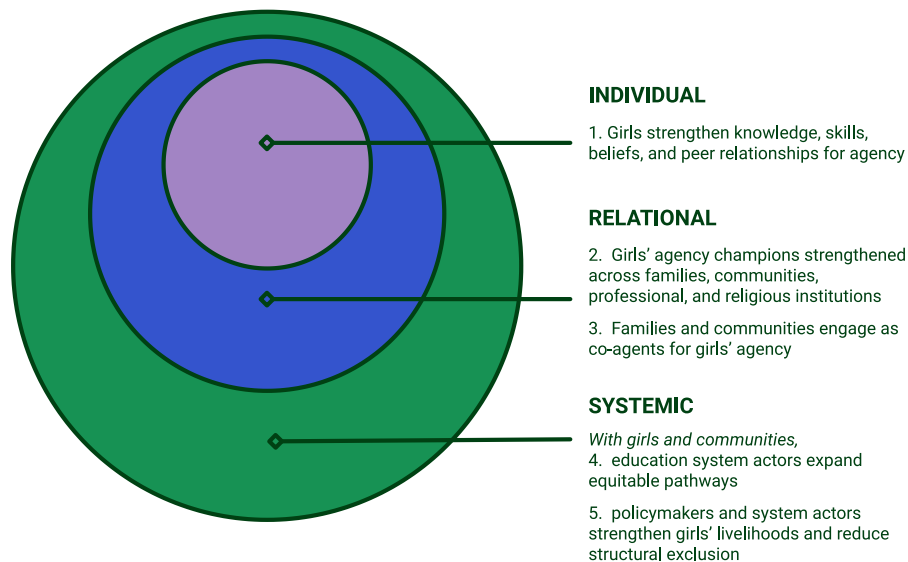
Strengthening girls' agency, therefore, requires more than individual skill-building alone; coordinated action is needed to strengthen girls' capacities, shift relationships and norms, and remove systemic barriers that limit girls' access to learning, livelihoods, and re-entry into formal education. The priority action areas below are organized across individual, relational, and systemic levels and respond to how girls themselves understand agency and the conditions needed to more fully exercise it.

Girls should be placed at the center of any action as the principal drivers of change. But as this research demonstrates, a diverse and comprehensive set of actors in the ecosystem around girls has a role to play in transforming systems with and for girls' agency. As such, the actions below are not assigned to a particular person, institution, or role. In Action Area 1, “create safe and reflective spaces for girls” could be advanced by groups of girls themselves, by a community leader, by a teacher, and so on. Actions at the systemic level are more specifically directed to those most responsible and accountable for ensuring systemic change, especially government entities responsible for education, economic development, poverty reduction, and social inclusion, working in partnership with others.

While these priority action areas apply across Oyo and Kano, the findings point to differences in emphasis. In Kano, for example, girls highlighted the importance of communication skills, confidence building, and mentorship integrated with emotional and relational support. In Oyo, girls placed special value on mentorship from accomplished women, support for school re-entry, vocational training, and engagement with families and religious institutions. Implementation of the recommendations below should be adapted to local realities while maintaining a shared framework for action.

6.1 Priority action areas to promote agency of girls who are out of school in Nigeria

Figure 4. A multi-level approach to strengthening girls' agency in Nigeria



» At the individual level

Key actors: *Girls, families, community and religious leaders, educators, civil society and non-governmental organizations, local business and government, researchers, and funders.*

Action area 1: Adolescent girls strengthen their knowledge, skills, beliefs, and peer relationships for agency

- Create safe and reflective spaces for girls to:
 - » Connect, learn with and from one another, share challenges, receive peer support, encouragement, and solidarity.
 - » Build and sustain peer networks that reinforce confidence, mutual learning, aspiration-setting, and collaboration to address shared concerns.
- Support girls to participate in structured activities that strengthen:
 - » Self-awareness, confidence, emotional resilience, and a sense of self-worth.
 - » Skills related to goal setting, decisionmaking, communication, collaboration, and leadership.
- Expand access to knowledge and skills outside of traditional schooling, including:

- » Non-formal learning and vocational pathways oriented toward financial literacy, economic autonomy, and livelihood development.
- » Opportunities to learn through observation, practice, and peer exchange.
- Create opportunities for girls to reflect on personal and collective experiences, enabling them to:
 - » Recognize and value their existing forms of agency.
 - » Build resilience in the face of systemic constraints, social pressures, and uncertainty.
 - » Practice agency by supporting and mentoring peers.

» **At the relational level**

Key actors: Families, community and religious leaders, educators, civil society and non-governmental organizations, local business and government, media, education authorities, researchers, and funders.

Action area 2: Strengthen girls' agency champions across families, communities, professional, and religious institutions

- Support women, especially mothers, grandmothers, sisters, and aunts, as key agents in:
 - » Protecting girls from early marriage and exploitation.
 - » Encouraging continued learning, skill development, and financial independence.
- Develop and sustain structured mentorship networks connecting girls who are out of school with:
 - » Women professionals in education, health care, skilled trades, and entrepreneurship.
 - » Trusted community and religious women leaders who provide guidance, encouragement, and practical support.
- Increase the visibility of women role models who:
 - » Challenge restrictive gender norms.
 - » Demonstrate diverse, locally relevant pathways for exercising agency.
- Equip mentors and community champions with tools to:
 - » Support girls' aspirations without exposing them to additional risk.
 - » Navigate tensions between girls' autonomy and prevailing social expectations.

Action Area 3: Families and communities engage as co agents in expanding girls' agency

- Engage families, including fathers and male relatives, in dialogue and reflection to:
 - » Promote the value of girls' education, skill development, and economic participation.
 - » Support girls' aspirations while maintaining emotional connection and care.
- Facilitate community dialogues that bring together:
 - » Girls, parents, religious and traditional leaders, and local authorities.
 - » Men and women of different generations to reflect on gender norms, early marriage, and girls' futures.
- Leverage religious and cultural institutions to:
 - » Reinforce messages of girls' dignity, worth, and potential.
 - » Promote collective responsibility for girls' safety and development.

- Support locally driven efforts to:
 - » Reduce social resistance to girls' education and work.
 - » Create shared accountability for expanding space for girls' agency.

» **At the systems level**

Accountable actors: National, state, and municipal government divisions responsible for education, poverty reduction, economic development, and social inclusion.

Key partners: Girls, families, community and religious leaders, educators, civil society and non-governmental organizations, and local businesses.

Action Area 4: Education system actors work with girls and communities to expand equitable pathways into learning, re entry, and educational participation

- Develop alternative and flexible education pathways for girls who are out of school, including:
 - » Second chance education, non formal learning, and vocational training.
 - » Flexible schedules that account for care responsibilities and informal work.
- Establish and operationalize clear school re entry mechanisms:
 - » Ensure financial support for girls pushed out of school due to poverty.
 - » Provide pregnant girls and young mothers with comprehensive financial, childcare, and institutional support.
- Invest in gender responsive education infrastructure and pedagogy, including:
 - » Safe, private sanitation and menstrual health facilities.
 - » Safe access to learning environments where relevant.
 - » Teachers trained in and supported to deliver gender-responsive pedagogy
- Build institutional capacity at local and state levels to:
 - » Identify, support, and retain out of school learners.
 - » Ensure accountability for inclusive education delivery.

Action Area 5: National and local policymakers and system actors work with girls and communities to strengthen girls' livelihoods and reduce structural exclusion

- Expand economic livelihood support for girls who are out of school, including:
 - » Market relevant vocational training linked to real income opportunities.
 - » Start up support (tools, equipment, microgrants) paired with financial literacy.
- Integrate economic opportunities with psychosocial support to:
 - » Strengthen confidence, self worth, and long term goal setting.
 - » Prevent economic participation from becoming purely survival driven.
- Strengthen coordination across education, economic, health, and social protection systems so that poverty, pregnancy, and caregiving do not permanently exclude girls from learning or work.

- Improve data generation and monitoring at federal, state, and local levels to:
 - » Identify which girls are excluded, where, and why.
 - » Target investments and track progress toward more equitable outcomes

A final note on collaboration & coordination for sustained change

Reaching LAAGA's objectives will require coordinated efforts and collaboration across multiple levels, from national and local levels to civil society and community organizations in Nigeria. All future action to promote agency for and with girls who are out of school should build upon efforts already in place, especially those supported by local leaders and the variety of CSOs currently working in the region. However, despite these efforts that address key aspects of action areas, significant gaps remain. More multisectoral, comprehensive, and localized coordinated approaches are needed for systemic and sustained change related to girls' well-being and agency.

Finally, as adults move into action in support of girls, we must remember that girls—and their dreams, decisions, and actions—must take center stage and lead the way forward.




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ABOUT THIS RESEARCH

This research was developed as part of the collaborative work of the Learning and Action Alliance for Girls' Agency (LAAGA). Using participatory, girl-centered methodologies developed collectively, from 2023 to 2025, LAAGA has conducted research in highly marginalized communities in Bangladesh, Jamaica, Nigeria, Pakistan, Vietnam, Zimbabwe, and the Karamoja region along the Kenya-Uganda border. Together, we are exploring how adolescent girls understand and exercise agency in their lives and the social, cultural, environmental, and economic policies, practices, and relationships that support or constrain that. This paper presents findings from and recommendations for Nigeria.

ABOUT LAAGA

The Learning and Action Alliance for Girls' Agency (LAAGA) is a community of practice composed of 25 leaders in gender and education, working in 15 countries across Africa, America, Asia, and the Middle East. LAAGA has grown out of and deepened the collaboration between alumni of the [Echidna Global Scholars Program](#) and the [Center for Universal Education](#) at the Brookings Institution. Guided by a vision of a world that values the knowledge and dignity of girls and young women, listens to their voices, and supports them in taking action to shape their own lives and those of their communities, LAAGA is working to co-create ideas and understandings on the development and exercise of girls' agency across diverse contexts. We are committed to translating these ideas and understandings into action, working alongside girls, their families and communities, educators, practitioners, and policy makers. For more information and to see our latest publications and events, please visit: www.brookings.edu/projects/learning-and-action-alliance-for-girls-agency/.

A NOTE ON THE USE OF PHOTOS

In keeping with LAAGA's ethical standards, girls were invited to participate in the public sharing of this research in ways that felt comfortable to them. Photos used in this brief reflect girls' interest and assent (as well as consent of their guardians) to be part of the sharing of the lessons on girls' agency they have co-constructed.

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