

Basic Education in Nigeria and Attainment of Goal Four (4) of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs): Challenges and Prospects

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Abstract

Education is fundamental to national development. Basic and primary education forms the substructure in any education system. In recognition of this, the Goal (4) of the SDGs is tailored towards the realization of quality education at all levels. Focusing mainly on the basic and primary education, this paper utilize secondary data to examine the causes of high rate of out- of - school children in Nigeria as well as its implication on Goal (4) of the SDGs. The paper reveals that the high rate of out- of- school children is a sword of Damocles hanging on the progress of basic education. Among other strategy, the paper recommends that there should be increased private participation, more involvement of Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) in the provision of basic and primary education under the regulation of the government.

Keywords: Basic education, Sustainable development Goal, Nigeria, Out of school children

INTRODUCTION

Education plays a very important role in the national life of any country. This explains why Jegede (2017) submitted that education is the propelling power of any development in any nation or community. Whether political, socio-economic and other forms of development, no nation can make any appreciable progress without recourse to education which is the pivot on which all development sit. In recognition of this fact, efforts were made at global level to ensure the provision of basic education by countries of the world to their citizens. For instance, the Jomtien 1990 World Conference on Education for All (EFA) followed in the year 2000 by the Dakar World Education Forum both of which focused the world's attention on basic and primary education.

Similarly, in appreciating the importance of education particularly the basic education to national development, the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria as amended (section, 18) as part of the fundamental objectives and directive principles of state policy stated that: *Government shall direct its policy toward ensuring that there are equal and adequate educational opportunities at all levels. Government shall strive to eradicate illiteracy and to this end, government shall as when practicable provide:*

- (a) *Free, compulsory and universal primary education*
- (b) *Free university education; and*
- (c) *Free adult literacy programme*

In a quest to ensure the realization of education in general and basic and primary education which this paper is concerned with, the Universal Basic Education (UBE) programme was introduced in Nigeria in 1999 and the enabling Act was enacted in 2004. The purpose of the programme among others is to reduce the high rate of illiteracy and school dropout. Specifically, the UBE programme which was launched to ensure the provision of basic and primary education has the following specific objectives in the implementation guideline:

- i. Develop in the entire citizenry a strong consciousness for education and a strong commitment to its vigorous promotion;
- ii. The provision of free, Universal Basic Education for every Nigerian of school going age;
- iii. Reducing drastically the incidence of dropout from the formal school system;
- iv. Catering for the learning needs of young persons who for one reason or the other have had to interrupt the school through appropriate forms of complementary approaches to the provision and promotion to basic education;
- v. Ensuring the acquisition of the ethical, moral and civic values needed for the laying of a solid foundation for life- long learning.

This paper therefore intends to investigate the delivery of basic and primary education in Nigeria in the light of attaining the Goal four (4) of the SDGs by the year 2030

Statement of the Problem

Global efforts such as the organization of the Jomtien 1990 World Conference on Education for All (EFA) and the Dakar World Education Forum were geared mainly towards the provision of basic and primary education. In pursuant to the objective of realizing basic and primary education, Nigeria enacted the Universal basic Education (UBE) Act, 2004 and its implementation started in 2005. Despite all these efforts, the goal of provision of basic and primary education has not been realized.

Jegede (2017) based on the UNESCO Institute for Statistics reports in 2013 revealed that Nigeria has the highest rate of out-of-school children in the world. This means that a significant proportion of children's populations are out of school. Similarly, United Nations Children Fund (UNICEF) in 2018 reported that 90% Nigeria children of pre-primary age are not enrolled in school (www.vanguard.com/2018). Only 10% of children between 0-8years across Nigeria are enrolled in Early Childhood Development (ECD) which is an integral part of basic education which the UBE scheme is to achieve. This is worrisome because the cognitive growth of every child depends solely on ECD programme.

Furthermore, the worrisome state of basic education in Nigeria was confirmed by a UBEC report which stated that 13.2 million children are out of school (Adedigba, 2018). This ugly development ranked Nigeria as having the highest number of out-of-school children in the world. This was an outcome of Demographic Health Survey (DHS) exercise conducted by Nigerian government and UNICEF in 2015. The overall implication of these reports is that many Nigerian children are yet to be provided basic education by the government.

Objectives of the Paper

The specific objectives of this paper are to;

- i. examine the causes of high rate of out-of-school children; and
- ii. explain the implications of high rate of out-of-school children on the attainment of goal four (4) of the SDGs.

Methodology

This paper relied mainly on the use of secondary data while the presentation and analysis is descriptive. Content analysis of reports, relevant books, journals and internet information were utilized.

Briefs on Basic Education and the UBE Act

Basic education is fundamental to human and national development as it is the foundation upon which other levels of education are built and a necessary requirement for human and national progress (Joel, 2014). It is axiomatic that no nation ever developed technologically, economically and socially without first investing its resources in basic education. The Universal Basic Education programme was introduced in Nigeria in September, 1999 by President Olusegun Obasanjo to serve as a catalyst to the entire Nigerian education system but most specifically the basic education sub-sector. It is also important to note that adult and informal education have been incorporated into the UBE scheme. The UBE implementation guidelines brought out the specific objective of UBE as:

- (a) Developing in the entire citizenry a strong consciousness for education and a strong commitment to its vigorous promotion;
- (b) The provision of force, universal basic education for every Nigerian of school going age;
- (c) Reducing drastically the incidence of dropout from the formal school system;
- (d) Catering for the learning needs of young persons who, for one reason or another, have had to interrupt their schooling through appropriate forms of complimentary approaches to the provision and promotion of basic education; and
- (e) Ensuring the acquisition of the ethical, moral and civic values needed for the laying of a solid foundation for life-long learning.

The UBE Act 2004 stipulated that the programme comprises Early Child Care and Development Education (ECCDE), six years of primary education and three years of Junior Secondary Education.

Briefs on Goal Four (4) of the SDGs

The SDGs is a plan of action for people, plants and prosperity. It is also referred to as the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The SDGs contain seventeen (17) inspirational goals and one hundred and sixty nine (169) targets between them as a post 2015 Development agenda as documented at (www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment). This paper focuses mainly on goal four (4) of the SDGs and this is because it relates to the provision of education particularly basic education. The goal four (4) and some of its targets are:

Goal 4: Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote life-long learning

opportunities for all. The targets are:

4.1 By 2030, ensure that all girls and boys complete free equitable and quality primary and secondary education leading to relevant and effective learning outcomes

4.2 By 2030, Ensure that all girls and boys have access to quality early childhood

development care and pre-primary education so that they are ready for primary education.

From this brief outline of goal four (4), it is clear that attainment of high education standard starting from the basic and primary education through secondary education and to the tertiary education by all nations of the world is a cardinal goal of SDGs and basic education forms the substructure for the realization of strong and productive educational system.

Theoretical Framework

The organismic perspective of system theory shall guide the explanation of basic education and goal four (4) of the SDGs in this paper. The organismic perspective is an attempt to study and understand an organism, policy, programme, entity or sector as a living organism. A system is meant to achieve a particular goal and is dependent upon the effective functioning of its parts called sub-systems. Each sub-system performs a series of needed activities to make the whole entity alive and functioning. Basic and primary education is a sub-sector of an educational sector and it forms the basis on which both secondary and tertiary sub-sectors are erected. Proper functioning of basic and primary education is necessary for the effectiveness and efficiency of the education sector. The education sector in entirety operates in an environment i.e social, economic, technological, legal, etc and its ability to relate and manage the challenges within its environment through constant adjustment to a greater extent determines its survival and success.

Basic and primary education is part of the entire educational system which should be functional and productive for other sectors of the society to work effectively. Since education is fundamental to development, realization of the goals of basic education as embedded in goal four (4) of the SDGs is central to the attainment of other goals in the Agenda 2030.

Causes of High Rate of Out-of-School Children

The high rate of out-of-school children i.e those that are unable to receive basic education is quite alarming. Many reasons can be adduced for this downward fortune of basic and primary education in Nigeria. These include;

Parental/guardians attitude: This attitude is rooted in poverty and ignorance that makes parents to attach little or no value to basic education. Instead of being enrolled in school to acquire basic education, some parents and guardian encourage their children to work in low paid jobs often to supplement low income of their family. The lack of parental will to encourage and support their children to enroll in school for basic education at the right age has been partly responsible for high rate of out-of-school children.

Almajiri Education System: The *Almajiri* education pattern has also contributed to high rate of out-of-school children. Onuoha (2013) stated that the system which started in Northern Nigeria around eleventh century AD involves sending male children to far away places to learn Islamic education. Its success in the past was because the host community took responsibility for the children's welfare. Presently some are left at the mercy of teachers/instructors who convert them into street beggars and they are denied of formal basic education.

Displacement Due to Insurgency: The emergence of Boko Haram insurgency in North-East Nigeria in 2009 has led to massive displacement of people mostly women and children. Some school facilities were destroyed and a great number of which were sent out of school thereby denying them the necessary basic education. Similarly, Fulani-Herder conflicts, armed banditry have all brought displacements and denial of children to basic education.

Absence of Infrastructure: School infrastructure such as road, classroom, furniture are not available and where they are, they are not in proper shape especially in the rural areas. This discourages enrolment of children and leads to high rate of out-of-school children.

Population Explosion: Another factor that causes high rate of out-of-school children is population increase. For instance, when Nigeria got independence in 1960, the population of citizens stood at 45.2 million people and by 2015 the population has quadrupled to 180 million and at the estimated annual growth of 3.6%, Nigeria's population is expected to double by the year 2050. The implication on socio-economic, infrastructural

usage is quiet enormous. This explosion in population growth has been partly responsible for high rate of out-of-school since the population is obviously out-spacing the available facilities for human usage.

Implications of high rate of out-of-school Children on attainment of Goal Four (4) of the SDGs

The high rate of out-of-school children means lack of access to basic education which is a cardinal target of goal four (4) of the SDGs. Therefore, implication of the later on the former can be explained from the following dimensions:

Poor early childhood development: The early childhood development education is part of basic education. However, the high rate of out-of-school children means that most children are unable to acquire basic cognitive skills and development at pre-primary level of education. The implication is that the primary and other higher level of education of children are impaired due to lack of the basic foundation.

Absence of relevant learning outcomes: Basic education is always acquired at formative stage of life where character and values are molded to enable the child contribute positively to the society in the future. Out-of-school children who lack basic education also lack morals, character and values but only learn bad habits and other vices from the streets and the environment. Due to this vacuum in upbringing, most of these children grow up to commit crime and perpetrate violence which adversely affects the realization of other goals in the SDGs like Goal 16 - Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all level”.

Difficulties in attaining complete free, equitable and quality primary and secondary education for all boys and girls by the year 2030: The target of ensuring access to quality early childhood development for all children of school going age as one of the targets under SDGs also remains a mirage. The number of out-of-school children in Nigeria has not shown any sign of decline since the past one decade rather it has been on the increase. The overall consequence is high rate of illiteracy and unemployment awaits the country since a significant proportion of the children who are leader of tomorrow are out-of-school.

Strategies to Curb High rate of out-of-school Children

In order to stem the tide of high rate of out-of-school children, there is need for the adoption of certain measures:

Increase in private sector participation: Through established and regulated institutions, the government needs to get private sector involved in the provision of basic education through appropriate legislations. This is necessary to meet up with the ever increasing demand for basic education in the face of population increase.

Restructuring of Almajiri education system: This can be achieved by making more political commitment and will to integrate the Almajiri education system into the formal educational system for government to increase her role in funding and provision of personnel. This will reduce the rate of out-of-school children as many children especially in Northern Nigeria will be removed from the street.

Media Advocacy: The Media in collaboration with Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) should help in creating awareness among parents and guardians on the importance of basic education in order to reverse the current trend of ignorance and poverty in some part of the country.

Increase in Funding: It is no longer news that budgetary allocation to the education sector has not been very encouraging. Education sector was allocated 6.1%, 5.4% and 7.04% in the Nigerian annual budget in the year 2016, 2017 and 2018 respectively (www.businessdayonline). These allocations fell short of the United

Nations Education Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)'s bench mark of 15 – 20% of the national budget that should be earmarked for the education sector. There are basic/primary, secondary and tertiary education sub-sectors in the educational system that need to share this allocation. The proportion that will eventually get to basic and primary education subsector is too meager. Government should therefore increase its budgetary allocation to education and other relevant agencies should be strengthened to increase the financial buoyancy of the basic education sector.

Increase in reproductive health education: This measure should be adopted to stem the high rate of population increase. Parents should be encouraged to practice child spacing as well as giving birth to the number of children they can adequately cater for so as not to be liability on the society.

Conclusion

Basic education remains the bed rock of entire education system. The high rate of the number of out-of-school children is a major threat not only to the education system but to the attainment of the Goal Four (4) of the SDGs. Increasing the participation of the private sector as well as allocating more fund to the education sector is highly imperative.

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