

**ACHIEVEMENTS AND CHALLENGES OF THE  
SAFE SCHOOL INITIATIVE (SSL) OF THE  
NIGERIA SECURITY AND CIVIL DEFENCE  
CORPS (NSCDC), 2014-2025**

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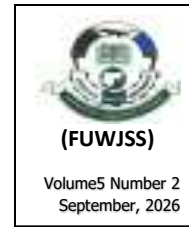
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**Abstract**

The paper examines the role of the Nigeria Security and Civil Defence Corps in the implementation of the Safe School Initiative in Nigeria between 2014 and 2025. The Safe School Initiative was introduced by the Federal Government of Nigeria in response to increasing attacks on schools, particularly following the abduction of schoolgirls in Chibok in 2014 by Boko Haram. Despite government interventions, schools across several parts of Nigeria continue to face threats such as terrorism, banditry, kidnapping, vandalism and communal violence, undermining access to education and national development. The paper, therefore, examines the contributions of the NSCDC toward school protection, the challenges affecting effective implementation of the initiative, and strategies for improving school security in Nigeria. The paper relied on both primary and secondary sources of data, utilizing interviews and documents such as government publications, journal articles, policy documents, newspapers, and reports from international organizations. The paper was anchored on Human Security Theory, which emphasizes the protection of individuals and communities from threats to their survival and well-being. Findings revealed that the NSCDC has contributed significantly to the implementation of the Safe School Initiative through school surveillance, deployment of security personnel, intelligence gathering, community sensitization, protection of educational infrastructure, and collaboration with other security agencies. The paper recommends, among other things, improved intelligence sharing and stronger collaboration among Nigerian security agencies to ensure the sustainability of the Safe School Initiative in Nigeria.

**Keywords:** Nigeria security, civil defence, safe school, initiative, implementation

## Introduction

Education is universally recognized as a fundamental instrument for national development, social integration, and human capital formation. A secure learning environment is therefore essential for the realization of educational objectives and the promotion of sustainable development. In many countries affected by violent conflicts and insecurity, schools have increasingly become targets of attacks by insurgents, terrorists, kidnappers, and criminal groups, thereby threatening access to education and the safety of students and teachers (UNESCO, 2011). In Nigeria, the growing wave of insecurity, particularly insurgency, banditry, kidnapping, and communal violence, has posed serious challenges to the educational sector and undermined the safety of schools across different parts of the country. The security situation in Nigeria deteriorated significantly with the emergence of Boko Haram in the North-East region. Since 2009, the group has carried out attacks on communities, religious institutions, markets, and educational facilities, viewing Western education as incompatible with its ideological beliefs (Onuoha, 2014). Schools in states such as Borno State, Yobe State, and Adamawa State became frequent targets of bombings, arson, abductions, and killings. The most prominent incident occurred in April 2014 when over 270 schoolgirls were abducted from the Government Girls Secondary School in Chibok. The incident attracted international condemnation and exposed the vulnerability of educational institutions in Nigeria (Amnesty International, 2015).

The increasing attacks on schools destroyed educational infrastructure, displaced students and teachers, closure of schools and the disruption of academic activities. According to the United Nations Children's Fund, thousands of children in conflict-affected areas were denied access to education due to insecurity, while many schools were converted into shelters for internally displaced persons or abandoned completely (UNICEF, 2018). Beyond insurgency in the North-East, the rise of banditry and kidnapping in Northwestern states such as Kaduna State, Zamfara State, and Niger State further intensified concerns over school safety. Several mass abductions of students from boarding schools between 2020 and 2023 demonstrated that insecurity in schools had become a national challenge requiring coordinated security responses. In response to these threats, the Federal Government of Nigeria launched the Safe School Initiative (SSI) in 2014 with support from international organizations, development partners, and the private sector. The initiative was designed to protect schools, ensure continuity of education during emergencies, and strengthen the resilience of educational institutions in conflict-prone areas. The Safe School Initiative focuses on improving physical security infrastructure, relocating students from highly insecure areas, training teachers on emergency preparedness, and enhancing

collaboration between communities and security agencies (World Bank, 2015). The initiative also aligns with the global Safe Schools Declaration, which emphasizes the protection of students, teachers, and educational facilities during armed conflict.

Among the security agencies involved in the implementation of the Safe School Initiative are the Nigeria Security and Civil Defence Corps (NSCDC). Established formally by Act No. 2 of 2003 and amended in 2007, the NSCDC is charged with the responsibility of protecting critical national assets and infrastructure, assisting in disaster management, and supporting the maintenance of peace and public order in Nigeria. The Corps has increasingly assumed important responsibilities in internal security management, including the protection of schools and other public institutions (Ajayi, 2016). The involvement of the NSCDC in the implementation of the Safe School Initiative reflects the growing recognition of the need for community-oriented and preventive security measures in addressing threats to education. The Corps engages in school surveillance, intelligence gathering, community sensitization, conflict prevention, and deployment of personnel to vulnerable schools. In some states, NSCDC officers collaborate with school authorities, local vigilante groups, and other security agencies to monitor suspicious movements and respond to emergencies. The Corps also participates in awareness campaigns aimed at educating students and teachers on safety procedures and security consciousness (Okoli & Iortyer, 2018).

Despite these efforts, the implementation of the Safe School Initiative in Nigeria continues to face several challenges. Scholars have observed that inadequate funding, shortage of trained personnel, weak intelligence coordination, corruption, poor logistics, and insufficient security infrastructure have undermined the effectiveness of security agencies in protecting schools (Awojobi, 2019). In many rural communities, schools remain vulnerable to attacks due to limited government presence and difficult terrain. Furthermore, the increasing sophistication of armed groups and the persistence of socio-economic inequalities have continued to threaten educational security in Nigeria. Existing literature on school security in Nigeria has focused largely on insurgency, terrorism, and the impact of insecurity on educational development. However, there is relatively limited scholarly attention on the specific role of the NSCDC in implementing the Safe School Initiative and the extent to which the Corps has contributed to safeguarding educational institutions in Nigeria. This gap in knowledge makes it necessary to examine the role, achievements, and challenges of the NSCDC in the implementation of the Safe School Initiative between 2014 and 2025. The paper, therefore, examines the contributions of the NSCDC to school security in Nigeria, assesses the effectiveness of its

strategies under the Safe School Initiative, identifies the challenges confronting the Corps, and proposes measures for strengthening the protection of schools and the promotion of safe learning environments across the country.

### **Safe School Initiative and National Security**

The issue of school safety has become an important subject in contemporary security and educational discourse due to the increasing attacks on educational institutions across conflict-prone societies. Globally, schools are expected to provide secure environments for teaching and learning, but the rise of terrorism, insurgency, kidnapping, and violent extremism has threatened educational systems in many developing countries. In Nigeria, the growing insecurity in the form of insurgency, banditry, communal violence, and school abductions has elevated the Safe School Initiative (SSI) into a major national security concern. The Safe School Initiative was launched in 2014 by the Federal Government of Nigeria in collaboration with international organizations and private sector partners following the abduction of schoolgirls in Chibok by Boko Haram. The initiative was designed to protect students, teachers, and educational infrastructure from attacks and ensure continuity of education in conflict-affected areas. According to Ogunode, Daniel, and Ayeni (2024), the Safe School Initiative was introduced to provide secure learning environments that support effective teaching and learning while promoting human security in Nigeria.

National security refers to the protection of a state's territorial integrity, institutions, citizens, and socio-economic systems from both internal and external threats. Traditionally, national security focused mainly on military defence and territorial protection; however, contemporary security studies emphasize human security, which includes the protection of lives, livelihoods, education, and social wellbeing (Buzan, 1991). Within this context, the protection of schools has become an essential component of national security because attacks on educational institutions threaten social stability, human capital development, and national integration. Several scholars argue that insecurity in schools has serious implications for Nigeria's national security and development. Ibrahim and Ibrahim (2025) observed that persistent attacks and kidnappings in schools undermine educational advancement, increase school dropout rates, and weaken national development efforts. The authors further contend that unsafe educational environments create fear among parents and students, thereby reducing school enrolment and increasing social vulnerability.

Existing literature indicates that the Safe School Initiative was developed as both an educational and security intervention. Ogunode et al.

(2022) note that the initiative aimed at strengthening school protection mechanisms through improved security infrastructure, emergency preparedness, relocation of vulnerable students, and enhanced cooperation between security agencies and local communities. The study identified inadequate funding, corruption, weak monitoring systems, political instability, and poor coordination among stakeholders as major obstacles to the effective implementation of the initiative. Scholars have also linked the Safe School Initiative to the broader concept of human security. Human security emphasizes the protection of individuals from fear, violence, poverty, and social exclusion rather than focusing solely on state security. Ogunode et al. (2024) argue that attacks on schools in Nigeria threaten not only educational development but also the psychological well-being and future opportunities of children. According to the authors, ensuring school safety contributes directly to human security by protecting children from violence, displacement, and educational disruption.

The literature further demonstrates that insecurity in schools contributes to broader national instability. Human Rights organizations and development agencies have consistently reported that attacks on schools in Nigeria have led to the displacement of thousands of students and teachers, destruction of educational facilities, and interruption of academic activities. These disruptions contribute to rising unemployment, poverty, social inequality, and youth vulnerability to radicalization and criminal recruitment. Consequently, the inability of the state to secure educational institutions weakens public confidence in government and threatens national cohesion. Another major issue in the literature is the role of security agencies in implementing the Safe School Initiative. Security institutions such as the Nigeria Security and Civil Defence Corps, the police, and the military are expected to provide surveillance, intelligence gathering, rapid response, and protection of school infrastructure. Studies emphasize that effective collaboration between security agencies, local communities, and school authorities is essential for achieving sustainable school safety. However, researchers have identified challenges such as a shortage of personnel, inadequate equipment, poor intelligence sharing, and weak inter-agency coordination as limitations affecting the effectiveness of security responses to school attacks.

Furthermore, scholars have stressed the importance of community participation in promoting school security. Community-based security approaches encourage the involvement of parents, traditional rulers, religious leaders, youth groups, and vigilante organizations in protecting schools and reporting suspicious activities. According to recent studies, local participation improves intelligence gathering and enhances trust between communities and security agencies, thereby strengthening national security

outcomes. Empirical studies on the implementation of the Safe School Initiative have produced mixed findings. Chinwuba (2024) found that the initiative positively influenced the behaviour and psychological stability of victims of insurgency in secondary schools in North-East Nigeria. The study concluded that safer learning environments contributed to improved student participation and reduced fear among learners affected by conflict. However, other scholars maintain that despite government interventions, many schools in rural and conflict-prone communities remain highly vulnerable to attacks due to inadequate security infrastructure and persistent insecurity.

The literature also reveals that inadequate funding remains one of the greatest challenges facing the Safe School Initiative. Okani (2025) argues that insufficient financial commitment from the government has affected the provision of security facilities, training programmes, monitoring mechanisms, and emergency response systems needed for effective school protection. Similarly, corruption and poor accountability have undermined the proper utilization of resources allocated for school security projects.

Another emerging area in the literature is the use of intelligence and technology in promoting school safety. Recent studies highlight the importance of surveillance systems, community intelligence, early warning mechanisms, drones, and digital monitoring tools in strengthening school security frameworks. Onumbu et al. (2025) argue that intelligence-based initiatives can improve the effectiveness of the Safe School Initiative by enabling proactive responses to threats and enhancing coordination among stakeholders. Despite growing scholarly attention to school safety in Nigeria, there remains limited literature specifically examining the relationship between the Safe School Initiative and national security from an institutional perspective. Much of the existing research focuses on insurgency, educational disruption, and implementation challenges, while fewer studies critically assess how school protection contributes to broader national security objectives such as social stability, human development, and state legitimacy. This gap underscores the need for further research on how security agencies and government policies can strengthen the implementation of the Safe School Initiative as part of Nigeria's national security strategy.

### **Theoretical Framework**

This paper is anchored on the Human Security Theory propounded by Buzan in 1991, and advanced by scholars such as Mahbub ul Haq (1995) and Amartya Sen (1999). Human Security Theory emerged in the post-Cold War era as a response to the limitations of the traditional state-centric conception of security, which focused primarily on military threats and territorial defence. The theory broadened the understanding of security by

emphasizing the protection of individuals and communities rather than concentrating solely on the protection of the state. Human Security Theory argues that genuine security should involve safeguarding people from threats such as poverty, hunger, disease, environmental degradation, violence, and political oppression (United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), 1994). The theory gained international recognition through the 1994 Human Development Report published by the UNDP, which formally introduced the concept of human security into global academic and policy discourse. The report argued that security should be people-centred and should address threats to human survival, dignity, and livelihood rather than focusing exclusively on military security (UNDP, 1994).

Mahbub ul Haq, who is widely regarded as one of the leading architects of Human Security Theory. Haq criticized the traditional understanding of security for placing excessive emphasis on state sovereignty and military strength while neglecting the welfare of ordinary citizens. According to Haq (1995), the true objective of security should be the protection of human life and the enhancement of human wellbeing. He maintained that millions of people around the world suffer more from hunger, unemployment, disease, and social exclusion than from armed conflict. Consequently, governments should focus on improving the quality of life of citizens as a fundamental aspect of national security. Another important proponent of Human Security Theory is Amartya Sen, whose capability approach strongly influenced the development of the theory. Sen (1999) argued that development should be viewed as the expansion of human freedoms and capabilities rather than merely economic growth. According to him, insecurity arises when individuals are deprived of opportunities and necessities required to live meaningful lives. Human security, therefore, involves creating social, political, and economic conditions that allow people to achieve their full potential.

The Human Security Theory is based on several fundamental assumptions. One major assumption is that the individual, rather than the state, should be the primary referent object of security. Traditional security theories focus on protecting state borders and political institutions, whereas Human Security Theory emphasizes protecting human beings from threats that endanger their lives and wellbeing (Buzan, 1991). The theory argues that a state may appear secure militarily while its citizens continue to suffer from poverty, violence, disease, and insecurity. Another assumption of the theory is that security threats are multidimensional and interconnected. Human Security Theory identifies various forms of threats, including economic insecurity, food insecurity, health insecurity, environmental insecurity, personal insecurity, community insecurity, and political insecurity (UNDP, 1994). These threats are interrelated and often reinforce

one another. For example, poverty may contribute to crime and political instability, while armed conflict may lead to displacement, hunger, and disruption of education.

The theory also assumes that prevention is more important than reaction in addressing security challenges. Human security scholars argue that governments and institutions should focus on preventing the conditions that generate insecurity rather than responding only after crises occur. This preventive approach involves addressing the root causes of insecurity, such as inequality, unemployment, poor governance, social injustice, and marginalization (Tadjbakhsh & Chenoy, 2007). Furthermore, Human Security Theory assumes that development and security are closely connected. The theory maintains that sustainable peace and stability cannot be achieved without economic development, social justice, and access to education, healthcare, and respect for human rights. In this regard, development policies are considered essential tools for promoting security and preventing conflict (Sen, 1999). Another important assumption is that security requires collective responsibility and cooperation among different actors. Human Security Theory recognizes the role of governments, international organizations, civil society groups, communities, and individuals in promoting peace and protecting people from threats. Security is therefore viewed as a shared responsibility that cannot be achieved solely through military force.

The theory further assumes that fear and want are the two major dimensions of insecurity. Freedom from fear refers to protection from violence, war, terrorism, and physical harm, while freedom from want involves protection from poverty, hunger, unemployment, and deprivation (UNDP, 1994). Human security can only be achieved when both dimensions are adequately addressed. Human Security Theory has been widely applied in explaining contemporary security challenges such as terrorism, insurgency, refugee crises, environmental disasters, and educational insecurity. In Nigeria, the theory is particularly relevant in understanding how insecurity affects citizens' access to education, healthcare, and livelihoods. The attacks on schools by insurgents and bandits demonstrate that national security is not only about protecting territorial integrity but also about ensuring the safety and well-being of citizens, especially vulnerable groups such as children and students. The theory, therefore, provides a useful framework for analyzing issues related to school security, the Safe School Initiative, and the role of security agencies such as the Nigeria Security and Civil Defence Corps in protecting educational institutions and promoting safe learning environments in Nigeria.

The justification for the use of Human Security Theory in this paper hinges on the fact that it is highly suitable for explaining the contributions



of the Nigeria Security and Civil Defence Corps (NSCDC) in the implementation of the Safe School Initiative in Nigeria because the theory focuses on the protection of individuals and communities from threats that endanger their survival, well-being, and development. Unlike traditional security theories that emphasize state sovereignty and military defence, Human Security Theory places human beings at the centre of security considerations (UNDP, 1994). This perspective aligns closely with the objectives of the Safe School Initiative, which seeks to protect students, teachers, and educational institutions from insecurity and violence. Indeed, the relevance of the theory to the paper lies in its emphasis on freedom from fear and freedom from want. In the Nigerian context, insecurity in schools caused by insurgency, kidnapping, banditry, and violent attacks threatens the lives, education, and future opportunities of children. Human Security Theory explains that when people live under constant fear of violence, their ability to develop socially, economically, and intellectually becomes severely affected (Sen, 1999). The attacks on schools in states such as Borno State, Kaduna State, Zamfara State, and Niger State demonstrate how educational insecurity has become a major human security challenge in Nigeria.

Similarly, the Human Security Theory is suitable because it recognizes education as an important component of human development and societal stability. According to the theory, individuals can only attain meaningful development when they are protected from violence, deprivation, and social disruption (Haq, 1995). The Safe School Initiative, therefore, represents a practical effort to guarantee the security of students and ensure uninterrupted access to education despite prevailing security threats. The involvement of the NSCDC in implementing the initiative reflects the practical application of human security principles in protecting vulnerable populations and critical social institutions. The theory is also appropriate because it supports preventive and community-based approaches to security management. Human Security Theory argues that security institutions should focus not only on responding to threats after they occur but also on preventing conditions that generate insecurity (Tadjbakhsh & Chenoy, 2007). In implementing the Safe School Initiative, the NSCDC engages in preventive measures such as surveillance of schools, intelligence gathering, sensitization campaigns, community policing, and early warning mechanisms. These activities are aimed at identifying and neutralizing threats before attacks occur, thereby promoting safer learning environments.

Furthermore, Human Security Theory emphasizes the multidimensional nature of security. It recognizes that insecurity is not limited to armed conflict alone but also includes threats to education, health, economic well-being, and social stability (UNDP, 1994). The destruction of

schools and disruption of educational activities in Nigeria have broader implications for national development, poverty reduction, youth empowerment, and social cohesion. The NSCDC's role in protecting schools, therefore, extends beyond physical security to include the preservation of human capital development and national stability. The suitability of the theory is further reflected in its emphasis on collective responsibility and cooperation among multiple actors. Human Security Theory acknowledges that governments, security agencies, communities, civil society organizations, and international institutions all have roles to play in promoting security and protecting citizens (Commission on Human Security, 2003). In the implementation of the Safe School Initiative, the NSCDC collaborates with other security agencies, school authorities, community leaders, vigilante groups, and international partners to improve school safety and respond to emergencies. This collaborative framework is consistent with the assumptions of Human Security Theory.

Another reason why the theory is suitable is that it explains the importance of protecting vulnerable groups within society. Children and students are among the most vulnerable victims of insecurity because attacks on schools expose them to violence, trauma, displacement, and educational deprivation. Human Security Theory emphasizes the need to prioritize the protection of vulnerable populations and ensure their access to essential social services such as education and healthcare (Newman, 2004). The Safe School Initiative and the contributions of the NSCDC are therefore consistent with the theory's people-centred approach to security. Additionally, the theory helps explain the consequences of failure to secure educational institutions. Human Security scholars argue that insecurity contributes to poverty, unemployment, social disintegration, and political instability (Paris, 2001). In Nigeria, repeated attacks on schools have resulted in school closures, increased dropout rates, displacement of learners, and psychological trauma among students and teachers. Such conditions threaten long-term national development and increase the vulnerability of youths to crime, radicalization, and social unrest. By working to secure schools, the NSCDC contributes not only to educational protection but also to broader national security and social stability.

The Human Security Theory is therefore highly relevant in explaining the contributions of the NSCDC to the implementation of the Safe School Initiative because it provides a comprehensive framework for understanding security beyond military protection. The theory demonstrates that ensuring safe learning environments is essential for protecting human dignity, promoting development, and sustaining peace in society. It also highlights the importance of preventive security measures, institutional cooperation,

and protection of vulnerable populations, all of which are central to the activities of the NSCDC under the Safe School Initiative in Nigeria.

### **Research Methodology**

The paper adopted descriptive survey design, and relied on both primary and secondary sources of data, utilizing interviews and documents such as government publications, journal articles, policy documents, newspapers, and reports from international organizations. The interview report is based on qualitative interviews conducted with selected stakeholders involved in school administration and security management. Respondents include school administrators, NSCDC officers attached to school protection units, and community stakeholders in selected locations

### **Findings and Discussions**

The Nigeria Security and Civil Defence Corps (NSCDC) have played a central operational and coordination role in the implementation of the Safe School Initiative (SSI) in Nigeria, particularly through its leadership of the National Safe Schools Response Coordination Centre (NSSRCC) and its field-based protective interventions. Its contributions can be clearly understood through concrete examples of policy implementation, security operations, intelligence work, and community engagement. These include: *Establishment and Operation of the National Safe Schools Response Coordination Centre (NSSRCC)*. One of the most significant contributions of the NSCDC is the hosting and management of the NSSRCC in Abuja, which serves as the command-and-control hub for school security operations nationwide. The Centre was established following rising attacks on schools, especially in Northern Nigeria, to provide a central platform for monitoring threats, coordinating responses, and sharing intelligence among security agencies. According to official NSCDC reports, the NSSRCC maintains emergency hotlines for schools under threat, coordinates rapid response deployments, collects and analyzes security intelligence on school vulnerability, and links schools directly with security agencies during emergencies. This has transformed school security from a reactive system to a coordinated national response mechanism, reducing delays in intervention during threats such as kidnappings or attacks.

*Nationwide School Vulnerability Assessment and Risk Mapping:* The NSCDC conducted a nationwide vulnerability assessment of schools across Nigeria, which became the foundation of the Safe School implementation strategy. The assessment revealed that over 60,000 of Nigeria's approximately 81,000 schools lacked adequate security infrastructure, such as fencing and security personnel. This data was formally submitted to the

Federal Ministry of Education for policy planning. This contribution is critical because it identified “hotspot” schools requiring urgent protection, enabled targeted deployment of security resources, and shifted policy from generalized protection to data-driven school security planning. Without this assessment, Safe School interventions would likely remain fragmented and inefficient.

*Prevention of Attacks through Tactical Units and Rapid Response Operations:* The NSCDC has established specialized units under the Safe School framework, including Safe Schools Protection Squads and Female Strike Teams, which operate in high-risk areas. The Commandant General reported that these specialized units have foiled over 110 planned attacks on schools nationwide through intelligence gathering and rapid intervention strategies. This demonstrates a shift from passive guarding to proactive threat disruption, where attacks are prevented before they occur rather than responded to after damage is done.

*Deployment of Community-Based Security and Sensitization Programmes:* Beyond armed response, the NSCDC implements non-kinetic (preventive) strategies, especially through community engagement and awareness campaigns. Through the NSSRCC and state commands, the Corps conducts school safety training for teachers and administrators, community sensitization on early warning signs, student awareness programs on reporting threats, and collaboration with parent and community associations. This approach strengthens community ownership of school security, making schools less isolated and more integrated into local protection networks.

*Rapid Response and Inter-Agency Coordination during School Threats:* The NSCDC serves as a coordination bridge between the Ministry of Education, police, military, and intelligence agencies. During threat alerts or attempted kidnappings, the NSSRCC activates emergency communication lines, inter-agency deployment protocols, and intelligence sharing systems for real-time response. This system ensures that multiple agencies respond simultaneously rather than sequentially. This improves response time and operational efficiency, which is critical in preventing mass abductions in school settings.

*Integration of Safe School Initiative into National Security Policy:* The NSCDC has helped institutionalize Safe School policies within Nigeria’s broader security framework. The Federal Government formally recognized the NSCDC as the lead operational agency for school protection, with a dedicated Department of Safe Schools established in the Ministry of

Education to work directly with the Corps. This elevates school security from a project-based initiative to a permanent national security priority, ensuring continuity beyond political cycles.

Interviews were also conducted to obtain information on the contributions of the Nigeria Security and Civil Defence Corps (NSCDC) to the implementation of the Safe School Initiative in Nigeria.

### **Contribution of the Nigeria Security and Civil Defence Corps (NSCDC) to the Implementation of the Safe School Initiative in Nigeria**

This interview report presents findings on the contributions of the Nigeria Security and Civil Defence Corps (NSCDC) to the implementation of the Safe School Initiative (SSI) in Nigeria. The Safe School Initiative was introduced as a national and international response to increasing attacks on educational institutions, particularly kidnappings and insurgency-related violence in some parts of the country. The NSCDC, as the lead agency for school protection under the initiative, plays a central role in ensuring the safety of learners, teachers, and school infrastructure. The report is based on qualitative interviews conducted with selected stakeholders involved in school administration and security management. Respondents include school administrators, NSCDC officers attached to school protection units, and community stakeholders in selected locations. Data collected focused on perceptions of NSCDC contributions, operational effectiveness, and challenges in implementing the Safe School Initiative. The responses were thematically analyzed.

#### ***Establishment of Structured School Protection Mechanisms***

Respondents consistently highlighted that the NSCDC has contributed significantly through the establishment of structured security frameworks such as the Safe Schools Protection Units (SSPUs) and the National Safe Schools Response Coordination Centre (NSSRCC). A school principal noted: “Before the NSCDC deployment, we had no structured security arrangement. Now there is constant patrol and emergency contact linkage with security responders.” This reflects institutional strengthening, where schools are now linked to centralized emergency response systems, improving coordination during threats.

#### ***Provision of Physical Security Presence in Schools***

A major contribution identified is the deployment of NSCDC personnel for the physical protection of schools, particularly in high-risk areas. An NSCDC officer explained that “our personnel are deployed to schools based on threat analysis. We conduct patrols and maintain presence in vulnerable locations.” This visible presence has helped deter potential attackers and

reassured school communities, especially in regions previously affected by insecurity.

### ***Intelligence Gathering and Early Warning Systems***

Respondents noted that the NSCDC plays a key role in collecting and analyzing security intelligence related to school threats. A community leader stated, “Sometimes the NSCDC alerts us before any incident happens. They work with local informants and security networks. This demonstrates a shift toward proactive security management, where prevention is prioritized over reactive response.

### ***Rapid Response to Security Incidents***

Another key contribution identified is the Corps’ ability to respond quickly to emergencies involving schools. A school administrator reported, “During a security scare in our area, NSCDC officers responded quickly and helped evacuate students safely.” Rapid response capacity is critical in minimizing harm during potential school attacks, although effectiveness varies by location and resource availability.

### ***Community Engagement and Sensitization***

The NSCDC also engages in community-based awareness campaigns aimed at improving school safety. A parent-teacher association member said that “they organize meetings with parents and teach us how to report suspicious activities around schools.” This strengthens community participation in school security and enhances early warning systems.

### ***Coordination with Other Security Agencies***

Respondents emphasized that the NSCDC serves as a coordination bridge among multiple security agencies under the Safe School framework. A senior education official stated that “the NSCDC coordinates with police and military units whenever there is a school-related threat.” This multi-agency collaboration reduces duplication and improves response efficiency, although coordination gaps still occasionally occur.

In conclusion, the interview findings indicate that the NSCDC has made significant contributions to the implementation of the Safe School Initiative in Nigeria through structured school protection mechanisms, intelligence gathering, rapid response operations, and community engagement. However, the effectiveness of these contributions is moderated by challenges such as manpower shortages, inadequate logistics, weak school infrastructure, and broader insecurity. Overall, while the NSCDC has strengthened school security architecture in Nigeria, sustaining and

expanding its impact requires improved funding, enhanced inter-agency coordination, and greater investment in preventive security infrastructure.

### **Challenges Confronting NSCDC Implementation of the Safe School Initiative**

Despite the contributions outlined above, several challenges were identified. Respondents noted that the NSCDC lacks enough personnel to cover all schools nationwide. They also identified shortages of operational vehicles, communication tools, and surveillance equipment. Several respondents consistently noted that many schools still lack fencing, gates, and basic security installations. They further stated that insecurity in some regions, particularly involving banditry and kidnapping, overwhelms available security resources. Similarly, respondents unanimously noted that limited financial support restricts the sustained deployment and expansion of school protection units. These challenges collectively limit the full effectiveness of NSCDC interventions, particularly in rural and high-risk areas.

### **Measures for Strengthening School Protection and Safe Learning Environments in Nigeria**

To improve the effectiveness of the NSCDC and the Safe School Initiative, a multi-layered reform approach is required, combining institutional strengthening, technology, community engagement, and policy reforms. These measures include:

*Increased and dedicated funding for Safe Schools operations:* The government should establish a ring-fenced Safe School Security Fund to support recruitment and training of additional NSCDC personnel, procurement of vehicles and surveillance equipment, and rapid deployment logistics. This would improve nationwide coverage and response capacity.

*Expansion of school security infrastructure:* All public schools should be gradually upgraded to meet minimum safety standards, including perimeter fencing and controlled gates, security posts at school entrances, installation of CCTV and alarm systems in high-risk areas, and emergency evacuation plans. For instance, schools in high-risk LGAs should be prioritized for full perimeter fortification.

*Strengthening community-based security systems:* A sustainable school protection model must integrate communities through School-Based Management Committees (SBMCs), trained community vigilante partnerships (properly regulated), and parent–teacher safety networks. This

is because community participation enhances early warning systems and reduces response time.

*Improved inter-agency coordination framework:* A clearer operational structure should be developed to define NSCDC as the lead responder for school security, assign police and military roles for escalation scenarios, and establish joint command protocols at the state level. This would reduce duplication and speed up crisis response.

*Intelligence-driven and technology-supported security systems:* The Safe School framework should be modernized using real-time incident reporting mobile applications, geo-mapping of high-risk schools, drone surveillance in extreme risk zones, and centralized security data dashboards under NSSRCC.

*Recruitment and specialized training of NSCDC personnel:* There is a need for expansion of personnel dedicated specifically to school protection units, training in child protection, crisis negotiation, and trauma response, and continuous simulation exercises for attack scenarios.

*Early warning and rapid response enhancement:* A standardized national system should be implemented where every school is linked to a 24/7 emergency response centre, panic alert systems are installed in high-risk schools, and response time benchmarks are enforced.

*Policy integration and long-term institutionalization:* The Safe School Initiative should be fully embedded into the national security strategy, the education policy framework, and state-level security planning. This would ensure continuity beyond short-term projects or political cycles.

### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

The NSCDC has become a key pillar in Nigeria's Safe School Initiative, playing a crucial role in protecting students and educational infrastructure through coordination, intelligence gathering, and rapid response operations. Its effectiveness is evident in improved coordination structures and the prevention of security threats. However, systemic challenges, particularly funding deficits, infrastructure gaps, and manpower limitations, continue to undermine full implementation. Strengthening school security in Nigeria, therefore, requires a multi-layered approach combining increased investment, community participation, technological innovation, and stronger inter-agency coordination to ensure that schools become truly safe environments for learning. The NSCDC's contribution to the Safe School



Initiative in Nigeria is both structural and operational. Through the establishment of the NSSRCC, nationwide vulnerability assessments, tactical prevention units, community engagement, and inter-agency coordination, the Corps has significantly shaped how school security is conceptualized and implemented. However, while these interventions have improved coordination and prevented several attacks, their effectiveness depends heavily on sustained funding, infrastructure development, and nationwide coverage. Without these, the impact of NSCDC efforts may remain uneven across regions. The NSCDC plays a critical role in safeguarding schools in Nigeria, but its effectiveness is constrained by manpower shortages, weak infrastructure, funding gaps, and a highly volatile security environment. Strengthening school protection requires moving beyond reactive security deployment to a comprehensive, intelligence-led, community-supported, and technology-driven protection system. If properly implemented, these reforms would significantly enhance the safety of learners and contribute to stable, secure educational environments across Nigeria.

On the strength of the findings, the paper recommends the following:

- i. There should be increased funding by the Federal government of Nigeria, recruitment and training of additional personnel to provide adequate security in schools.
- ii. Improved intelligence sharing and stronger collaboration among Nigerian security agencies to promote actionable intelligence gathering and swift response.
- iii. There should be provision of modern security equipment by the federal government of Nigeria to ensure the sustainability of the Safe School Initiative in Nigeria.

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