

Primary Education as Means of Achieving Sustainable Development: An Assessment of Universal Basic Education (UBE) Program in Nigeria

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Abstract: Education has been directly equated with the overall development process of any human society. Basic or primary education being the foundation, is necessary not only for the sake of basic literacy and numeracy, but because it prepares children or human for future challenges. The more adequate and qualitative the primary education is given to children, the more equipped and industrious the children would become in the future. Therefore, good administrative planning and provision of primary level of education is crucial in achieving educational development. This paper examines Universal Basic Education (UBE) as a programme designed to provide primary education, outline its policy thrust and nature of implementation as well as assessing the ways through which the scheme can tackle the educational challenges facing the country, for an achieved sustainable development. Secondary data was used comprising the UBE documents and various literatures written by scholars on education and development in order to analyse and assess the relationship between basic (primary) education and sustainable development in Nigeria.

Keywords: Basic, Education, Development, National, Program and Sustainable

INTRODUCTION

Education occupies a very unique position in the national development programme of any nation, as it is the gateway to the future and the key to economic, social and political advancement and sustainability. Education is the vital instrument

for social and economic mobility at the personal level and an instrument for transformation of society at the national level. It also remained a social process in capacity building and maintenance of society, because it is a weapon for acquiring skills, relevant knowledge and habits for surviving in the changing world [1].

Primary education is the first level of education, because primary school is the first place that introduces formal education or literacy to the children. In other words, primary school education is a foundation upon which all other levels of education are built [2]. Suffice it to say that, the background or foundation of any knowledge or education, as necessary ingredient for sustainable development in any nation, is the primary school education.

This may be the fundamental reason why the federal government of Nigeria launched the Universal Primary Education (UPE) in September 1976. The scheme, which was welcomed in many parts of Nigeria, aimed at, among others, upgrading the quality of education, improving resource allocations, increasing enrollment, strengthen public institutions responsible for primary education and stimulating future planning for the next phase of the program [3]. This scheme and

other efforts by the government in providing primary education did not yield significant result, largely due to some factors, which include lack of continuity in the administration, poor coordination, corruption, mismanagement and the likes.

In November 1999, the Nigerian government under the leadership of Olusegun Obasanjo launched the Universal Basic Education scheme in Sokoto for the nation. The re-launching of the programme seen by many as similar to UPE makes Nigerians to think that, there is something desirable, which the scheme is expected to enable them, achieve [4].

As stated in the UBE document [5] a lot of attention would be given to the scheme in order to improve upon the standard of education and build a solid foundation for the development of further education and other sectors in the country. Despite this assertion, demographic studies on the existing national situation in the primary education sector revealed that, 12 percent of primary school pupils sit on the floor, 38 percent classrooms have no ceilings, 87 percent classrooms overcrowded, while 77 percent pupils lack textbooks, and almost all sampled teachers are poorly motivated [1].

It's against this background that, this paper seeks to assesses UBE as an educational development programme, evaluates its aims and objectives, examines the challenges facing the scheme, and proffer some possible ways through which the challenges can be met for achieving the overall sustainable development in Nigeria.

Universal Basic Education (UBE) is a Universal programme, because it involves everybody and as such it's a programme aimed at providing education for all. It's basic as it provides the base for starting point from which other levels of education can develop. Education is seen here as the process of teaching or learning in a formal setting like the school and the knowledge acquired through the process. Thus, UBE is a plan of activities to be done or achieved and that is why it's a programme.

Nigeria's Education Situation

Nigeria is Africa's most populous country with estimated population of about 140 million and more than one-fifth of the continents total population [6]. Educating this population has been recognized both as a human right in itself and a crucial instrument for the pursuit of other rights as well as instrument through which sustainable education and economic development can be attained.

According to the Global Monitoring Report, the most recent data for Nigeria shows an adult literacy rate of 69 percent (78 percent for men and 60 percent for women). More than 50 million people are illiterate, 65 percent of whom are women [7]. Similarly, primary education enrolment figures nationwide in 1991 was about 13.8 million with a higher enrolment in the southern part than in the northern part of the country. Female enrolment was lower than male enrolment in the north; higher in the southeast and at par in the southwest. In most part of the country, enrolment rates were higher in urban areas than in the rural, as classes in urban areas tended to be over-crowded due to inadequate infrastructure, while under population was common in rural areas in all the states. Average primary school completion rate was estimated at 69 percent. However, the proportion differed among boys and girls (girls 66 percent and boys 60 percent). Some dropout of school early due to several reasons which might included lack of financial resources on the part of parents, poor school environment, irrelevance of existing school curricula in relation to career opportunities, and teacher absenteeism [8].

An Overview of UBE

Basic education is the foundation for sustainable lifelong learning. It provides readings, writing and numeracy skills. It comprises a wide variety of formal and non-formal educational activities and programmes designed to enable learners acquire

functional literacy. In Nigerian context, basic education includes primary, junior secondary and nomadic education as well as adult literacy.

The specific aim here is to equip individuals with such knowledge, skills and attitudes that will enable them to live meaningful and fulfilling lives, contribute to the development of the society, derive maximum social, economic and cultural benefits from the society, and discharge their civil obligations competently [5].

Goals and objectives of UBE

The major goals of UBE as outlined in the implementation guide by government in 1999 are to universalize access to basic education, engender a conducive learning environment and eradicate illiteracy in Nigeria within the shortage possible time. While the specific objectives include:

- Developing in the entire citizenry, a strong consciousness for education and a strong commitment for its vigorous promotion
- Providing free Universal Basic Education for every Nigerian Child of school-going age.
- Reducing drastically the rate of drop-out from the formal school system
- Catering for young dropouts and out of schoolchildren or adolescents through various forms of complementary approach to the provision and promotion of basic education.
- Ensuring the acquisition of appropriate levels of literacy, numeracy, manipulative communicative and life skills as well as the ethical, moral and civil values needed for laying a solid foundation for life long living.

UBE Vision and Mission Statement

Drawn from the desire that, every child that passes through the system should acquire appropriate levels of literacy at the end of the nine (9) years of continuous education. Other skills include numeracy, communication, and manipulation of life skills and be employable, useful to himself and society at large by possessing relevant, ethical, moral and civil values. The mission statement states in part-working in consent with all stake holders by mobilizing the nation's energies to ensure that education for all becomes the responsibilities for all. The scope includes programmes and initiatives for early childhood education and development, the six-year primary education and three-year junior secondary school.

Implementation

The implementation of the scheme started with the inauguration of two committees by the then President; committee on the implementation and technical committee headed by the Vice-president and Minister of Education. After the launch of the programme in September 1999, there were consultations between federal ministry of education,

state governments, international community and other major stake holders on areas of intervention and implementation strategies, national mini-summit on the implementation of the scheme, collection and analysis of relevant statistics and data as well as preparation of the cost implication, in October/ November 1999. In December 1999, it was the coordination of meetings and implementation workshops and seminars of all the three tiers of government and other stakeholders. By January 2000, the scheme took off at the primary level and adult literacy level, while JSS one took off in September 2002 [5].

Financing

In addition to other foreign aids and grants, the scheme (UBE) has been arranged to be jointly financed by all the tiers of government and was divided into four. First category is the teachers training and re-training where federal and state governments would train teachers for both primary and junior secondary schools, adult literacy to be financed by all the three tiers of governments and nomadic education by federal government only. Second is the teachers' recruitment and remuneration where primary schools are owned by local governments, junior secondary schools for federal and state governments, adult literacy - all the three tiers and nomadic education by the federal government alone.

Third category is the infrastructural provisions (e. g. classrooms and learning centers, play grounds, toilets etc) where primary school would be finance by federal government (75 percent) and state government (25 percent), junior secondary schools - federal government (25 percent) and state government (75 percent), adult literacy – federal government (25 percent) and state government (50 percent) and local (25 percent), Nomadic education - federal government (100 percent). The last category is the provision of instructional and learning materials where, primary schools is to be totally financed by the federal government, junior secondary school - federal (50 percent) and state (50 percent) and local government (25 percent), Nomadic education - Federal government (80 percent) and state government (20 percent).

Moreover, this money would be sourced from budgetry provisions, revenue from education tax fund (ETF) and contributions from Non-governmental Organisations (NGOs), bilateral partners, multi-laterals agencies and all stakeholders, local or international [5].

Challenges of Basic Education Programme in Nigeria

Sustainable development has been regarded as a process of change in which the exploitation of resources, the direction of investment, the orientation of technological development and institutional change are all in harmony and enhance both current and future potential to meet human needs and aspirations [9].

Owing to the above explanation, satisfying human aspirations and needs is the major objective of any sustainable development. One of these basic human needs and ingredients to economic, political, social and technological development is education. Investing in education is therefore seen not only as the means of satisfying human needs and aspirations but also an act of bringing about an institutional change through developing human capital thereby enhancing both current and future potentials for achieving sustainability in development process.

Nigeria as a nation, in particular, recognized the importance of basic education through participating in various international meetings and conferences where declarations concerning education are made from time to time. For instance, the Persepolis Declaration 1975 – a declaration on people's right on access to literacy through eliminating all forms obstacles and discrimination against access to education, the Vienna Declaration 1993 – by the world conference on human rights, pronounced equal enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedoms by all with emphasis on education as one of the ingredients for human development, and the Hamburg Declaration 1997 - aimed at improving the quality of literacy and numeracy, with specific pronouncement of adult education as more than a right to all and even see it as the key to the 21st century development. Programmes, especially on the need to make the basic literacy and numeracy accessible to the citizens have been introduced in the country, among which is now the Universal Basic Education [8]. In spite of this, the literacy level in Nigeria remain daunting. Thus, for Nigeria to attain the desired national literacy rate and overall sustainable educational development. The current education programme, (UBE) Scheme should re-design to meet so many challenges.

For instance, Nigeria signed the 1990 Jomtien Declaration of Education For All (EFA) by the year 2000, and committed to the total eradication of illiteracy. But presently, the country is among the nations with high rate of illiteracy in the world. The nation's literacy rate is estimated to be 57 percent. Education statistics for 2006 shows that only 4.1 million children are enrolled in primary schools out of the 8 million children of school going age. The completion rate was 64 percent while the rate of transition to junior secondary school was 43.3 percent [10].

This was further elaborated by the former minister for education, Professor Tunde Adeniran, in his opening remarks at the UBE mini-summit in Abuja that,

Our record shows that the transition rate from primary school to junior secondary school is 43.7 percent. By implication 56.3 percent of those in the

nation's primary school today are likely to grow into adulthood as illiterates and this would further compound the problems of an estimated 43 percent adults who have missed their opportunities of formal education [5].

The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) to which Nigeria fully subscribes has basic education as one of the targets to reach before the 2015 universal deadline. Significantly, education is among the seven-point agenda of President Umaru Yar'Adua. By his own declaration, education is one area in which the performance or otherwise of his government could be measured. In fact, the document of the first phase of the National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDS) captured that: "*The constitution of Nigeria gives all citizens the right to education.* But the delivery of education in Nigeria has suffered from years of neglect, compounded by inadequate attention to policy frameworks within the sector. Findings from an ongoing educational sector analysis confirm the poor state of education in Nigeria. The national literacy rate is currently 57 percent. Some 49 percent of the teaching force is unqualified. There are acute shortages of infrastructure and facilities at all levels. Access to basic education is inhibited by gender issues and socio-cultural beliefs and practices, among other factors. Wide disparities persist in educational standards and learning achievements. The system emphasizes theoretical knowledge at the expense of technical, vocational, and entrepreneurial education. School curricula need urgent review to make them relevant and practice oriented [11].

Director and Country Representative of the United Nations Education Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), Mr. Abhimanyu Singh. Made a case for child and adult education in Nigeria on the premise that:

It is disconcerting that despite Nigeria's efforts to improve the reach of and quality of education system, it still has 8 to 10 million children of the school-going age who are neither in primary or secondary school Today, there are about 60 million adults in Nigeria, 85% of them under the age of 35 years can neither read or write [11].

It is worrisome that this is still the situation in the sector years after the Universal Basic Education (UBE) Act was passed.

According to Anigbo [12] Nigerian education system unfortunately is aimed at preparing the child for secondary schools, because in all practical purposes both in structure and in content, emphasis is placed on literacy and numeracy at the expense of life skills. Unfriendly school environment, poor infrastructure and facilities add to low enrolment. This is partly the reason why our products cannot apply what they learn in

schools for creativity, as a result increasing unemployment led to negative perceptions of the relevance and value of education provision, lowering the quality of learning outcome and skills acquisition.

Other challenges facing the scheme as enumerated in the programme document include:

1. The issue of the control of primary education needs to be addressed. States seem to be lukewarm about taking full responsibility of primary education. Yet the constitution vests responsibility for primary education on states and local governments. States need to be awakened to the responsibility of proper funding and management of primary education.
2. On the recruitment of additional teachers, it should be recognized that shortage of teachers is one challenge that needs to be confronted to reduce teacher-pupils ratios to acceptable levels, so far states and local governments have not been forthcoming in recruitment of additional teachers in spite of the glaring needs. Even graduate of the pivotal teacher-training programme (PTTP) have not been absorbed by states and local governments.
3. Low cash backing has hampered the pace of work in funding the classroom construction projects. There is need to expedite action on the release of funds so that the classroom blocks can be completed and furnished.
4. Operational issues in the junior secondary component of the formal aspect of UBE need to be addressed. For example, in line with nine-year provision for UBE, issues about who manages JSS will need to be tackled. Perhaps, JSS will join primary in a nine-year structure, while senior secondary education stands on its own
5. Finally, relationships among federal states and local governments in matters of funding primary education will need to be clearly defined to ensure sustainability.

Therefore, for Nigeria to pursue its process of development and as well achieve sustainable, and possibly be part of the 21st century development. The above statistics need to be controlled.

Critique of Universal Basic Education (UBE) Programme

Universal Basic Education Scheme, as the same with other government developmental programmes attracted people's attention which as a result amounted to raising of some questions against it. However, some of these appeared to be observations and comments, but some appeared as shortcomings or criticisms to the programme. For instance, Fasokun, [7] argued that, UBE as an education programme is ineffective, because it has not produced the desired result yet, and millions of people (Nigerians) are still being denied access to literacy.

Similarly, Aluede [4] criticized the entire implementation process of the scheme, pointing out that, since the objectives of the universal Basic Education did not differ significantly from the objectives of the Universal Primary Education Scheme and the UPE failed due to lack of planning in the implementation process, so also UBE. He opined that, in all the two programmes' planning and implementation process issues like, estimated number of pupils that will be in school, number of schools required in each locality or ward and amount of effort to renovate the existing schools were not properly addressed.

Olaniyan and Obadara [2] opined that, as good as primary education is in providing the basic skills needed to acquire permanent literacy and numeracy as well as to gain admission into secondary schools, Nigerian primary schools are not fulfilling the central purpose of primary education. Instead, it brought the emergence of many private primary schools presently experienced in Nigeria. Experience has shown that public primary schools tend to perform more poorly than private primary schools in Nigeria. It appears as if the private primary schools usually produce more qualitative students than public primary schools. In other words, the public primary schools cannot boast of literacy and numeracy competences. This explains why people (who can afford) mostly take their children to private primary, secondary and even institutions of higher learning.

However, the whole idea of UBE was criticised by Anikpo [12] on the following grounds;

1. That most the activities of the Universal Basic Education are grounded due to inadequate funds. At present, the commission is relying on the World Bank credit (PEP) to function most of its activities. What happens when it expires?
2. The program has been stigmatized by some people as a 'white elephant' project of Obasanjo administration, which will not satisfy the yearning of Nigerians. The programme since inception lacked adequate publicity to project its image.
3. Misunderstanding of the role of the Federal Government in the UBE by states and Local Governments.
4. Endemic problem of lack of accurate, comprehensive and up to date statistics on expenditures is a constraint since such data is essential for realistic budgeting.
5. There is total imbalance in the administrative cost of teaching and non-teaching education functionaries such that more funds than is required is sent on services of non-tutorial staff.
6. Doubtful integrity of some of the managers of educational funds, when part of the money appropriated for education needs is misappropriated, mismanaged and thus inadequacy of funds sets in.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The development of any nation does not only rest on production of it's economic wealth but also on the smart investment and development of it's educational sector. Arguably, education is the pillar upon which all other sectors of the economy rest because no any meaningful development can be achieve without a vibrant educational sector for it provide the society with experienced, productive and sound minds. Primary or basic education, as the starting point, seems to be in a state of neglet in Nigeria. Various governmental efforts towards providing and improving access to quality primary education have more often than not abortive. Although some of these programmes and policies may appear to be very comprehensive but most of the time lack proper implementation.

Therefore, for sustainable development, not only of the educational sector of our society, but of the overall society to be achieved, this paper recommends that, governments at all levels should not only adequately finance the primary education system but also monitor and ensure the effective utilisation of the resources projected in. Teachers are very important to the success of basic eduaction in Nigeria, they should be made effective, experienced and reflective practitioners who will be ready to take the responsibility for managing teaching and learning in their classrooms through support, supervision, mentoring, training and development. These should not only be based on the salary increment.

Moreover, primary education stakeholders must be ready to increase investments in the development of primary schools and teachers, national and international development partners should direct financial grants and credits towards such projects, and at the same time ensure the proper and prudence utilisation of the funds. Ministries of education also, a part from devoting some part of their annual incomes towards institutionalising and sustaining all the schools and teacher support and mentoring projects, ought to ensure that the resources are channel to what they are meant for, there by assessing the impacts of such projects. Likewise community-based organisations and individuals in general should be sensitized and educated on the importance of primary education development for them to support it. In doing this also Non Governmental Organisations and other Civil Society Organisations should have a greater stake.

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