

In 1999, the Nigerian government introduced Universal Basic Education, a programme to provide free primary and secondary education for all. This programme was created after several unsuccessful attempts at improving education in the country. Unfortunately, although there has been some improvements in enrolment in recent years, its results have been limited and Nigeria's educational system still rates very poorly in most international rankings.

## **The challenge**

Nigeria gained its independence from British rule in 1960, but it took time to develop its own educational system. "Prior to 1977 Nigeria operated an educational policy inherited from Britain at independence. The inability of this policy to satisfy the national aspirations of the country rendered it unpopular. During the 1970s, the foundations were laid for a new policy, and in 1976 the Universal Primary Education (UPE) programme was launched, but it was widely considered to be unsuccessful. "A National Seminar was organised by the National Educational Research and Development Council (NERDC) in 1973... This gave rise to the National Policy on Education in 1977. The policy was then revised in 1981 and 1990 to try to ensure that the education sector was supportive of government development goals.

School enrolment was still low at the beginning of 1990s – as of 1990, gross enrolment ratio in primary school was at 86%, but it had dropped to a mere 25% by the time children reached secondary school. The education sector infrastructure also deteriorated and was neglected. In 1997, the federal minister of education – while on a nationwide tour of the country's schools – allegedly stated that "the basic infrastructure in schools such as classrooms, laboratories, workshops, sporting facilities, equipment, libraries were in a state of total decay. The physical condition of most schools was reported to be pathetic.

## **The initiative**

The Universal Basic Education (UBE) programme in Nigeria was launched in 1999, with the goal of providing "free, universal and compulsory basic education for every Nigerian child aged 6-15 years". The programme, however, was not able to take off immediately after its launch as it did not have legal backing. Therefore, initial UBE-related activities were carried out only in areas of social mobilisation, infrastructural development, provision of instructional materials, etc. The UBE programme only took off effectively with the signing of the UBE Act in April 2004.

The main beneficiaries of the programme are:

- Children aged 3-5 years, for Early Children Care and Development Education (ECCDE);
- Children aged 6-11+ years for primary school education;
- Children aged 12-14+ years for junior secondary school education.

Its scope included the following expansion of activities in basic education:

- "Programmes and initiatives for [ECCDE];
- "Programmes and initiatives for the acquisition of functional literacy, numeracy and life skills, especially for adults (persons aged 15 and above).
- "Out-of-school, non-formal programmes for the updating of knowledge and skills for persons who left school before acquiring the basics needed for lifelong learning;
- "Special programmes of encouragement to all marginalised groups: girls and women, nomadic populations, out-of-school youth and the *almajiris* (*Qur'anic student*);
- "Non-formal skills and apprenticeship training for adolescents and youth, who have not had the benefit of formal education."

## **The public impact**

There has been some improvement to education in Nigeria since the programme started, but it has been marginal considering its span of almost two decades:

- As of 2015, Nigeria ranked 103 out of 118 countries in UNESCO's Education for All (EFA) Development Index, which takes into account universal primary education, adult literacy, quality of education, and gender parity.
- UNESCO's 2015 review of education in Nigeria found that enrolment at primary and junior secondary levels had greatly increased since 2000. However, transition and completion rates remained below 70%.
- Enrolment rates increased by 130% for secondary education in the period from 2000 to 2013 (based on the latest available statistics from the World Bank), but decreased by 4% for primary level.

In its latest review of Nigeria's educational standing in 2015, UNESCO has concluded that although progress has been made in basic education, much more remains to be done, both in quantity and quality:

- Participation in primary education is still low in comparison with primary school age population;
- The quality of the national school curriculum is undermined by the generally low quality of teachers who implement it, which translates into low levels of learning achievement;
- Infrastructure, toilets and furniture are inadequate and in a dilapidated state;
- The system of collecting comprehensive, relevant data for planning is weak;
- There are social and cultural barriers that are hindering female participation;
- There is a lack of enforcement of the UBE Act 2004 on enrolment and retention.

## **What did and didn't work**

All cases in our Public Impact Observatory have been evaluated for performance against the elements of our Public Impact Fundamentals.

### **Legitimacy**

#### **Public Confidence Weak**

Although the Nigerian public viewed the objectives of the UBE positively, their perception of the country's education infrastructure – as well as the government and institutions responsible for running it – were negative.

A study produced for the World Bank in 2000 on the Nigerian education sector concluded that: “The public perception is that the quality of education offered is low and that standards have dropped. These perceptions are based on lack of adherence to acceptable educational practice. Teacher qualifications are low. The learning environment does not promote effective learning. Basic facilities, teaching and learning resources are generally not available. Teacher-pupil ratios are high. General performance in examinations is poor and the graduates have low levels of competencies in the work environment.”

Corruption was also a factor affecting public confidence. According to a survey conducted by GeoPoll in Nigeria, over half of respondents reported that they frequently encounter corruption in public services, especially in the education

sector. “54 percent of Nigerians report that they always or frequently encounter corruption in their interactions with public services. The poll surveyed 2,000 Nigerians about their experiences with corruption in fundamental sectors and found that while Nigerians consider education and electricity to be among the most important public services, they are also seen as the most corrupt. The poll also found that the poorest Nigerians are most affected by corruption.

### **Stakeholder Engagement Weak**

The main stakeholders involved in the Nigerian education policy were the federal government, state governments, as well as some international institutions that have provided support over the years.

However, although there is a clear responsibility and involvement of state actors in terms of implementation and funding, there is no evidence of communication or consultations between institutions at the federal and state level in the design of the UBE programme, which led to misalignment later in the implementation phase. UNESCO mentions, for example, that insufficient consultation with the states in designing and implementing the UBE programme, including project selection, has been one of the main causes of problems in the funding allocations in the years since its launch.

### **Political Commitment Fair**

The Government of Nigeria has made recurrent attempts to reform its education system since the 1970s, but has lacked the alignment and political continuity to implement its programmes successfully.

Although UPE has been announced as a priority by every Nigerian government since its introduction in the 1970s, the actual commitment of the different governments to the scheme has varied substantially. The economic problems encountered have also contributed to the difficulties experienced in its implementation.

Despite being set up with specific targets, funds and implementation procedure, the national education policy faced significant discontinuity between governments, which negatively affected commitment and consistency across the years. “Educational policies were formulated by various governments, but political instability stalled or discouraged the political will to implement such policies. As new governments came in quick succession and with relative uncertainty, continuity in policies could not be guaranteed. Every political player was in a hurry

to help himself before he was displaced by another group. This has affected educational policy implementation in Nigeria.”.

## **Policy**

### **Clear Objectives Fair**

The objectives of the UBE initiative were stated at the outset, with some measurable targets and some less well-defined objectives:

- “Develop in the entire citizenry a strong consciousness for education and a strong commitment to its vigorous promotion;
- “Provide free, universal basic education for every Nigerian child of school-going age;
- “Reduce drastically the incidence of drop-out from the formal school system (through improved relevance, quality and efficiency);
- “Cater for the learning needs of young persons who, for one reason or another, have had to interrupt their schooling, through appropriate forms of complementary approaches to the provision and promotion of basic education;
- “Ensure the acquisition of 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 lifelong learning.

### **Evidence Weak**

The programme was expected to be a continuation of the UPE programme, which was abandoned in 1976, and was similar to its predecessor in many respects. President Obasanjo launched the new UBE programme in September 1999 in order to realise the country’s educational ambitions, but it shared with UPE many of the elements that had made the previous initiative unsuccessful.

A study published in 2006 reviewing both programmes concluded that the problems affecting the UBE were the same as those that affected its predecessor, and there was no evidence of improvements to its formats after the re-launch. “[UBE’s] problems are the same as those that handicapped the implementation of the UPE. This indicates that the re-launching of the UPE with the new nomenclature of UBE did not result from any lesson that was learned from the failure of the UPE. The quality of education at the primary level today is worse than the pre-1976 era.”.

## **Feasibility Fair**

Nigeria has implemented several initiatives since the 1970s to improve their education sector, but they have had important challenges to their implementation, which have compromised the resources and infrastructure required to achieve these programmes' goals.

The key elements and resources for the implementation of the UBE initiative were established in the UBE Act and the National Policy on Education (revised 2004). Some of the policy initiatives from this law include:

- It requires every government in Nigeria to provide compulsory, free, UBE for every child in primary or junior secondary school
- It establishes that all services in public primary and junior secondary schools are to be free of charge – and penalties are prescribed for those who do not comply
- Parents have a duty to enrol their children, and make sure they complete the basic education cycle – with penalties for noncompliance.
- A provision is made to finance the UBE from – a federal government grant of not less than 2% of its Consolidated Revenue Fund, funds or contributions in form of federal guaranteed credits, and local and international donor grants.

In this regard, funding availability for the programme has not actually been a limitation but rather its allocation and accessibility. "It is on record that between 2000 and 2008, the sum of NGN22.6 billion that had been allocated to some public tertiary institutions, state Ministries of Education and Universal Basic Education Boards by the Education Trust Fund was not accessed during the period."

Similarly, human capacity for UBE delivery has been a constraint on programme delivery. A UNESCO report states that the government committed to have the human resource base necessary to manage and implement the UBE Scheme by 2015.

## **Action**

### **Management Weak**

The implementation of the UBE programme is overseen by the UBE Commission (UBEC), with a range of other institutions specifically responsible for education in

the country. However, there is no clarity on the management structures and guidelines for the programme's delivery.

Basic education administration and management in Nigeria is the responsibility of Local Education Authorities (LGEAs) under the supervision of State Universal Basic Education Boards (SUBEBs) and the UBEC at the federal level. There are a large number of other institutions, including: the National Commission for Nomadic Education (NCNE), the National Commission for Mass Literacy, Adult and Non-formal Education (NMEC), the National Teachers' Institute (NTI), the Nigerian Education and Research Development Council (NERDC), the National Commission for Colleges of Education (NCCE) and the Teachers' Registration Council of Nigeria (TRCN).

Many argue that, with this array of organisations, the country's institutional framework lacks a clearly defined structure. A study published in 2015, which reviewed a decade of the UBE programme, concluded that "Nigeria does not possess the required executive capacity to effectively implement the UBE programme because of the overlapping functions of bureaucratic agencies. The Nigerian education sector suffers from weak capacity at the institutional, organisational and individual levels. They observed that a weak institutional framework that has multiple agencies with overlapping roles and responsibilities remains unreformed."

### **Measurement Fair**

There is some evidence of tracking and measurement of basic education data by the UBEC after 2007. However, measurements and monitoring since the outset of the different education initiatives have been weak, and improved only slightly over time.

The UBEC published some basic education data after 2007, including:

- Enrolment by the state for different educational levels (primary, junior secondary school, senior secondary school)
- The number of teachers by state for different educational levels
- The annual reports after 2012. The reporting format, however, changes every couple of years, which makes it difficult to track progress effectively.

UNESCO's Education review of Nigeria in 2015 addresses this challenge as one of the main obstacles to achieving progress. "The 2002 Global Monitoring Report documented the fact that Nigeria was one of the countries in sub-Saharan Africa

without data on UPE. The report also shows that Nigeria had no data on Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) and Net Enrolment Ratio (NER), and that the country is one of the 11 African countries at serious risk of not achieving the goal. The exercise to analyse progress towards the goal of UPE has been based on country net enrolment ratios, and these countries had NERs of less than 80%.”

Other papers reviewing the initiative also point out that the monitoring systems in place were not appropriate. “Effective performance management systems and efficient monitoring and evaluation within government can help to assess the progress made in the key educational policy priority areas, yet have not been implemented.”

### **Alignment Weak**

The structural alignment of institutions at the national level is not strong, with several organisations overlapping, or with unclear management objectives.

The UBE framework has been described, by Professor Pai Obanya, as “a clear case of discordant dancing to the same musical tune”. Nigeria’s UBE was originally conceived to be a coordinated response to the challenge of basic education. However, it has not managed to achieve that degree of coordination, as there are three different government institutions for basic education: the UBEC, the NMEC, and the NCNE.

A similar lack of coordination is replicated at state level. “The primary section of UBE is controlled by the SUBEB, while the junior secondary segment is under the control of a Secondary Education Board. Second, the chair of SUBEB is a direct appointee of the state governor and stands on the same pedestal as the head of the education sector in the state – the commissioner for education. Consequently, there is a situation in which a SUBEB is headed by an ‘executive chairman’, who reports directly to the state governor. By the Act establishing the SUBEBs, it means that a large bulk of the school system is under the direct control of the SUBEBs excluding the state ministries of education.”

The under-utilisation of funds has also become a major challenge in the implementation of the UBE programme. Several reasons relate to the lack of alignment:

- Insufficient consultation with the states in the design and implementation of the UBE programme;

- Inadequate policy coordination across three tiers of government in the implementation;
- Lack of capacity within states to use funds in accordance with the guidelines;
- Complex conditions for accessing the funds and the associated bureaucracy;
- Lack of capacity and political will at the federal level to amend guidelines in light of experience and to drive through disbursements, etc.

Moreover, the economic difficulties of the country aggravate the situation at the household level, where the levels of poverty make it difficult for parents and families to support children's education. "The UBE programme was not actually performing on its mandate because of the harsh economic realities of parents, which have forced many school age children out of school in search of means of livelihood through hawking or other menial jobs."

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