

The Federal Government's Transformation Agenda on Basic Education and the Implementation of the Universal Basic Education [UBE])

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Abstract

It is indisputable that sound national development is predicated on the access of Nigerians to education, especially at the grassroots. Despite the good intentions of the government, the UBE Scheme is vitiated by poor implementation. In analyzing the implementation of the scheme, the paper argues that lack of effective policy implementation and coordination among the States and Federal Governments affected the achievement of basic education. The paper further posits that funding constraints, which have created a yawning gap between policy initiative and outcome, weakened the effectiveness of the scheme. The paper relied on content analysis as its method of data analysis, while Human Capital Theory was adopted as the Theoretical Framework.

Key words: Transformation Agenda, Universal Basic Education, Access, Funding,

“By 2020, Nigeria intends to have a large, strong, diversified, sustainable and competitive economy that effectively harnesses the talents and energies of its people and responsibly exploits its natural endowments to guarantee a high standard of living and quality of life to its citizens.”

Introduction

The key role of education in the economic transformation of Nigeria cannot be over-emphasized. It is in recognition of this transformational role that education was elevated to a right by international conventions and treaties. The African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights (to which the country's constitution subscribes to, by virtue of the Charter's domestication and ratification in Nigeria) provides for the economic and social rights for

citizens. Based on the ideals of the charter, most of the provisions of Chapter II of the constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria 1999, which were stipulated under the Fundamental Objectives and Directive Principles of State Policy were merely declaratory and unenforceable, but have been elevated to enforceable rights as a result of the Charter. Besides, under section 17, the social order of Nigeria is founded on the ideals of freedom, equality and justice which entitles every citizen to have equality of rights, obligations and opportunities before the law, the right to education is integral to this and inalienable.

The right to education is further reinforced by the provisions of section 18 (1) of the constitution which states as follows: Government shall direct its policy towards ensuring that there are equal and adequate educational opportunities at all levels; and Government shall strive to eradicate illiteracy, and to this end, Government shall as and when practicable provide- (a) Free, compulsory and universal primary education; (b) Free university education; and (c) Free adult literacy programme (FRN, 1999).

In recognition of the universal right to education which has imposed an obligation on sovereign nations, the United Nations placed emphasis on Education For All (EFA) and the MDGs which was enunciated by the body as a global template for poverty reduction and development. While the EFA canvasses the absolute necessity of educating all, the MDG (Goal 2) targets the achievement of Universal Basic Education by 2015 (UN, 2014). Education is at the core of achieving the MDGs because it will lead to the attainment of a better-ranked Human Development Index (HDI) for Nigeria. The Transformation Agenda of the Federal Government recognizes education as a right as well as a critical element in human development. In this regard, therefore, human capacity development facilitated by strong

learning systems is central to the attainment of Vision 2020. Under the Transformation Agenda, the aim is to strengthen the Nigerian Education System with the overall aim of supporting the human capital development needs in producing: highly-skilled world class manpower and world-class institutions in Nigeria with world-class infrastructure. The vision is committed to ensuring that all boys and girls, irrespective of ethnicity, gender or disability, complete a full course of basic education – 12 years of formal education consisting of 3 years of Early Childhood Care Development and Education (ECCDE), 6 years of primary schooling and 3 years of junior secondary schooling. This is to be followed by at least 3 years of vocational training (informal/ formal education) or senior secondary schooling. Meeting this basic target will speed up progress towards the achievement of all the other targets for NV20:2020, including the eradication of poverty and hunger, as well as accelerated economic development.

The levels and key priorities of vision 2020 as regards primary, junior and senior secondary educations are as follows: (i) Early Childhood Care Development and Education (ECCDE): Reduce cost of pre-primary education to parents to encourage mass participation; Provide integrated and child friendly centres in at least 50% of public schools; and Encourage participation of the private sector and not-for-profit organizations in the delivery of ECCDE to expand access. (ii) Primary Education: Ensure 100% retention and completion in primary education for both boys and girls; Bridge rural-urban gap in enrolment and school attendance; and provide inclusive facilities and resources for gifted and talented children and the physically challenged. (iii) Junior Secondary Education: Ensure completion and facilitate the onward progression of 60% to secondary education, 20% to technical education, 10% to vocational training centres, and 10% to

apprenticeships schemes; and support community participation in school management. (iv) Senior Secondary (Post-Basic Education): Increase the transition rates of boys and girls from basic education to the post-education level; Promote mainstreaming of pupils who have completed the integrated Quranic education and nomadic education programmes into the post-basic education programme; and Facilitate the transition from basic education to post basic education of children with special needs such as the mentally and physically challenged (NPC, 2009).

The Federal Government believes that if access to basic education is enhanced, and enrollment increases, more children will gain access to basic education. Child vulnerability will equally be reduced as the number of out of school children will drop. This will create a positive impact on socioeconomic development because the vulnerability of children to abuse and gross violation of their rights such as child trafficking and child labour will be drastically curtailed.

Constitutionally, the States and Local Governments are responsible for secondary and primary education respectively. The Federal Government's intervention at the basic education level, as evidenced by the introduction of the UBE Scheme, is aimed at ensuring that access to education is enhanced with the removal of constraints like lack of trained teachers, funding etc. To achieve this, it has devoted 2% of its Consolidated Revenue Fund to the UBE Scheme. Under the rules governing the scheme, States wishing to benefit from the scheme are required to comply with some conditions, one of which is the provision of matching grants to make the scheme effective. Additional condition for accessing the fund by the States is that the earlier intervention fund must have been utilized to the tune of 70% before accessing the new one.

Theoretical framework

The theoretical framework adopted for this study is the *Human Capital Theory*. British economists, Sir William Petty (1623-1687) and Adam Smith (1723-1790) are regarded by economists and historians as the primary proponents of the Human Capital Theory. While Adam Smith established the basis of the economics of human capital, Petty examined the role of the state in the economy and emphasized the value of labour. Furthermore, Smith was the first to establish a nexus between the skill of the worker and higher wage levels. The theoretical framework most responsible for the wholesome adoption of education and development policies has come to be known as human capital theory. Human capital theory rests on the assumption that formal education is highly instrumental and even necessary to improve the production capacity of a population. In short, the human capital proponents argue that an educated population is a productive population (Olaniyan and Okemakinde, 2011). In the new global economy, tangible assets are not as important as investing on human capital.

The theory asserts that education increases the productivity and efficiency of workers, by increasing the level of cognitive stock of economically productive capability, which is a product of innate abilities and investment in human beings. The rationality underpinning investment in human capital is premised on three critical assumptions: (a) that the new generation must be given the appropriate parts of the knowledge which has already been accumulated by previous generations (b) that the new generation should be taught how existing knowledge should be used to develop new products, to increase new processes and production methods and social services; (c) that people must be encouraged to develop entirely new ideas, products, processes and methods through creative approaches.

Modern economists are of the view that education and health care constitute the key to improving human capital and ultimately increasing the economic outputs of the nation (Becker, 2010). Because the people constitute the greatest assets of any nation, human capital development constitutes the most formidable weapon for transforming the economies of nations. Harbison (2010) points out that human resources constitute the ultimate basis for the wealth of nations. Capital and natural resources are passive factors of production; human beings are the active agents who accumulate capital, exploit natural resources, build social, economic and political organizations, and carry forward national development.

Although the tangible financial capital is an effective instrument of promoting economic growth of the nation, the intangible human capital, on the other hand, is an instrument of promoting comprehensive development of the nation because human capital is directly related to human development, and when there is human development, the qualitative and quantitative progress of the nation is inevitable. The importance of human capital is explicitly recognized in the changed approach of United Nations towards comparative evaluation of economic development of different nations in the World economy. United Nations publishes Human Development Report on human development in different nations with the objective of evaluating the rate of human capital formation in these nations. The statistical indicator of estimating Human Development in each nation is Human Development Index (HDI). It is the combination of "Life Expectancy Index", "Education Index" and "Income Index".

The Life expectancy index reveals the standard of health of the population in the country; education index reveals the educational standard and the literacy ratio of the population; and the income index reveals the standard of living of the population. If all these indices have the rising trend

over a long period of time, it is reflected into rising trend in HDI. The Human Capital is developed by health, education and quality of Standard of living. Therefore, the components of HDI viz, Life Expectancy Index, Education Index and Income Index are directly related to Human Capital formation within the nation. HDI is indicator of positive correlation between human capital formation and economic development. If HDI increases, there is higher rate of human capital formation in response to higher standard of education and health. Similarly, if HDI increases, per capita income of the nation also increases. Implicitly, HDI reveals that the higher the human capital formation due to good standard of health and education, the higher is the per capita income of the nation. This process of human development is the strong foundation of a continuous process of economic development of the nation for a long period of time. This significance of the concept of human capital in generating long-term economic development of the nation cannot be neglected. It is expected that the macroeconomic policies of Nigeria and indeed all the nations are focused towards promotion of human development and subsequently economic development. Human capital is the backbone of human development and economic development in every nation. Mahroum (2014) suggested that at the macro-level, human capital management is about three key capacities, the capacity to develop talent, the capacity to deploy talent, and the capacity to draw talent from elsewhere. Collectively, these three capacities form the backbone of any country's human capital competitiveness. Nigeria has one of the lowest HDI in the world, depicting the nation as one of the most underdeveloped countries in the world.

The Transformation Agenda and the Universal Basic Education

The need to implement the Federal Government white paper on the report of the Presidential Task Team on Education necessitated the revision

of the National Policy on education (NPE) which gave rise to the update of the 2007 edition in order to respond positively to the needs of the Universal Basic Education (UBE).

In furtherance of its constitutional responsibility of setting and maintaining minimum standards in education, the Federal Government enacted the Compulsory Free Universal Basic Education Act in April 2004. Part (1) of the UBE Act states, *inter-alia*, that without prejudice to the provisions of item 30 of Part II of the second Schedule and Item 2(9) of the Fourth Schedule to the 1999 Constitution dealing with primary school education, the Federal Government's intervention under this Act shall only be an assistance to the states and local governments in Nigeria for the purposes of uniform and qualitative basic education throughout Nigeria. The Act established the UBE Commission as the mechanism of intervention in the basic education subsector and also provided for State Universal Basic Education Boards.

In line with the National Policy on Education (FRN, 2010), the relevant provisions of the extant laws establishing the UBE charged it with the following statutory responsibilities: an uninterrupted access to 9 year formal education by providing free, compulsory basic education for every child of school age (6-15); drastic reduction in incidence of school dropout and entrenchment of relevance, quality and efficiency in the sub-system; acquisition of literacy, numeracy, life skills and appropriate values for lifelong education and useful living; removal of distortions and inconsistencies in the delivery of basic education by reinforcing the implementation of 6-3-3-4 system of education as provided for in the National Policy on Education; and enhancement of community participation in decision-making process in schools with a view to engendering community interest in, and eventual ownership of basic educational

institutions. Essentially, the major objectives of the scheme are to eradicate illiteracy, ignorance and poverty with the aim of facilitating national development, political consciousness and national integration.

Nigeria's Commitment to Universal Basic Education and the problem of Access

Philosophically and constitutionally, the implementation of basic education in Nigeria has suffered severe setback as the rights of children to basic education have not been enforced by the Federal and State governments. Under the Child Rights Act, every child (male or female) is entitled to receive compulsory basic education and equal opportunity for higher education depending on individual ability. Regrettably, since 2003 when the Child Rights Act was signed into law, only 15 out of the 36 States in Nigeria have enacted it into law. The States are: Abia, Anambra, Bayelsa, Ebonyi, Ekiti, Imo, Jigawa, Kwara, Lagos, Nasarawa, Ogun, Ondo, Plateau, Rivers, and Taraba. Neither the Federal nor State governments have set up Implementation Committees as a follow-up measure for realizing the provisions of the Act. Primary six completion rates have decreased from 8 pupils out of every 10 to 7 pupils between 2004 and 2007 (NPC, 2010). Despite present enrollment, it is appalling that Nigeria has 10.5 million out-of-school children, the highest in the world (Punch, 2014). Similarly, the UBE is constantly threatened by poor quality as forty-four percent (44%) of Nigerian students cannot read a complete sentence on the completion of their primary education (NES, 2014). Still, about 52% of young women who complete primary education remain illiterates while the number of adults who cannot read and write stand at 35 million. Child labour, child marriage and child trafficking prevent thousands of children from enrolling in basic education (UBE, 2011).

Table 1: Enrolments in Primary Schools by Year, Percentage Distribution and Gender

Year	Total	Girls	% Girls	Boys	% Boys
2008	19,041,223	8,457,812	44.42%	10,583,411	55.58
2009	19,806,083	8,791,072	44.39	11,015,011	55.61
2010	25,704,793	11,338,280	44.11	14,366,513	55.89
2011	21,395,510	9,571,016	44.73	11,824,494	55.27
2012	22,115,432	9,926,359	44.88	12,189,073	55.12
2013	23,017,129	10,441,435	45.36	12,575,694	54.64
Average 128	21,45560.28	1342265.94	44.65	12,092,366	55.35

Source: National Bureau of Statistics, 2013

Table 2: Enrolment in Secondary Schools by Year, Percentage Distribution and Gender

Year	Total	Girls	% Girls	Boys	% Boys
2008	4,601,150	2,054,112	44.6	2,546,993	55.4
2009	4,897,048	2,176,143	44.4	2,720,906	55.6
2010	6,509,772	2,847,321	43.7	3,662,541	56.3
2011	6,279,562	2,739,914	43.6	3,539,648	56.4
2012	6,367,937	2,844,156	44.7	3,523,781	55.3
2013	6,536,038	2,893,167	44.3	3,642,871	56.8
Average	5,865,251.2	2,592,468.8	44.2	3272775	56.8

Source: National Bureau of Statistics, 2013

Against the foregoing background, widespread disparities and daunting challenges cut across primary and secondary levels. Broadly speaking, the educational sector has been bedeviled by years of neglect, mismanagement and inadequacy of resources relative to national needs, population growth and demand. This has had the deleterious effect of denying education its strategic importance and ill-positioning it as a transformational tool as well as a formidable instrument for socio-economic development.

In specific terms, the basic education sector has been buffeted by the challenges of access and equity; standards and quality; funds and resource utilization constraints. The problems of access, funding, infrastructure, lack of policy coordination between the Federal and State Governments remain

the most critical challenge facing the basic schools subsector. Emphasis on equity will give Nigerian children equal opportunities and play a significant role in addressing the problem of poverty and inequality. Equity will ensure that opportunity is provided to all children of school age irrespective of gender, family background, location and physical attribute. Equity will also enhance access because it will break the barriers of physical access, quality access and economic access posed by economic, cultural, urban- rural and public- private barriers etc. To enhance physical access, it is estimated that an infrastructural requirement of 4,000 additional classrooms per annum for pre-primary; 22,000 additional classrooms per annum for Primary; 10,160 classrooms per annum for Junior Secondary School; and 950 additional classrooms per annum for Nomadic Education and other facilities, would be needed for the attainment of the required enrolment levels. The inadequacy of additional classrooms has hampered access to basic education.

Statistics from the 2010 Nominal Personnel Audit shows that there are 54,434 public primary schools in Nigeria with an enrolment figure of 24,422,918, out of which the male accounts for 13,302,269 (or 54.5%), while the female accounts for 11,120,649 (or 45.5%) indicating a gender parity of 83 to 62%. More males are enrolled in the primary schools than females in the North while a near parity is recorded in the South. About 65% of primary school children in the North are males while 35% are females. Also, there are 7,129 Public Junior Schools in Nigeria with a total enrolment figure of 3,266,780. Gender disparity exists in male and female enrolment figures at the JSS level nationwide and about 55% are male while 45% are female. For Nomadic Education, the required number of teachers is 23,835 while only 11,506 (48%) are available. This shows a shortfall of 12,329 (52%) and a teacher- pupil ratio of 1:50.

The widespread disparities between the expected and actual enrolment at the early childhood education stages as well as primary and junior secondary levels pose considerable problems of access and equity. For instance, the expected enrolment in Early Childhood Care Development and Education (ECCDE) is 22 million but the actual is 2.02 million, leaving 19.98million out of school. The expected enrolment in Primary Education is 34.92million but the actual is 24.42 million. This creates a shortfall of 10.5million. In Junior Secondary Education (3years), the expected enrolment is 9.27million whereas the actual stands at 3.27 million, leaving a total of 6.0 million unenrolled (FME, 2012).

The story is the same at the non-formal level. Out of the current population figure of 40million non-literate adults, current enrolment stands at 500,000, leaving 39.5million un-enrolled. For the Nomadic and Migrant children, only 450,000 are enrolled out of the 3.5million school- aged learners, hence 3.1 million are out of school. Other challenges are inadequate and inaccurate data as well as poverty. Available classrooms in formal education in 2006 are 497,871, with a shortfall of 1,152412 while the existing classrooms for Nomadic Education are 10,469 with a shortfall of 28,931(FME, 2012). The overall enrolment in the 3 sub-sectors is presented in Figure 1 below:

Table 1: Enrolment

Level	Number of Institutions	No. of Students	No Access
Primary	44,000.00	24million	20million
Secondary	10,000.00	8million	27million
Voc and Technical	65	280,000.00	27million
Coll of Edu.	64	550,000.00	2million

Source: COL Workshop, 2010

The Problem of funding and the implementation of the UBE scheme

The introduction of the UBE policy notwithstanding, education is not yet free. Although public schools are essentially free, the hidden costs of PTA levies, examination costs, uniforms and books exclude the poorest and most vulnerable children from accessing basic education. In situations where the parent’s income has been reduced due to illness, children are forced to drop out of school and engage in various forms of labour, many of which are harmful and expose them to abuse and exploitation. Against the background that there are no clear-cut education policies specifically addressing the needs of children, especially those at the pre-primary and primary stage, exorbitant fees/levies and other financial costs of going to school act as a significant barrier to the most vulnerable children accessing their right to basic education. The UBE Education Policy stipulates punishment for parents or guardians of children who are found on the streets and not attending school during school hours with imprisonment. No parent has been arrested or prosecuted despite the thousands of children, including trafficked children, found hawking on the streets. None of the trafficked children has been questioned in order to know their parents or guardians.

Table 1: UBE Matching grants and level of access by states and FCT (in Naira) from 2009-2013

STATE	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	TOTAL
Releases to States and FCT	19,651,499,999.32	23,042,932,728.68	32,283,510,347.90	31,558,658,415.04	38,139,500,000.10	144,676,101,491.01
Total Amount Accessed by States/FCT	19,651,500,000	22,401,449,879.78	29,100,348,196.11	20,266,199,038.15	7,384,349.05	98,803,846,551.9
Unaccessed Funds by States/FCT	-----	641,482,849.30	3,183,162,151.40	11,292,459,376.90	30,755,125,572.90	45,872,229,950.50

Source: NES, 2014

More importantly, funding the UBE is jeopardized by a number of daunting challenges: inadequate budgetary provision, slow draw-down of matching grants by state governors; and inadequate funding for effective monitoring to take care of the 36 states and the FCT. Lack of effective policy implementation and coordination has eroded the capability of the scheme to enhance the attainment of basic education as envisioned by the Federal Government's Transformation Agenda tagged Vision 2020. A constitutional lacuna has been created as a result of the Federal Government's inability to enforce the UBE in the States just as the scheme suffers from inadequate funding at the State level. State governors hardly cooperate with the Federal Government in funding the UBE Scheme due to the tendency of governors to divert UBE funds to other projects. The EFCC is prosecuting a governor for an alleged embezzlement of UBEC funds. A daunting challenge facing the UBE scheme is the large reserve of unaccessed funds by States, due to their inability to meet the conditions for accessing the fund. Sadly, States are unwilling to provide counterpart funding as a pre-condition for accessing the UBE fund. A staggering Forty-Five Billion, Eight Hundred and Seventy-Two Million, Two Hundred and Twenty-Nine Thousand, Nine Hundred and Fifty Naira and Fifty kobo (45,872,229,950.50 Naira) is lying unaccessed by States and the Federal Capital Territory (NES, 2014). The States mostly affected are: Bayelsa, Benue, Ebonyi, Zamfara, Abia, Anambra, Enugu, Cross River, Edo, Ekiti, Gombe, Imo, Kogi, Lagos, Nasarawa, Niger, Ogun, Osun, and Plateau.

Between 2009 and 2013, the Federal Government invested the sum of One Hundred and Forty-Four Billion, Six Hundred and Seventy-Six Million, One Hundred and One Thousand, Four Hundred and Ninety-One Naira and Four kobo (N144, 676,101,491.04 Naira) in basic education. Out of this amount, Ninety-Eight Billion, Eight Hundred and Three Million,

Eight Hundred and Forty-Six Thousand, Five Hundred and Fifty One Naira and Nine kobo (N98, 803,846,551.9 Naira) was accessed by States and FCT (NES, 2014). While the Federal Government is providing matching grants to fund the scheme, State Governments lack political will to fund mass literacy programmes at the local level. Both in absolute and relative terms, the UBE is remarkably buffeted by paucity of funds just as there are other development issues crying for attention and funding by the Federal Government. From 1999 to 2002 when the UBE program supposedly received government's attention, the recurrent expenditure on education as a share of the total expenditure declined from 12.3% to 9.1% while the share of capital expenditure has remained unchanged, in spite of the absolute necessity of expanding access (World Bank, 2012).

The available statistics on teacher/pupil ratio is appalling. In 1999 when the Universal Basic Education was first launched, the number of primary school teachers was put at 590,000 with an average teacher/pupil ratio of 1:45 (Yobe state had the highest ratio of 1:94 while Anambra state had the lowest ratio of 1.20). It is projected that by the year 2010, about 30 million pupils would have been ripe for primary school and would require a teacher's population of about 976,000. Presently, there is a teacher shortage of about 1.3 million. Where the Federal Government will get this staggering number of trained teachers to meet the shortfall beats our imagination. That the UBE scheme faces the dearth of qualified teachers is not a hyperbole. The indication is that the Federal Government did not prepare for the scheme before dabbling into it: pupils' enrollment far outweigh number of trained teachers. At present, pupils still sit under trees and dilapidated structures to receive lessons. Apart from the problem of funding, the implementation of the scheme is plagued by lack of effective coordination between the States and the Federal Government. It is not surprising that the

scheme is challenged by high rate of illiteracy in the country, inadequate and obsolete infrastructure, equipment and library facilities. A more worrisome problem is the low girl-child enrolment and boy-child drop out and the large number of out-of-school children which have combined to render the scheme ineffectual.

The problem of infrastructure has equally taken its toll on basic education. It has not only limited access to educational opportunities but also impaired learning. The basic schools are lagging behind in modern infrastructure like ICT, well-equipped libraries and laboratories for science and technological education. The cost of providing modern infrastructure to boost learning is enormous and has not been budgeted by the Federal and State Governments. Schools are replete with cases of inadequate supply of electricity, water and sanitation services. The classrooms are in a deplorable physical state with floors full of holes, dilapidated roofs and broken ceilings, etc. These adverse conditions reduce the quality of teaching and learning, and make the environment less conducive for cognitive development. Similar problems bedeviling the scheme include data challenges, low quality education and the millions of school days that are lost due to water and sanitation-related diseases. Effective implementation of the policy could have helped to put more children back into the classroom and check their extreme vulnerability to traffickers (UNICEF, 2012).

Conclusion

In spite of the lofty ideals encapsulated in the Federal Government's Transformation Agenda on basic education, its chances of being realized are limited. As long as State Governments continue to pay lip service to the implementation of the UBE scheme, the basic education system will be far from making the intended impact. To ensure the success of the UBE

scheme, State Governments must play active role in funding mass literacy at the State level by cooperating with the Federal Government in accessing UBE matching grants for the implementation of the scheme. There is need for constitutional amendment to enable the Federal Government acquire the requisite backing and authority to monitor and enforce the implementation of UBE in the States.

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