

STRATEGIES FOR FINANCING PRIMARY EDUCATION IN AN AILING ECONOMY

ABBA ABUBAKAR HALADU

Introduction

Education is very crucial to our very existence and survival, our progress and that of our children. It is thus an economically and socially productive investment. As in many developing countries, education in Nigeria is financed and provided predominantly by the government. Its expansion and stability therefore depend on fiscal resources. In recent years, however, adverse macro-economic conditions and keen intersectoral competition for public funds have reduced most government's ability to continue managing education (Psacharopoulos G. et al, 1986). The results are under-investment in education and with widespread corruption and mismanagement; the collapse of the system is imminent.

Primary school education is the foundation on which the pillars of learning are laid. It is the first exposure of most learners to the world of formal schooling. Therefore its importance cannot be over-emphasized. In education as Omolewa (1992:2) observed, if the first step is misplaced, much harm can be done and in most cases the harm may be inseparable. Indeed like a physical structure, any education system that does not begin with an efficient primary level, will lack a permanently result – oriented education focus and a major foundation (Indabawa, 1996). The state of primary education in Nigeria today, and its continuing decay, places a responsibility on society, particularly those in the education system, to examine the state of affairs and deliberate on the possible outcomes and alternative solutions. This paper attempts to discuss some possible strategies of funding primary education in this period of declining economy.

The Importance and State of Primary Education in Nigeria

The age distribution of Nigeria's population indicates a predominance of young people, with about 45 percent of the population below the age of 15 (Philips, 1997: 3-4). Thus about half of the population is made up of primary school age children. A minimum level of education is widely seen as a basic human right for all citizens. The Federal Government identified the fact that the primary school level is the key to the success or failure of the whole educational system since the rest of the system is built upon it. Recognizing the importance of primary education, the national policy on education has set out its broad objectives to include:

- a) the inculcation of permanent literacy and numeracy, and the ability to communicate effectively;
- b) the laying of a sound basis for scientific and reflective thinking;
- c) giving citizenship education as a basis for effective participation in and contribution to the life of the society;
- d) moulding the character and develop sound attitude and morals in the child;
- e) developing in the child the ability to adapt to his changing environment;
- f) giving the child opportunities for developing manipulative skills that will enable him to function effectively in the society within the limits of his capacity; and
- g) providing basic tools for further educational advancement, including preparation for trades and crafts of the locality (NPE, 1998: 8).

Thus primary education is to provide a broad-based education with emphasis on permanent and functional literacy and effective communication. Indeed these objectives are most pertinent for the personal development of the individual and the collective society (Indabawa, 1996). Therefore, by its nature, primary education is of great interest and concern to all parents, the government and the wider society. The 1989 constitution stipulates that from 1992, the first nine years of child's education shall be free and compulsory. In other words, from primary one to junior secondary school there shall be free and compulsory education with one hundred percent transition from primary to junior secondary school (Abdulkadir, 1993). But in spite of these laudable provisions what hopes are there for our children? How equipped are our primary schools, to ensure the attainment of these national objectives, thereby laying the foundation for national development?

As noted above, the National Policy on Education (1989) had enunciated very laudable policies on Primary Education, but the implementation has proved to be less than stated. Indeed the goals have been difficult to attain. Studies conducted by the World Bank: Economic Sector Work (ESW) (1989); the Poverty Assessment Study (1991) and the Social Sector Review (1994) revealed that the primary education sector in Nigeria was performing below expectation and at variance with the policy provisions (NPEC, 1999 - 9). Some of the more pertinent causes of this unhealthy state include exponential demographic or population increase; socioeconomic factors such as parents income, opportunity cost of child's labour time, availability of learning support; shifting policy options affecting effective continuity in educational practices; poor and ill-managed fund supply and inadequate involvement of the host community and other non-governmental concerns in education (Indabawa, 1996). The result is an obvious decline. Some of the problems facing primary education are as follows:

- (a) There are not sufficiently qualified teachers because teachers are leaving the profession due to poor conditions of service. Information on primary school teacher's salary indicates that until 1999 the normal range is between N900=00 to N2,000=00 per month. There is therefore no doubt that teachers salary is far from being enough or sufficient. The price for low pay is massive exodus and poor quality of education (Indabawa, 1996). Although the National Certificate in Education (NCE) is expected to ultimately become the minimum basic qualification for entry into the teaching profession (NPE, 1989, 38), only 8.97 percent of teachers at primary level were holders of NCE and above in Nigeria, by 1992 (Yoloye 1994, 63). This then means that 91.03 percent are grade II or less. It is also observed that of this number, large proportions are referred grade II holders (Indabawa, 1996).

It is however interesting to note that of recent the teaching staff situation is improving in quantity and quality. A World Bank assisted study conducted by the National Primary Education Commission on costs, financing and management of Primary Education in Nigeria (1997) revealed that more teachers are being trained; 31% are NCE +; 48% TCII and 21% unqualified. However, there are more female teachers in the South (63%) and more males in the North (72.8%). The incidence of untrained teachers, however, remains a feature of the system especially in the Northern States (42%). In the South, only 6% are untrained (below TCII) (NPEC 1999; 11).

- (b) There are no adequate facilities or classrooms; the little that was there had all deteriorated. The flooring of classrooms are bad, roofing are off; ceilings are messy, cracked or even absent; walls are cracking; doors and windows are broken or completely removed; chalkboards wear out; paintings on walls are won out; and the general environment too inconducive for meaningful learning (Indabawa, 1996). In addition, the teachers whose classes and offices have no chairs and tables are not comfortable to carry out their duties successfully. In most primary schools in the country, there is no enough furniture for both teachers and their pupils. In some cases the pupils are left in the open air learning their lessons while the teachers have no other alternative but to sit on the classroom windows. Evidences show that by 1991, 4.86 percent of primary schools are without buildings, there was a shortfall of pupils furniture to the tune of 62.23 percent and a shortfall of 62.50 percent in teachers furniture in the whole federation (Yoloye, 1994,62).
- (c) Primary Schools lack instructional materials such as textbooks, writing materials and other pedagogical tools. When students have no textbooks and teachers lack relevant teacher materials it is hardly surprising that

students learn little or nothing with many relapsing into illiteracy. The World Bank assisted study conducted by the National Primary Education Commission also revealed that instructional materials are grossly inadequate and less than 40% of pupils have basic textbooks and writing materials. Indeed over 80% of schools have no library facilities (NPEC, 1999; 11).

- (d) There is prevailing a high dropout rate also indicating inefficiency in the use of resources. Part of the reasons for dropping out could be non-school factors such as the high opportunity cost of children attending school that would otherwise help out in daily struggle for survival of their family. But some students drop out because the services provided are poor. There is also a glaring decline in primary school enrollment particularly in the northern states with an exceedingly poor attendance rate (Indabawa, 1996).

The glaring poor quality of primary school education has unavoidably affected the rest of the entire educational system. Without good primary school education what hope is there for good secondary school education? Part of the cause for this unhealthy situation is the fact that the financing system has been slow and unable to match the phenomenal growth of education. The problem has worsened as a result of tremendous changes in scope and modality the system has witnessed throughout the history of Nigeria, about forty years to date.

Nigerian Ailing Economy

The exploitation of petroleum resources in Nigeria in the early 70's has led to the dramatic explosion in government revenues between 1973 and 1981. This enabled the federal and state Governments to undertake a vast expansion in the development of infrastructure and the provision of social services including education (Asiodu, 1994). However, with the dwindling of the nation's economy due to the fall in the oil revenue earnings in the early 1980s, Nigeria began to experience either sluggish growth in Gross Domestic Product (GDP), or negative rates (0 – 4% per annum) for long periods. Consequently, Nigeria has plummeted from middle-income status in the late 1970's, with a per capita income of \$1,000 to low income status in the 1990s (FGN/UNCF, 1997 – 2001:5). Nigeria's annual per capita income as at 1999 was barely \$280 (World Bank, 1999).

The introduction of Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) in 1986 sanctioned by the IMF further worsened the situation. SAP produced a large number of side effects, particularly for vulnerable sections of society. For instance, downsizing of government contributed to high unemployment, while lower annual budgets led to reduce real spending on infrastructure maintenance. Another significant effect was the weakening of the currency, following the steep devaluation, which brought the official exchange rate down from N9 per dollar in 1991 to N82 per dollar in 1995 and as at 2002 the official exchange rate was N126

per dollar. Among other things, the devaluation has led to rapid inflations and hence the standard of living of the masses of the people was drastically reduced involving some 34 million Nigerians below the assumed poverty line (FGN/UNCF, 1997 – 2001:7). In real terms therefore, the population is now poorer than before the oil boom.

Hence, with declining oil revenue, low industrial capacity utilization, growing debt burden and increased level of corruption, the funding of the numerous social services including education, could no longer be adequate. And with the primary school-age population (children aged 6 – 11) continuing to rise, estimated at about 22 million by the year 2000 (UNESCO, 1994:27), Nigeria faces daunting challenge of expanding education on a shrinking national income. Hence, the existing resources are inadequate to provide essential inputs in the quantity and of the quality required and therefore ways of mobilizing additional resources for financing primary education must be found.

History of Primary Education Finance in Nigeria

An attempt shall now be made to briefly trace the history of funding primary education in the country.

Before and After Independence

Primary schools existed in Nigeria as far back as pre-colonial period when missionaries considered schools as an essential part of evangelism, and only in 1896 was the first government school opened, (Bray, 1981). In the early 1950's the structure of primary education in the country was not streamlined, there was no uniformity; each region operated its own system of primary education based upon its own wishes and perception. While fee-paying mission schools dominated the then Eastern Region, mainly Native Authority administered primary schools prevailed in the North. Western Region on other hand seemed to have caught the vision of providing free primary education to its citizens as far back as 1954 (Odiongenyi, 1991:212-225). At that time the regions were strong and they became the sole financiers and managers of primary education. With the Revenue Allocation Order of 1951 educational responsibility was distributed between the Central and the Regional Governments, Local or Native bodies, the communities and partners alike. But the issue of physical control of schools was still the right of the regional governments (Triumph November 18th 1993:7).

After the colonial rule, with the attainment of independence, the financial management of primary schools was concentrated in the hands of the Local Education Authority (LEA) following the Oldman's Report of 1960 - 1962, (Fafunwa, 1974). However, the financial management of primary education was fairly constant up till 1967 when new states were created (Omotayo, 1994). Between 1968 - 1975, State governments contributed 60% of public schools and

The Federal Government introduced the UPE scheme in 1976. To ensure uniformity in standard, operation and otherwise, the Federal government took on the responsibilities of formulating operational policies, and providing funds for the programme. Funds from the Federal Government therefore covered such areas as: Providing new and expanding existing infrastructure for Teachers Training Colleges in the whole country, training UPE Teachers and paying them to run the scheme. To ensure success of the scheme, different state governments were to coordinate within the state jurisdiction. On the other hand, the Local Government was directly involved in the management and quality control of the scheme. Each arm of government had clearly defined roles to play, but the Federal Government shouldered the entire financial burden (Odiongenyi, 1991).

With this arrangement therefore, the UPE scheme enjoyed smooth operation until 1978 when the Federal government could no longer bear the financial burden of the scheme alone. State, Local Government and benefiting communities were then called upon to share in the cost of running the scheme. This decision did not go down well with the Local Governments. With their slim revenue sources, the question of managing and financing education became more complex. The scheme began to suffer some setbacks. Thus the Federal UPE failed when politicians took control of the administration machinery of government in 1979.

Financing of Primary Education in the Second Republic

By 1979, it became a constitutional requirement for the Local Government to participate with the State government in the provision and maintenance of primary education. However, in spite of the constitutional provision, the Federal Government did not abruptly pull off the UPE scheme but continued to send UPE grants-in-aid to the different states to keep the scheme afloat until 1982 when the Revenue Allocation Law was enacted.

Following the recommendations of the Okigbo commission on revenue sharing formula, which was accepted and implemented in 1982, the states and Local Governments share of national revenue was increased at the expenses of the Federal Government. Because of this increase in the revenue of the two tiers of government, the federal government withdrew from funding primary education and instructed the state and the local governments to shoulder the burden. Meanwhile, the numbers of children enrolled in primary schools continued to soar. By 1983, over 16 million children were attending primary schools in the country (Triumph, November 17th 1983:13). The huge rise in the enrollment of children in primary schools coupled with a whittling down of revenue sources of the local governments and the fact that the local governments tried to satisfy their socio-political existence by embarking on developmental projects beyond their means have all contributed and created a serious problem of funding and management of primary education in the country. The money budgeted for

primary schools by both States and Local Governments, though spent by the end of the year, was never applied to running and maintaining these primary schools. The states blamed the local governments and vice-versa. The Federal Government, though reluctantly, had to wade into primary education problems.

The Era of Primary Schools Management Boards (PSMBs)

The deplorable condition of primary education in the country had led some states to take urgent corrective measures. For example, the Government of Kano State established in 1986 the first Primary Schools Management Board (PSMB). The aim was to restore the fast fallen standard of primary education in the state (Triumph November 18th, 1993:7). The board, acting in an autonomous capacity was responsible for the management of primary education in the state as well as the recruitment, appointment, promotion and discipline of teaching and non-teaching staff. Moved by the success of Kano State Primary Schools Management Board, the federal government directed that all states of the federation should established similar Primary Schools Management Boards in their domain. By 1988 the Federal Government had promulgated and signed into law Decree No. 31 called Primary School Education Commission etc. decree. The Primary Education Commission was soon established and took off very quickly. The Federal Government contribution to primary schools for that year alone was N800 million.

There was no intention by the Federal Government to take over the control of primary schools but rather that the Federal Government would contribute up to sixty –five percent of the funds required for running primary schools, while the State Government would contribute twenty-five percent and the local government would contribute ten percent (Abdulkadir, 1993:11). The use of these funds was to be through the establishment of the primary schools Boards in each State and Local Government, which would ensure proper running and maintenance of all these schools. The primary school commission also had the responsibility of implementing the provisions of Decree No.16 of 1985, which conferred on the Federal Ministry of Education the responsibility of establishing and maintaining minimum academic standards at all levels of education including the primary schools (Abdulkadir, 1993). With the Primary School Commission, primary education began to be revived. The number of primary schools increased, infrastructural facilities improved and enrollment figures went up. These steps gave a new lease of life to primary education in the country.

Unfortunately however, economic and political forces joined hands and by January 1991 the pronouncements was made that decree No. 31, establishing primary schools commission at the Federal level was scraped. The Federal Government revert the responsibility of running primary schools to the Local Governments. The arrangement left huge responsibility of salary payment to the local government a responsibility which even the Federal Government, dreaded.

In an effort to help the situation, the Federal Government increased the subvention to local governments from the Federation Account from ten to fifteen percent. The five percent increase was supposed to help the local governments run their primary schools but it did not say so specifically nor was it stipulated that it should be strictly applied to the running of primary schools.

The state of affairs of our public primary schools started reverting to its hitherto poor condition. Primary School staff could not receive their salaries and allowances promptly. There were several calls for the restoration of the primary school commission. When the Abacha administration came to power in 1993 it promised to bring back the commission, which it did in 1994. Since then there has been some stability with regards to prompt payment of teachers' salaries.

The Universal Basic Education (UBE) Programme

In order to revitalize the sorry state of primary education in the country and in keeping with the global concern for basic education, the democratic government of President, Olusegun Obasanjo launched the UBE programme on September 30th, 1999 in the historic city of Sokoto. The programme is intended to provide free, compulsory and qualitative education at primary and junior secondary schools and other aspects of basic education. The overall aim is to make basic education accessible to all target groups (Tahir, 2002).

Since the launching of the UBE some progress has been made, by both the federal and state governments, especially in areas of classrooms construction and school rehabilitation, training and re-training of teachers as well as procurement of instructional materials. However, one of the difficulties that the programme is confronted with is operating without a legal backing. To make matters worst, the recent Supreme Court ruling of 5th April 2002, in the On-shore Offshore suit, declared as illegal the direct deduction of local government contribution for primary education at source from the Federation Account. Hitherto the funding of UBE was predicated on this mode of financing. Apparently the programme is thus thrown into a state of confusion.

Hence, in spite of these efforts, primary school education is still far from being revived. What is clear is that government alone cannot totally shoulder the financial responsibility of primary education. A joint venture between the government and the communities can be a viable strategy in reviving the battered sector.

Strategies for Effective Financing of Primary Education

It is urgently necessary to establish a working partnership between the Federal, State and Local Government and the communities to develop an effective system of financing primary education.

The Role of the Three Tiers of Government (Federal, State and Local)

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The Role of the Three Tiers of Government (Federal, State and Local)

Although government alone cannot totally shoulder the financial responsibility of primary education because of the gloomy economic situation in the country, the three tiers of government, Federal, State and Local must continue to take the lion share of the financial responsibility which should be supplemented by individuals, private bodies, communities and other agencies of education which would also encourage grassroots participation.

Even though the government is the principal financier of education, there is a wide gap between funding needs and actual allocation hence funding is staggeringly inadequate. As such, Federal, State and Local Governments should devote at least 26% of their annual budgets (as recommended by UNESCO) as expenses for education. 40% of this should be devoted to Primary Education. All funds supplied for education should be used effectively for the purpose. Diversion of such funds to other uses should not be tolerated again.

Decentralization through Private Participation

Private school contributes to educational development and can be allowed to operate. Encouraging them mobilizes additional private and local resources for education without excessively increasing government, fiscal burden. Private schools, as the term implies are schools that are established by private individuals, groups or organizations with different motives and for different reasons. Such schools are now indispensable in our education system and exist in complementary distribution with that of the government.

As part of the growing disenchantment of the ability of public schools to provide the needed quality education, private schools are sought by many to be a panacea to the problems in the public schools. However, one observes that private schools themselves are associated with a number of problems. We should however acknowledge that few of such schools are well sited, equipped and staffed.

Different state governments regulate conditions relating to the establishment and operations of private schools. However, these regulatory checks must be imposed without undue favoritism and laxity in order to ensure sanity and quality control. Such norms regarding fees, the hiring of teachers,

teachers' qualifications and salaries, curriculum content and student selection should be determined by both the government, the owners of such schools and the local communities. Fees in such schools should not be too high hence beyond the reach of vast majority of Nigerians. As such monitoring inspection or accreditation is very necessary to ensure that such schools promote national unity. The schools must be accountable to both central authorities and local groups, including parents, villages, neighbourhood associations, and other forms of local government. More importantly fees should be moderate so that children of the poor could also benefit. Subsidized private schools can also receive government assistance. Non-monetary measures could also be adopted to motivate and encourage the private sector to participate fully in the development of educational facilities particularly at the primary school level.

Promoting Community Schools

Community – run schools could be organized and administered by recognized local groups. A committee of members of the local community should manage the schools and determine the types of support parents will give. The committee should also keep the parents informed about school affairs. These bodies should also be given the freedom to mobilize additional resources through fees and local levies. Without this latitude, they would depend too heavily on the government for financial assistance. The government can become a financial catalyst, allocating financial assistance as a reward for local fund raising. Community schools are an important vehicle of decentralization. In such schools, private assistance can be mobilized through cash and labour contributions to cover operating costs and school construction. Parents can also contribute for educational services in kind i.e. foodstuffs.

Studies by the World Bank Nigeria, especially the school matching grant (pilot) project has reported the prevalence of a number of community primary schools in the South. This same communal spirit for education support is also picking up in the North which until recently appeared to be very low if not absent.

School Innovative Financial Schemes

Schools could be mobilized to venture into income generating activities. Schools can maintain income-earning farms, gardens or poultry. The sale of schools magazines, bazaar or students activities like drama could serve as sources of revenue to schools. Profit realized could be used to purchase equipment.

It is interesting to note that these innovative schemes are now being introduced. Report from the National Primary Education Commission (NPEC 2000:165 – 170) on School Matching Grant (pilot) project, clearly shows a number of small-scale school improvement self-help projects taking place across the country. Community members, State Primary Education Boards and the

World Bank assist schools to establish projects in agriculture, animal husbandry, crafts, leather works, sewing, knitting, soap and pomade making, tie and dye and confectionery.

In addition to functional skills to pupils, the projects are expected to generate supplementary income to maintain the schools or carry out urgently needed repairs. Examples of such pilot projects include the Community Gardening Scheme at Hausawa Model Primary School in Tarauni Local Government Area and the craft-skills acquisition project at Dala Special Girls Primary School in Dala Local Government Area, all in Kano State. The emphasis is that, primary school managers should be encouraged and given incentive and authority to innovate and implement these initiatives in collaboration with their respective Parent Teachers Associations.

Encouraging the Contributions of Private Organizations and Individuals

Individuals and organizations are contributing immensely as regards the repairs and construction of classrooms, issuing of textbooks, provision of chairs and tables etc. A National Primary Education Study on Costs, Financing and Management of Primary Education, showed clearly the involvement of Parent Teachers Associations (PTAs) in financing capital projects such as construction and renovation of classroom blocks and provision of furniture across the country. It is thus important that PTAs and Old Boys Associations be made to exist in all schools, and in the most effective way possible. Their activities must also be pursued with honesty and high degree of accountability in order to generate greater public confidence (Indabawa, 1996).

Business and other private organizations are now contributing towards educational development in the country, particularly through their contribution to the Education Task Fund (ETF). The Fund was established by the Federal Government and backed up by Decree 7 of 1993 to assess, collect and disburse education tax from companies to relevant educational establishments and institutions. The Fund provides intervention projects worth billions of Naira to primary, secondary and tertiary institutions in the country. However, since its take-up the Fund has been ridden with allegations of fraud as contained in many investigation and panel reports. For example, the report of a panel led by M. A. K. Smith, Inspector General of Police, published in Sunday Tribune, 4th June 2000 established on the basis of its investigation in Lagos zone, cases of under-assessment, under-collection of dues and other abnormalities by the Federal Inland Revenue Services and a total of N1,122,882,189.97 was recovered by the panel (as at 06/04/2000). There is therefore an urgent need in the interest of education and the country for the Federal Government to put the activities of the Fund in order particularly considering the impact the Fund could make in the improvement of Primary Education in the country.

Sourcing Assistance from International Organizations

Nigeria being a member of the United Nations deserves assistance from relevant U. N. organs like UNESCO, UNICEF, UNDP and other international organizations like the British Council and the World Bank etc. in the effort to revive the battered primary education sector. The important contribution of these United Nations and other donor agencies would be to encourage the incorporation of primary education into their development projects. In fact most of the development projects undertaken by these agencies could only succeed when illiteracy is eliminated and illiteracy can only be eliminated through an integrated approach that combines primary school education of sufficient duration and high quality.

It is known that these organizations do assist in salvaging the primary education sector through supporting studies aimed at determining the true state of the sub-sector and in the provision of textbooks as in the case of the World Bank Books. However, these Foreign Aid Agencies can do more in the efforts to improve the quality of primary education. For instance, these agencies can assist the Government in setting up industries for the production of instructional materials and sporting facilities and can also make funds available for the production of local school furniture.

Conclusion

This paper has attempted to highlight the issue of primary education finance in Nigeria. It has been pointed out that primary education has had a difficult history with regards to its financing. The main reason for the funding constraints was the sharp economic decline following the oil slump in the 1980s. This coupled with competing demands and inefficient management of resources has affected the flow of capital investments and recurrent expenditures for the system, which made it difficult to cope with the dramatic expansion over the years.

It is believed that for us to lay the foundation for qualitative education we need to increase our investments in education. Hence, the three tiers of government (federal, state and local) have to raise their budgetary allocations to education substantially and ensure proper management of funds allocated. There should also be a clear-cut direction as regards which tier of government can best do what in financing Primary Education. However, the financial responsibilities of primary education cannot only be left in the hands of the three tiers of government. Other agencies of education should also be actively involved. In this process, teachers, parents, administrators, private concerns and the entire community must serve as a faithful partners in progress and cannot afford to abandon their responsibilities in the mobilization and management of the

necessary resources to ensure that children receive appropriate and good quality primary education.

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