

## **THE CHALLENGES AND PROSPECTS IN THE IMPLEMENTATION OF EFA AND PERSONS WITH SPECIAL NEEDS**

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### **Introduction**

Huge challenges remain in the implementation of education for all (EFA) in Nigeria range from poor learning outcomes and low-quality education, financial, social and even physical challenges on the part of special needs persons these and many others have become both convergent and widely problematic in implementing the EFA and achieving its goals by year 2015. In this paper the challenges and prospects in the implementation of EFA and person with special needs were discussed.

Education for all (EFA) is an international initiative first launched in Jomtien, Thailand 1990 to bring the benefits of education to every citizen in every society”

The 1979 and 1999 constitution of the federal republic of Nigeria made provision in section 18 free and universal primary and secondary education for the citizens. But those who drafted and approved the constitution deliberately did not include the right to education among the fundamental right chapter of the constitution. The argument was that the provision of free universal primary education was not right but an obligation of government which should be provided “as and when applicable” (FRN, 1999). The implication was that participation in education was a privilege extended to citizens at the whims and caprices of those exercising political power of government when ever they felt able and willing to do so.

In Nigeria the right to education was only recognized in 2014 when the National Assembly eradicated the universal Basic Education Law to enforce a free universal and compulsory nine years “basic education” composing primary and junior secondary education.

Nigeria’s National Policy on Education (FRN 1977, revised, 1998 and 2014) recognized education as an instrument par excellence for effective national development. One of the important goals of the policy was the provision of Universal Basic Education (UBE) in a variety of forms, depending on needs and possibilities (FRN. 2001.9) although political leaders highly rated education as an important factor in national development plans, they perceived it as a “privileged rather than a right”. This perception influenced the funding of education and intimately the rate at which education was made accessible. This perhaps explains why it took Nigerian 41 years after its independence in 1960 before it was able to make basic education free and compulsory. In spite of being endowed by nature with human and material resources.

Since 1990, countries have been working toward providing access to education for all children (EFA), during this period, primary school enrollment rates have

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increased, and according to UNESCO 2002 EFA monitoring report, so countries have achieved EFA enrolment goals. However, the report also warns that “almost one-third of the world’s population live in countries where achieving the education for all goals will remain a dream unless a strong concerted effort is made (UNESCO, 2002).

UNESCO estimates that large percentage of the 115 million children still out of the school live in the poorest and most remote regions of certain countries. This is true of Africa where 42 million children are out of school. The vast majority of other children who are not being reached by formal education are orphaned, working, and special needs children.

Although there has been steady progress towards achieving many of the EFA goals, challenges remain today, there are about 77 million children of school age, including 44 million goals, who are still not in school due to financial, social or physical challenges, including high fertility rates, HIV/AIDS, and conflict.

Access to schooling in developing countries has improved since 1990 some 47 out of 163 countries have achieved universal primary education and an additional 20 countries are estimated to be “on track” to achieve these goals by 2015. However, huge challenges remain in 44 countries 23 of which are in Africa. These countries are unlikely to achieve universal primary education by 2015 unless domestic and international efforts are accelerated substantially. Although the gender gap in education is narrowing. Girls are still at a disadvantage when it comes to access and completion of both primary and secondary school.

Poor learning outcomes and low quality education also remain overriding concerns in the education sector. Historically, special needs children have been treated as a local or family issue and not thought of in the name of economic development. (Eleweke & Rodda, 2002) thus becomes clear in 2010 when the EFA goals were reassessed at the Dakar world education forum and only included vague allusions to the rights of persons with special needs, for example, article 7.3 states “we hereby commit ourselves to: ensuring that the learning needs of all young people and adults are met through equitable access to appropriate learning and life-skills programs (UNESCO, 2000, article 7.3). Disability rights can be interpreted from such phrase but are not explicitly identified.

Borishde (2002), the former minister of education in Nigeria said that the government had many concerns about education, but the most critical appeared to be associated with issues of expanding and equalizing access to educational opportunities; the maintenance and improvement of quality and standards and the cost of providing education.

Nwaguwa (2000) opined that going by past experiences, there would be much difficulty and even reluctance to enforce compulsory attendance of students, planned expectations, many children may not be attending school by 2015 for many different reasons, including parental poverty, physical and mentally challenged children, unattractive or unavailable school facilities and programmes and corrupt law enforcement agents.

The eradication of illiteracy from the African continent through mass literacy and adult education programmes is one of the cardinal objectives of EFA in education literacy rate in Nigerian was 49% (FME 2004), Nigeria's female literacy rate was also lower Nigeria has a very large fast growing population hence it contributes significantly to Africa's large illiterate population. According to UNESCO (2002) there are about 70 million illiterates in Nigeria. This means that the country is just searching the problem on the surface. We can even assert that all the mass literacy campaigns of the last decade have been mere window dressing in that they have been ineffective in producing the desired results. A survey carried out by Ojogwu 2004 why many illiterate adults do not benefit from the free adult literacy programmes, showed many problems in the organization of the programmes among these are scheduling of the every class, shortage of trained institutions with appropriate methodology and skills to read and write and other problems. To dramatically increase adult participation in mass literacy programmes the problems identified above must be properly addressed by government and adult education organizers.

Persons with special needs were not always viewed as priority in the rebuilding of effort of education due to the lack of formalized state services, much of the service provision for people with special needs were organized by religious groups (Kliwer & Fitzgerald, 2001), NGO'S (ingstad & Whyte, 1995).

The provision of infrastructure in is another challenge on the education of special needs because the infrastructure of the nation schools did not allow persons with special needs to have access to most of the class rooms there was no specific effort to remove barriers. There are also problems associated with teacher's attitudes, inappropriate curriculum, and inaccessible buildings. (Miles, 1993).

In respect to these challenges, Nigeria still attempted in meeting the educational needs of children with special needs within the constraints of available resources by removing physical and educational barriers so that students with special need can learn along side the non-disabled peers and access a high quality curriculum. This however because an attractive way for the nation to seemingly solve one of the big challenges in education.

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