

Communities Role in Universal Basic Education: Partnership Policy on Facilities Provisions in Nigerian Primary Schools

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Abstract

The implementation of the Universal Basic Education Scheme in Nigeria started with its official launch on 30th September, 1999 in Sokoto, Sokoto State. Since then, steps have been taken towards the provision of facilities to primary schools in the country. As stated clearly in the blueprint of the programme, providing education for all is the business of all. To this extent, the scheme adopted the partnership/collaborative approach for the provision of facilities and the achievement of the overall objectives of this new initiative educational structure.

To ensure the adequate provision of facilities such as reading, writing and instructional materials, classrooms, teachers, etc, communities, as one of the partners in the education project, are expected to play significant roles in ensuring the success of the scheme. It must be noted that prior to the introduction of the UBE, communities were to a large degree involved in facilities provision to schools at all levels of education in the nation. The current UBE may therefore not be an exception.

This paper focuses on the role of communities in ensuring the workability of the partnership approach in the area of facilities provision to primary schools in Nigeria under the UBE and how well they have been able to articulate their efforts with that of the other stakeholders for improved educational system.

Introduction

Primary education has been referred to as the little mustard seed sown by the Christian mission in Nigeria, watered and nurtured in discordant socio-economic milieu into gigantic national educational systems. There is no denying the fact that primary education is the bedrock of the entire educational system, as it provides an extensive educational preparation for all spheres of life and living generally. It is indeed, the foundation of the entire education system the world over (Odigbo, 2001: Okeke, 1997).

Education at this level, therefore, is of immense importance both to the persons and the society because they will acquire requisite skills that will support their personal and economic growth while benefiting the society as a whole. To this end, the specific objectives of education at this level include:

- the inculcation of permanent literacy and numeracy, and the ability to communicate effectively;
- the laying of a sound basis for scientific and reflective thinking;
- citizenship education as a base for effective participation in and contribution to the life of the society;
- character and moral training and the development of sound attitudes;
- developing in the child, the ability to adapt to his changing environment;
- giving the child opportunities for developing manipulative skills that will enable him function effectively in the society within the limits of his capacity; and
- Providing basic tools for further educational advancement, including preparation for trades and crafts of the locality (FGN, 2004 : 4(18), pg. 9).

As stated above, primary education is the first and compulsory, formal and organized basic education of the child. It is for this reason that the UNESCO (1961) organized the conference of African Ministers of Education in Addis Ababa on the development of education targeted at achieving free, compulsory six-

year primary education. This all-important conference led Nigeria to the establishment of the Universal Primary Education (UPE) scheme in 1976 and the introduction of article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which asserts that everyone has the right to education before the later introduction of the new initiative Universal Basic Education (UBE) in 1999.

Before the UPE of 1976 for the entire nation, the first attempt at implementing a universal education scheme occurred in the 1950's in the then Western and Eastern regions. The Western Regional Government was the first to introduce the Free Primary Education scheme in 1955. Planning for the scheme started in 1952, with focus being on teacher preparation and construction of school buildings. The Eastern Regional Government, in 1957, introduced its own scheme without elaborate planning as witnessed in the Western Region. The lack of planning made its implementation less successful in the Eastern Region. It should be emphasized that in spite of the planning attempts of the Western Regional Government, problems like large number of untrained teachers, lack of continuity in staffing, overcrowded classes, presence of under-aged children, lack of cooperation from parents and guardians and haphazard supervision of schools by inspectors still plagued primary education in the region. These same problems characterized primary education in the Eastern Region but on a wider scale. In these early experiences, the states recognized issues with facilities, personnel and funds made available by the UPE programme. The UPE of 1976 made headway in the areas of providing funds and personnel, but lack of provisions for facilities persisted and continues to persist even with the introduction of the new concept of basic education of the Universal Basic Education scheme (Adeyemi, 2007: 2009; Alani, 2002; Fafunwa, 1974 & Nwagwu, 2002).

The UBE Partnership Approach on Facilities Provision to Primary Schools

The Universal Basic Education scheme is an educational programme put in place by the Nigerian government to provide the foundation for sustainable life-long learning. It is therefore aimed at eradicating illiteracy, ignorance and poverty as well as to stimulate and accelerate national development, political consciousness and national integration. The new UBE initiative was triggered by the world conference on education for all which was held in Jomtien, Thailand 5th - 9th March 1990 organized by the World Bank, UNDP, UNESCO and UNICEF. The UBE educational scheme expected to encourage attempts at increasing the literacy rate, promoting a productive work force in all areas of the economy and for improving provision of facilities to schools. These are the reasons why at the launch of the UBE on 30th September, 1999, President Olusegun Obasanjo asserts that the UBE cannot afford to fail this time around.

A 15-year deadline has been set for the achievement of the objectives of the UBE scheme. Thus, in the past five years, a massive programme supporting the area of funding and provision of school facilities has been embarked upon by the Nigerian government, this includes:

1. Rehabilitation of schools and the construction of new schools and classroom blocks
2. Special programmes targeted at girls and hard-to-reach groups such as children of fishermen and nomadic communities.
3. Reduction of high pupil -teacher ratio
4. Formation of partnerships with local governments and communities on education.

The building programme of the UBE programme involves three components:

1. The provision of additional classrooms / offices / stores / toilets / special rooms to existing schools that are short of such facilities.
2. The renovation of existing structures in bad condition. This involves a number of minor works on floors, walls, openings and most importantly, the repairs of old/poor furniture.
3. It also involves the construction of new schools for which a new layout plan has been made. An alternative design is also included in this plan for urban schools that are tight on the availability

of land. The designs in both cases have been made fairly flexible to fit into different sites while growing by simple linear additions of classrooms .

Other strategies include:

1. Expansion of early childhood care education
2. Improvement of teacher training
3. Provision of teaching-learning materials and;
4. Provision of other forms of teacher support programme

The Role of Communities in Facilities Provision

Considering the enormity of facilities that are needed for the effective performance of Nigerian schools, the Universal Basic Education Scheme has adopted the collaborative/partnership approach. Thus the Federal, State and Local Governments on the one hand and the International Development Partners such as the World Bank, Commonwealth of Learning, UNESCO, UNICEF, DFID, JICA, USAID, etc. NGOs, CBOs and the civil society on the other hand, are complementing one another's efforts in the advancement of the UBE programme. Specifically, the Federal Government as the initiator of the programme deals on policy articulation, quality control, evaluation and research. It also supports states, local governments and communities with funds to construct and renovate classrooms, train and re-train teachers and procure instructional materials. The day-to-day operation of the programme is done at the state, local government and community levels.

International Development Partners have been involved in such areas as capacity building and the strengthening of personnel and institutions executing different aspects of the programme. For example, the World Bank and DFID through the Primary Education Project (PEP) II are assisting 16 States in the implementation of UBE. On the same project, the World Bank, UNESCO and USAID are assisting with funds to collect and process a backlog of basic education data. The Japanese government DFID has also provided different forms of technical assistance. Opportunities for strategic partnership still exist in so many other areas including provision of mid-day meals, provision of additional infrastructure and facilities, staff training and research.

The provision of education for all has been seen as the responsibility of all. Communities, as one of the stakeholders, are expected to play significant roles in ensuring that the quest for the provision of adequate facilities is achieved.

Local Community Efforts

The roles and responsibilities of the local communities are to initiate and execute specific projects and activities within the framework of the scheme in their localities. Specifically they are to:

- provide logistic support and enabling environment for the execution of the scheme in the localities;
- provide relevant human and material resources for the successful implementation of the scheme;
- ensure safety and maintenance of the scheme infrastructure and UBE implementation resources and materials in their localities;
- organize and ensure the supports and effective participation of the entire community in the scheme.

Articulation of Communities Partnership Efforts with that of other Stakeholders

To effectively play their roles in the area of facilities provision, communities are expected to create workable collaboration with other stakeholders in the business of providing facilities for the success of the UBE scheme in Nigeria. The collaborative effort approach towards effective articulation and pool of resources ; financial, human and material would assist in the compilation of statistics, adequate planning and monitoring/supervision of the scheme.

The conduct of stakeholder's joint meeting/committee is necessary (UBE Act,2004) and should be coordinated by governments of the three tiers in the nation. Representatives of the communities and that of other stakeholders would have the opportunity to interact and discuss issues relating to the provision of facilities. Communities are also expected to meet with school heads to identify their needs and determine how such needs can be met.

Communities must create conducive working relationship. This will enable mutual understanding and the good intentions of both parties realized for the success of the UBE scheme in general and especially in realising the facilities implementation strategies of the scheme as identified above.

Conclusions

There is no arguing that the focus of the new initiative UBE is to achieve literacy for all by the year 2015. Furthermore, this can only be attained when school environments are made conducive through the provision of adequate facilities. To this extent, all stakeholders must effectively play their roles as expected. Communities that are one of the beneficiaries of the UBE initiative should be encouraged by governments at all levels through enlightenment/sensitization programmes and other avenues for effective interaction. These are expected to strategically position communities for the required responsibilities they are to play. The levels of the school system covered by the UBE like other levels are based, first and foremost, on a particular environment of a community and are also one of the direct beneficiaries of the system. There is, therefore, the need for effective school and community relations especially in the area of facilities provision. To this extent, government at all levels should pursue vigorously the collaborative effort as indicated in the implementation blue print of the scheme in Nigeria which accommodated community participation in facilities provision.

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