

Basic Education and Education for All in Nigeria: The Role of Multinational Corporations

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In spite of the concerted efforts made by the Nigerian government at funding the Universal Basic Education (UBE) in the country, 11 million children of school age are still out of school. To augment the funding, the paper proposes the involvement of multinational corporations. Participation in UBE is seen as a tangible Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) project that will have direct impact on the host communities in such a way that will eliminate the hostilities of the host communities towards multinational corporations.

Introduction

Nigeria, the most populated country in Africa with over 140 million people, launched its Universal Basic Education (UBE) on September 30, 1999, which are in line with the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). The target is to achieve 100% enrollment of all children of school age by 2015. In 2000, Nigeria further demonstrated her commitment to this purpose by being one of the over 170 countries that were signatories to the World Education Conference in Dakar that reaffirmed the commitment to deliver education for all by 2015. The Nigerian government created the Universal Basic Education Commission (UBEC) as a unit under the Federal Ministry of Education in 2001 to ensure its effective coordination and implementation. In 2004, the Compulsory Free Universal Basic Education Act was passed thereby giving legal framework for the implementation of the program. Beside these efforts, the government also has an Education for All (EFA) Coordination Unit in the Ministry of Education charged with the responsibility of preparing a national action plan for the delivery of Education For All in the country. With this overwhelming

evidence of commitment and elaborate organization it would seem that the country would achieve the goal of providing education for all by 2015. However, in April 2008, the Federal Minister of Education, Aja Nwachukwu made a startling announcement that 11 million children are out of school in the country. The number is shockingly high and there is need to look outside of the government, non-governmental organizations, and private individuals, and focus on the private sector, particularly the multinational corporations. These companies have depleted the natural resources of the country, and made huge profits, and neglected to take tangible corporate social responsibilities in their host communities.

Free Universal Education in Nigeria: A Brief History

Efforts at providing free universal primary education (UPE) in Nigeria began before the country's independence in 1960. The Western Region of Nigeria introduced free universal education in 1955 followed suit by the Eastern Region in 1958. After independence, the drive towards universal primary education was temporarily interrupted by the civil war which lasted from 1967 to 1970. After the war, government concentrated on reconciliation, reconstruction, and rehabilitation, as well as the unity of the nation. Once this seemed apparent, the federal government introduced free UPE for the whole nation in 1976. The 1976, UPE was a giant revolutionary stride in the provision of formal education to the children of Nigeria. The turnout was overwhelming as the actual enrollment far outnumbered the projected enrollment. Mohammed (2001) observed that the enrollment placed a lot of pressure on classrooms, learning materials, and the number of teachers resulting in overcrowded classrooms leading some teachers to hold classes under trees with the pupils sitting on stones. Many schools solved the problem of overpopulation by running two shifts. By this arrangement, half of the pupils came in the morning and end classes by noon, while the other half come at noon and close at 5 p.m. or thereafter. Each shift uses the same facilities used by the other half. Most public schools still operate with the shift system as a means of offering more children opportunities to be educated. Uko-Aviomah, Okoh, and Omatseye (2007) have attributed poor planning and poor funding as the major problems that stifled the achievement of the objectives of UPE at the time. Since then, public primary education has remained free even though parents buy uniforms and books, pay a number of levies, and construct and furnish classrooms through the Parent Teacher Association (PTA). Analysts have termed this financial involvement as "user fees" which many poor parents cannot afford, which leaves their children out of school.

The Current Basic Education Program

The former president of Nigeria, Olusegun Obasanjo, launched UBE in September 1999 with the ultimate objective of providing an uninterrupted nine-year compulsory, free, universal, basic education for all children of school age in the country. Government envisaged that “at the end of the nine years students would acquire an appropriate level of literacy, numeracy, manipulative skills, communicative skills, and life skills and be employable, useful to themselves and society at large by possessing relevant ethical, moral and civic values” (UBEC, 2006, p. 5).

The Nigerian Education Research and Development Council (NERDC, 2008) spells out the scope of basic education in Nigeria to cover:

1. Nine-year uninterrupted formal education consisting of six years of primary education and three years of junior secondary school.
2. Early childhood care and education for children 3 to 5 years.
3. Adult literacy and non-formal education.

The federal government of Nigeria (2008) sees UBE as that education which inculcates fundamental knowledge and skills in the learner such as permanent literacy, numeracy, scientific inquiry, trade/vocational skills, life skills, and moral values. Obayan (2000) described basic education as the education that builds firm roots for literacy and numeracy, inculcates basic life skill and consolidates the skills of learning how to learn. UBE ensures that on completion, students are equipped with knowledge, skills, and experience to enter the world of work and engage productively in an occupation or to proceed to senior secondary school.

Funding Universal Basic Education

The bulk of funding of primary education is done by the local governments through their 20% allocation from the federation account. The total cost of teachers' salaries is deducted each month from allocation to the local government council and routed to State Basic Education Boards (SBEs) through the UBEC. The overhead cost, classroom construction, and renovation comes from 10% of the aggregate salary bill within a state deducted from the state government's allocation and also routed to SUBEB. In addition, 50 naira per pupil is given by the federal government for acquiring learning materials. Funding secondary education is the responsibility of the state governments.

Currently, capital projects such as the construction of classrooms or renovations are done by the Education Tax Fund. The Education Tax Decree

No. 7 of 1993 requires corporations to remit 2 percent of their annual assessable profit to the federal government as education fund. (FGN, 1998). The monies are inadequate to fund quality education in the country, therefore stakeholders in education, particularly the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU), have incessantly called upon the government to increase budgetary allocation to education to reach the 26% required by United Nations Educational, Social and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) in developing countries. Consequently there has been some increase in the budgetary allocation to education. The budget increased from 8.2% in 2007 to 12% in 2008. In monetary terms the budget rose from \$185 billion to \$210 billion in 2008 (Chukwulaka, 2008).

In spite of government's effort, reports on the state of education in Nigeria show that education is grossly underfunded and this may be one reason why as many as 11 million children are out of school. Adepoju and Fabiyi (2007) reported that three demographic studies of the existing national situation of primary education reveal that 12% of primary school pupils sit on the floor, 38% of classrooms have no ceiling, 87% of classrooms are overcrowded, 77% lack textbooks, and 100% teachers in the public schools are poorly motivated.

Apart from the federal, state, and local government funding, international organizations and donor agencies also support UBE in Nigeria in the form of grants, donations, and loans. Prominent among these are United Nations International Children Education Fund (UNICEF), United Nations Education Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), World Bank, United Kingdom Department for International Development (DFID), United States Agency for International Development (USAID), and the Japanese Agency for International Cooperation (JICA).

Children Out of School

The 2005 report of United Nations Children's Educational Fund (UNICEF) showed that 40% of school-aged children do not attend any form of school at all. The north recorded the highest number of children who do not attend school, particularly girls. The figure stood at 10 million children. The Punch newspaper Nigeria (2008) reports the minister of education as saying that the current figure stands at 11 million. This shows that the number has increased rather than reduced when it is already halfway to the targeted date of 2015 to achieve the 100% enrollment of all school-aged children. The figure is outrageously high. The question is, who are the children out of school?

In a review of research by Nigerian Society for Educational Psychologists (NISEP), Okonkwo reveals that they include the following categories of children:

- Children from poor families
- Children from large polygamous homes
- Female children
- Children engaged in child labor including children working as hawkers, on the farm, at the motor parks, food canteens, plantations, shops, as bus conductors, and wheelbarrow pushers
- Victims of child trafficking
- Street children (those under the bridge and street beggars)
- Domestic servants who are domestic workers or nannies
- Orphans, particularly those who have lost their parents due to AIDS.
- School refusals (In south eastern Nigeria, an increasing number of boys are refusing to go to school. Instead they prefer trading)
- School dropouts: The dropout rate is 2.3% for primary school while the secondary is 9.8% (Nigeria 2003 DHS)
- Children with disabilities
- Children living far away from any school, especially those separated by difficult geography such as mountains and rivers
- Children living with stepparents
- Children of single parents
- Children involved in early marriage
- Children in conflict-affected areas such as places involved in ethnic or religious crisis
- Children in traditional Islamic schools.

The Involvement of Multinational Corporations in Education: The Story So Far

Multinational corporations are corporations with branches in a number of countries. A parent company in the United Kingdom, the United States, France, Italy, Norway, Japan, China, or any other country having subsidiaries as Nigerian corporations. Today, multinational corporations dominate the major sectors of the Nigerian economy including manufacturing, construction, petrochemicals, and telecommunications. Others are commercial and merchant banks, hotels, insurance companies, conglomerates, and chambers of commerce. Amao (2008) names the major oil companies as:

- Anglo-Dutch Royal Shell – the largest oil producer in the Niger Delta.
- American domicile corporations, namely Exxon-Mobile, Chevron/ Texaco, Sunoil and Conoco
- France's Total

- Italy's Agip
- Norway's Stat Oil
- South Africa's Sasol

The oil and gas sector of multinational corporations operate in partnership with the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporations (NNPC).

So far, the involvement of multinational corporations and other companies in Nigeria have been through the Education Tax Fund (ETF) which is 2% of the companies' assessable annual profit. The fund is disbursed to the various levels of education through an Education Tax Fund Board of Trustees. The disbursement of funds to the various levels of education is as follows:

1. Higher Education - 50%
2. Primary Education - 30%
3. Secondary Education - 20%

Bajah (2001) states that the ETF fund is used mainly for capital projects and since its enactment in 1993, the fund has been used for construction and renovation of classrooms, laboratories, libraries, special learning centers, and administrative blocks.

The strategy of getting multinational corporations and other companies involved in education through ETF is a good one but Bakare (2008) reported that some of them have a tendency of colliding with government officials and accountants to evade the tax or manipulate their liabilities.

In addition to the ETF, some companies also sponsor quiz competitions in science and mathematics and essay writing. Others give scholarships, sponsor games and competitions, or sponsor distinguished teacher awards.

In as much as we reckon these levels of participation in education, I must be quick to point out that these contributions are too insignificant next to the huge profit these corporations are making. Besides, the meager contributions are nothing compared to the resource and environmental depletion and pollution the host communities suffer. The corporations therefore need to focus on more tangible corporate social responsibility projects that will contribute meaningfully to the development of their host communities.

Charting a New Course: Involving Multinational Corporations in Universal Basic Education

Hosting communities in the Niger Delta have become increasingly hostile toward multinational corporations. One plausible explanation to this phenomenon

is that the host communities feel alienated and dispossessed of valuable resources from which the corporations are making millions daily while the members of the communities around them have seemingly no solution to end the spin of poverty. The attitude of the communities towards the multinational corporations is a strategy of speaking to the government and corporations about their plight in a language they can understand. Consequently, the Federal Executive Council (FEC) approved a Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) policy on May 21, 2008 for the country to instill ethical behavior in Nigerian business. CSR refers to the adaption of responsible business practices by corporations to improve the standard of living in the communities in which they operate. The policy requires businesses to be involved in community development in such areas as education and health by participating in the provision of basic social amenities like schools, water, electricity, and hospitals to host communities.

One of the most tangible ways multinational corporations can contribute to the meaningful development of their host communities is by being involved in educational development as quality education is the bedrock for development and empowerment. Each multinational corporation should establish a complete UBE structure in the community where it operates. Such a structure should have the following:

1. Pre-primary section where children from 3 to 5 years receive early childhood care and education
2. Primary school section with enough classrooms for each grade to cater to all school-aged children in the community
3. A junior secondary school section with enough classrooms for the primary school graduates to make 100% transition from primary school to junior secondary school
4. Adult literacy and non-formal education center
5. Physical education facilities
6. Toilets and water facilities
7. Administrative blocks with spacious offices and staff rooms
8. A school clinic
9. A board for the entire school system consisting of members of the community, members of the corporation, and representatives from the federal, state, and local governments, Teachers Registration Council, and the state Teachers Service Board should be constituted to manage the school and ensure that quality teaching and learning is maintained.
10. The state and local governments should be responsible for the payment of teachers through UBEC while the corporations give additional incentives in the form of allowances to the teachers.

11. Community leaders, ward heads, village heads, and traditional rulers should be involved in ensuring that all families in their domain are enrolled in school and retained until they complete basic education.
12. The curriculum of junior secondary school and non-formal education should include the skills required in the junior staff cadre in the company so that graduates of the school can be employed in the corporation as junior staff.
13. The multinational corporation that are concentrated in the cities such as hotels, banks construction firms, manufacturing firms and telecommunication firms should embark on an “adopt a village” policy where they collaborate with the local government to set up UBE projects in their communities. In this way a lot of villages can benefit from the corporate social responsibility projects of multinational corporations.

Conclusion

In Nigeria the government provides free UBE but governmental effort is not meeting the desired goals in that as high as 11 million children are out of school. Even though international organizations and external donors such as UNESCO, UNICEF, World Bank, United Kingdom DFID, USAID, and JICA have made valuable contributions to the government in its effort to achieve 100% enrollment of school age children, the country is still far away from meeting the target. We can find answers to this serious problem by involving the multinational corporation through the CSR policy by making it mandatory for the multinational corporations to embark on UBE as one of their CSR projects.

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