

A GLOBAL ASSESSMENT OF THE IMPLEMENTATION LEVELS OF THE EDUCATION FOR ALL (EFA) INITIATIVE AND THE MILLENNIUM DEVELOPMENT GOALS (MDGs) ON EDUCATION IN SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA: A FOCUS ON NIGERIA

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Abstract

This paper presents an analytical appraisal of the varying levels to which the Education for All (EFA) project linked with two of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) has been implemented in sub-Saharan Africa with particular focus on Nigeria. It draws attention to the inequities among countries of the region while generally assessing Nigeria's prospects in the achievement of the EFA goals. The paper begins by highlighting the goals of the EFA project which include expanding and improving comprehensive early childhood care and education, especially for the most vulnerable and disadvantaged children and the educational MDGs by 2015 and the MDGs while aligning them with Nigeria's policies on education. It then proceeds to examine advances made in implementing EFA goals such as the expansion of Early Childhood Care and Education and challenges in Nigeria and sub-Saharan Africa. Finally, practical strategies, geared at improving the achievement potential of the region in general and the country in particular are recommended. To this end, making practical plans to fund and manage all levels of education so that they can be accessible to all children regardless of socio-economic background and location was strongly advocated.

Introduction

Education is indisputably a veritable and fundamental key to eroding the maladies of poverty and unlocking the potentials of sustainable human and national development across the globe. Indeed, it is the pivotal force that gives potency to every other instrument geared towards any form of worthwhile development because in its absence, all efforts are bound to end in futility. It is through education that ignorance is eradicated and awareness, created. With this awareness, individuals and nations alike become empowered with the ability to understand realities, discern and harness opportunities, improve their capabilities as well as effectively handle adversities for more positive outcomes.

Considered as an absolute necessity, education has been established as a human right the world over. As stated in the Universal Declaration on Human Rights, everyone has the right to education. Similarly, it is stated in Article 28 of the United Nations' Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC, 1998) that state parties recognize the right of the child to education, and with a view to achieving this right progressively and on the basis of equal opportunity. In particular, the states shall make primary education compulsory, available and free to all, encourage the development of the different forms of secondary education, make higher education accessible to all on the basis of capacity by every

appropriate means, make educational and vocational information and guidance accessible to all children and take measures to ensure regular attendance at schools and the reduction of drop-out rates.

Basic education, being the bedrock of higher forms of education, is the foundation of all the benefits of education. Not only is it the minimum requirement for a purposeful, worthwhile life in the society, it is also a pre-requisite for advancement to subsequent levels of education and hence to greater heights in life. In fact, the UNESCO (2000) aptly notes that,

Basic education allows personal development, intellectual autonomy, integration into professional life and participation in the development of the society in the context of democracy. In order to achieve these aims, basic education must lead to the acquisition of: key skills used as personal development tools and, later on, as a basis for lifelong learning; initial vocational guidance; the knowledge, values and abilities that are needed for individual development, and for the exercise of participatory and responsible citizenship in a democracy (p.66).

That the provision of individuals with basic education is apparently germane can therefore not be overemphasized. It is in obvious recognition of this fact that the 1990 World Conference in Jomtien, Thailand adopted two important documents – The World Declaration on Education for All and The Framework for Action to meet Basic Learning Needs. The objectives of these documents include expanding early childhood care/development, ensuring universal access to and completion of primary education, improving learning achievements and reducing adult literacy. They also aim at expanding the provisions of basic education and training in other essential skills required by youths and adults as well as providing education through channels such as the mass media and other forms of modern communication (Nwokoro, 2011). Essentially, the Education for All (EFA) programme is a global commitment to provide quality basic education for all children, youths and adults.

With many nations far from attaining the target benchmarks for the EFA objectives, 164 national governments together with several partner institutions met again in Dakar, Senegal ten years later in April 2000 to adopt a Framework for Action focusing on the achievement of six Education for All (EFA) goals aimed at global educational development by 2015. In September of the same year in New York, the United Nations General Assembly adopted the eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) which have the achievement of Universal Primary Education as goal number two (MDG2) with a target to ensure that by 2015, children everywhere, boys and girls alike, will be able to complete a full course of primary schooling (World Bank, 2013). The MDGs were adopted by 189 nations.

The target date, 2015 is now barely a couple of years away yet as reports indicate, the probability of many nations ever being able to meet either the set target or the goals is

very remote. This is especially true of the sub-Saharan African countries with Nigeria, the African giant at the extreme rear of the success rank list. Ranging from financial lapses, inequalities, social vices and conflict to governance and policy issues, various challenges have directly or indirectly obstructed the smooth progress of the educational projects. Worse still, there seems to be a lack of readiness and true commitment to the implementation of recommended strategies on how to surmount these challenges. Consequently, school access remains marginalized; educational facilities are grossly inadequate and in bad shape; the teaching staff are unevenly spread with many lacking the necessary skills; drop-out rate is steadily on the increase and of course, literacy rates are disconcertingly low.

While there is a concession that achieving Education for All is certainly not a stroll in the park especially for notoriously corrupt developing nations like Nigeria, the present authors are strongly of the opinion that the implementation level as it currently stands can at least be fast-tracked in the light of proper awareness and full commitment to the tasks at hand. It has therefore become pertinent to draw attention not only to the comparatively unsatisfactory state of affairs but also to the implementation lapses, the deficiencies of national implementation plans, the areas of urgent need and pragmatic strategies to the achievement of the EFA goals in Nigeria, and sub-Saharan Africa in general.

The Goals of EFA, the MDGs and Nigeria's Educational Policy Statements

The six internationally identified educational goals aimed at meeting the learning needs of all children, youth and adults by 2015 are enumerated in the Dakar Framework for Action thus:

1. Expanding and improving comprehensive early childhood care and education, especially for the most vulnerable and disadvantaged children.
2. Ensuring that by 2015 all children, particularly girls, children in difficult circumstances and those belonging to ethnic minorities, have access to complete, free and compulsory primary education of good quality.
3. Ensuring that the learning needs of all young people and adults are met through equitable access to appropriate learning and life-skill programmes.
4. Achieving a 50 percent improvement in levels of adult literacy by 2015, especially for women, and equitable access to basic and continuing education for all adults.
5. Eliminating gender disparities in primary and secondary education by 2005, and achieving gender equality in education by 2015, with a focus on ensuring girls' full and equal access to and achievement in basic education of good quality.
6. Improving all aspects of the quality of education and ensuring excellence of all so that recognized and measurable outcomes are achieved by all, especially in literacy, numeracy and essential life skills (UNESCO, 2000:15-17).

The EFA goals contribute to the global pursuit of the eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) which were signed and adopted as a renewal of collective responsibility to uphold the principles of human dignity, equality and equity at global and national levels particularly for the most vulnerable, especially children, the endorsement of which gave new impetus and benchmarks for progress towards a new vision of development that is

both pro-poor and sensitive to human rights, basic needs and human development (Nwokoro, 2011). The content of the MDGs are specifically factored to;

1. Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger
2. Achieve universal primary education
3. Promote gender equality and empower women
4. Reduce child mortality
5. Improve maternal health
6. Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases
7. Ensure environmental sustainability
8. Develop a Global Partnership for Development (World Bank, 2013:1).

Specifically related to the EFA goals are the second and third MDGs. However, it is noteworthy that none of the eight MDGs can be realized without some substantial sustainable investment in education. The annual EFA Global Monitoring Report aims at measuring how national governments have followed up on their commitment to EFA. The indicators for measuring progress in the realization of the MDG2 objective which include net enrolment ratio in primary education, proportion of pupils starting grade one who reach grade five, and literacy rate of 15-24 year olds are also used as indices for measurement in the EFA reports.

Like many other nations in pursuit of EFA and the MDGs, Nigeria has spelt out several policy statements addressing the goals while acknowledging that education is the most important instrument of change. Section 18 of Nigeria's constitution (FRN, 1999) clearly states that the government shall direct its policy towards ensuring that there are equal and adequate educational opportunities at all levels, and shall strive to eradicate illiteracy by providing free, compulsory and universal primary education, free university education and free adult literacy programme. Nigeria's five main national goals as stated in the National Policy on Education (2004) are the building of

- a. a free and democratic society
- b. a just and egalitarian society
- c. a united, strong and self-reliant nation
- d. a great and dynamic economy
- e. a land full of bright opportunities for all citizens (FRN, 2004:6).

The policy also spells out Nigeria's philosophy of education to include the belief that "...every Nigerian child shall have the right to equal educational opportunities irrespective of any real or imagined disabilities each according to his or her ability" (FRN, 2004:7).

Likewise, one of the nation's educational goals as contained in the policy is "...the acquisition of appropriate skills and the development of mental, physical and social abilities and competencies as equipment for the individual to live in and contribute to the development of the society"(FRN, 2004:8).

According to the policy,

Life-long education shall be the basis of the nation's educational policy...education and training facilities shall continue to be expanded in response to societal needs and made progressively accessible to afford the individual a far more diversified and flexible choice...educational activities shall be centred on the learner for maximum self-development and self-fulfillment... (and) universal basic education in a variety of forms, depending on needs and possibilities, shall be provided for all citizens (FRN, 2004:9).

Concerning early childhood education specifically, the Nigerian government intends amongst others, to

...establish pre-school sections in existing public schools and encourage both community and private efforts in the provision of pre-primary education, make provision in teacher education programmes for specialization in early childhood education ...set and monitor minimum standards for early child care centres in the country, ensure full participation of government, communities and teachers associations in the running and maintenance of early childhood education facilities (FRN 2004:12).

Furthermore, Nigeria has spelt out several policy initiatives in order to eradicate illiteracy at the shortest possible time. Besides the provision of mass literacy programmes to all beneficiaries free of charge, it is stated that, "there shall be a nation-wide mass literacy campaign based on various strategies including that of 'each-one-teach-one' or 'fund-the-teaching-of-one', Participatory Rural Appraisal...and other innovative approaches" (FRN, 2004:26).

Progress towards EFA; the Status of Nigeria and Sub-Saharan Africa

Although EFA has recorded some significant achievements around the world, there is still a great deal of doubt about the complete success of the programme as envisaged. Concern in this direction is raised in UNESCO (2011) when it is stated that,

(While even) some of the world's poorest countries have registered impressive gains, demonstrating that low income is not an automatic barrier to accelerated progress,...the gap between the Dakar declaration and delivery remains large, and there are worrying signs that it is widening. On current trends, there could be more children out of school in 2015 than there are today. Without a concerted effort to change this picture, the Dakar promise to the world's children will be comprehensively broken (p. 4).

Findings of the Education for All Global Monitoring Reports (EFAGMR) for over a decade have progressively indicated that governments in Sub-Saharan Africa are falling short of their collective commitment. Nigeria in particular has been reported as having some of the worst education indicators globally (UNESCO, 2012). To corroborate this impression, Olupohunda (2013:18) reviews some gloomy statistics;

.....the EFA Development Index calculated for 129 countries at mid-term revealed that of the 25 countries that are far from achieving the EFA, two-thirds of these are in sub-Saharan Africa. Out of the 129 countries, 51 have achieved or are close to achieving the four most quantifiable EFA goals, 53 are in the intermediate position and 25, including Nigeria, are far from achieving the EFA as a whole. In fact, Nigeria makes up the list of the four countries: Cote d' Ivoire, Namibia and Rwanda that will not achieve the EFA goals. Since the mid-term report, Nigeria has had no hope of achieving the target.

The foregoing is hardly surprising as many writers have consistently lamented that education in Nigeria is generally confronted with hordes of challenges. Odi and Omofonmwan (2007) enumerate some of these challenges to include poor funding; poor educational infrastructure such as classrooms; poor teaching aids like projectors, computers, laboratories, libraries and other instructional materials; poor convenience facilities; paucity of quality teachers and; poor learning environment in addition to numerous social vices such as examination malpractices, cultism, hooliganism and corruption. Nwokoro (2011) adds that the neglect of the education sector by past successive military dictatorships as well as lack of appropriate planning and logistic provisions have also contributed to the set back which education in Nigeria has continued to suffer.

A step by step examination of the advances and setbacks pertaining to each of the EFA goals would present a clearer picture of the condition of the sub-Saharan African region and the Nigerian nation.

Goal 1: The Expansion of Early Childhood Care and Education

In all developing nations, especially in the African continent, it appears that the tendency to underestimate the potentials of early childhood education is exceedingly high. The overwhelming relevance of early childhood education is succinctly explicated in the UNESCO (2011) EFAGMR in the following words;

Early childhood programmes prepare children for school, mitigate the effects of household deprivation, halt the transfer of educational disadvantage from parents to children and strengthen prospects for economic growth....the linguistic, cognitive and social skills they

(children) develop in early childhood is the foundation for lifelong learning (p.5).

Unfortunately, the 2011 report also indicates that early childhood policies in many developing countries continue to suffer from insufficient funding, fragmented planning and inequality, and that whereas children from the most disadvantaged households have the most to gain from such programmes, they are often the least represented. For instance in Côte d'Ivoire, about a quarter of children from the wealthiest households attend pre-school, while the attendance rate for those from the poorest households is close to zero. This is very similar to the case of Nigeria where impoverished children can only aim to enroll for the free primary education, with no thoughts at all for the mostly privately run and hence expensive pre-school education. According to the UNESCO (2011), while some countries such as Mozambique have demonstrated that a strengthened commitment to equity can open the doors to pre-school for highly disadvantaged groups, pre-school in Nigeria still remains highly inaccessible to these groups. This is because the profit-oriented private proprietors generally prize them out of the reach of the poor.

Ill-health, malnutrition and lack of stimulation undermines the fruits of early childhood education as they limit the achievement capacity of children victims both physically and mentally. Nevertheless, governments have continued to overlook the severe effects that these factors have on early childhood education such that in sub-Saharan Africa, an overwhelming number of children are chronically malnourished and the proportion underweight is also on the high side.

Goal 2: The Achievement of Universal Primary Education (UPE)

Globally, there has been remarkable advancements in primary school enrolments since the year 2000. As at 2011, UNESCO reported that buoyed by the advances in India, South and West Asia had reduced the size of its out-of-school population by half while Sub-Saharan Africa had increased enrolment ratios by almost one-third, despite a large increase in the school-age population. Sadly however, Sub-Saharan Africa still accounted for about 43% of the world's out-of-school children. Whereas most countries within the region are working harder to register progress in this area, a few others are lagging well behind. For example, from 1999 to 2008, Ethiopia reduced the number of out-of-school children by about four million making the country to finally have a realistic chance of achieving Universal Primary Education by 2015. Conversely, from 1999 to 2012, the number of out-of-school children in Nigeria increased from 7.4 to 10.5 million making the country home to the largest number of out-of-school children in the world, representing one in six out-of-school children globally (UNESCO, 2012). Comparatively, the same gloomy picture has been reported for Pakistan with 5.1 million, Ethiopia with 2.4 million, India with 2.3million, the Philippines with 1.5 million and Cote d' Ivoire with 1.4 million out-of-school children. Prior to this development, the primary net enrolment ratio in Nigeria had fallen from 61% of children of primary school age in school in 1999 to 58% in 2010 even though the average for the Sub-Saharan region had risen from 58% to 74% over the same period.

It is important to note that achieving universal primary education does not simply entail quantitative increase in school enrolment; the completion rate is also a necessary condition. Although statistics indicate that more children are transiting from primary school to secondary education and beyond, it is also true that many children start school only drop to out before completing a full primary cycle. Findings show that in sub-Saharan Africa, around 10 million children drop out of primary school each year and that poverty and poor education quality, with children failing to achieve the learning levels required for grade progression, both contribute to high dropout levels (UNESCO, 2011). Inequality and disparities based on wealth, location, ethnicity, gender and other markers for disadvantage have also been cited as constituting obstacles to accelerated progress in education. Not unconnected with this is Nwokoro's (2011) assertion regarding the achievement of MDG2 in Nigeria that while enrolment rate in the country is said to be relatively high at 88.8 percent, regional differences are also high between the north and south considering that high dropout rates as a result of children engaging in income generating activities (child labor), inability to pay fees, insecurity, parental apathy etc, are still very prevalent. According to him, the situation is also a function of the fact that mass failures in various examinations, as well as malpractices are very rampant. There is no gainsaying the fact that high drop-out rates represent a vast waste of talent and a source of inefficiency in the country's educational system.

Goal 3: The Development of Learning Opportunities for Youths and Adults

The development of learning opportunity for youths and adults goes beyond the scope of primary education to the offering of functional basic skills for better future life. This is mainly achieved through higher levels or forms of education. UNESCO (2011) observes that most rich countries are close to universal secondary education, with a large share of the population (about 70% in North America and Western Europe)progressing to the tertiary level whereas at the other end of the spectrum, sub-Saharan Africa has a gross enrolment ratio at the secondary level of just 34%, with only 6%progressing to the tertiary level. It also observes however that the region is beginning to catch up from this very low trend citing Ethiopia and Uganda (where enrolment ratios have more than doubled) as well as Mozambique (where the ratio has quadrupled since 1999) and noting that with primary school enrolment ratios increasing across the developing world, demand for secondary education is growing and technical and vocational enrolment is also increasing.

Nigeria has striven to attain the third EFA goal under the auspices of the 1999 Universal Basic Education (UBE) which includes not just early childhood care and six years of primary education but also three years of junior secondary education, adult literacy and non-formal education, skills acquisition programmes and the education of special groups such as nomads, fisher-folks, migrants, girl-child and woman, *almajiri*, street children and disabled groups(Education Reform Act (ERA), 2007). Specifically, the Nigerian junior secondary school curriculum has been redesigned to equip young adolescents with relevant skills for self-reliance. However, several studies reviewed below, paint a grim picture of the implementation of the UBE scheme in the country.

Ado, Akinbobola and Inyang (2010) in their study on the status of human resources and its implications for the implementation of the upper basic level of the UBE programme in

Bayelsa State of Nigeria, revealed that although the state boasted qualified teachers for the implementation of the programme, qualified teachers in English Language, Mathematics and Integrated science- three very basic subjects- are inadequate. Adeyemi (2009) who had earlier carried out a study titled Enrolment Analysis and Teacher Requirements for the Universal Basic Education Programme in Kwara state, Nigeria found a low average enrolment growth rate which stood at 3.7% in primary schools and 3.8% in junior secondary schools while suggesting that the state would require 9128 primary school teachers and 4244 junior secondary school teachers come 2017. In addition, Adeotun (2011) conducted an evaluation of the libraries of State Universal Basic Education Board (SUBEB) in some selected states in South-West Nigeria and showed that there was gross inadequacy of library material for the implementation of the UBE programme.

More recently, the research study of Amuche and Kukwi (2013) investigated the perception of stakeholders on the implementation of UBE in the North-central geopolitical zone of Nigeria. Among others, the findings of the study included that school administrators are unsatisfied with the implementation of the UBE programme as they perceive that funding of the programme is inadequate and that parents of learners in UBE schools perceive that human resources are inadequate for effective implementation. Furthermore, the study found that the major factors militating against the effective implementation of UBE programme in the North-Central zone of Nigeria are overcrowded classrooms, inadequate funding and dilapidated buildings. Similarly, examining the challenges affecting the implementation of the UBE in Delta state of Nigeria, Edho (2009) identifies poor funding, poor motivation of teachers, improper supervision and monitoring of the programme as well as inadequate teaching and learning facilities as enduring problems. Considering the condition of UBE in Nigeria, it is safe to conclude that learning opportunities and skill acquisition are quite limited for both the youths and adults.

Goal 4: The Spread of Adult Literacy

Concerning adult literacy, the EFA action plan specifies a 50% improvement by 2015 as the target. Given that adult literacy has suffered inattention in educational policies for so long, it appears that this target will be unattainable by a wide margin. There has been an indication that the global adult literacy rate has increased over the last twenty years from about 76% to 84%. Nevertheless, as at 2010, there were still 775 million illiterate adults and while half were in South and West Asia, over a fifth was in sub-Saharan Africa (UNESCO, 2012).

Only ten countries, including Nigeria, account for 72% of the total number of illiterate adults. However, while others in the group like Brazil, China, Mali and even India have made significant progress towards attaining universal adult literacy, Nigeria like Madagascar, has recorded a phlegmatic progress. According to UNESCO (2012), the number of adults with no basic literacy skills in Nigeria has increased by 10 million over the past two decades to reach 30 million. Interestingly, in comparatively poor countries like Chad for example, the adult literacy rate which was 74% in 2000 has been projected to fall to 61% by 2015 (well above a target of 37%).

Justifiably, lack of political commitment has been extensively cited as a reason for slow progress in literacy. For instance, it is quite undeniable that Nigeria has several policies aimed at adult education and mass literacy but these are mainly vague statements without necessary implementation details and measurable yardsticks. This problem apparently has its roots at the international level where sufficient attention and a concrete plan of action has not been committed to adult literacy. The MDGs for example, does not even overtly include literacy in the agenda.

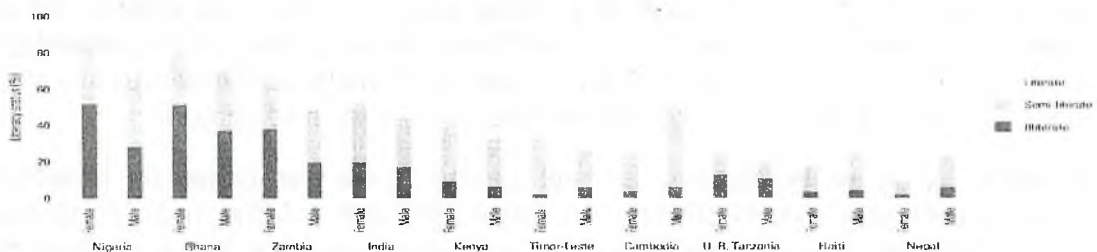
Goal 5: The Achievement of Gender Parity and Gender Equality in Education

Gender parity, particularly in education, is considered a human right, a pre-requisite for equal opportunities, and a veritable means for social and economic growth. In fact, to undermine the human potential of any gender, particularly the female, is to deny the propensity for enhanced development. From a global perspective, gender gaps appear to be narrowing as regions (the Arab States, Sub-Saharan Africa, South and West Asia) which were renowned for having the largest gaps have all made great progress.

Indeed, narrowing gender gaps in primary school enrolment has been one of the landmark achievements of EFA the world over but despite this fact, UNESCO (2012) reports that sixty-eight countries have not achieved gender parity in primary education, and girls are at the disadvantaged position in sixty of these countries. Severe disadvantage has in recent times been measured by a gender parity index below 0.90. Data from 1999 show that thirty-three countries had such an index and twenty-one of these countries were in sub-Saharan Africa. By 2010, the number of countries with a primary school enrolment gender parity index below 0.90 had reduced to seventeen but twelve of them were still in sub-Saharan Africa.

Furthermore, 2005-2011 data on the literacy status for men and women aged 15 to 29 who completed only six years of schooling reveal that Nigeria and Ghana are battling for extreme bottom position with both having the highest female illiteracy rate of over 55% as against male illiteracy rate of about 30% and 35% respectively. Gender disparity with regard to primary school-leavers' literacy was shown to be minimal in countries like India (estimated 20% female, 18% male), Kenya (estimated 10% female, 8% male), Cambodia (estimate 13% female, 6% male), Tanzania (estimated 15% female, 12% male) and Haiti (estimatec 4% female, 5% male) where the number of illiterates are not only significantly lower but gap between males and females is virtually almost non-existent.

Figure 1: 2005-2011 Data on Men/Women Literacy Rate in Selected Countries



Source: EFA Global Monitoring Report (2012)

The sub-Saharan African situation is not better or brighter at the secondary education level as there seems to have been no improvement in gender parity even in the light of a huge leap in female secondary school enrolment. This strongly contrasts with the case of South and West Asia where increase in female enrolment has been matched with marked improvement in parity. In 2008, twenty-four countries with relevant data in sub-Saharan Africa were found to have gender parity indices below 0.90 in secondary school enrollment, and ten had 0.70 or less. Conversely, only three countries in South Asia had a below 0.90 index. Suffice it to add that whereas in Chad there were twice as many boys as girls in secondary school, Pakistan had three girls for every four boys (UNESCO, 2011).

It has been duly noted that gender disparity often begins right from the enrolment stage and since this has not been addressed, gender imbalances threaten to remain a permanent feature in schools. For example, it was observed by UNESCO (2011) that three quarters of the countries that have not achieved gender parity at the primary level enroll more boys than girls at the start of the primary cycle – the gross intake rate at grade one in Mali for instance, is 102% for boys and 89% for girls. In some other cases, gender disparity is more evident in drop-out rates – the survival rates for girls in school in Guinea is quite lower than that for boys while the situation is vice-versa in Ethiopia. Additionally, certain associated factors such as wealth (rich versus poor), location (rural versus urban) and language are crucial in reducing or extending gender disparities. In Nigeria, all of these parity barriers apply albeit to varying degrees hence the heavy presence of gender bias.

Goal 6: Improvements in Educational Quality

Quality education is one that efficiently satisfies the purpose of adequately arming its beneficiaries with necessary skills to become assets to themselves, their families and their society. In essence, it is not enough that a large number of people are enrolled and a good number of them graduate – what is essential is that they demonstrate that they have indeed imbibed and mastered the purpose for which they attended school in the first place. This is what receiving quality education entails. Although it is seemingly inconceivable that any student would go through an educational system and not acquire even basic literacy and numeracy skills, this is the circumstance with many students in several developing countries today as international learning assessments have revealed. In fact, according to UNESCO (2010), millions of children are leaving school without having acquired basic skills such that young adults in some sub-Saharan African countries who have had at least five years of formal education had a 40% probability of being illiterate. The cases of the Dominican Republic, Ecuador and Guatemala are similar as less than half of grade 3 students had more than very basic reading skills.

A recent assessment by the Southern and Eastern Africa Consortium for Monitoring Educational Quality (SACMEQ) revealed that in sub-Saharan Africa, only 10% of grade six pupils reached desirable level of reading in six countries while they were fewer than 25% in four other countries (UNESCO, 2009). In Nigeria, primary school education is not of sufficient quality to ensure that children learn the basics and there is a huge skills deficit among young people who are now facing the world work (UNESCO, 2012). Problems such as overcrowded classrooms with overworked teachers, low quality of teachers with poor remuneration, lack of incentives and unsatisfactory working

conditions, inadequate infrastructural and instructional resources, poor or a complete absence of inspection and a generally poor financial base have all ensured that the delivery of quality education continues to elude the country. The result is mass failure notably in external examinations such as West African Senior Secondary Certificate Examination (WASSCE), Unified Tertiary Matriculation Examination (UTME) and Post Unified Tertiary Matriculation Examination (PUTME). Hence Ochuba (2009) asserts that there has been a public outcry on the continual decline in the standards of education in Nigeria especially as indicated in public examinations and the performance of education outputs that are inadequate for employment.

The table below is a statistical summary of progress towards the EFA goals in Nigeria, Sub-Saharan Africa and the world with reference to data from 1999 and 2010.

Table 1: Progress towards the Six Education for All (EFA) Goals in Nigeria, Sub-Saharan Africa and the World

<i>Indicator</i>	<i>Nigeria</i>		<i>Sub-Saharan Africa</i>	<i>World</i>
	<i>1999</i>	<i>2010</i>	<i>2010</i>	<i>2010</i>
Goal 1 Pre-primary gross enrolment ratio (%)	8	14	17	48
Goal 2 Primary net enrolment ratio (%)	61	58	76	89
Out of school Children (million)	7.4	10.5	30.6	60.7
Goal 3 Lower secondary gross enrolment ratio (%)	25	47	47	82
Out of school adolescents (million)	21.7	70.6
Goal 4 Adult literacy rate (%)	55	61	63	84
Youth literacy rate (%)	71	72	72	90
Goal 5 Primary gender parity index	0.81	0.91	0.93	0.97
Secondary gender parity index	0.91	0.88	0.82	0.97
Goal 6 Primary pupil-teacher ratio	41	36	43	24

Source: EFA Global Monitoring Report (2012)

Recommendations

1. It is simply not sufficient to write beautiful educational policies and goals which make inspiring reading. In addition, there should be improved political commitment to the provision of quality pre-primary education through a discontinuation of the practice of leaving this level of education largely in the hands of private owners. In Nigeria, the government should therefore make practical plans to fund and manage this level of education so that it can be accessible to all children regardless of socio-economic background and location.
2. Abolishing school fees is not enough to ensure universal primary education. In Nigeria, achieving high enrolment and completion rates of primary education requires the government to cover several miscellaneous school costs (examination fees, uniforms, reading and writing materials, etc) incurred by parents/guardians. Other specific barriers such as lack of adequate classrooms, instructional materials and qualified teachers must also be removed to ensure qualitative public primary education that can favourably compete with the expensive private primary education received by the children of the wealthy. Importantly, measures

should be put in place to properly enlighten parents/guardians particularly in Northern Nigeria in order to eradicate their ignorance of the importance of primary education and resultant unwillingness to send their children/wards to school. The recent efforts of the Federal Government in connection with the *almajiri* education programme are steps in the right direction.

3. UNESCO (2012) asserts and rightly too, that formal secondary schooling is the most effective way of developing the skills needed for life and work. In Nigeria where vacancies for pen-and-paper (white-collar) jobs are saturated and the demand for practical work skills is on the increase, there is need for the government to ensure the extension and full implementation of practical-oriented vocational subjects all through secondary education. This means that equipped laboratories and workshops, necessary technologies and competent specialist technical schools and teachers must be made available in both rural and urban areas. Moreover, tuition and external examination fees in the senior secondary schools which bar millions of students from experiencing and completing education at this level should be abolished.
4. To improve adult literacy, governments of sub-Saharan African countries should intensify efforts towards the provision and funding of diverse programmes directed towards this goal. The Nigerian government specifically, should restructure its policy statements on adult literacy to include coherent and practical measure to engage participant adults in activities where they can learn and use literacy skills in their everyday lives.
5. Finally, barriers to the attainment of gender parity should be eliminated through regular sensitization of the masses concerning the importance of educating the girl child. Beyond this, the Nigerian government should institute and dutifully implement policies directed towards creating non-discriminatory and girl-friendly school environments, offering scholarships and other incentives for girls' education and developing various informal and non-formal platforms where girls can be trained to acquire useful skills that will empower them to participate equally in building the nation.

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