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PLANNING PRIMARY EDUCATION TO AMELIORATE THE WRENCHING EFFECTS OF ADJUSTMENT

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ABSTRACT

Structural Adjustment Programme has negative effects on participation in primary schooling, funding of education and quality of primary education in developing countries.

Owing to the declining proportions of government budget to education, the growing number of children to educate and the rigidity of the institutional framework for planning, there has been serious gaps between vision and action in the provision of education. Highlights of the suggested policy framework for improving the planning of primary education to ameliorate the effects of SAP in Nigeria include : expansion of access to schooling, improving equity in the provision of education, enhancing quality and learning achievements, improving teachers' performance, increasing funds and resources and managing them for optimum utilization. Practical activities for carrying out the policies are suggested.

Introduction

Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP), as described by the World Bank (1988 : 1), has a "wrenching" effect on the public expenditure on education, the purchasing power of the institutions of learning and their staff, and on access, equity and quality indicators in education at the first level in Nigeria ((Babalola, Lungwangwa and Adeyinka, 1997 : 12). Losers from SAP in Nigeria include teachers and other staff whose salaries have been eaten up by inflation; poor children who could not afford the high private costs of education, namely school leavers who could neither continue their education nor get employment as a result of narrowing labour market situations; access victims who could not participate in secondary school education owing to supply problems; and school libraries which owing to foreign exchange and devaluation problems could not source quality materials. The above describes the type of learning environment in which Nigerian pupils "learn" under SAP.

Yet, primary schools in Nigeria are expected to produce a literate and numerate population to lay the ground work for further education (Babalola, 1996 : 139). The question is: considering the declining public expenditure on education during adjustment in Nigeria, has primary

nation. The drop in gross enrolment ratio became significant since the inception of SAP in 1983 when Nigeria signed a credit agreement with the IBRD for a loan of US \$250 million to import fertilizer (World Bank, 1995, Annex-Table 1:276).

Between 1983 and 1987, the ratio

Table 1 :
Primary Education Under SAP in Nigeria

	<u>Gross Enrolment Ratio</u>		Pupil per school	Pupil-teacher ratio
	Both Sexes	Female		
1975	53	45	291	35
1980	97	84	377	37
1981	98	84	381	37
1982	97	84	387	38
1983	92	81	376	40
1984	—	—	—	—
1985	82	73	375	44
1986	—	—	—	—
1987	68	59	333	43
1988	72	62	364	42
1989	70	63	384	45
1990	72	63	389	41

Source :

Culled from : UNESCO Staistical Year Books (1988, 1991, 1992 and 1995)

education been able to meet its objectives? As far as the gross enrolment ratio or both sexes is concerned, since 1975, Nigeria has increasingly failed to provide all school-age children with the opportunity to attain necessary skills that would enable them to contribute effectively to development of the

dropped by about 20% (Table 1). The implication of this trend on access to primary education is obvious.

Table 1 reveals a significant downward trend in female participation in primary education in Nigeria following SAP in 1983. The Female gross

enrolment which was 81% in 1983 dropped to 63% in 1990. The implication of low participation of girls in primary education cannot be over-emphasised. The ability of Nigeria to appropriate the socio-economic advantages of education will be depressed as more girl-children are being excluded from taking part in primary education (Babalola, 1996 : 140).

With respect to the number of pupils per school, the school size jumped from 291 in 1975 to 377 in 1980. From 1983, there was almost a constant trend in school size. However, the class size was reduced from 376 in 1983 to 333 in 1987. From 1987 upwards, Nigeria experienced the second episode of increasing school congestion as the school size increased from 333 in 1987 to 389 in 1990. The effect of school congestion on the quality of instruction is obvious.

Another indicator of quality of instruction is the pupil teacher ratio. In Nigeria, 40 pupil per teacher has been considered the critical ratio for effective learning. Table I shows that, constrained by money during adjustment, Nigeria was making a desperate effort to manage its resources including teachers. Hence, Nigeria upgraded the number of pupils handled by each teacher from 40 in 1983 to 45 in 1989.

As far as completion rate is concerned public primary schools in Nigeria were faced with the problem of low completion rate following SAP. Out of the 2.762 million 1986 primary school cohort, five percent did not complete primary four by 1989; 56% of this number were girls (Babalola, Lungwangwa and Adeyinka, 1997 : 7). Since successful completion of primary four class level is considered as threshold for attaining permanent literacy and stimulating socio-economic growth, the low completion rates following SAP compromise the system for human capital development in the future (Babalola, 1996 : 141).

Having diagnosed the trends in primary education development between 1975 and 1990, it is meet to highlight what should be done to ameliorate the wrenching effects of SAP in Nigeria in terms of proposed plan objectives for the twenty first century.

Planning the Educational Objectives

From the above discussions, we notice that the following gaps in primary education development have been created by the implementation of SAP in Nigeria:

- (a) rather than move towards primary education for all, Nigeria was moving far away from that goal;

- (b) instead of experiencing more female participation in primary education, the country was grappling with a decreasing level of girl participation;
- (c) a significant proportion of those who started primary school dropped out before reaching the fourth grade which is considered to be the threshold of literacy and numeracy;
- (d) the learning environment was gradually becoming uncondusive as SAP bit harder on the provision and maintenance of learning resources; and
- (e) the quality of priamry education provided was increasingly being eroded by various cost reduction measures necessitated by SAP.

One important planning question is "what are we going to do to bridge these gaps?"

It is suggested that Nigeria as a nation should make deliberate efforts to salvage public primary education in the country. As the twenty first century dawns, the planning efforts should be directed at achieving the following sectoral objectives at all levels of primary education administration in Nigeria:

1. The dominant goals of all primaty schools should be excellence, and quality. These should become

the national, state, local community, parental, school and learner's slogan;

2. In quest of excellence and quality in the provision of primary education, there is virtually no limit to the amount of money an institution could spend. Every institution associated with primary schooling should aim at optimal utilization of educational resources. Consequently, another important objective for the first planning period in the next century should be to make the best use of the available resources at the school, district, state and national levels;
3. Efficiency in primary education delivery should be emphasised in the next century through an encouragement of framework and initiatives which will bring about efficient distribution of responsibilities among pupils, parents, parent-teacher associations, religious organizations and public authorities;

Equity in provision of primary education should be a priority in the next millenium. Education policies, programmes, projects and budgets should contribute to ensuring that every child in Nigeria is able to benefit from educational opportunities designed to meet

their basic learning needs through a compensatory provision of education for those who are most at risk - the poor, girls, the disabled, rural children, and those affected by HIV/AIDS.

5. Relevance of primary education to socio-economic development should be emphasized in Nigeria through reforms which will make parents feel like sending children to schools even if it means paying heavily for the education provided;
6. Partnership and collaboration in the provision of primary education should be two major principles which must guide educational policies, reforms, programmes and projects in the year to come; and
7. Accountability in the use of education resources should be an important planning objective at all levels of primary education management in the next millennium. Support should therefore be given to initiatives which make users pay for educational services they enjoyed which will make workers justify the salaries they are paid, and make providers more responsive to the needs of parents and pupils.

The foregoing has been a discussion of the main planning objectives which, it is suggested, Nigeria should aim at achieving in the future. The section that follows deals with some of the main constraints which may hinder the achievements of the highlighted objectives.

Constraints to be considered

Nigeria is good at visioning but owing to the following real life constraints, there have always been serious gaps among visions, mission and action in the provision of primary education. Constraints such as political instability as it affects continuity in government's visions and actions will be avoided so as to make our discussions as practicable as possible. However, this aspect will be discussed by the following levels of decision-making in primary education to associate each constraint with the corresponding locus of action.

At the National and State Levels

Financial constraints seem to be at the centre of discussions in the present day Nigeria. The Federal Government, in response to the conditionalities of SAP, has continuously made efforts to reduce public expenditure on education. For instance, per capita education spending dropped from US \$ 5.6 in

1981 through US \$ 3.9 in 1983 to US \$ 1.1 in 1988. (Babalola, Lungwangwa and Adeyinka, 1997). As far as the share of education in the national budget is concerned, Nigeria experienced downward trends from 1984 when education share was 8.0% per cent. By 1986, Nigeria experienced about three per cent drop in education share and by 1988, the country experienced about six per cent drop in education share when compared with the 1984 level.

Consequently, the education expenditure per child which was US \$ 82.92 at the inception of SAP in 1983 DROPPED TO US \$ 55.59 in 1985. As rightly observed by Adeyinka (1993:9),

The financing of Nigeria's education system has reached a crisis point. Government does not seem to be able to make adequate provisions for capital development in the various educational institutions. Classroom accommodation ... does not seem to be adequate ...

Second, the governments are constrained by the ever increasing size of the public primary education sub-sector in the face of dwindling economic strength. Before Nigeria's independence, the colonial government directly and effectively managed the few public primary

schools under her control and did not neglect the ones owned by the missions and the native authorities. Following independence, however, the introduction of the Universal Free Primary Education (UPE) policy led to an unexpected increase in the number of primary schools owned, financed and managed by the government. The consequence of the over centralization of ownership and funding of primary schools in Nigeria is the government's failure to provide primary education in the right quantity and quality.

Third, comprehensive planning of primary education development is constrained by the institutional setting of educational planning and administration in Nigeria. There is no "clear" framework within which educational planning and administration are to be carried out. The tendency to strike a balance between centralization and decentralization of primary education has made it difficult to predict the line of action of government concerning management of primary education. As a result, there are complaints of inconsistent policies concerning primary education in particular. Often, there are contradictions, confusions and conflicts among major stake holders in primary education. Moreover, the institutional framework for planning gives room for neither flexibility nor discretionary decisions and actions.

For instance, review of education policies and laws are seldom made, and when reviews are made, they come at a time when events must have overtaken such reviews. In fact, little attempts are usually made to initiate primary education reforms in response to the complaints, criticisms and demands of the local people and international communities. As an illustration, private primary schools in Nigeria are always aware that parents are largely interested in getting their children admitted into secondary schools of pupil's choice. They further encourage speaking of the English language among their pupils. On the other hand, public primary schools seem not to be responsive to the immediate needs of parents and pupils owing to the rigid framework within which things are done in the public schools.

At the Local Level

One serious constraint at the local level is the low revenue generating capacity of many local government councils in Nigeria. Most of the local government councils heavily depend upon their meagre allocation from the Federation Account to finance both capital and recurrent expenditures on education, health, roads and so on. Unfortunately, corruption or lack of transparency which is widespread in Nigeria has made Federal Government to be reluctant

to provide more resources for the local authorities. The most frequent types of corruption encountered at the local government level include bribes to have compromising documents removed from files, fraudulent use of official stationery, diversion of public funds, presentation of false bills and frauds by revenue collectors.

While local governments cannot be singled out in matters relating to corruption in Nigeria, there are certain things which make them more vulnerable to lack of transparency. First, poverty is more pronounced at the local level than at the central level. Poverty is capable of generating systems of patronage and dependence which can force poor people to tolerate, initiate or take advantage of corruption in official circles (Gould and Amaro-Reyes, 1983, in Babalola 1993 : 160). Second, corruption can be encouraged by the community spirit and cohesion at the local level. There are fewer corruption watchdogs in the rural sector than in the urban sector of the Nigerian economy. Third, there is shortage of qualified personnel such as accountants, auditors and planners who are expected to plan and enforce financial accountability. The lack of accountants and auditors to ensure proper authorization of funds and enforce rules and regulations

concerning the use of resources does not only encourage corruption at the local level, it also hinders devolution of financial power to the local level in education. Similarly, the lack of educational planners make devolution of planning and decision making power difficult.

At the School Level

Poor supervision and control to ensure quality of education at the primary school level is a serious problem in Nigeria. In fact, the poor control system coupled with a lack of performance-based incentive system has made teachers in public schools to become less committed than their counterparts in the private schools in spite of the fact that those in the private sector are less paid.

Community insensitivity to schooling problems has also constituted a serious bottleneck. This is owing to the fact that parents who have their children in public schools are mostly poor and uneducated. It is therefore almost impossible to mobilize sufficient community resources into the public primary school systems.

Public primary schools are generally faced with low capacity to take important decisions and initiate necessary actions. Unfortunately, the private schools which are quite

good at quick decision and prompt actions are restricted to the urban centres. Unlike the private schools, public schools are not given the legislative freedom to select desired inputs, charge fees, and control process and output. In fact the tradition of free education is a serious bottleneck to any financing reform aimed at cost sharing at the primary level in Nigeria. Having identified some of the constraints to school effectiveness in Nigeria, we now turn to the next section which attempts to suggest possible solutions.

Strategies to Ameliorate SAP Effects

As the 20th century moves to a close most institutions talk of strategic planning containing a set of actions aimed at enhancing the organization's ability to achieve its goal. Once the National Policy on Education has determined the long-term objectives of all institutions connected with the provision of instructional services, it becomes the task of the educational managers within each institution (Ministry of Education at federal and state levels; National and State Primary Education Boards; Local Government Primary School Boards; and Schools) to decide the best way in which to achieve the broad objectives over the years that follow.

School Effectiveness Strategies

Given that the main purpose of any primary school is to provide literacy and numeracy skills to children between ages 6 years and 12 years, and help them to gain admission into secondary school of their choice, the following strategies may be adopted (World Bank 1995):

(a) *Setting Standard for Quality Assurance*

It is the duty of the government and its agents to help improve academic achievement at the primary level by setting clear and high performance standards in every subject.

(b) *Supporting the following five main educational inputs*

(i) *Students' capacity and motivation to learn* can be increased by encouraging high-quality pre-school educational programmes; providing child nutrition programmes, school-health programmes, and learning environment improvement programmes.

(ii) the subject to be learnt (curriculum) can be improved by linking the subject to be taught to performance standards and measures of outcome. Will this subject

lead to acquisition of the needed skills, help the pupils in gaining admission and enhance the reputation and attractiveness of the school? The government should furnish general guidance on the frequency and duration of instruction. At present, every subject at the primary school lasts for equal number of minutes. Teachers in public schools, in practice, teach only about one-quarter of the expected number of subjects. The language of instruction is not strictly specified. While English language is highly encouraged in the private schools the vernacular is commonly used in the public ones. There is the need for a national policy (guideline) on the more effective language of instruction (English or Mother tongue). The content of what is learnt is also important with respect to the creation of a girl-friendly primary school. There is the need for government to have a clear guideline on making the curriculum gender-sensitive, and gender neutral.

(iii) the teacher who knows the subject and how to teach it can be developed through human resource development approaches such as headteacher organised in-service training to

improve teachers' subject knowledge and related pedagogical practices.

- (iv) the time for learning can be extended and improved by extending the official school year, reducing unscheduled school closing, teacher and student absence, and miscellaneous disruptions; permitting flexible time-tables to accommodate seasonal variations, holidays and children's domestic chores; and by assigning homework.
- (v) the tools for teaching and learning can be improved by supporting any initiative aimed at improving instructional materials such as blackboards, chalk and textbooks. Reading skills require acquisition of supplementary reading material.

c. *Increasing flexibility at the local and schools levels*

School governing boards, head-teachers and teachers are best able to select the most appropriate school inputs, such as textbooks and teaching methodology, owing to their intimate knowledge of the local conditions. Government needs to come out with clear

guidelines on devolution of power which will make primary schools become clearly accountable to parents, communities and pupils; encourage shared goals regarding the learning objectives of the school; encourage flexibility in allocating instructional resources; and encourage school - based leadership. The last section of this paper highlights what we consider as possible sets of actions which can be taken to improve the primary school system in Nigeria.

Suggested Policy Framework for Ameliorating the Negative Effects of SAP

Table 2 contains possible means by which the Nigerian government can address the weak areas in the provision of primary education in the country. The suggestions tabulated are based on literature on the issues raised. The table is self-explanatory: it focuses on how to expand access to primary education and improve equity in its provision, enhance quality and learning achievement, improve teachers' performance, improve textbook production, improve the efficiency in the utilization of education resources, strengthen management capacity and increase funds at the primary school level.

Table 2 :

Suggested Policy Framework for Improving Primary Education.

What to do	How to do it (Strategy)
Expand access to primary education	<p>(a) <i>Supply-side interventions</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • build more schools and class rooms • hire more teachers • maintain existing infrastructure <p>(b) <i>Demand-side interventions</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • legislate and enforce compulsory attendance • implement automatic promotion more effectively • reduce direct and indirect costs of primary education
Improve equity in the provision of primary education	<p>(a) <i>poverty -gap interventions</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • provide scholarships, free textbooks, mid-day meals and transport to the weak households. <p>(b) <i>rural/urban-gap interventions</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • provide incentives for rural teachers • institute a rural supervisory system <p>(c) <i>gender-gap interventions</i></p> <p>(i) <i>supply-side</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • increase the number of girl schools • open informal education centres • establish flexible school schedules

(Table 2 Cont'd)

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • provide private toilets for girls • provide transport for girls • appoint more female teachers (especially in rural areas) • give gender-sensitive training (particularly to female teachers) • revise textbooks to eliminate gender bias • subsidize girls' education
Enhance quality and learning achievement	<p>ii. <i>demand-side interventions</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • institute awareness campaigns • provide creches to release girl children from sibling care • provide free tuition, books, food, uniforms and transport • delegate authority for improvement to the lower levels • institute performance standards at all levels • establish and monitor professional codes of conduct • encourage and coordinate production of instructional materials • give training on learner-centred methodologies • increase number of hours/days of instruction • provide home counselling services • establish norms to enhance school-community relationship • train headteachers on quality control and skills • Encourage establishment and sourcing of school libraries
Improve teacher performance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implement teacher qualification standard that makes the NCE the minimum qualification

(Table 2 cont'd)

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • emphasize building of teaching skills in all teacher training institutions /colleges • encourage local level provision of school based in-service training. • improve the conditions of teaching • make promotion contingent on performance - however, develop the criteria for measuring good performance • encourage the use of mother tongue at lower grades
<hr/> <p>Improve textbook production</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • set standards for vocabulary and sentence complexity and length • conduct sample trials of readability and comprehension with students and teachers • invest more on research, writing and book design
<hr/> <p>Improve efficiency in the utilization of resources</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • establish necessary coordinating structures • develop guidelines for cost-sharing among beneficiaries • initiate and implement activities aimed at encouraging private and voluntary sector involvement in primary education.
<hr/> <p>Strengthen the management and institutional capacity</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • train local-level educational planners, village education committee members and headteachers on education management. • strengthen the state primary education boards to provide support at the village and school levels. <hr/>

(Table 2 cont'd)

Increase funds at the primary school level

- establish a management information system to provide more accurate and timely education data for use at all levels.
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- develop a wider revenue base to improve resource mobilization
 - increase shares of expenditure to primary education
 - develop financial incentives to stop diversion of funds
 - enable the local governments to raise additional revenues from taxes that may not be available to the state governments
 - reduce repetition and dropout rates to reduce cost per graduate
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Summary

This paper has made the attempt to diagnose the primary education system under the Structural Adjustment Programme in Nigeria. It has identified areas where there is need for deliberate intervention as the twenty first century dawns, and based on literature, it has highlighted various initiatives which can be used to ameliorate the negative effects of SAP. It is the belief that details concerning who to do what, when, what should be done and with what resources, will be developed at all levels of primary education management in the country. Readers may find this paper useful as a guide in understanding

the technique of planning in the education sector. It is therefore important to follow the process, starting from the diagnosis of the education system, through the formulation of major educational policies (guidelines). The paper has drawn a proposal policy framework but has been unable to prepare the detailed work plan. This gap can be filled by any interested reader and researcher.

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