Towards A Policy Brief On Delaying Early Marriage In Northern Nigeria Through Girls’ Education - Evidence From The Consortium Project

Summary of findings

The development Research and Projects Centre (dRPC) is supporting a Consortium of three indigenous Nigerian NGOs in promoting girls’ education in some Northern States (Kaduna and Kano). The project is funded by the Ford Foundation and anchored by Action Aid Nigeria. The main objective of this project is to contribute to the delay of early marriages of girls in Northern Nigeria through girls’ education programmes such as girls’ camps and mentoring. The project holds that if more girls and their parents are sensitized enough to attend and complete secondary education, that would substantially delay their early marriages, with overall health benefits for the girls.

An end of project review which has taken recently taken place and generated important findings about what works in girls’ education. Given that Nigeria 2015 marks the final year of the 4-year Strategic Plan for the Development of the Education Sector, and that the Federal Ministry of Education is now poised to develop the new Plan, findings from this project are particularly significant as they offer lessons and point to strategic directions that the new Plan may wish to consider. The issue of education is the focus of study approved by the last administration for the 2015 Senior Executive Course of the National Institute for Policy and Strategic Studies (NIPSS) Kuru, with the theme: Repositioning Nigeria’s Education System for Global Competitiveness. As is customary every year, NIPSS will soon present the report of its findings to Mr. President. As governmental think tanks such as NIPSS and non-state research institutes such as the dRPC, the Nigerian Economic Summit Group explore the relevance of education for the health and development of the nation it is important action follows research findings.
1. Introduction

The key findings of the Consortium Project end of project assessment point to the following:

1. Government Girls Secondary Schools do not provide opportunities for girls to learn craft subjects for livelihood as envisaged in the new WAEC Curriculum.

2. That when girls participate in safe space clubs they become more confident and perform better in exams.

3. That NGOs working on girls’ education programs require a platform to give feedback to all stakeholders on their findings. Feedback should also be treated as important and incorporated into the planning process.

4. That the training of teachers, child protection issues should be deepened, conducted and carried out with government support.

5. Parents continue to be sceptical about the benefits of sending girls to schools as they do not see the economic benefits. It is therefore to develop a strong school to work programs for girls at risk of child marriage.

6. Community and religious leaders are important stakeholders with tremendous capacity to support girls’ education when consulted, mobilized and included in interventions.

7. That NGO advocacy around the right to education laws provide opportunities to increase awareness of poor access for girls and constitute an important mobilization point.

This presentation is guided by two main questions:

1. Whether the current Education Sector Strategic Plan (2011-2015) addresses the findings of the Consortium Project to delay the age of marriage?

2. What recommendations could be proposed to education planners based on the findings of the Consortium project and how would those recommendations shape the new education plan?

To address these questions, the presenter was required to do a brief review of the current Education Plan and to conduct a quick interview with officials of the Federal Ministry of Education. Following this Introduction, the presentation is divided into three sections: A Brief Review of the Current Education Plan; Report of the Interview with the Director of Education Planning at the FME and Suggestions on Policy Input for the next Education Plan.

II. A Brief Review of the 4-Year Education Sector Strategic Plan, 2011-2015

The Education Plan signifies the readiness of the Federal Ministry of Education, under the former
Minister of Education, Professor Ruqayyatu Ahmed Rufa’i, to boldly tackle the challenges hampering the Nigerian Education System from playing its key national development role. It seeks not only to present the Education Component of the Transformation Agenda of the former Administration but also articulate for the four-year plan period activities targeted towards addressing specific challenges. The Plan draws from the rich resource of available development oriented documents that already exist in the sector. These include the Roadmap for the Nigerian Education Sector, the One Year Strategy for the Development of the Education Sector, May 2010-April 2011 and the Report of the Presidential Task Team on Education. In addition, views of individuals and groups within the Nigerian Education Sector were harnessed and embedded in the Plan. It is divided into six focal areas:

1. Strengthening the Institutional Management of Education
2. Access and Equity
3. Standard and Quality Assurance
4. Teacher Education and Development
5. Technical and Vocational Education and Training
6. Funding, Partnerships and Resource Mobilization

The Plan, in line with the goals of the Transformation Agenda envisaged that at the end of the Plan period, the Nigerian Education System is able to start to effectively support Nigeria’s human Capacity needs and meet developmental objectives.

This would mean the availability of:

— Highly-skilled world-class manpower and
— World class institutions in Nigeria with
  • world class infrastructure;
  • world class learning resources; and
  • World class teachers.

The Plan identifies the responsibilities of departments, units, parastatals of the Federal Ministry of Education, State governments and other relevant stakeholders towards meeting the set goals. In addition, timeline for completion of activities over the four years were provided. The Plan also defines strategies and initiatives that will strengthen the role the Federal Ministry of Education, through the establishment of effective National Systems to maintain minimum standards. The outlines of such National Systems are six. These are:

1. Nigeria Education Management Information System (NEMIS)
2. Teacher Development Needs Assessment system (TDNA)
3. Monitoring Learning Achievement (MLA)
4. Guidance and Counselling System (G & C)
5. Quality Assurance (QA)
6. School-Based Management Committees (SBMC)

It is indeed a plan that attempts to implement strategies that will make “education” more functional beyond “schooling” where emphasis is on certification. It is recognized that Education is not synonymous with schooling. What really distinguishes education from schooling is its
emphasis on development. The purpose of development of individuals is to enable them to contribute to the development of society. For this reason, the Plan lays emphasis on Technical and Vocational Education & Training (TVET) as the “master key” to unlocking our future. Nigeria is uniquely positioned to be able to harness and distribute its resources for sustenance of its population and to those of others. This self-reliant disposition can be nurtured in the vast number of the unemployed youth through education and training. The curricula and syllabi ought to reflect this by providing the knowledge and skills that will position citizens to actively pursue careers such as mechanised agriculture, entrepreneurship, natural resource development and processing, export-based industry and outsourcing, all to be enabled on the platform of cutting edge technology.

We now highlight some of key elements of the Education Plan:

**· Standards and Quality Assurance**

Quality Assurance is a major challenge of Nigeria's education system. A critical look at the educational institutions reveals low standard and quality of schools and their products. Infrastructural decay, obsolete facilities, poor teacher quality, mass failure in public examinations, cultism, examination malpractice and maladministration, are indicators of the poor state of education in Nigeria. Most primary and secondary schools lack the essential infrastructure to enable them function. They lack adequate support services that enhance teaching and learning. For meaningful national development, academic excellence should be complemented with sound character, emotional stability, good health and respect for fellow citizens.

There has been a considerable international interest in establishing ways of monitoring the quality of education in schools. Much of this has focused on the need to shift emphasis of school inspection away from physical enumeration of school facilities to assessment of teaching and learning processes. This process combines critical self-assessment with independent external assessment. Quality Assurance is generally more cooperative and less inquisitorial than traditional ways of inspecting schools. It is developed as a reaction to the failure of school inspection systems to assessment of what actually goes on in the classroom and its relation to student learning. The main objective of school inspections are to: ensure that learning takes place in schools; ensure that the required standards are being maintained; make sure schools are accountable to their proprietors (in the case of public schools, the government) and their customers (parents and students); provide guidance on how schools can improve; and build up a picture of how well schools are performing for informed policy decisions. This list could be expanded. Judged against any of the objectives on the list, school inspection in Nigeria would be found wanting.

The situation in our schools is further compounded by weak and inadequate quality assurance mechanisms. The result is ineffective school supervision and inspection by the Federal, the State
and Local government operatives. To compound the uncertainty over institutional jurisdiction, there have been recurrent problems of low capacity, with inspectorate services traditionally regarded as a dumping ground for unwanted staff. Postings to the inspectorate are perceived as “punishment” or a ‘waiting room’ for retirees.

At the tertiary level, the concern is related to instability of the academic calendar, infrastructural decay and obsolete equipment among others. All these culminate in the lowering of the quality of graduates from tertiary institutions. In addition, existing tertiary education curricula are out-dated and, therefore, largely irrelevant to our national needs and global competitive demands. Other challenges to education quality include:

- non professionalization of Education Quality Assurance practice;
- absence of a comprehensive Standard and Quality Assurance Standards Policy document;
- lack of synergy among relevant stakeholders in Quality Assurance, resulting in institutional constraints and role conflict;
- weak support structure for Students Industrial Work Experience Scheme (SIWES);
- low learning outcomes in literacy, numeracy and life skills;
- inadequate deployment of ICT for teaching and learning purposes;
- inadequate capacity of educational institutions to undertake internal/comparative quality assessment; and
- Inadequate mechanisms for identifying learners with special needs and the gifted children. Educational projects and programmes in the next four years will have to address these key challenges in order to improve education quality and bring about the desired transformation of Nigeria.

The Turn around Strategies proposed for the Focal Area of Standard and Quality Assurance are clustered around five critical education issues, namely:

i. policy coordination;
ii. educational input (infrastructure, instructional materials, ICT, etc.);
iii. process issues arising from implementation of educational programmes and services;
iv. benchmarking and setting of educational standards; and
v. assessment, monitoring, and evaluation issues.

Specific actions to perform in order to address these challenges include:

- reviewing and strengthening legal framework for educational institutions and regulatory agencies;
- undertaking capacity building of school inspectors and supervisors;
• professionalization of education standard and quality assurance practice;
• strengthening partnerships/collaboration among relevant stakeholders;
• establish a Quality Assurance Management Information System that links with NEMIS;
• reviewing and enriching the existing school curricular;
• development of instructional materials (such as textbooks, syllabi, etc);
• establishment of a standardized assessment system for monitoring and reporting learning achievement;
• provision and monitoring of Direct Teaching and Laboratory Cost Grant (DTLC);
• provision and monitoring of Teaching and Research Equipment Grant;
• establishing and equipping of Guidance and Counselling Units in all schools;
• provision of ICT infrastructure and equipment in all schools;
• introduction of e-learning to expand access to quality education;
• implementation of the provisions of the National Information Technology Education Framework; and
• rehabilitation and development of infrastructural facilities across sectors of education

• Teacher Education Development

The Nigerian education system is faced with large number of teachers unable to manage the classroom of the 21st century. This state of affairs is not only antithetical to growth and development; it is also counterproductive. Assessment for career advancement of teachers is unsatisfactory mainly because promotions are based on years of service rather than quality of output. This brings about laziness, lack of creativity and commitment and general inefficiency in the system. The impact of the low remuneration and delayed salary payment, include high attrition rate, low morale and motivation to teach, endless struggle to make ends meet; sometimes toiling as ‘okada’ riders. Such teachers can neither inspire confidence nor command respect of those they teach. Consequently, teachers are no longer regarded as role models. The cumulative effects of poor teaching-learning conditions and teaching incentives are low performance and poor teacher retention rate. Teachers work in very poor physical environments with limited professional support and tools. They also contend with overcrowded classrooms of an average teacher: student ratio.

The challenges of poor teacher quality become more pronounced in the following teacher education development areas:

i. pre-Service teacher education;
ii. Orientation and induction of new teachers;
iii. Continuing professional development for teachers;
iv. School leadership recruitment, appointment
and training;

v. framework for teaching standards; and

vi. Incentives to attract and retain quality teachers

**• Funding, Partnerships, and Resource Mobilization & Utilization**

Funding is the life blood of every enterprise and the Nigerian educational system is not an exception. The sources of funding education in Nigeria broadly include government, private sector, nongovernmental organisations, International Development Partners and faith-based organisations. All tiers of government in Nigeria are involved in the funding of education. Constitutionally, local government authorities are responsible for funding primary education, while the states fund secondary education with the exception of the Federal Unity Colleges, which are owned by the Federal Government. Tertiary institutions are funded by their proprietors including the federal, state and private owners.

For the past years, the education budget, as a proportion of total Federal spending, is approximately less than 10%. Even when state and local governments’ spending is included (an estimated 12% of total government expenditure), government spending across all tiers, lies far below the UNESCO guideline of 26%. The present Strategic Plan is interested in exploring new ways of expanding education revenue base, creating conducive environment for greater private sector participation in education funding, accessing intervention funds, and partnering with international donors for greater educational funding opportunities.

**• Technical and Vocational Education & Training (TVET)**

Globally, it is estimated that about eighty per cent (80%) of the jobs undertaken by people require technical and vocational skills. The shortage of appropriately skilled labour across many industries is a big challenge to Nigeria’s economic growth and future development. Labour supply in Nigeria is characterized by abundance of unemployed and under employed workers, mostly in the agriculture and informal sectors. The ability of Nigeria to realize the vision of becoming one of the twenty largest economies in the world by the year 2020 is largely dependent on the capacity to transform its youth into highly skilled and competent citizens capable of competing globally. A major part of the responsibility for preparing such a workforce rests on the nation’s education sector. It is for this reason that commitment to TVET must be strengthened. To be competitive in the current global economy, Nigeria needs to develop the appropriate knowledge and skill sets.

Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) is currently not given the attention it deserves in Nigeria. If well developed, TVET could be an avenue for addressing a number of social and economic problems facing the country.

Government policy in the past had not accorded TVET its rightful place within the education sub-sector of the country. TVET in Nigeria is facing many challenges some of which are low enrolment, infrastructural decay, inadequate equipment and training materials. Other challenges are:
i. lack of standardisation and development of non-formal technical and vocational education and training;

ii. dearth of qualified and competent teachers;

iii. low remuneration for skilled vocational workers;

iv. low societal estimation of technical and vocational education and training;

v. poor private sector participation in the implementation of TVET programmes;

vi. low level of entrepreneurship and ICT literacy and utilization;

vii. poor learning outcomes due to poor learning environment;

viii. use of outdated curriculum, which results in a mismatch between what is taught and the needs of the labour market; and

ix. poor management of funds

On The Educational Needs of the Young, the Vulnerable and Children with Special Needs.

In recognition of the importance of education as a veritable tool for national development, a fundamental right of all school-age children, avenue for acquisition of relevant skills and competences for the full development of their potentials, government policies have been directed towards adequate educational opportunities. This is reflected in the high level commitment and concern to the course of the Universal Basic Education, the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and Vision 20:2020, through the instrumentality of education. Unfortunately, these efforts and commitments have suffered setbacks and failed to yield the desired results. The prevailing socioeconomic, cultural, political and institutional hurdles must have indeed hindered considerable access to education from the early childhood care to the tertiary level.

At the basic education level (i.e. basic one, two and three) one out of every three children of school age is out of school. It is estimated that there are about 10.1 million children who are out of school at this level presently, with a high prevalence of excluded girls in the northern part of Nigeria and boys in the south-eastern part.

In order to address this anomaly, a national campaign on access to the girl-child education has been launched in the North-East and plans are on the way to do the same thing for the boy-child education in the South-East. The trickle-down effect of the gains for the launching at the national level to state and grassroots levels is yet to take place. (The problem of boy-child education in the South-East, particularly Anambra State seems to be improving recently. My enquiry reveals that Anambra State scored the highest marks in WAEC and NECO this year).

There is also the perennial challenge of effective integration of the vulnerable, the poor and the totally excluded into the Nigerian education mainstream. The totally excluded groups such as: the almajiri, children with special needs, the
nomadic, the migrant fisher-folks and the adult illiterate population whose contributions to national socio-economic development remain untapped, are part of the great concern.

Presently, there is lack of Sector Plans at the state education levels. This is occasioned by a weak policy-backing to the use of the Plans which constitutes a critical problem that tends to negatively impact on the continuity of projects and invariably on the end users.

Extant evidence suggests that the Organised Private Sector (OPS), Non-Government Organisations (NGOs), Civil Society Organisations (CSOs), Faith-Based Organisations (FBOs), among others, are contributing their own input to access to education. In Lagos state, for example, private enrolment at the early childhood and basic education levels has soared to over 50% of total enrolment (sustained efforts of the NGOs in the North especially as it relates to Girl child and their educational needs will no doubt yield a greater result most especially with Government collaboration). The poor monitoring of private schools across the country poses the risk of abuse by profiteering private providers. It is, therefore, important to revisit the policy on private education provision and review the nature of state collaboration with these non-state providers to strengthen and streamline educational provision across the country.

Lack of access to schools at all levels, therefore, remains a critical issue of concern that causes distortions and disparities in the nation (most especially in the north (Girl-child) and in the south (boy-child)). Therefore, it is imperative that the following turn-around strategies, specific activities, achievable deliverables and time lines be implemented in order to give the future generations of Nigerian children the deserved access to quality education.

III. Report of Interview at the Federal Ministry Education

The following is the summary of the interview that this writer held with the Director, Educational Planning, Research and Development at the Federal Ministry of Education, Abuja, 13th October 2015

1. On whether the current Education Sector Strategic Plan has been reviewed and what are the outcomes?

The Director responded that the Federal Ministry of Education (FME) has started preliminary work on the new Education Strategic Plan. Experts are being consulted. They shall also be carrying out the review of the current plan at the same time. The work on both is at their commencement stages.

2. Does the current Education Sector Strategic Plan address the issue of the use of education to delay early marriages of girls in Northern States?

According to the Director, there is general understanding that if girls are encouraged to attend and complete secondary education, it will drastically reduce early marriages. “The Ministry is conscious of this. It is addressed by policy of Access and Equity in education. We also have Girls Education Project. It is recognized that in many States of the North, attendance of girls to school
is still problematic. Even for boys. That is why the Federal Government embarked on establishing Alamjiri Schools. It is now being changed to TSANGAYA schools. The term “Alamjiri” is considered derogatory.” He also stated that there are two Federal Government Unity Schools in every State of the Federation, one mixed and one for the girls.

3. Is there a policy of Government on school to work programmes for girls in order to delay their early marriages?

According to the Director, there is no specific policy of providing jobs for girls either while in school or after. However the new policy of education has incorporated skills acquisition in schools, called Technical and Vocational Education & Training (TVET). Besides, the Federal Government has established Science and Technical Colleges in each state of the Federation. This is in order to encourage students to become self-reliant after school.

4. On the need for Government support to deepen the training of teachers in child protection.

The Director said it is not only girls that need protection even though they may be more vulnerable than boys. However, according to him, in every Federal Government College, there is a Principal and 5 Vice Principals. For the Senior Secondary, there are VP (Admin) and VP (Academics). There is also VP Junior Secondary. And then there is for the whole school the VP for Special Duties, including labour and transport and VP, Student Affairs. All these measures are to protect students. In addition there are professional Guidance Counsellors.

5. On the involvement of community and religious leaders in the promotion of girls’ education in their communities.

According to the Director, the Ministry has embarked on sensitization tours of some Northern States in this regard but it not systematic or regular. He believes this is very important but a lot will be the responsibility of the States and Local Governments.

6. On the need for platforms for feedback by NGOs working on girls’ education programmes to government and other stakeholders.

The Director stated that the FME is monitoring the activities of NGOs working in the education sector. The same applies to private education providers. He said that there is a process to register all NGOs involved in education matters and issue them certificates. There is a Division within the Ministry that is in charge of that. This measure will be strengthened in the Strategic Plan.
Conclusion: Towards a Policy Brief for the next Education Sector Strategic Plan, 2015-2020

“If the education sector is not reformed in our country, all other developmental efforts would be in vain. It is therefore my hope that President Buhari will put a serious and reform-minded person in the ministry of education to tackle the rot within while putting in place enduring structures to reposition the sector.

It is very important for this administration and other critical stakeholders to understand that the classroom remains the central location of Nigeria’s hope for change.”

- Olusegun Adeniyi, Thisday, October 15, 2015

It is no longer news that the Nigerian education system has serious challenges. The challenge is at all levels from primary to tertiary levels. An eloquent confirmation of this is not just the recent observation of Olusegun Adeniyi in his recent Thursday column (in Thisday newspaper) from where the above quotation is taken. The issue of education is the focus of study approved by the last administration for the 2015 Senior Executive Course of the National Institute for Policy and Strategic Studies (NIPSS) Kuru, with the theme: Repositioning Nigeria’s Education System for Global Competitiveness.

As is customary every year, NIPSS will soon present the report of its findings to Mr. President. From the brief review of the current Education Sector Strategic Plan, 2011-2015 and discussion with the Director, at the Federal Ministry of Education, presented in Sections II and III above, respectively, some few recommendations that should be considered for the next Education Sector Strategic Plan, with particular reference to girls’ education in Northern States, are hereby suggested.
Policy Recommendations

i. The Federal, States and Local Government should work together to promote girl-child education in Northern States through advocacy programmes, particularly in rural areas where most of the out of school girls are located.

ii. There should be a collaborative approach with NGOs and community and religious leaders of the local communities, who in fact should be encouraged take the lead in the campaign.

iii. The advocacy should also focus towards re-orientating the perception of some Muslim parents on the erroneous belief that female education to certain level is antireligious.

iv. The mass campaign for the promotion of female secondary education should take the form of the fight for polio eradication in Nigeria.

v. TVET should be taken more seriously. Provision for learning basic skills should be made compulsory for girls. Such skills should include sewing, cooking, baking, typing, knitting, tie/dye, and subsistence agriculture.

vi. The Northern State Governments should consider building a female University in order to create more opportunity for girls to transit from secondary to university in the North. Such a University will provide a good environment for girls to pursue higher education without the fear of losing their religious practice.

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