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EXAMINING THE ADMINISTRATIVE STRUCTURE AND IMPLEMENTATION APPROACH OF SAFE SCHOOL INITIATIVE IN NIGERIA

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Abstract
In conflict areas of Northern Nigeria, schools are targeted by conflicting parties for political, military, ideological, ethnic, religious or criminal reasons. In situations of violent conflict, government forces and armed non-state groups such as Boko Haram converts schools to bases, barracks, weapons stores, detention facilities and camps for refugees and internally displaced persons. As a result, school premises become theatres of military operations instead of learning centres thereby disrupting access to education. Since 2013, incidence of attacks on school environment have grown exponentially across Nigeria. Schools, teachers and students have been targeted for killings, kidnapping and abduction, rape, and other forms of danger. In May, 2014, there was the kidnapping of nearly 300 girls from their school in Chibok. Since then, Nigeria had witnessed several attacks on schools, thereby increasingly turning the school environment to an unsafe place for learning and habitation. The Chibok abduction necessitated the launch of safe school initiative in 2014 through an initial investment from Global Business Coalition for Education, which has mobilized more than $30 million for the protection of schools in Northeast, through UNDP hosted multi-donor trust fund. This study therefore examined the administrative structure and implementation approach of the safe school initiative, with a view to make it more efficient for an improved safety in school environment across Nigeria. The study adopted qualitative research approach with the use of secondary sources of data and content analysis. Also, the study is anchored on Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs as theoretical basis of analysis. The study noted the deficiencies in the administrative structure and implementation components of the initiative and prescribes a reform of structure, roles, operational strategies as well as the re-alignment of its relationship with relevant government ministries to ensure sustainability of the scheme for improved safety for teachers and students in the school environments.

KEYWORDS: Administrative, Structure, Implementation, School, Safety

INTRODUCTION

The Safe School Initiative (SSI) is a national programme launched by the Nigerian Government, UN Special Envoy for Global Education, Gordon Brown, Nigerian Global Business Coalition for Education and private sector leaders, in May 2014, as an immediate response to the abduction of 276 students from the Government Girls Secondary Chibok, Borno State. The programme is aimed at addressing emerging safety and security needs in schools to ensure educational continuity. Meanwhile, the spate of attacks on schools is not limited to the North East. The North West and North Central parts of Nigeria have also witnessed increasing number of violent attacks on schools by armed 'bandits.' For instance, on 11th November 2020, Government Science Secondary School, Kankara in Katsina State came under attack by armed bandits and more than 300 students were abducted. Similar incidents were reported at various times in Kagara in Niger State, Jangebe in Zamfara State, Rama and Afaka in Kaduna State among others. These show the increasing potency of threats to education as parents and guardians become fearful of sending their children to school due to safety concerns in Northern regions that was already battling the problem of high rate of out-of-school children. These incidents set the context within which the Safe School Initiative in Nigeria commenced as part of the global efforts to protect education from attack.

To be specific, the Safe Schools Initiative (SSI) was launched by the FGN in collaboration with the UN Special Envoy for Global Education, Mr. Gordon Brown and a coalition of Nigerian Business

leaders on May 7th, 2014 during the World Economic Forum for Africa (WEFA) in Abuja. In October 2016, the SSI was subsumed by the Presidential Committee on Northeast Initiative (PCNI). With this, the overall management of the implementation of the SSI program lies within the purview of the North East Development Commission. The main objective of the SSI Program is to urgently protect hundreds of schools across the country, (starting with those in North-Eastern Nigeria) from future attacks and kidnaps. The SSI started in 2014 with about 20 million USD to support the Northeast of Nigeria, after incidents of abductions of students in Chibok, Borno state. The implementation of the programme was anchored by the Federal Ministry of Finance.

Consequently, due to rising cases of insecurity in schools all over the northern region, it become imperatives to carry out a study of the administrative structure and operational approach of the SSI and modalities of the implementation of the programme with a view to prescribes a reform of structure, roles, operational strategies as well as the re-alignment of its relationship with relevant government ministries to ensure sustainability of the scheme for improved safety for teachers and students in the school environments in Nigeria.

CONCEPTUALISING SAFE SCHOOL INITIATIVE

In simple term, Safe school initiative is an intervention aimed at ensuring that every child is offered a safe place to learn, play and realize their full potentials especially for children in emergencies and conflict. In essence, the intervention is to protect Nigeria children in schools from the insurgent attacks in form of kidnapping, hostage taking, rape and outright killing by the hoodlums. Safe schools offer supervision, services and teaching to save children's lives in the short term and help them to develop in the long term. Safe school initiative was borne out of series of researches, campaigns and programmatic activities in collaboration between Their World and the Global Business Coalition for Education to institutionalize safe schools and learning environments in times of conflict and emergencies (Their World, 2018).

According to Chester (2015), safe schools initiative is a response to children and schools affected by militants in the North Eastern states of Nigeria. The safe school initiative basically entails a combination of: transfer of secondary students to other states; support to education in internally displaced persons' camps; and pilot safe schools models including community mobilization. The management of safe school initiative in schools in Nigeria involves a synergy approach between the school authority, community members, parents, government and other stakeholders in the school system. The safe school initiative also involves a combination of three main management approaches i.e the school based interventions, community based interventions to protect schools and the special protection measures for some risk populations.

RATIONALE FOR SAFE SCHOOL INITIATIVE

Prior to the launch of SSI, schools in Nigeria were soft targets of Boko Haram and bandits. The children are one of the most vulnerable groups to conflict prone areas of the North. When a population at risk is predominantly children, each death means an entire lifetime of lost life and productivity. Therefore, the economic gains of protection of children are going to be very high. One of the most systematic ways to protect children is to preserve their education, hence, the rationale for safe schools which involve measures to protect children's lives by building secure infrastructure in schools and educating children around early warning, evacuation and more comprehensive disaster risk reduction.

Since 2009, prevailing security situation across the country remains uncertain, especially in the Northern part of Nigeria and pockets of insecurity are prevalent across other parts of the country with the abduction of students gradually becoming a norm and a weapon of war or negotiations. Since 2009, Nigeria has witnessed an unprecedented level of insecurity that is of significant concern because it affects children, parents, teachers, communities, the general population, and more importantly, the education sector. For a country like Nigeria to attain Sustainable Development Goal four, inequalities must be bridged. This bridge can only be achieved in Education when teaching and learning can happen in a safe and protective learning environment. The annual drop-out rate for children in the North particularly the Northeast is the highest in Nigeria. The formal education sector

is struggling to cope with educating IDPs and returnee students and host community students, with poorly maintained school buildings, where teachers are often poorly qualified and class sizes large. Water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) facilities, including access to potable drinking water, are often lacking or insufficient in schools and have been identified as barriers to attendance in schools by families, especially for children living with a disability (Adedire,2016). The safe school initiative started to remedy this ugly situation in schools particularly in the northeast.

METHODOLOGY

The study employed qualitative research method with the use of secondary sources of data from books, journals, newspapers, reports and archival records while the information gathered were also analyzed through content analysis.

THEORETICAL BASIS OF ANALYSIS

Abraham Maslow's Hierarchy of needs is the theoretical framework adopted for analyzing the insecurity in Schools in Nigeria. Abraham Maslow's Hierarchy of needs affirmed that human beings are guided by needs and wants which are rather complex but ordered in a hierarchy of need. Maslow (1954) classified all needs in a hierarchy and simply separated the needs as lower order needs and higher order needs. The first four levels are: 1) Physiological: hunger, thirst, bodily comforts; 2) Safety/security: out of danger; 3) Belongingness and Love: affiliate with others, be accepted; and 4) Esteem: to achieve, be competent, gain approval and recognition. The general level needs that focused on growth beyond that oriented towards self as further explained by Maslow are: 5) Cognitive: to know, to understand, and explore; 6) Aesthetic: symmetry, order, and beauty; 7) Self-actualization: to find self-fulfillment and realize one's potential; and 8) Self-transcendence: to connect to something beyond the ego or to help others find self-fulfillment and realize their potential (Huitt, 2007).

In the opinion of this study, once the physiological needs have been satisfied, the next need that surfaces is safety needs which range from "protection against danger, harm or threat and noise to protection from fear, anxiety, chaos disorderliness, attack, relocation, war, crime etc. Safety or security needs call for orderliness, law, limit and extent of freedom" (Kpee and Comporf, 2014). Therefore, safety needs deal with the protection and survival of any form of chaotic situations or danger that are not limited to "communal crises, conflicts, wars, clashes, civil disturbance, riots, militancy, terrorism, kidnapping, armed robbery, killings among others which usually threaten peaceful co-existence and harmonious living of people in various communities in the society in the contemporary human environment"(Aruma and Hanachor, 2017) . This is the true situation of things in some northern states of Nigeria where Boko Haram is causing social disorder and chaotic situation leading to destruction of lives and property. The safety of schools is therefore threatened in this area and fundamentally, no community in Boko Haram prone states of Borno, Yobe, Adamawa, Bauchi, Gombe and Jigawa among others, can conveniently embark on community development in such chaotic environment in the country as further noted by (Aruma and Hanachor, 2017).Hence, the safe school initiative become relevant and important.

EXAMINING THE GOVERNANCE STRUCTURE OF SAFE SCHOOL INITIATIVE

First, for its operations, a set of guidelines and terms for community and organization access to the Safe Schools Initiative funding was set up, requiring schools to demonstrate that they are able to provide the minimum conditions to promote learning, inclusion, stimulation and a friendly environment to sustain children students, teachers, school personnel, etc. Projects funded by the Nigeria Safe Schools Initiative are to build resilience and promote vigilance and awareness of threats.

Secondly, the Nigeria Safe Schools Initiative adopted a set of established standard operating procedures for Fund administration and Fund management in line with international best practices.

Thirdly, it was also adopted the UN agreed and harmonized recovery rates, pre-agreed contribution agreements with partners, and publicly available programmatic and financial information through an online platform

Furthermore, the Safe School Initiative's governance structure comprises of five operational organs for its administration and execution of its programmes. The organs are;

a. *Steering Committee*

With respect to the structure, in accordance with common practices for UN country-based multi-donor trust funds, the Nigeria Safe Schools Initiative is governed by a Steering Committee, which is supported by a Technical Secretariat. The Fund governance is aimed to mobilize development assistance from traditional and non-traditional partners by providing an accountable, transparent, result-oriented and cost-effective financial instrument (Shaba, 2015)

To avoid duplication and enhance synergies between the national Fund and the Nigeria Safe Schools Initiative, the already established Steering Committee (SC) of the national Fund also serves as steering committee of the Nigeria Safe Schools Initiative. The Steering Committee's responsibilities include;

i. to oversee the allocation of mobilized funds;
ii. discuss the fund requirements and priorities; and
iii. to provide oversight and overall guidance on the Fund's impact and achievement of results.

b. Secretariat

In addition to providing administrative support to the Steering Committee for fund operations, the Fund's secretariat performs a technical function and provides programmatic support. The main secretariat functions include:

i. preparing operational manuals with rules of procedures;
ii. facilitating Steering Committee meetings;
iii. managing project proposal submission and review process using standard technical and impartial reviews (e.g. double-blind assessment of proposals);
iv. monitoring projects and coordinating evaluations; and
v. overseeing and managing public communications.

The secretariat also coordinates with the fund's administrative agent to produce and distribute narrative and financial reports (UNDP, 2015)

c. Implementation Entities

The Safe School Initiative comprise a wide range of implementing entities, including Participating UN Organizations (PUNOs) which also partners with various national, international, non-governmental and private organizations to execute specific project activities. The PUNOs receive financial resources directly from the Fund through its administrative agent and manage them to carry out a range of agreed activities designed to achieve the Initiative's planned results. For projects directly approved for NGO implementation, one of the PUNOs may be appointed as Managing Agent (MA) to transfer funds to NGOs while retaining programmatic and financial control, and accountability vis-à-vis the Fund and its contributing partners (UNDP, 2015).

d. Administrative Agent

The Multi-Partner Trust Fund Office (MPTF Office) also serves as the Administrative Agent (AA) of the Nigeria Safe Schools Initiative. The Administrative Agent functions include:

i Fund establishment: Support Fund design (governance structure and financial architecture), development of legal instruments and logical and results framework based on the fund's theory of change;

ii Fund administration: Receive contributions, administers funds received, disburse funds to participating organizations in accordance with instructions from the Steering Committee and consolidating financial and programme reports including final reports and fund closure;

iii Advisory services: provide advisory services, upon request, to enable rapid and efficient fund initiation and operations (UNDP, 2015).

For the sake of emphasis, Figure 1 contains the governance structure and financing structure of Safe School Initiative

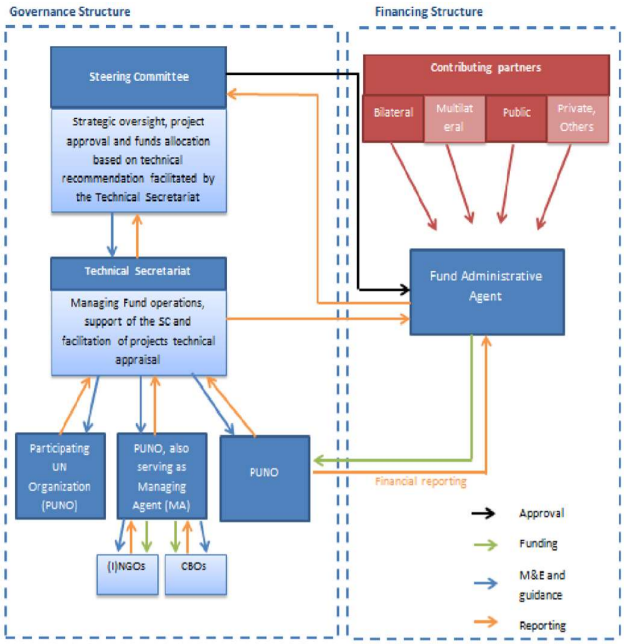


Fig 1: ORGANOGRAM OF SSI

Culled from: Nigerian Safe School Initiative Multi Door Trust Fund Paper (2015)

e. Safe School Initiative Fund Structure

The Government of Nigeria launched the Safe Schools Fund as an initial response with a contribution from the Federal Government of US$10 Million and another US$10 Million pledge from the Private Sector. The Safe Schools Fund is managed by the Ministry of Finance. This national Fund is complemented by the establishment of the Nigeria Safe Schools Initiative Multi-Donor Trust Fund (MDTF) for UN support, co-financing and implementation of activities pertaining to the Initiative. Building on the comparative advantages of the specialized UN Agencies, Funds and Programmes, and to complement efforts from the national Safe School Fund implemented by the Federal Government of Nigeria, the Nigeria Safe Schools Initiative channeled donor contributions from traditional donors as well as emerging partners for UN implementation of complementary activities to support the government's safe schools initiative agenda. The Fund was established with the initial lifespan of 3 years. (SSI-MDTF,2015). Figure 2 contains the SSI-Fund structure for financing the programme.

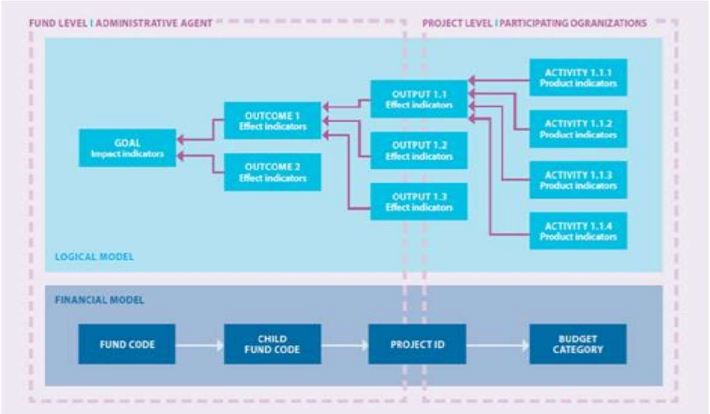


Fig 2: SSI FUND STRUCTURE

Culled from: Nigerian Safe School Initiative Multi Door Trust Fund Paper (2015)

f. Information Link of SSI

On transparency and access to information, the MPTF Office has a gateway with the link: http://mptf.undp.org, and is a web-based service portal, which provides real-time financial data generated directly from UNDP's accounting system. It is a first of its kind in the UN to provide real-time financial information to the public. Partners were able to track information on contributions, transfers and expenditures. The MPTF Office GATEWAY (http://mptf.undp.org/) supports a Results Based Management (RBM) system. The Fund architecture design is set up to mirror the result areas. The RBM system captures performance data at the outcome and output level. It links programmatic and financial performance indicators, allowing an assessment of both the Fund's efficiency and effectiveness. This data can in turn inform a better performance based allocation of funding and serve as a tool to complement Monitoring and Evaluation efforts (SSI-MDTF PAPER, 2015)

EXAMINING THE MODE OF OPERATION AND IMPLEMENTATION APPROACH OF SSI

Building on the comparative advantages of the specialized UN Agencies, Funds and Programmes, the Nigeria Safe Schools Initiative channeled the donor contributions from traditional donors as well as emerging partners for implementation of complementary activities supporting the government's safe schools initiative agenda. In close coordination and complementarity with the national Fund, the Nigeria Safe Schools Initiative operates a flexible financial mechanism to disburse co-financing to the participating implementing partners- be it national or international NGOs, private sector partners and community-based organizations (CBOs) in the Northeast of Nigeria.

For the operations of the Nigeria Safe Schools Initiative, a set of guidelines for community and organization is formulated for accessing the Safe Schools Initiative fund. Beneficiary schools are required to demonstrate that they will provide the minimum conditions to promote learning, inclusion, stimulation and a friendly environment to sustain children, students, teachers and school personnel. Projects funded by the Nigeria Safe Schools Initiative are also aimed to build resilience and promote vigilance and awareness of threats.

Equally, the initiative is to ensure disbursement of fund and implementation of activities in the areas which are of most difficult access in the Northeast. The Nigeria Safe Schools Initiative benefited from a set of established standard operating procedures for Fund administration and Fund management in line with international best practices. It also benefited from UN agreed and harmonized recovery rates, pre-agreed contribution agreements with partners, and publicly available programmatic and financial information through an online platform (UNDP, 2015).

According to UNDP (2018), the Safe School Initiative entails a combination of school-based interventions; community interventions to protect schools; and special measures for at-risk populations. The initiative started in Adamawa, Borno and Yobe states, that were declared state of emergency, and the scheme expanded to others States in the north and, as a national initiative, have plan to cover the entire country.

For its mode of operation, the Nigeria Safe Schools Initiative had a set of guidelines and terms for community and organization to access to the Safe Schools Initiative funding, set up the requirement that schools must demonstrate to be able to provide the minimum conditions to promote learning, inclusion, stimulation and a friendly environment to sustain children students, teachers, school personnel, etc.

In line with common practices for UN country-based multi-donor trust funds, the Nigeria Safe Schools Initiative is governed by a Steering Committee, and supported by a Technical Secretariat. It is eligible for funding from UN Organizations and from NGOs, Civil Society Organizations, private sector partners and CBOs. It could access Fund through one Participating UN Organization that will assume the role of Managing Agent.

The Fund's governance is aimed at mobilizing development assistance from traditional and non-traditional partners by providing an accountable, transparent, result-oriented and cost-effective financial instrument. The Fund comprise a wide range of implementing entities, including Participating UN Organizations (PUNOs), which may also partner with various national, international, non-governmental and private organizations to execute specific project activities of the scheme. The PUNOs receive financial resources directly from the Fund through its administrative agent and manage them to carry out a range of agreed activities designed to achieve the Fund's planned results. For projects directly approved for NGO implementation, one of the PUNOs may be appointed as Managing Agent (MA) to transfer funds to NGOs while retaining programmatic and financial control and accountability vis-à-vis the Fund and its contributing partners (SSI-MDTF, 2015)

Available records shows that the Safe Schools Initiative carried out interventions such as school transfer programme, school re-construction programme and innovative education materials as follows:

a. A student transfer program in which the SSI transfers those students in the highest risk areas to schools in safer parts of the country. Students from high-risk areas in the three States of emergency were transferred to one of 43 federal colleges. The program began with 2,400 students, 800 from each state. Thus, 20,000 students have been transferred as the program continues to scale (UNICEF-SBMC, 2015);

b. A school reconstruction program in which the SSI developed physical protection infrastructure in schools in the north east. Also school security plans were carried out in collaboration with security consultants from the UK's Department for International Development, and the Nigerian Army Engineer Corps. They developed risk profiles for schools in the states of emergency, supplied additional security measures such as scanners and solar power to schools. Emergency plans were also developed for each school and school-based management committees were strengthened to act as first responders in time of attacks (UNICEF, 2016); and

c. The SSI also provides innovative education strategies and materials to children living in IDP camps in conjunction with UNICEF. They provide education to children living in IDP camps, and a total of 28,000 enrolled in a double shift system as of December, 2014 while 683 teachers were trained and 35,000 school bags with learning materials and 400 school-in-a-box kits were distributed to support IDP learners (UNICEF, 2016).

DISCUSSIONS AND ANALYSIS

Based on the governance structure and implementation approach of the safe school initiative enumerated above, the study supported the position of the President of the 9th Senate; Ahmed Lawan, who expressed displeasure on how the Federal Ministry of Finance is handling the Safe School Initiative in Nigeria. Lawan (2021), emphatically stated that SSI was designed to fail from the beginning and thus, recommended the transfer of the programme from the Federal Ministry of Finance to Federal Ministry of Education that control and supervises the schools. The study observed with dismay that it is the federal ministry of finance that is controlling and supervising the operation and activities of SSI since its inception, while the federal ministry of education that is statutorily responsible for education matters becomes an on-looker on the SSI activities. This arrangement need to be changed without further delay. The SSI ought to be directly implemented by the government institution managing basic education in Nigeria i.e, the Universal Basic Education Commission (UBEC) and the federal ministry of education. Also, the SSI needs to support States through the Universal Basic Education Commission by providing counterpart grants to address some of the critical security challenges within Schools.

Furthermore, it is observed that monitoring is lacking for SSI activities and operations. The study therefore saw the need for SSI to establish an effective monitoring Unit across States, to monitor the utilisation of resources within the various States for proper and effective management of resources meant for the scheme. The monitoring unit should oversee and monitor the activities of SSI across the States.

Additionally, the study observed that security need assessment of schools were not undertaken by SSI prior to its interventions in schools, hence the establishment of the National Schools Committee is therefore necessary for conduct of the security needs assessment for all schools to ascertain the actual security needs of the schools that will guarantee their safety and to guide intervention modes and types by SSI.

Finally, the study further observed that the existing evaluation systems in the Safe School Initiative (SSI) programme used for feedback and key performance indicators are incomplete and unreliable, as they are consequently not fit to inform policy-makers and programme executors of the current state of implementation at a particular point in time. Considering this, annual monitoring and evaluation of environmental and social performance needs should be conducted during the implementation of the Safe School Initiative (SSI) programme to ensure proper evaluation and to further provide guidance for the re-designing of the scheme(whenever it is necessary) by government..

CONCLUSION

Based on the foregoing discussion and analysis, the study concludes that the present governance structure and the implementation approach of the safe school initiative (SSI) is defective, not fit for purpose, hence is unsuitable for effective performance and sustainability of the scheme. Therefore, the study noted the deficiencies in the administrative structure and implementation components of the SSI.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In the light of the foregoing discussion and conclusions, the study noted the deficiencies in the administrative structure and implementation components of the initiative and as a way forward, is recommending a reform of its structure, roles, operational strategies as well as the re-alignment of its relationship with relevant government ministries, particularly the Federal Ministry of Education to ensure the sustainability of the scheme, for improved safety of teachers and students in the school environments across the country.

Additionally, the study makes the following recommendations:

1. That instead of continuing hosting of the SSI in the Federal Ministry of Finance, the SSI should be hosted, supervise and control by the Ministry of Education. Also, the SSI should be directly implemented by the government institutions with the mandate of managing basic Education in Nigeria ie, Universal Basic Education Commission(UBEC).
2. Also, a regulatory framework and guideline, to be backed-up by legislation should be introduced to prevent and disallow funding meant for SSI to be re-channelled to unrelated budgetary heads.
3. On SSI funding, and in the interest of transparency, a clear guidelines and criteria for accessing SSI funds at the national and sub-national levels, with regular updates of applications received, approval granted, funds allocated and released, which should be accessible in open access platforms that should be established.
4. That an accountability framework and mechanism should be introduced into SSI, in which a public accountability platform and dashboard with regular updates of allocation, releases, spending on the SSI should be created by the scheme.
5. That a transparent procurement procedures and processes should be introduced for a value for money implementation components and assessment criteria to ensure the efficient use of SSI funds by end-users at the State and local government levels.
6. As an additional operational component, the SSI should institutionalise Safe Spaces in all places of learning, with the minimum standards such as:

    a) a universal safe spaces curriculum to be developed and implemented for different age groups;

    b) engaging personnel to run safe spaces;

c) trauma training for safe spaces coordinators;

d) developing and equipping designated safe spaces in all places of learning;

e) Schools should be empowered to create safe spaces for their students to receive adequate psychosocial support and speak up on personal issues; and

f) Schools should be made to develop effective emergency preparedness, crisis prevention and intervention programme.

7. Finally, there should be regular voluntary reports on SSI to the global community to serve as encouragement to donors to provide additional funds.

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