



In partnership with  
**Canada**



**act:onaid**



# REAMS

Reintegrating Adolescent Mothers into School  
A Nigeria Case Study

[www.teenagenetwork.org](http://www.teenagenetwork.org)

AUGUST, 2023

© Teenage Network.  
All rights reserved.

This publication is a product of Teenage Network's findings. Efforts have been made to ensure this report reflects the accurate information primarily obtained from the field. Therefore, Teenage Network and its partners assume no responsibility or liability for any error, omission, or actions taken as a result of this publication.

No part of this report may be reproduced in any form without appropriate referencing or permission from Teenage Network.

Teenage Education and Empowerment Network  
Third Floor, AEA Building,  
Katampe Estate, Abuja.  
Email: [teenageducation@gmail.com](mailto:teenageducation@gmail.com), [hello@teenagenetwork.org](mailto:hello@teenagenetwork.org)  
For more information, visit [www.teenagenetwork.org](http://www.teenagenetwork.org)

## **Acknowledgment**

Teenage Network appreciates the Director, FCT Secondary Education Board, and the community mobilizers who worked with us to achieve the REAMS project objectives. Teenage Network appreciates the resilience, dedication, and commitment of the team that worked tirelessly towards the success of this objective; Comfort Ajock, Kaneng Francis, Gladys Oghene, and Peter Ogah.

We appreciate ActionAid Nigeria and Global Affairs Canada for the funding support for this laudable initiative. We especially thank Nkechi Ilochi-Kanny, Niri Goyit, Vivian Efem-Basse, and Amina Aliyu Adamu for the strategic leadership accorded to Teenage Network.

Olanike Timipa-Uge  
Executive Director, Teenage Network

# Table of Contents

I. Executive Summary	3
II. About Teenage Network	5
III. Background of the Study	7
IV. Methodology	8
V. Key Findings	10
VI. Recommendations	13
VII. Conclusion	14



Teenage Pregnancy is one of the leading causes of school drop-out among adolescent girls in Nigeria. According to the National Demographic Health Survey (NDHS, 2018), 1 in 5 girls between the ages of 15–19 years have begun childbearing. When girls become pregnant, they are forced to drop out of school, usually with no alternative skill-acquisition opportunities. Over the years, development programs in Nigeria have targeted increasing school enrolment and retention among girls by investing in adolescent sexual and reproductive health services, school feeding programs, and promoting access to STEM, however, while these are laudable interventions, not much has been done for girls who already dropped out of the school system as a result of Teenage Pregnancy.

In September 2021, Teenage Network was awarded the Strategic Innovation Fund by ActionAid Nigeria under the Women's Voices in Leaders Initiative of Global Affairs Canada to pilot the Reintegrating Adolescent Mothers into School (REAMS) project for six months in the Federal Capital Territory of Nigeria.

During this period, Teenage Network secured the commitment of the Federal Capital Territory Secondary Education Board to re-admit out-of-school adolescent mothers, held advocacy meetings with stakeholders across 15 rural communities to drive positive change in their perception of adolescent mothers and mobilized them to support the return of adolescent mothers to school. In addition, Teenage Network built the capacity of 8 school administrators and counselors to ensure the smooth reintegration of adolescent mothers into school.

Teenage Network observed three major barriers to Adolescent mothers' return to school during this project. First, parents, guardians, and society at large see 'Adolescent mothers as deviants, hence, withdrawing them from school was a way of punishing them'. Secondly, although the Nigeria Child Rights Act (2013) made provision for the return of adolescent mothers to school, there are no structures in place to facilitate their return. There are no guidelines that clearly specify when an adolescent mother is expected to return to school after delivery, what the re-admission process would look like, and what measure of support the school is expected to provide to the returning adolescent mothers. Teenage Network observed that schools do not have records of girls who dropped out as a result of teenage pregnancy, and School administrators, Teachers, and Counsellors do not have sufficient knowledge on how to support returning adolescent mothers in schools. The lack of school reintegration timelines and guidelines makes it difficult for adolescent mothers to return to school after delivery. The longer they stay at home after delivery, the lower their interest in returning to school and the more difficult it is to catch up with learning. Thirdly, eighty percent of the adolescent mothers engaged by Teenage Network are from low-income families. The birth of their babies further stretched the family economy, hence parents couldn't afford to send the mothers back to school and still care for their babies at the same time.

Teenage Network recommends the establishment of context-specific school re-entry guidelines for adolescent mothers. The guideline should clearly define the timeline for the readmission of adolescent mothers, and highlight the role of school administrators, teachers, and counselors in ensuring their smooth reintegration (i.e to ensure learning gaps are bridged and schools are safe and free from stigmatization and discrimination against the adolescent mothers), and also design a learning schedule that allows adolescent mothers to attend to their babies in between classes. Furthermore, there is a need to sensitize community members on the need for adolescent mothers to return to school after delivery. Education is a right, not a privilege, hence, it should never be taken away from anyone as a punishment. Finally, Teenage Network recommends that reintegrating adolescent mothers should come hand-in-hand with support services such as self-paced remedial courses to bridge the learning gap, leadership development to enable adolescent mothers to address their day-to-day challenges, and educational support in terms of learning materials and tuition fees. Entrepreneurial Skill acquisition programs could also be beneficial to them to enable adolescent mothers to cater to their long-term needs.

**NMENT**

**SECONDARY**

**KWALI, ABUJA**

**Administrative Block**

**SCHOOL HOUSES**

● **OBASANJO HOUSE**

● **BUHARI HOUSE**

● **BABANGA HOUSE**

● **HOUSE**

● **HOUSE**



# About Teenage Network

Teenage Education and Empowerment Network (Teenage Network) is an adolescent-serving nonprofit that facilitates access to quality education and health for young people between the ages of 10–19 years, especially girls. Since registration in 2018, Teenage Network has innovatively worked towards balancing classroom lessons with comprehensive sexuality education and life skills, providing gender-based violence prevention and intervention services, and facilitating the return of out-of-school adolescent mothers to school in Nigeria. Our initiatives have directly impacted more than ten thousand adolescent girls in Nigeria.

## Our Vision

We envision a world where every adolescent is empowered to take leadership roles in the society.

## Core Values

- Transparency
- Accountability
- Mutual Respect
- Solidarity



# TEENAGE NETWORK



***I SUPPORT***  
**RE-INTEGRATION OF  
ADOLESCENT MOTHERS  
INTO SCHOOLS**

# Background of the Study

Adolescent Mothers are faced with heightened barriers to quality education. According to the National Population Commission (2019), every year, an average of 200,000 babies are born to adolescent girls in Nigeria. Twenty-three percent of girls between the ages of 15–19 years have begun childbearing. When girls become pregnant, they are either suspended from school with no stipulated date for resumption or they quietly drop out of the school system themselves before the pregnancy becomes noticeable to avoid stigmatization. The barriers to adolescent mothers' education range from unfavorable school policies, societal discrimination, lack of parental support, and complex childcare duties. This study defines adolescent mothers as girls who got pregnant between the ages of 10–19 years and elect to parent them.

According to UNICEF (2015), there are about 13.2 million out-of-school children in Nigeria, fourteen percent of whom are adolescent mothers. Keeping adolescent mothers out of school has a ripple effect on the Nigerian education system, economy, and gender inequality index. Without education, adolescent mothers cannot secure decent jobs. Without decent jobs, they become financially dependent and vulnerable to gender-based violence. This further prevents them from holding leadership roles within the society; thus, widening the gender inequality gap and reinforcing unequal power relations. In addition to these, children born to out-of-school adolescent mothers are less likely to go to school and are at higher risk of experiencing infant mortality. According to UNICEF (2010), an educated mother is more than twice as likely to send her children to school. A study by Borgen (2018) also revealed that Children whose mothers receive secondary school education are twice as likely to receive vaccinations against major diseases.

Although, the Nigerian Child Rights Law (2003) states that “every child has a right to education and a child who becomes pregnant, before completing her education shall be given the opportunity, after delivery, to continue with her education, on the basis of her individual ability”, millions of adolescent mothers in Nigeria are still unable to return to school after delivery. Over the years, adolescent mothers have been excluded from education programs because of their unique needs. They find it difficult to participate in programs designed for adolescent girls because they are mothers and their needs differ from that of other girls. They are also left out when programs are designed for women because even though they have babies, their needs are still different from those of adults.

In 2019, Teenage Network engaged 18 adolescent mothers from Pegi Village, Abuja in a 3-day leadership development program. During this engagement, Teenage Network observed that a significant number of adolescent mothers could neither read nor write. This motivated Teenage Network to embark on the Reintegrating Adolescent Mothers into School (REAMS) project. Teenage Network was awarded the 2021 Strategic Innovation Fund by ActionAid Nigeria in partnership with Global Affairs Canada to pilot the project for six months. The goal of the REAMS project was to facilitate the return of twenty out-of-school adolescent mothers in the Federal Capital Territory (FCT) to schools. The project objectives include:

- To galvanize the support of stakeholders for the return of adolescent mothers to school
- To ensure schools are safe for returning adolescent mothers

This report provides the findings and recommendations for future interventions on reintegrating adolescent mothers into school in Nigeria.



Teenage Network designed and implemented the Reintegrating Adolescent Mothers into School (REAMS) project under the strategic innovation fund to contribute to the body of knowledge on gender transformative education. The project engaged 15 rural communities in the Federal Capital Territory (FCT) of Nigeria. The FCT has a mixture of urban and rural communities with people of different ethnic groups, religions, and socioeconomic statuses. The project was implemented in the FCT because it was convenient for Teenage Network, relatively safe, and more cost-effective, considering the size of the project grant. However, the 15 rural communities engaged were selected based on evidence from previous studies which shows that teenage pregnancy is higher in rural communities. The 15 communities engaged are Kado-Kuchi, Kabayi, Jikwoyi, Kurudu, Kpegyi, Karu, Nyanya, Pigba-Sama, Mpape, Ruga-Fulani, Kagini, Brazil Village, Kwali, Kpuduma and Dutse-Alhaji.

Teenage Network deployed four major approaches for this project. They are:

- Advocacy for schools' board to readmit adolescent mothers into schools
- Capacity building for school counselors to support returning adolescent mothers
- Community mobilization to facilitate the return of adolescent mothers to school and motivate change in perception about adolescent mothers
- Provide learning resources for returning adolescent mothers

Adolescent Mothers	Schools Administrators	Communities	Parents/Guardian/ Partners
58	7	15	64

Table 1: Total Number of Participants



## Advocacy

Through advocacy, Teenage Network secured the commitment of the FCT Secondary Education Board to reintegrate out-of-school adolescent mothers back into school. 15 adolescent mothers were readmitted.

## Social behavioural Change Communication

Teenage Network sensitized parents/guardians, community stakeholders, religious leaders and partners of Adolescent Mothers on the need for adolescent mothers to return to school. An interface meeting was further organized between them and the FCT Secondary Education Board to mobilize their support for the adolescent mothers' readmission.

## Capacity Building

Teenage Network trained selected school administrators and counselors to respond to the needs of returning adolescent mothers. The training focused on changing the perception of school administrators who like other members of the society see adolescent mothers as deviants and have concerns about adolescent mothers influencing other students negatively. The training increased their knowledge on why adolescent mothers should be supported to return to school, the unique needs of adolescent mothers and how the school can support them.

## Provision of learning resources and tuition

A significant number of the adolescent mothers engaged are from low-income backgrounds. As such, the cost of re-admission (tuition, school uniform, and books) was covered by Teenage Network while some other charges were waived by the schools. However, for sustainability purposes, Teenage Network signed agreements with their parents/guardians to continue to fund their education after the project's lifespan. The subsequent tuition cost is expected to be lesser and affordable compared to the initial re-admission cost.

# Key Findings

## 1. Social norms play a critical role in keeping adolescent mothers out of school

Teenage Network experienced resistance from community leaders, religious leaders, and parents of adolescent mothers at the onset of the REAMS project. At inception, Teenage Network held advocacy meetings with community leaders across fifteen rural communities to secure their support in mobilizing and facilitating the return of adolescent mothers to school. Sixty-seven percent of the community leaders argued that children who dropped out of school as a result of other reasons are more deserving of the project than adolescent mothers. In many cases, they went ahead to mobilize children who dropped out of school as a result of funding issues. While the religious leaders were simply not willing to engage.

During the interface meeting with officials of the FCT Secondary Education Board, about sixty percent of parents invited did not show up even though the meeting was held outside their communities to avoid stigmatization with transport support provided. Teenage Network thereafter embarked on one-on-one visitation to parents of adolescent mothers. Although Teenage Network was able to convince forty-seven percent of the parents engaged, fifty-three percent of them were unwilling to support the adolescent mothers to return to school. According to them, "they are not worthy of their investment, they already brought shame to the family". In one of the engagements, the mother of one of the adolescent mothers who was eager to return to school said "Who will help her take care of her child? Is it me? No way? No be the school she dey when she carry belle? This belief builds on the perception that girls' education is a privilege and not a right.



"Who will help her  
take care of her child?  
Is it me? No way!  
No be the school she dey  
when she carry belle?"

## 2. Out-of-school adolescent mothers are often from poor homes

Teenage Network observed that eighty percent of the adolescent mothers engaged on this project are from low-income families. Before they became pregnant, many of them were schooling and working as live-in house helps or hawking after school to make ends meet. When they became pregnant, they were sacked from work. Although some of their parents were willing to support their return to school, they just couldn't afford it. The arrival of the babies has further strained the family income.

In one of the situations, the family had agreed to support the adolescent mother to return to school. While the readmission process was going on, the Mother of the adolescent mother who had agreed to look after the baby while the adolescent mother returned to school got a cleaner job. The family really needed the money from the job. Therefore, the family agreed that the mother pick up the cleaner job while the Adolescent mother remains out of school.

## 3. Partners of out-of-school mothers discourage school reintegration

Regardless of how the pregnancy took place (forceful or consensual), pregnant girls are often forced to marry the person who impregnated them. Sometimes, this is done to preserve the honor of the family, while at other times, the motive is to punish the man for impregnating their daughter. Teenage Network engaged some of the men who have been forced to marry the girls they impregnated, but they declined to support the girls' return to school for three reasons; they don't want to bear the financial burden, they believe the girls will be unable to do house chores and take adequate care of their baby when they resume school, and they believe education will make adolescent mothers less submissive. As a result, the partners convinced the adolescent mothers to remain out of school with a promise to support them to start petty trading. According to the National demographic health survey (2018), girls who married between the ages of 15-19 years and did not complete secondary school are at higher risk of spousal control and other forms of gender-based violence.



"My husband said I should not go to school that he will open shop for me".

"The family has agreed, we will go for the cleaning job. Our daughter can not resume school yet".

# Key Findings

PAGE 12

## 4. Policy and Capacity gaps in Schools limit the reintegration of Adolescent Mothers

Teenage Network observed that the absence of school re-entry guidelines for Adolescent mothers discourages adolescent mothers from returning to school. A significant number of adolescent mothers have the intention to return to school after delivery at the time they were suspended, however, the absence of a resumption timeline and clear re-admission process makes it difficult for them to return to school. The longer they stayed at home after the delivery, the more it became difficult for them to return to school. In situations where an adolescent mother eventually returns to school, there is usually no measure in place to meet their unique needs. School administrators and teachers often do not have the capacity to support or set up structures that will enable them to catch up with their peers in the classroom, attend to their babies during school hours, and also to ensure schools are safe and free from all forms of stigmatization and discrimination.

## 5. Reintegrating Adolescent Mothers into Schools facilitates the enrolment of their children in school

Teenage Network observed that twenty percent of adolescent mothers whose children were out of school at the beginning of this project enrolled their children in school after their reintegration. Reintegrating adolescent mothers into school would have multiple effects in reducing the number of out-of-school children in Nigeria. According to the girls, "they cannot be in school while their children remain uneducated". This agrees with previous studies that say children born to educated mothers are more likely to go to school than children born to uneducated mothers.



"I'm happy to be finally back in school. We have bought school bag and uniform for my son too. He will start school too. My son cannot be at home, when me I'm in school"

# Recommendations

Teenage Network believes that reintegrating Adolescent Mothers into Schools requires interventions at both the demand and supply sides. For the demand side, there is a need for social behavioral change communications programs to stop discrimination against adolescent mothers and to galvanize community support for adolescent mothers' education. Teenage Network found radio programs effective in delivering these messages and therefore, recommend creative approaches for the delivery of these messages.

For the supply side, Teenage Network recommends the formulation and implementation of context-specific school re-entry guidelines for adolescent mothers. The guideline should clearly address the following: stipulate the timeline for re-integration after delivery, the processes for the reintegration, the role of school administrators, counselors, and teachers in ensuring that schools are safe, free from discrimination, give room for adolescent mothers to care for their babies and also have measures in place to bridge the lost learning time. This is important not only to facilitate the return of adolescent mothers to school but also to promote retention within the school system.

Teenage Network recommends that projects aimed at facilitating the return of adolescent mothers to school should be long-term because behavioral change takes time. Also, the projects should be comprehensive enough to meet the basic needs of adolescent mothers. It is important that adolescent mothers undergo leadership development programs aimed at building their self-esteem. This will also enable them to set and achieve individualized learning goals and empower them to address day-to-day challenges. This may also include providing them or their families with entrepreneurial skills that would enable them to fund their education in the long term.



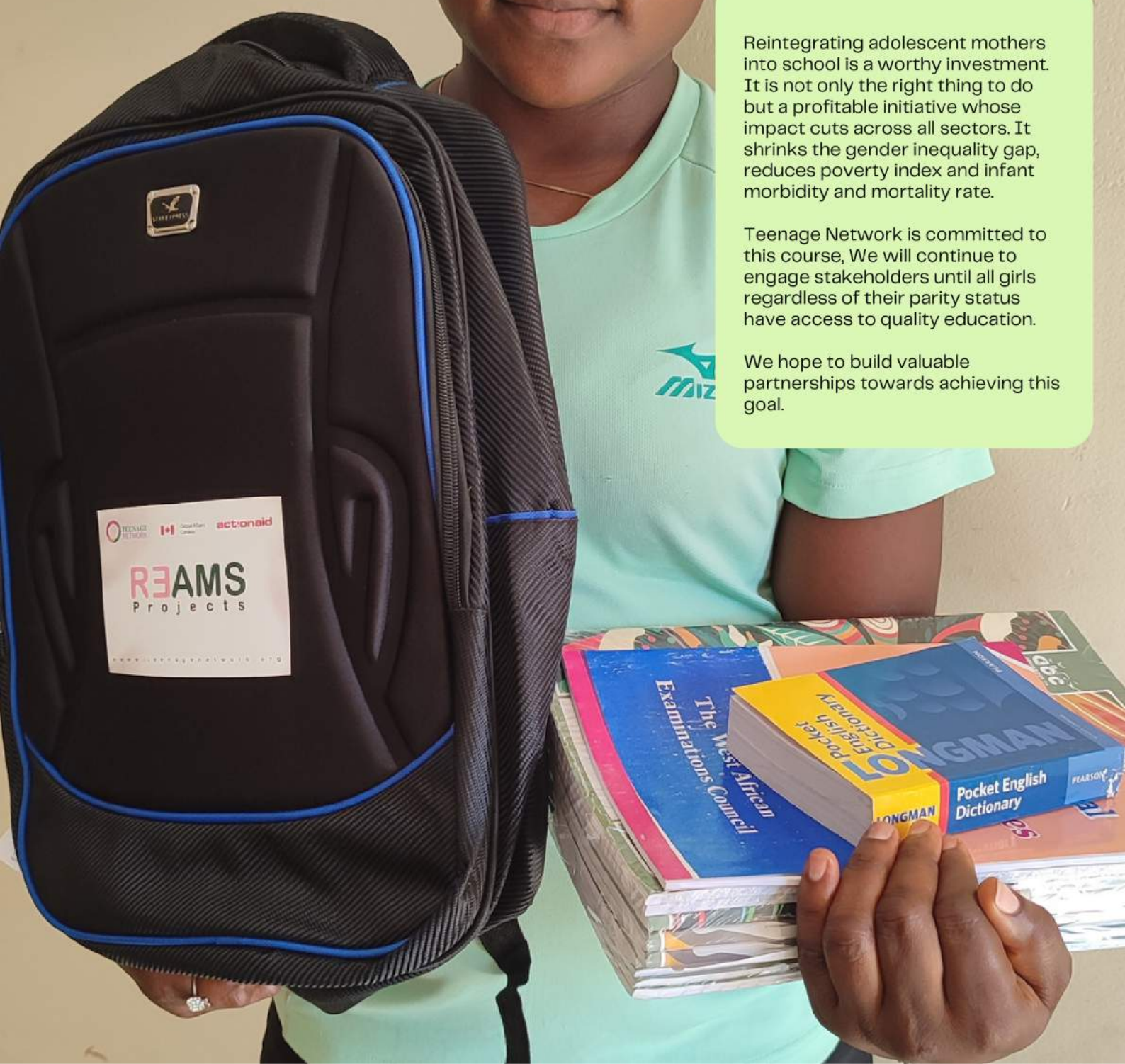
# Conclusion

PAGE 14

Reintegrating adolescent mothers into school is a worthy investment. It is not only the right thing to do but a profitable initiative whose impact cuts across all sectors. It shrinks the gender inequality gap, reduces poverty index and infant morbidity and mortality rate.

Teenage Network is committed to this course, We will continue to engage stakeholders until all girls regardless of their parity status have access to quality education.

We hope to build valuable partnerships towards achieving this goal.





**Contact us  
for further  
inquiries**



---

[hello@teenagenetwork.org](mailto:hello@teenagenetwork.org) | [teenageducation@gmail.com](mailto:teenageducation@gmail.com) | +2347033167515 | [www.teenagenetwork.org](http://www.teenagenetwork.org)