

Education For All in Nigeria, West Africa: The Journey So Far

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1. Introduction

Twenty-two years after the World Conference on Education for All (EFA) in Jomtien, where countries reaffirmed commitment to meet basic learning needs of all children, youths, and adults. Specific goals, in the light of which countries agreed to establish national targets, included universal access to and completion of basic education by the year 2000 and the reduction of adult illiteracy, with specific emphasis on eliminating gender disparities in educational opportunities. The World Education Forum in Dakar 2000 provided the opportunity to take stock of the achievements, the lessons and the failures of the EFA goals. The most disappointing lesson is that the objectives from Jomtien have not been achieved. Yet for 125 million children the right to education is violated every day, leaving them trapped in poverty. For millions more children, lack of teachers, classrooms, and books means their education is cut short and little is learnt. According to International Consultation of NGOs (2000), girls account for two-thirds of the children out of school. One in three adults in the developing world - 880 million people - is still illiterate.

From the global trends and assessment however, problem of economic stagnation, continued population growth, and economic and social disparities both among and within nations have posed various challenges to making this a

reality. The World Education Forum in Dakar provided an opportunity to deliver on the commitment to quality education for all. Governments and international agencies have to make a concerted effort to mobilise political will and financial resources. Two decades have passed since Jomtien. What progress has been accomplished towards the goal of education for all especially in Nigeria? This is the focus of this paper.

2. Concept and the Imperative of Education

The genuine and lasting development of any nation depends on the level of literacy of its citizens. Realizing this pertinent truth, nations strive to equip their citizens with quality education in order to contribute to the attainment of national development. The singular instrument for this is education. Education is the nutrient (food) for the human mind. The mind must never be under-nourished or malnourished but must be nurtured from birth with the appropriate food. This ensures well developed minds which can be applied appropriately use for national development. Education is therefore, the weapon needed for the acquisition of relevant knowledge, skills for all round development (Mangvwat and Awuya, 2009).

Education is therefore an instrument for social change. Schult (1961) has argued that

population quality and knowledge are the major determinants of the future welfare of mankind. Going further with this argument, Harbison and Hanushek (1992) assert that a country which is incapable of developing its people's skills and knowledge and to utilize them effectively in the natural economy will be incapable of developing anything else. These arguments centre on the relevance of population quality and knowledge, and we get quality population through education. This position was corroborated by Psacharopoulos (1985), who asserted that education is widely regarded as the way to economic prosperity, the key to scientific and technological advancement, the foundation of social equity, and the spread of political socialization and cultural vitality. Therefore, educating all citizens reduces and even eradicates class differences and human development cannot be realized except through education.

Consequently, African, Asian and Latin American governments embraced the Universal Primary Education (UPE) in the early 1960s, which was recently rekindled by the Jomtien and Dakar Education for All (EFA) conferences (Chimombo, 2005). Education if properly positioned has the capacity to change any society for the better. This must have informed Article 26 of the 1948 UN universal declaration of human rights, which states that everyone has a right to education and that this education shall be free and compulsory. The Article further states that education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. The base for the UBE has been this Article and the EFA conferences.

3. Global Assessment of EFA

The EFA 2000 Assessment demonstrates that there has been significant progress in many countries. The International Consultation of NGOs (2000) in their assessment declared that it was unacceptable in the year 2000 that more than 113 million children have no access to primary education, 138 million adults are

illiterate, gender discrimination continues to permeate education systems, and the quality of learning and the acquisition of human values and skills fall far short of the aspirations and needs of individual and societies. Youth and adults are denied access to the skills and knowledge necessary for gainful employment and full participation in their societies. Without accelerated progress towards education for all, national and internationally agreed targets for poverty reduction will be missed, and inequalities between countries and within societies will widen.

Education is a fundamental human right. It is the key to sustainable development and peace and stability within and among countries, and thus an indispensable means for effective participation in the societies and economies of the twenty-first century, which are witnessing rapid globalization.

The EFA goals as stipulated in the document revolved around the following:

- (i) expanding and improving comprehensive early childhood care and education, especially for the most vulnerable and disadvantaged children;
- (ii) ensuring that by 2015 all children, with special emphasis on girls, children in difficult circumstances are from ethnic minorities have access to and complete free and compulsory primary education of good quality;
- (iii) ensuring that the learning needs of all young people and adults are met through equitable access to appropriate learning and life skills programmes;
- (iv) achieving a 50 per cent Improvement in levels of adult literacy by 2015, especially for women, and equitable access to basic and continuing education for all adults;
- (v) eliminating gender disparities in primary and secondary education by 2005, and achieving gender

- equality in education by 2015, with a focus on ensuring girls full and equal access, to and achievement in basic education of good quality;
- (vi) improving all aspects of the quality of education and ensuring excellence of all so that recognized and measurable learning outcomes are achieved by all, especially in literacy, numeracy and essential life skill:

The countries of the world reaffirmed commitment to meet the above goals. In assessing the journey so far on education for all amongst nations the International Consultative Forum on Education for All (2000) asserted that like China, Indonesia, Brazil, Mexico and Egypt, the increase of primary-school-age enrolments, representing a main goal of national policies, accompanied by a decline of the primary-school-age population, implied that universal primary education will be achieved by 2015. In china, the sharp decline of the primary school-age population, by more than 30 million pupils in just 10 years, was one of the factors that permitted the provision of a place in school to every child 2000. In Indonesia, the growth in primary-school-age enrolment outpaced the growth of the primary-school-age population between 1980 and 1990 and practically all primary school-age children had the opportunity to participate in education at some point during the 1980s.

In Brazil, the 1990s marked the turning point in the growth of their primary-school-age population. The decrease in the number of children, coupled with a policy aimed at increasing enrolment ratio in primary school is predicated to result in the achievement of universal primary education by the year 2015. In Mexico, universal primary education was already achieved by 1980, so that a moderate expansion of the number of primary school-age children during the 1990s was easily covered by a corresponding expansion of enrolment (International Consultative Forum on Education for All, 2000). In Egypt, the growth in the number of enrolments outpaced the growth in the number of primary-school-age children during the 1980s and 1990s, and it is estimated

that the number of out-of-school children declined by more than 80 per cent between 1980 and 2000. The expansion of the primary-school-age population is projected to stop in 2000, which will facilitate the achievement of universal primary education during the first decade of the twenty-first century (International Consultative Forum on Education for All, 2000). In such countries according to International Consultative Forum on Education for All (2000), the challenge is now how to improve learning conditions and achievement, increase the internal efficiency of education systems, reduce school disparities in educational outcomes and expand participation in education beyond primary school.

4. Universal Basic Education in Nigeria and Education for all

Universal access to education has been prime target for Nigeria in the last four decades and Nigeria is a signatory of World Declarations on Education for All. Igwe (2006) reported that the United Nations Organization (UNO), article 26 on the Universal Declaration of Human Rights states in part that everyone has the right to education, and this shall be free in elementary and primary stages. So, both at the national and international levels, Nigeria is committed to the provision of basic education to all its citizens. Many attempts have been made in this direction but no appreciable positive results have been recorded. The problem of implementation continues to be a perennial problem to the fulfilment of a constitutional and social obligation to make access possible to all (Adepoju and Fabiyi, 2007).

The fundamental principle of UBE in Nigeria is that everybody must have access to equivalent education comprehensively and co-educationally. The concept of the Universal Primary Education (UPE) introduced in 1976. (6 years education) was to change into Basic Education (9 years education) twenty three years later. Basic education is not completely new but its meaning has been broadened after the World Declaration on Education for All (EFA), and the Framework for Action to meet Basic learning needs. The policy provisions of these documents

surpass what was on ground then. Three demographic studies on the existing national situation in the primary education sector revealed that, 12% of primary school pupils sit on the floor, 38% classrooms have no ceilings, 87% classrooms overcrowded, while 77% pupils lack textbooks. Almost all sampled teachers are poorly motivated coupled with lack of community interest and participation in the management of the schools (Adepoju and Fabiyi, 2007).

The goals and objectives of the UBE are outlined in the implementation guidelines (FRN, 2004). The goals of the programme are to universalize access to basic education, engender a conducive learning environment and eradicate illiteracy in Nigeria within the shortest possible time. Thus in a bid to actualize these goals, the following are clearly stated as the specific objectives:

- Developing in the citizenry a strong conscientiousness for education and strong commitment to its vigorous promotion;
- Provision of free compulsory universal basic education for every, Nigerian child of school-going age;
- Reducing drastically the- dropout rate from the formal school system through improved relevance and efficiency;
- Catering for dropouts and out-of-school children/adolescents through various forms of complementary approaches to the provision and promotion of basic education; and
- Ensuring the acquisition of the appropriate levels of literacy numeracy, manipulative, communicative and life skills as well as the ethical, moral and civic values needed for laying a solid foundation for life-long learning.

The document further spells out who the programme covers. These are:

- Formal basic education encompassing the first nine years of schooling for all children.

- Nomadic education for school age children of pastoral nomads and migrant fishermen; and
- Literacy and non-formal education for out-of-school children, youths and illiterate adults.

These goals and components are the coordinating responsibility of the Universal Basic Education Commission (UBEC), which has the following functions (FRN, 2000 p. 14):

- Prescribe the minimum standards for primary, junior secondary and adult literacy education throughout Nigeria;
- inquire into and advise the Federal Government on the funding of basic education in Nigeria;
- receive the Universal Basic Education funds from the Federal Government and allot the funds to the Education Boards of the states of the Federation and the Federal Government sponsored special basic education projects in accordance with a formula to be prescribed as the Federal Executive Council may from time to time prescribe;
- collate, after consultation with all state governments, periodic master plans for a balanced and coordinated development of basic education in Nigeria; make proposals to the Federal Government for equal and adequate basic education opportunities in Nigeria;
- ensure that the basic national curriculum and syllabus and other necessary instructional materials are in use in primary, junior secondary and adult literacy institutions in the country; collate, analyse and publish information relating to primary, junior secondary and adult literacy education in Nigeria; and
- carry out such other activities that are relevant and conducive to the discharge of its functions as the commission may from time to time determine.

In the Government's efforts to ensure the success of this programme, the UBE Act 2004 was passed into law. It provides for compulsory universal basic education and stipulates penalties for parents, societies or institutions that fail to comply with these provisions.

The UBE programme has been with us for about eleven years and furthermore, we are expected to have learned from the failed UPE scheme. Yet there are still lapses in the implementation of the scheme. What are the lapses or hiccups that are still affecting the scheme? What other factors are impeding the successful implementation of the scheme and how can these be tackled for the expected outcome? (Mangwat and Awuya, 2009).

5. Assessment of the UBE in Nigeria, West Africa: A Critique

The UBE scheme has taken up and appears to be doing well. Yet there are certain salient facts that need to be set straight. The scheme has not adequately addressed the problem of poor or dilapidated infrastructure in schools. There are many pupils who still sit to receive instruction on the bare floor. This makes the school environment not to be conducive for learning. Nothing within the school environment by this situation will attract the child. This may be one of the reasons for some pupils to drop out of school. Some of these facilities are left for the communities to provide. In a study conducted by Adepoju and Fabiyi, (2007) revealed that majority of rural communities were not involved in the provision of infrastructure.

Another cause of obstacle to the scheme is the politicization of education. The study by Adepolu and Fabiyi (2007) also established that the UBE programme was being politicized. When education is politicized then quality is eroded. A study by Chimambo, Kunje and Chimuzu (2004) has demonstrated that it is easier to achieve reforms which secure increased access to schooling than that which enhances robust improvements in schooling quality.

There is no clear evidence to show that efforts aimed at good quality education for all are being pursued. The schools in the rural areas are the worst hit by lack of teaching and learning materials. Theirs appear to be the crumbs from the masters' tables (the urban schools). The disparities still persist and the low socio-economic groups manifest low achievement (Chimambo, 1999; Kadzamira and Rose, 2003). The policy formulators, implementers and those responsible for taking care of the programme do not send their children to the public schools which they manage. This is a clear demonstration of the fact that they do not have confidence in the system they superintend over. Thus the poor pupil is further marginalized in the face of globalization.

The allocation to the programme is not commensurate with the goals. The target of eradicating illiteracy in the country by 2015 appears a fall dream. The economic hardship still makes pupils to drop out of school to hawk or engage in menial jobs to supplement the income of their poor parents.

The performance of the products appears not to be encouraging. An assessment of the learning achievement of primary four pupils in Nigeria discovered that there had been no improvement (Falayajo, Nakonju, Okebukola, Onugha and Olubaje, 1997). More than ten years after their research, the research by Adepoju and Fabiyi (2007) also revealed that teachers performance was rated as low as their students' achievement.

The three components of the UBE scheme which are handled by the UBEC makes the UBE scheme cumbersome "to handle under one agency. Already, there is intense lobbying by principals, including teachers, in many secondary schools to be posted to the junior secondary section because of the expected larger that from all indications might fall. The issue is not larger commitment or performance but benefits first. Furthermore, it is to handle' nomadic education and adult and non-formal education. This is untidy and some of these responsibilities appear to hinder the

effectiveness of the scheme. Recently it has been saddled with the Teachers Scheme adding more load to an already overloaded wagon (Mangvwat and Awuya, 2009).

The Act which stipulates punitive measures for parents who withdraw children from school appears to be on paper. The Act is not being well enforced. The welfare of the teacher is not being given the desired attentions. There is no motivation, no regular workshops, etc. The prolong strike for teachers-' nationwide for the Teachers' salary scale is a case in point (Mangvwat and Awuya, 2009).

Education has remained a social process in capacity building and maintenance of society for decades. It is a weapon for acquiring skills, relevant knowledge and habits for surviving in the changing world. Invariably, the major problem identified in the Nigerian UBE system lies in the automatic promotion, that is, 100% promotion and transition for 9 years. This indeed is a mockery of any form of evaluation done at this level and is bound to reflect on the standard of education in no distant future. In particular the provision for the out of school population has remained obscure since eight years of its introduction and inception (Adepoju and Fabiyi, 2007).

Yoloye (2004) observed that, the concept of Basic Education is not a completely new term to the Nigerian society and that within the last decade; it has assumed a global significance and its meanings have been broadened. The expanded vision of UBE comprises the universalising of access and promotion of equity, focusing on learning and enhancing the environment of learning and strengthening partnerships.

6. NGO Declaration on Education for All: A Call to Action

The International Consultation of NGOs met in Dakar to declare their support for EFA goals, nearly 300 NGOs gathered to discuss Education for All and believe that Education for All is achievable if Governments and international agencies commit themselves to the following:

- There is a need to renew the commitment to education as a right as

expressed in UN's declaration on human rights paragraph 26, The international Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, Article 13 and the Convention of the Right of the Child, Article 28.

- There must be a commitment to providing free quality basic education for all children, youth and adults. Equity in quality must be ensured at all levels. All direct costs of basic education have to be removed.
- There must be a clear commitment to ensure that quality education for all includes all the marginalised and excluded groups like the disabled, ethnic minorities, internally displaced persons and refugees.
- There must be a clear statement that education is a core responsibility of the state.
- Governments must commit themselves to develop and improve mechanisms and structures of democratic participation of, and accountability to civil society, including teachers and their representative organisations, in education decisions at all levels.
- Governments must commit themselves to guaranteeing their part of the necessary resources for quality basic education, including increases in proportion of GNP allocated to education. Governments need to spend at least 6% of GNP on education. Governments have to secure increases in revenue from efficient taxation, reduce excessive military and other unproductive expenditure and put an end to corruption.
- Governments should immediately identify and reverse existing disparities in per capital-funding which discriminate against rural communities, ethnic minorities, people with disabilities and underdeveloped regions, in order to achieve equitable spending per learner by 2005. They should further commit themselves to delivering extra funding to meet needs

of schools in poor and marginalised areas, in order to bring all schools up to agreed standards by 2015 and to ensure that curricula, teaching materials and methods are responsive to the needs of marginalised groups. There must be a commitment to end child labour and to ratify the ILO Conventions No. 138 and 182.

- Governments must develop innovative responses to ensure that learners in families affected by HIV/AIDS will not lose their access to education. Plans need to be made now to cope with the loss of teachers and with the new pressure on children. A close link has to be established between education and health as education has comparative advantage to support the prevention of HIV/AIDS in the population.
- Governments must ensure that new information technologies can be equitably accessed to promote quality of education. However, it must be recognised that indigenous knowledge and traditional forms of media are equally valuable.
- A core code of conduct for donors should be agreed within the framework of UN in partnership with civil society by 2002 to bind donors to following good practice in the relationship with partners and in disbursement of aid to education. Governments should have single accountability lines. The monitoring and control of aid programmes should be turned over to government in partnership with civil society.

Positive changes to aid and international commitments must not be contradicted and undermined by wider institutional policies of international financial institutions. Financial advice and financial support from IMF, World Bank or regional development banks be designed with education as an integral part of poverty reduction and development.

Donors must ensure that all governments that are serious about education have access to the

necessary resources to achieve basic education for all. A key step toward this must be to increase aid to basic education to at least 8% of total aid budgets.

Donors should commit to increased and rapid debt relief, improving progress of the Heavily Indebted Poor Country initiative (HIPC2). Debt relief should add to aid flows and not undermine them, and be linked to national education plans in the context of wide poverty reduction plans.

A strong representation of southern governments and civil society has to be ensured in international EFA structures set up after the World Education Forum in Dakar. Resources, and technical expertise and monitoring of progress must be decentralised with major investment in a regional level EFA capacity. These structures have to be effective, accountable and transparent.

National civil society alliances should have the right to call for the international EFA structures to investigate cases where there are clear violations of the right to education. The EFA structures should have the power to call an investigation by the UN Special Rapporteur on Education or the regional Human Rights Commissions.

A comprehensive review should be planned for 2006 to identify progress against the major international targets of education. Both national and donor action plans should specify mid-term targets for each EFA goal, and specify explicit additional resourcing and contingency commitments if these targets are missed. If the mid-term review shows that a substantial number of countries continue to be off-track then an official UN Conference on Education with Heads of State should be convened for 2010.

Conclusion

There is no doubt that with the intervention of NGOs all over the world the various government would not have any excuse to fail in their operational strategies and plans toward achieving the EFA goals. The NGOs gathered in Dakar from all over the world, they were committed to

work and cooperate with governments and a wide range of groups, individuals and institutions to reach the goal of quality education for all.

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