

Child Labour and The Progress Towards The Attainment of the Education For All (EFA) Goals in Nigeria

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Abstract

Child labour is a major challenge for the attainment of the goals of Education for All (EFA) in Nigeria. The paper examined the state of child labour in Nigeria and its consequence on the progress towards the attainment of the goals of EFA in Nigeria by the year 2015. The paper argued that child labour can be traced to the culture of the people, which has lots of traits, which are inimical to the goals of Education for All, in particular, for children. The Nigerian government has shown commitment to the EFA plan, however, ineffective implementation of policies and inadequate funding of the educational sector generally are major challenges. Combating child labour and attaining the goals of Education for All in Nigeria, therefore, require the synergy of government at all levels, the private sector and all other stakeholders in the educational sector, in Nigeria.

Introduction

Child labour is a major challenge for the attainment of the goals of Education For All (EFA) in Nigeria. Child labour is defined as, the participation of young children under the age of 15 years in the labour force, with the aim to earn a living or to support household income (Grootaert and Kanbur, 1995). In most developing countries, 1 in every 5 children work; and 1 in every 3 children work in Africa (Nigeria inclusive), though there are significant differences in economic activity rates across these regions (World Bank 2007). Child labour is widespread and has been on the increasing in Nigeria, where 45 percent of the total population, of over 140 million people, has been found to be children under the age of 15 years (PRB, 2009).

A huge 15 million children, under the age of 15 years, are engaged in one form of labour or another in Nigeria. A majority of these children are exposed to long hours of work in very dangerous and unhealthy environments. Children in Nigeria are employed in public places and markets: as street vendors (64%); beggars and shoe shiners (4%); car washers/watchers (6%); scavengers (5%); and feet washers (8%). In northern Nigeria, children who survive on the street by begging are referred to as 'almajirai'. The rise in the rate of child labour in the country might have been a consequence of the demand for cheap labour and poverty (UNICEF, 2006), although, children have always worked in Nigeria.

The philosophy of most cultures in Nigeria, have encouraged children to work with their families, in order to learn skills they would need in adulthood. However, children today are forced to work as a survival strategy for themselves and their family. The money earned by child laborers' has formed a significant part of poor families' income. Child labour has led to mass drop out from primary and secondary schools, increased involvement of children in crime and drug related habits, hampered human capital development, and the development of the potentials of developing countries like Nigeria. There is widespread belief, that employment is destructive to a child's' intellectual and physical development, especially that of young children. Children in Nigeria have been found to spend their time in four main activities, namely: work, school, work/school, and leisure/idle. ILO estimated in 1999, that 24.2 percent of children in Nigeria between the ages of 10 and 14 years have worked. The latter situation was said to have been responsible for the increased rate of child trafficking in Nigeria. Key source and destination countries of trafficked

children from and into Nigeria included: Cameroon, Gabon, Benin, Equatorial Guinea and Togo. Nigeria has been credited to have the highest number of trafficked children and women in Africa, as an estimated 8million Nigerian children, are involved in child trafficking & exploitative labour (NAPTIP, 2008).

The Education for All movement is a global charge to provide quality basic education for all children, youths and adults. The movement was launched at the world Conference on Education for All in 1990, where representatives of the international community accepted to universalize primary education and massively reduce illiteracy level by the end of the decade. The global commitment of EFA emerged as a reaction to the increasing rate of child labour, child trafficking, child exploitation and child related abuses that deprive children of basic education, and an insured future. The cardinal goals of EFA are: (i) to expand early childhood care and education, (ii) provide free and compulsory education for all, (iii) promote learning and life skills for young people and adults, (iv) increase adult literacy by 50 percent and (v) achieve gender parity by 2005 and gender equality by 2015.

The aim of the paper is to examine the incidence of child-labour, its effect on child education, and progress towards the attainment of the goals of Education for All in Nigeria by the year 2015. The paper is divided into five sections: introduction, child-labour and Education for All, Progress towards education for all, laws and initiatives for education for all and a conclusion.

Child Labour and Education For All

Child labour affects both the ability to attend school, and to benefit from schooling; hence it has been identified as major challenge to the attainment of the goals of EFA. When children are employed in one form of labour or the other, they tend to drop out of primary and secondary schools. Child domestic labour, in third-party households, represents a major barrier to access and completion of quality basic education in Nigeria. A majority of out-of-school girls are involved in domestic labour. Girls' involved in domestic labour are made vulnerable to exploitation and abuse and often experience harsh working conditions and are denied of their rights.

Most of the children, who work do not have time, money, nor the energy to go to school. There are about 6 million working children in Nigeria, half of which are girls, and 1 million of them do not attend school at all or are forced to dropout of school due to poverty or because of parents' demand to contribute to the family income. Over 8 million children combine schooling and work. This group of children work during their spare time to raise funds to pay their school fees. In the process they often skip classes due to the demand of the work place (UNICEF, 2006). Missing out on education makes it impossible to break the cycle of poverty and exploitation and prevents children from having better life and a safe future.

There is dearth of data on primary school attendance rates in Nigeria. While school enrollment rates are a sign of the level of commitment to education in Nigeria, they do not always reflect a child's participation in school. The gross primary school enrollment declined in the country, from approximately 86.2 percent in 1993 to 70.3 percent in 1996. The dropout rate for both male and female children in primary schools is relatively high, being around 10 to 15 percent between 1990 and 1994, 64 percent of students' in primary school completed grade five, and only 43.5 percent continued on to junior secondary school.

Progress towards Education for All (EFA)

Substantial progress has been made in Nigeria towards the realization of the cardinal goals of the EFA movement since it was enunciated in 1990, though challenges remain. The federal government has developed a number of educational policies, such as Universal Primary Education (UPE), EFA and Universal Basic Education (UBE), in order to check the problem of school drop outs, the dwindling enrollment in primary and secondary schooling, and educational deterioration generally in the

country. The UPE scheme was instituted by the military government in 1976 to develop the educational capacity of illiterate Nigerians. The scheme was not as effective as expected. More people have been able to go to school, read and write their names, and are better informed, as a result of the scheme. On the other hand, the Universal Basic Education (UBE) was enacted in 1999; it made the first nine years of schooling free and compulsory for all Nigerian children of school age. UBE is backed up by a law that also stipulates free, compulsory and universal primary education, when it is practicable.

Furthermore, a free-lunch policy has been instituted by most states in northern Nigeria to attract mass school enrollment. Under the latter policy pupils are given free lunch in school in addition to the provision of free school uniform, free textbooks, writing and reading materials. There is a National Commission for Mass Literacy (NCML) in the country, which is mandated to put in place programmes and strategies to raise Nigeria's literacy rate and align with the fourth goal of EFA. Available data have indicated a steady rise in adult literacy enrollment, from 665,113 persons enrolled in 2001, 842,987 in 2001 to 933,868, in 2004. EFA policies and reforms put in place by government have not been as effective as anticipated. Hence the educational sector is faced with major challenges of: poorly paid teachers, a dearth of trained teachers, a poor and inadequate infrastructure, and poorly motivated teaching staff. This has consequently contributed to poor or irregular school attendance among children in the country. These challenges, notwithstanding, have been steadily rising in primary school enrollment in the country. The pattern of enrollment has shown that a total of 19.2 million primary school pupils were enrolled in 2001; 19.8 million in 2002; and 25.7 million in 2003. In terms of gender, there are more male enrollment in primary school, than their female counterpart; 10.8 million male and 8.4 million female children enrolled in 2001; 11.0 million males and 8.7 million females in 2002; and 14.4 million male and 11.3 million females were enrolled in 2003 (FME, 2007).

Teacher-pupil ratio in the country is improving. It was 1:40 in 2001; 1:44 in 2003 and 1:37 in 2005. Generally, there is a traditional bias in the training of the girl-child in the country; it is however, greater in rural areas and northern states of Nigeria. Only 42 percent of rural girls are enrolled in school, whereas, 72 percent of urban girls are enrolled. In some of the northern states, girls are often withdrawn from school and made to enter into early marriages, employed as domestic and agricultural labor, or involved in commercial activities, such as, trading and street vending (ILAB, 2008).

The UNICEF, primary school attendance statistics for the period between 2000 and 2004, indicated a gross male primary school enrollment ratio of 132; gross female primary school enrollment ratio of 107; net male primary school enrollment ratio of 74; net female primary school enrollment ratio of 60; net male primary school attendance ratio of 58; and net female primary school attendance ratio of 66 between 2000 and 2004 (UNICEF, 2005).

A new Teachers Salary Structure (TSS) was approved by the federal government, as a welfare package to encourage and raise teachers' commitment to the goals of EFA. In addition, a National Teachers Institute (NTI) has put in place a programme to train and re-train teachers, in order to provide quality education, in line with the goals of EFA.

Laws and Initiatives for Education For All

The Nigerian constitution calls for the provision of free, compulsory and universal primary education, when it is practicable. In 1999, Nigeria defined a new basic education plan that made the first nine years of schooling free and compulsory. The aim of the plan was to improve the relevance, efficiency, quality of schools and to create programs to address the basic education needs of nomadic and out-of-school children, youths, adults and vulnerable children, generally. The Labor Act of 1974 prohibited the employment of children under the age of 15 years in commerce and industry. It also restricted labor performed by children to home-based agricultural or domestic work. Nigeria is a member of a number of

international organizations, such as, the ILO, with whom the country has signed international protocols. These protocols are aimed at protecting vulnerable children and providing basic education to all children of school age in order to meet the Millennium Development Goals set for the country. In furtherance of the vision of providing basic education for all children of school age, the Federal Ministry of Women Affairs and Social Welfare worked out a synergy with UNICEF and the Centre for Non-Formal Education and Training (CENFET), to contain the challenge of lack of formal education curriculum for girls, children without access to school, school dropouts, in particular, children from Koranic schools, where girls account for 60 percent of all dropouts. These efforts have contributed to an increase in enrollment, particularly, among the girl-child, and enhanced the development of non-formal and nomadic education. In a pilot project carried out in Sokoto State, in Northern Nigeria, it was discovered that school enrollment in basic education, rose from 914 pupils in 1996 to 115,525 pupils in 2000, out of which, 73,291 had passed their exams. The project recorded less than 0.2 percent dropout rate, with fewer girls dropping out of school than boys.

Though it appears there is a strong commitment by government to the attainment of the EFA plan, it has not been matched with adequate public funding of the educational sector. In 2000, for example, only about 46 billion Naira (i.e. about US \$460m), was appropriated by the federal government of Nigeria to support the basic education plan (CBN, 2000). Furthermore, education budgetary allocation is less than five percent of the Gross National Product (GNP), which is the stipulated international standard. From 1989 to 1995 public spending on education, as a percentage of (GNP) in Nigeria, has fluctuated between 0.5 percent and 1.0 percent. In 2004, out of the Federal government's total budget of N893.3 billion, only about 11% or 93.8 billion was allocated to the education sector. This figure was found out to be significantly low when compared with allocations made to education by some African countries: Ghana (26%), Botswana (21%), and Namibia (22%). Nigeria allocated almost 60% of its education budget to tertiary education and less than 40% to primary and secondary education combined (Vaz, 2004).

In order to supplement direct public funding of education, the Educational Tax Fund (ETF) was established by government to intervene in critical issues or areas of need in the educational sector in Nigeria. ETF transfers funds directly to benefiting institutions for specific capital projects. Allocations are made according to agreed percentages: primary (20%), secondary (30%) and tertiary (50%) education. Funds meant for primary education are disbursed on the basis of equality, that is, each Local Government Area (LGA) in the country is given equal allocation, irrespective of the number of primary schools and primary school enrollment recorded by each LGA. Despite the yardstick that 20% of ETF revenues be allocated to primary education, ETF fund allocation to States Primary Education Board (SPEB) has been on the decline since 1999 (Vaz, 2004).

A recent legislation that was signed into law by the Nigerian President, on the 22nd of May 2004, provided for funding of UBE from three sources: (a) block grants in form of proposed federal matching contributions to state financing of primary education, of not less than 2% of the federal government consolidated fund; (b) funds or contributions in form of federal guaranteed credits and loans; and (c) international donor grants. A Child Right Act was passed into law in 2007 by the Nigerian National assembly to protect the rights of children, in particular the girl-child, with the aim of facilitating their access to education, protection as against early marriage, and all forms of child abuse.

Conclusion

The goal of protecting and providing Education For All, in particular for vulnerable children in Nigeria, requires the synergy of all stake holders in the educational sector. That is, policy makers, non governmental agencies, international agencies and the civil society, should be made to harmonize their strategies in order to check child labour, child trafficking, protect orphans and provide the required educational infrastructure needed for the attainment of the goals of EFA.

It is important to note that significant progress has been recorded on the EFA programme in Nigeria. However, many vulnerable children are found over the length and breadth of the country and are yet to access and benefit fully from UBE and EFA programmes. These vulnerable children are mainly street children referred to as 'almajirai', nomadic Fulani children, orphans and the girl-child. There is, therefore, need to develop new strategy to accommodate this group of vulnerable children found in several states of Nigeria in order to hasten the country's progress towards the attainment of the EFA goal and by extension the Millennium Development Goals. In this light there is absolute need for aggressive and sustained advocacy for EFA, in all states of the country.

The advocacy for EFA should involve educating and enlightening the rural populace, in particular, of the need for children of school age to participate and benefit from the EFA programme. The government should, as a matter of urgency, create an enabling environment for all stakeholders in the educational sector, under a private-public partnership strategy, to own and manage educational infrastructure at the primary and secondary levels of education. Government at all levels of governance should show their political will to facilitate the attainment of EFA goal by raising their respective budgetary allocation up to the international baseline standard allocation to education, develop the capacity of teachers through training and re-training programmes and finally, EFA curriculum should be developed using a participatory approach to enhance the level of acceptance of the EFA programme and consequently the attainment of EFA goals in Nigeria.

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