

# Strategies to Achieve a Stable, Adequate, and Sustainable Financing of Primary Education in Nigeria in This Decade And Beyond

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**Abstract:** It needs not be overstressed that primary education is the foundation on which the other levels of education rest. It can also be likened to the gate of a building, which controls the entrants into it. In spite of the importance of primary education however, its financing has been unstable, inadequate and unsustainable in Nigeria. Over the years, primary education has been experiencing a ‘push and pull syndrome’ among the three tiers of government (i.e. federal, state, and local). Its financing has also been inadequate to meet its challenges while also becoming a burden for government to bear. This paper examines the history of primary education financing in Nigeria and in the process, highlighted the maneuvering among the federal, state, and local governments; the inadequacy, as well as the non sustainability of the financing. To achieve adequate, stable and sustainable financing of primary education in Nigeria in this decade and beyond therefore, joint financing by the federal, states and local governments, introduction of Education Tax for public service workers, increased participation/contributions by private sector, seeking the assistance of old students, organizing fund raising activities, engagement in agricultural activities, as well as ensuring accountability in the management of primary education funds, are recommended.

**Keywords:** Strategy, achieve, stable, adequate, sustainable, financing, primary, education, primary education, Nigeria, decade, beyond

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## I. INTRODUCTION

Education is the greatest invention of man, in an attempt to conquer the environment, including the natural resources, both flora and fauna, and to obey the command of the creator, as indicated in the Book of Genesis of the Holy Bible, which states:

...so God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him, male and female he created them, and God said to them: be fruitful, multiply and fill the earth, subdue it, and have dominion over the birds of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every other living things that move upon the earth (Genesis 1: 26-28).

Education can be acquired in informal, formal and formal settings. Formal education can be acquired at different levels of educational institutions, such as the crèche, kindergarten, nursery, primary and secondary schools, monotronics, polytechnics, colleges of education, and universities. Literatures have however been supportive of the enviable position of primary education among other levels of educational system, and why it needs to be accorded much priority in a country. According to Okeke (1990), it is the embryo of the educational system, as it prepares a greater number of a community for a larger number of occupations at the grass-root. Ogunsanya (1990) also posited that it is the bedrock of a nation’s educational system, as it determines the quality of the educational sector while also serving as a catalyst to its growth and development in the social, political, and economic system.

## II. NATURE AND OBJECTIVES OF PRIMARY EDUCATION IN NIGERIA

In Nigeria, primary education is the education, which is provided for children whose ages ranged from 6 to 11 years, in primary school, which can be owned by government, religious, corporate organizations, or individual. It follows the kindergarten/elementary education (meant for children of ages of between 2 and 3 years). Its curriculum include the languages (English, a language of the environment, and French), Mathematics, Science, Physical and Health Education, Religious Knowledge, Agricultural Science, Home Economics, Social Studies/Citizenship Education, Cultural and Creative Arts, including Drawing, Handicraft, Music and Cultural Activities. A child supposes to spend 6 years in primary school thus implying that at the age of 11 years, he/she supposes to have completed primary education.

The objectives of primary education in Nigeria are, the:

- inculcation of permanent literacy, numeracy, and ability to communicate effectively;
- laying of a sound basis for scientific and reflective thinking;
- provision of citizenship education as a basis for effective participation in and contribution to the life of the society;
- molding of the character and development of sound attitude and morals in the child;
- giving a child opportunities for developing manipulative skills that will enable him/ her to function effectively in the society within the limits of his/her capacity; and
- Provision of a child with basic tools for further educational advancement including the preparation for trades and crafts of the locality (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2004, 14).

### **Financing Primary Education in Nigeria, in Retrospect**

The financing of primary education in Nigeria has been in different phases. Of particular interest are the:

#### **Era of Exclusive Financing by Christian Missionaries**

At the onset of western education in Nigeria, its financing was under the exclusive control of the Christian missionaries. Owing to the lukewarm attitude of the colonial government, the financing of primary education was until 1872 achieved through personal donations of the Christian missionaries, friends and acquaintances, Sunday school offerings, as well as the donations from overseas missions (Adeyemi, 1998, Adesina, 1977, Adesua, 1981).

#### **Era of Dual Financing by Christian Missionaries and Colonial Governments**

The involvement of government in the financing of education in Nigeria dates back to year 1872 when a grant of £10 was given to each of the three Christian Missions that operated schools in Lagos then (i.e. Church Missionary Society, Roman Catholic Mission, and Wesleyan Methodist Mission). The grant was increased to £300 between 1874 and 1876 and £600 in 1887 (Fafunwa, 1974, Fafunwa, 1974). As at 1891, annual grant to schools was £1, 675 while in 1895, it was £ 3,400 (Adesina, 1977, p.11). Significant landmark in the financing of primary education was achieved through the adoption of Macpherson's Constitution in 1951, which led to the division of the country into Western, Eastern, and Northern regions and thus makes the financing of primary education the main responsibility of regional governments.

#### **Impact of Universal Primary Education (UPE) Programme in Eastern and Western Regions**

In 1955, the Government of Western region launched Universal Primary Education (UPE) programme, which was aimed at providing primary education free for eligible and willing children of primary school-age of the region at the time. It is not doubtful that significant fund was expended on primary education in the region through this programme, as buttressed by data in Table 1.

**Table 1: Grants to Primary Education by Western Region (£ million): 1955-1966**

| Year    | Total Education Grant | Grant to Primary Education | % of Total Education Grant |
|---------|-----------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|
| 1955/56 | 5,342                 | 2,767                      | 52.00                      |
| 1956/57 | 5,059                 | 3,011                      | 60.00                      |
| 1957/58 | 5,885                 | 3,337                      | 57.00                      |
| 1958/59 | 5,569                 | 3,867                      | 69.00                      |
| 1959/60 | 5,889                 | 4,883                      | 83.00                      |
| 1960/61 | 7,400                 | 6,205                      | 84.00                      |
| 1961/62 | 7,566                 | 6,144                      | 81.00                      |
| 1962/63 | 7,850                 | 5,944                      | 76.00                      |
| 1963/64 | 6,170                 | 4,551                      | 74.00                      |
| 1964/65 | 6,178                 | 4,791                      | 78.00                      |
| 1965/66 | 6,259                 | 5,020                      | 80.00                      |

*Source:* Adesina (1977). Planning and educational development in Nigeria

As indicated in Table 1, the grants for primary education, which was £2,767 million in 1955 (the first year of UPE implementation), increased to £5,020 million in 1965/66, which represented 81.42% increase. According to Adesina (1977) in spite of the fact that the programme was short-lived two years after its introduction in the region, owing to inadequate planning, lack of funds, strong religious opposition by some religious bodies (Ukeje, 1991), a total of £ 4, 449, 328 was spent up till the period of its termination.

The immediate post-independence period, still witnessed the financing of primary education by the regional governments, which was achieved through the provision of grants in aid. Following the division of the country into twelve States in 1967, the financing of primary education became the responsibility of the State Governments, with little assistance from Federal Government.

**Table 2: Federal and States Governments Capital Expenditure on Primary Education in Nigeria: 1970-1974 (N)**

| Year      | Federal | States | Total  |
|-----------|---------|--------|--------|
| 1970-1971 | 1.320   | 5.019  | 6.339  |
| 1971-1972 | 2.020   | 9.295  | 11.315 |
| 1972-1973 | 1.520   | 8.657  | 10.177 |
| 1973-1974 | 1.600   | 4.507  | 6.107  |

*Source:* Adesina, S (1977). Planning and educational development in Nigeria, p.70

As indicated in Table 2, Federal and States governments' capital expenditures on primary education in Nigeria in 1970/71 was N1.320 billion and N5.019 billion respectively. As at 1973/1974, Federal Government's expenditure on primary education amounted to N1.600 billion while it was N4.507 billion in the case of the states government.

**Impact of National Brand of Universal Primary Education Programme**

Sequel to the launching of Universal Primary Education programme at national level in 1976, the burden of primary education financing was taken over by Federal Government. There is however no gainsaying that Federal Government committed lot of funds to the implementation of this project which revolutionised the access to primary education in Nigeria.

**Table 3: Expenditure on Primary Education by Federal Government: 1968-1978 (£ million)**

| Year    | Total Recurrent Expenditure | Recurrent Capital Expenditure on Education | & on Expenditure on Primary Education | % of Total Expenditure on Education |
|---------|-----------------------------|--|---------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| 1968/69 | 187.68                      | 20.19                                      | 0.06                                  | 0.3                                 |
| 1969/70 | 206.54                      | 21.57                                      | 0.03                                  | 0.1                                 |
| 1970/71 | 285.26                      | 27.15                                      | 0.03                                  | 0.1                                 |
| 1971/72 | 439.70                      | 35.42                                      | 0.07                                  | 0.2                                 |
| 1972/73 | 648.92                      | 52.14                                      | 0.12                                  | 0.2                                 |
| 1973/74 | 797.88                      | 69.30                                      | 0.22                                  | 0.3                                 |
| 1974/75 | 1,003.50                    | 116.71                                     | 0.81                                  | 0.7                                 |
| 1975/76 | 1,702.74                    | 265.25                                     | 0.89                                  | 0.3                                 |
| 1976/77 | 2,192.40                    | 517.81                                     | 212.46                                | 41.0                                |
| 1977/78 | 3,040.60                    | 87.36                                      | 548.96                                | 63.3                                |

*Source:* Ndagi (1981), in Ajayi, K & T. Ajayi (1989). Trends in the development of primary education in Nigeria

As indicated in Table 3, percentage expenditure on primary education relative to the total expenditure on the education sector, increased from 0.06% in 1968/69 to 0.89% in 1975/76 (i.e. when UPE was introduced). Two years after (i.e. 1977/78), it increased to £548.96, which represented 63.3% of the total expenditure on education.

**Impact of Universal Basic Education (UBE) Programme**

In 1999, Federal Government introduced the Universal Basic Education Programme, to provide free basic education (the first nine years of schooling) to eligible citizens of Nigeria. As part of efforts towards achieving its successful implementation, Federal Government had established the Universal Basic Education Fund, being deducted directly from the federal account and used to defray the expenditure accrued by the Federal Government in implementing the programme. The management of such fund has been placed under the care of Universal Basic Education Commission (UBEC), which is to allot it to the States Universal Basic Education Boards (SUBEB), and meant for sponsoring Federal Government’s sponsored projects for the implementation of the programme. Since inception, UBEC has been providing intervention and states’ counterpart funds. UBEC report (in [http://ubeconline.com/about\\_ubec.html](http://ubeconline.com/about_ubec.html)) indicates that between 2005 and 2009, the under-listed have been provided through the utilization of intervention and counterparts funds in the thirty six (36) states and Federal Capital Territory of Nigeria:

- Construction of new classrooms; 41,009
- Renovation of classrooms 59,444
- Provision of furniture for pupils and teachers 1,139,196

|   |  |            |
|---|--|------------|
| - | Construction of toilets  | 14,769     |
| - | Sinking of Boreholes   | 996        |
| - | Training of Teachers   | 1,493,352  |
| - | Provision of Instructional/Play Materials  | 77,570,540 |
| - | Provision of primaries 4 & 5 Mathematics,<br>English Language and Activity Based Science |            |
| - | Subjects   | 16,356,812 |
| - | Assorted Library Resource Materials for JSS  | 1,710,091  |

### **Reflections on Primary Education Financing in Nigeria**

The financing of primary education in Nigeria, has been a subject of controversy from the onset of western education. Going down the memory lane, the colonial governments did not initially deem it fit to participate in the financing of education, having then considered it to be outside their priority (Adesina, 1977). For almost four decades therefore (i.e. 1842-1872), the financing of primary education was left exclusively for the Christian missionaries, which was achieved through the collection of offerings, tithes, donations from philanthropists, and grants from the overseas missions (Adesina, 1977; Fafunwa, 1974). Such meager funds could not then encourage significant development of primary education. When the colonial government however deemed it fit to participate in the financing of primary education, it was limited to the provision of grants, which was not only irregular, meant for selected primary schools, but also low in value, and not paid at times (Adesina, 1977). It is worthy to note that at this period, three categories of schools, such as the ‘assisted schools’ (supported through grants in aid), ‘non-assisted schools’ (unqualified for grants in aid, based on established criteria), as well as the ‘government schools’ (funded mainly by government) emerged, thus marked the onset of discrimination in the financing of education in Nigeria.

With the attainment of the country’s independence in 1960, one would have thought that Federal Government would take over the role of the financing of primary education completely, as a mark of preparation for self identity. This was however left for the regional and state governments. It took the Federal Government a period of sixteen (16) years (i.e. 1976) to fully take over this role. Worthy to note also is the fact that the Federal Government then decided to introduce the national brand of Universal Primary Education (UPE) programme in 1976, after many loopholes were observed in the provision of education across the regions (Adesina, 1977). The joy, derived from the financing of primary education by Federal Government, was however short-lived in 1979 when, following the advent of the civilian government and the adoption of a new constitution, which placed education in a concurrent legislative list, this was pushed to the local government.

The transfer of the financing of primary education to local government then, calls for a period of ‘sober reflection’ because it was characterized by gross mis-management of primary education and under-financing of primary schools, owing to financial insolvency of the local governments, occasioned by in-congruency of their revenue allocation and cost of primary schools’ sustenance. Not only were infrastructure and facilities inadequate in primary schools, there was decay of most of those available (Adesina, 1977). Payment of teachers’ and non-teachers’ salaries, as well as the allowances was irregular, which culminated in strikes that paralysed academic activities in various primary schools.

There is no doubt that the transfer of the financing of primary education back to local governments in 1979, recorded setbacks in the administration and financing of primary education in Nigeria. Complaints of inadequate funds were then prevalent among the local governments’ administrators. As a result, most primary schools were underfunded. There was acute shortage of infrastructure and facilities/equipment in schools, while many among those available, were in deplorable state (Adesina, 1977). There was also over-congestion in the available classrooms. Pitiably also, salaries and allowances of teachers were not paid promptly. The glooming picture of primary education then, occasioned by its management under the tutelage of local governments, was halted in 1988, following the assumption of the responsibility for its financing by Federal Government, through Decree 31, which also established National Primary Education Commission (NPEC) and

the State Primary Education Board (SPEB). National Primary Education Fund, which was supposed to be deducted directly from the Federal Government's share of the Federation Account and meant for the payment of sixty five percent (65%) of the cost of teachers' and non teachers' salaries and allowances in primary schools, was also introduced.

The joy accrued from Federal Government's intervention in the financing of primary education was terminated through Decree 3 of 1991, which pushed it back to local governments while Local Education Authority (LGEA) was established to manage it. The responsibility for the financing of primary education was again pushed back to Federal Government, through Decree 96 of 1993, which established the National Primary Education Commission (NPEC) and vested on it, the responsibility for coordinating the management of primary education in the country. It is thus disturbing that within six years (i.e. 1988-1993), the financing of primary education in Nigeria witnessed three Decrees by the Military Government (i.e. Decree 31 of 1988, which transferred it to Federal Government), Decree 3 of 1991, which transferred it back to local governments and Decree 96 of 1993, which transferred it back from local to Federal Government. Such situation, according to Maduewesi (1998), was unhealthy and frustrating for policy implementation, not to mention the demoralising effect on teachers and pupils. The 'zero allocation', which became the house hold slogan in many local government areas of the federation, was a matter of great concern. Each local government area was then mandated to submit the data of teaching and non-teaching staff under its jurisdiction. Rather than supply the correct data, inflated data were supplied, so as to get more funds from Federal Government. The deduction of teachers' salaries directly from the Local Governments' Share of Federation Account, based on the data submitted then, pushed many local government areas into tight corner, as meager funds were then left for capital projects and other logistics after the deduction,

Since the advent of Universal Basic Education (UBE) programme in 1999, the financing of primary education has improved, particularly, with the provision of 2% of its Consolidated Revenue Fund by Federal Government. For States to fully benefit from the fund however, criteria have been established which they have to comply with. The UBE Act also provides for the establishment of Universal Basic Education Commission (UBEC), to coordinate the implementation of the programme at the states and local government's levels, through SUBEB and LGEA. In what appears like a tree that was cut at the top but later regenerated, the issue of who to take charge of the financing of primary education in Nigeria has reared its ugly head and now generating tension in the country. Federal Government is planning to send a bill to the National Assemblies, to make local government areas autonomous and in the process, push the responsibility for the financing of primary education back to them. With the support of the trade unions, such as Nigeria Union of Teachers (NUT), Nigeria Labour Congress (NLC), among others, the LGAS are crying for non-actualization of such intention because of the experiences of the past, even with the threat of total strike should Federal Government decides to go ahead with the plan. The arguments have been that local government areas lack the capacity and ability to pay the teachers promptly and thus finance primary education appropriately. With this development, the financing of primary education in Nigeria is again at crossroad.

### **III. STRATEGIES TO ACHIEVE STABLE, ADEQUATE, AND SUSTAINABLE FINANCING OF PRIMARY EDUCATION IN NIGERIA**

It is obvious that over the years, there has not been a stable policy on the financing of primary education in Nigeria. Primary education has thus become a ball that has to be pushed among the three tiers of government (i.e. federal, state and local). This development has not been helpful to the development of primary education in Nigeria. It is however imperative for a definite finance policy to be put in place for primary education in Nigeria. To achieve this feat, there is need for a stable finance policy for primary education financing in Nigeria. In this regard, Joint Financing by Federal, State and Local Governments is recommended. Both the federal, state and local governments should share the responsibility for financing primary education in Nigeria. A financing formula: 50: 30: 20 respectively is hereby suggested. Federal government should assume the greatest share (50%), followed by state government (30%) while local government should have the least (20%). Federal government however needs to review the revenue allocation to state and local governments to be able to cope with the demand of the implementation of this formula.

Another remarkable feature of the financing of primary education in Nigeria is the fact that government is the principal financier (Aladejana, Adesina and Adeleke, 2009), while little contribution comes from the private sector. The financing

of primary education has thus been inadequate and not sustainable in Nigeria. To achieve adequate and sustainable financing of primary education therefore, the following strategies are recommended:

**Introduction of Compulsory Education Tax on Public Service Workers in Nigeria:** Although at present, each registered company in Nigeria is indirectly contributing to primary education financing through the 2% Tax, being deducted from their assessable profits annually. Like Oliver Twist, more is still required from them, especially the buoyant ones. Donation of cash, equipment, construction and renovation of buildings for primary schools, will be a step in the right direction. To boost the Education Tax Fund being earmarked from the registered companies annually, government at both the state and federal levels should introduce a minimal education levy of one hundred naira (N100) for public civil servants, having at one time or the other, benefited from education being provided by government. Such money should however be deducted directly from the monthly salary on **PAY AS YOU EARN** basis and form part of the Education Tax Fund.

**Assistance by Parents and Wealthy Individuals in the Society:** Apart from meeting the private cost of educating their children, parents should assist more in financing education, through generous donation of cash, equipment and construction of buildings most especially by the wealthy ones.

**Seeking Assistance of Old Students:** It needs not be overstressed that we have reached a stage in Nigeria where education should not be left entirely for government alone to finance. In this case, it is imperative for old students of each primary school to contribute to the development of their school. Head teacher and other members of management of each primary school however need to take bold steps to mobilize the members of old students, to achieving this feat.

**Organising Fund Raising Ceremony:** Primary school that has projects to finance, can organize fund raising ceremony where notable people within the community in which it is located and immediate environment can be invited to for donation of cash towards the completion of such projects and the development of the school generally. Churches, social clubs, wealthy Philanthropists within the community can also be invited to such ceremony while scholarship and bursary can also be awarded to indigent pupils, by the wealthy ones in the community or society at large.

**Charging Education Levies:** All adult citizens of the community where a primary school is located can introduce special levy for the adults within the community, which can be used for the development of the primary school, particularly to sponsor part of the projects in the school.

**Generation of Fund by Each School:** A primary school can generate fund internally by renting out some of their facilities such as hall, Public Address System, Chairs, among others, for a fee. Annual harvest and bazaar, Christmas Carol, music concert can also be organized by a primary school, to raise fund for the development of the school.

**Engaging in Agricultural Activities:** A primary school can cultivate cash and arable crops while the proceeds from such can be sold to members of the public. It however needs to be stressed that pupils should not be used for such farming activities because of the implications on their academic performance and physical strength. A primary school can also keep poultry, rear pigs, cattle, and other marketable animals. Money realized through their sales can go a long way to strengthen the pulse of the school.

**Reaching out to Financial Institutions:** To boost the financing of primary education, Federal Government should reach out to the International Charity Organizations for assistance.

**Ensuring Accountability in the Management of Primary Education Funds:** No matter the quantum of fund that is available for primary education, this can have meaningful impact only if it is well utilized. In this case, funds meant for the development of primary education, should be consolidated and judiciously utilized by educational and schools' administrators, for the purposes it is meant for. Government should however put appropriate control measures in place, to guard against mis-management and mis-allocation of primary education funds.

#### IV. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

It is not a gainsaying that primary education is the foundation of the education process. Without a solid foundation, a building will collapse like a pack of cards. Not everybody in a society/nation may be willing or opportune to pursue

education to the tertiary level, which is why primary education is regarded as the basic education in all nations in the world, which every individual must strive to acquire, although in Nigeria's case, the junior secondary education constitutes part of basic education. It is not a gainsaying that primary education needs to be accorded priority in every nation, for its objectives to be achieved. Unfortunately, right from onset, the financing of primary education in Nigeria, has been inadequate, unstable, and non sustainable, which has been undermining its development. At present, inadequate infrastructural facilities, coupled with poor condition of most of the available ones, inadequate teachers, among others, characterized many primary schools in Nigeria. In this paper, the issue of inadequacy, instability, and non sustainability of primary education financing in Nigeria was examined while strategies that can help in achieving a stable financing such as the joint financing by federal, state and local governments, as well as those that can help in achieving adequate and sustainable financing of primary education, were discussed. In view of the strategic role of primary education in the education process, the need to ensure the adequacy, stability and sustainability of its financing cannot be underestimated. It thus behooves on government and other stakeholders in education in Nigeria to strive to adopt these strategies, for these feats to be achieved, which hopefully will achieve a turnaround of the status of primary education in Nigeria.

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