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SUSTAINABILITY OF THE UBE PROGRAMME IN NIGERIA: STRATEGIES FOR SUCCESS/ATTAINMENT

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Abstract
This paper identifies the general problems that could hinder the sustainability of programmes/projects in developing countries and discusses mainly the factors that contribute to the hindrance of the Universal Basic Education (UBE) programme in Nigeria as a sustainable programme. Such factors include the activities of implementers and stakeholders, inadequate welfare of human resources (teachers and beneficiaries), insufficient awareness of the stakeholders of their new roles, instability of policies in Nigeria which affects international donors. Finally, the writer discusses the strides taken in the implementation of UBE programme and also suggests new ideas and strategies which if addressed properly will sustain the UBE programme in Nigeria. Such strategies include: improved system of fund distribution, political commitment for the grassroot and effective monitoring outfit.

Introduction
Education all over the world is geared towards socialization of all members irrespective of age, gender, religion, social conditions, geographical location and physical disabilities. Since 1960, various Nigerian governments have always put education on their priority agenda. The introduction of the Universal Primary Education (UPE) in September 1976 was the first major national initiative that was aimed at universalizing access to education. This was followed by launching of the National Mass Literacy Campaign on 8th September, 1982. The former project (UPE) went with the republic while the parents were made to pay for the education of their wards at the primary level. The latter is still in existence but not meeting the need as expected. This situation aggravated level of illiteracy and poverty among Nigerian youths and rural adults. The situation continued until 1999 when the Nigerian government came up again to eradicate illiteracy by launching Universal Basic Education (UBE) on 30th September 1999 by President Obasanjo.

The government merged the Universal Primary Education, adult education and nomadic education into one project called Universal Basic Education (UBE) with the unique function of providing basic education for all beneficiaries (children, adolescents, adults, women etc) in Nigeria. The widening of the scope of basic education and the pursuit of equity, relevance and quality are essential features of the project (UBE). The universality of the basic education will help to quell the gender disparity by creating increased access to schooling for both sexes since the government, international donors, NGOs and community base organisations are helping in bearing some of the financial burden.
Obasanjo (2000), advancing reasons why the present democratic governance in Nigeria re-launched the Universal Basic Education, said that the future of mankind lies in the capacity of man to learn, to know, to discern, to co-exist and to share. This assertion is built on the belief that education zone is the most crucial source through which these can be achieved. Continuing, he emphasized that his administration will move Nigeria from transition to real transformation and that the Universal Basic Education is the source through which this transformation will be achieved. Hence, the objectives of the Universal Basic Education in Nigeria (FRN, 2000:2) are:

1. Developing in the entire citizenry a strong commitment to its rigorous promotion;
2. The promotion to free, Universal Basic Education for every Nigerian child of school-going age;
3. Reducing drastically, the incidence of drop-out from the formal school system (through improved relevance, quality and efficiency);
4. Catering for young persons who, for one reason or another, have had to interrupt their schooling through appropriate forms of complementary approaches to the provision and promotion of basic education;
5. Ensuring the acquisition of the appropriate levels of literacy, numeracy, manipulative, communicative and life skills as well as the ethnic, moral and civic values needed for laying a solid foundation for life-long learning.

The above objectives can be said to be well-planned, articulated and laudable for a sustainable human resource development. But, there is concern that this laudable education programme may fail to achieve the objectives for which it was set up. The fear is reinforced by the experiences of other innovative educational programmes in this country such as the Universal Primary Education (UPE), Adult Literacy Programme (ALP) and Non-Formal Education (NFE) project for out-of-school boys and girls which were launched some years ago in which there were expectations but which today have made little impact on the society.

Furthermore, the political will in which the programme (UBE) is based on will at no much time in future affect the programme directly or indirectly and will vanish or collapse like its sister programme, UPE. In line with this, Operations Evaluation Department of the World Bank (1991) asserted that “political support” can be a mixed blessing because political alignments can shift and key officials can be reassigned; and thus the project can be jeopardized…” (Joseph 1994:187).

Also, other problems such as lack of adequate provision of physical facilities by the three tiers of the government (Federal, State and Local); the lean financial resources available to the government may not allow for proper funding and lack of human resources in terms of teachers. These problems can affect the sustainability of this laudable innovation in no time in future. When a project/programme is well planned, organized, designed, adopted and effectively implemented, sustainability is in sight. Therefore, for Universal Basic Education programme to acquire immunity of
Concept of Sustainability

Programme sustainability is often defined as the capacity of a programme/project to continue to deliver its intended benefits over an extended period of time. According to the Operations Evaluation Department of the World Bank (OED) of World Bank, 1986), the term sustainability describes the ability of a programme to maintain an acceptable level of benefit flows through its economic life. While this may often be expressed in quantitative terms involving the internal economic or financial rates of return, benefits may also be qualitatively assessed. Sustainability depends also on whether a balance can be achieved in the use of the principal term of capital—namely human, natural, cultural, institutional, physical and financial. By implication, means that UBE programme should continue to deliver its intended objectives stipulated in the blueprint of National Policy over an extended period of time. Its main objective is to ensure the universality of basic education, its access and equity, school age and underprivileged adult, at no cost to the parents. To sustain educational programme of such magnitude depends on the quality and stability of staff, the adequacy and stability of financial resources for recurrent expenditures, co-ordination with other government agencies, and links to local community organisations and beneficiaries.

The success of a project may also be affected by its ability to mobilize the support of the central and local government, trade unions and business organisations, religious organisations, local community groups and international organisations. But note that "political support" can be a mixed blessing because political alignment can shift and key officials can be reassigned. Thus, a programme/project strongly supported by one administration may quickly lose its support following a change of government or a realignment of key figures (Valadez and Bamberger, 1994). In Nigerian case, many programmes have suffered due to constant changes in government. It is pertinent to point out that sustainability of the programme (UBE) implies to sustainable development of the programme that is effective and permanent development of such a programme. In this context, sustainable development is a comprehensive concept, embracing all facets of human life. Hence, the 1992 Rio conference popularly referred to as the Earth Summit, noted that the call for sustainable development is not simply a call for environmental protection, but one that solicits for economically, socially, politically and ecologically balanced growth (Ayichi, 1995).

General Factors Affecting Programme Sustainability

The sustainability of any programme is broadly affected by groups of factors, namely: how the programme is designed and implemented; how the project is organized; external factors operating at the local, national and international levels and the responses of intended and actual project beneficiaries. These factors will be discussed one after another.
If the primary function of a project is to achieve precisely the development of human resources, the emphasis will be gradual and on long-term basis. In the Nigerian context, the federal and state ministries of education have each a department of educational planning. It is the function of the department to collect and analyze relevant demographic information and data necessary for the effective and efficient organization and management of the education system including its funding and development of facilities for teaching and learning. New projects and programmes are evaluated by the department of educational planning in terms of cost benefit analysis for their cost effectiveness. Unfortunately, many plan objectives have never been realized mainly because of poor implementation of action programme. Very often, over-ambitious plan and weak accountability, have combined to hinder the implementation of any programme’s sustainability. Many sustainability problems can be traced to procurement. Delays in obtaining equipment or acquiring materials frequently lead to implementation delays, cost over runs, poor quality services, or reduced accessibility for certain target groups.

Programme Organisation

There is need to decide which ministry or agency should oversee a programme, what kind of co-ordinating mechanisms should be established between agencies, and whether the project should be implemented through an existing department or through a specially created project implementing agency. In the case of Nigeria, the Ministry of Education is in charge but if the organisation is hurriedly done, the programme will lack sustainability. Bamberg and Shams (1990) demonstrates that there is close tie between beneficiary involvement and successful implementation and sustainability.

External Factors

Sustainability is affected by a wide variety of national and international factors over which project planners and managers may have very little control. The most notable of these is economical changes. For example, the decline in oil prices and a shrinking economy in late 80’s affected the programme of National Mass Literacy in Nigeria. Akpofure (1998) stated that limited resource availability from federal coffers and the fierce competition from other equally meritorious social sector have reduced funding for education, both for federal programme and for assistance to states. This is a common national factor that can affect the stability of any programme.

The Response of Actual and Intended Beneficiaries

The social and political organisation of rural communities can either facilitate or impede the creation of cooperatives and the organisation of rural development programme. The enrolment into primary education between 1976, when Universal Primary Education (UPE) was introduced rose from 8.3 million in 1976 to 16.15 million in 1983. This indicated that the intended beneficiaries had a positive attitude towards the programme (Obanya, 1992).
With all these insights about these problems that impede sustainable development, the problem facing Nigeria since independence on how to achieve sustainable development will be solved.

Strides in the Implementation of the UBE

The democratic government has made some strides within its short stay in extending basic education to Nigerian children and underprivileged adults such as rural women, nomadic Fulani, the migrant fishermen and businessmen nationally.

The following are recorded as achievements of the government:

1. There is a tremendous increase in the enrolment of pupils in primary and secondary schools and students enrolling in teacher education programmes. The enrolment will help in increasing the number of the citizenry acquiring basic educational skills. In effect, it will reduce the percentage of illiteracy among the new school age pupils (Oluban, 2002:6).

2. Teachers' salary has improved. This improvement is expected to serve as a motivating factor for the teachers to teach and for many children and adults want to take lessons from their teachers. Hence, today many Nigerians want to be associated with teaching. Teachers in primary school levels recently can afford to buy cars for themselves unlike before.

3. There is an improvement in the provision of physical facilities for learning in schools nation-wide. This enhances the effective teaching/learning activities. Many primary schools in Enugu and Anambra states have been renovated since the on-going UBE programme.

4. There is awareness among most Nigerians about the right of the child to education, which is being provided freely by the government. This is the basic pertinent achievement. The Universal Basic Education programme has taken a significant step towards achieving the policy of Education for All (EFA).

5. There is awareness at the moment that free education is possible in Nigeria when coupled with past failures.

6. There is an awareness amongst every stakeholder in the UBE and higher institutions to contribute and at the same time benefit from the UBE initiatives.

Factors Hindering the Sustainability of UBE Programme

However, although the UBE initiative and its giant strides are, it is not without some hindrances. One of the problems facing Nigerian since independence has been how to make development sustainable through various projects or programmes from different sectors. Making a plan in education is not a thing but making the plan work is another. In third world countries, numerous factors have affected the sustainability of many projects or programmes, and if time is not taken, UBE will follow suit.

The likely problems of the UBE's sustainability will emanate from the following factors: the activities of the implementers and stakeholders, inadequate policy and support resources; insufficient material resources and international donor agencies. These problems will be discussed one after another with particular reference to Nigeria.
Activities of Implementers

The activities of the implementers and stakeholders can jeopardize the UBE being sustainable through coordination, absence of trials, insufficient awareness of the stakeholders of their new roles and instability of policy in Nigeria affecting international donors. Each of these would be discussed at length.

It is not easy for implementers to coordinate all the segments of the UBE under one unit especially at the state level. Olaitan (2002) is of the opinion that some aspects of the UBE dwarf down other aspects to the extent that certain aspects of nomadic or adult education are just taking off. This implies that there is a major focus on the primary education through State Primary Education Board (SPEB) at the expense of nomadic or adult education, which are being controlled by Adult and Non-formal Education Agency (ANEA) than State Primary Education Board (SPEB). The needs of the various categories of beneficiaries in terms of facilities, materials, methods of teaching and teachers vary. For instance, the type of desk and bench which primary school pupils use is quite different from those of adults. Therefore, an adult learner could be provided a facility he/she will not find conducive for learning. The educational needs of the migrant learner are even more involving. Coordination is therefore the bedrock that sustains the organisation of any project or programme. Lack of coordination causes instability in planning, organizing and implementation.

On absence of trial, the UBE initiative has nothing to draw upon as a successful story locally, except on the literature of the failure of past programmes. One would think that the implementers should use some schools as a trial before the large implementation.

To support this assertion, Olaitan (2002) expressed that UBE should have passed through some trials or experimentation which some of the successful educational programmes in Nigeria passed. For example, polytechnic education such as Yaba College of Technology, Kaduna Polytechnics, institute of management and technology lineage were guinea pigs before the proliferation of polytechnics in Nigeria today. Also, the stabilization of University College Ibadan provided impetus for the establishment of first generation universities (e.g. University of Nigeria,Nsukka, Ahmadu Bello University, University of Lagos and Obafemi Awolowo University) before the establishment of numerous universities today.

Psychologists recognize that there are individual differences. Hence, many parents and probably policy makers in Nigeria may not have too many stakes in the problem experienced by parents who were asked to send to school their children compulsorily. These children are probably their helpers in their daily activities. Therefore, if these children are drawn to the school according to the policy the burden of the parents will increase in several directions. This condition can affect the attitude of the parents towards allowing their children or wards to attend school especially their house-helps in the rural areas since majority of these contribute to their livelihood. This will definitely reduce the parents’ income. Generally, it may affect the supply of goods and services. These hindrances may be detrimental to some parents in rural areas though the government is helping to educate their children. This can swell the number
of illiterates in the society if enough publicity is not made to the grassroots in the rural sectors and to the underprivileged.

Insufficient awareness of the stakeholders of their new roles is a major factor affecting UBE in Nigeria as the country is a multilingual, and multi-state nation. In this situation, the willingness to comply with the modules of the new programme varies. To date, many Nigerians and even foreigners are still skeptical about the UBE. In line with this, Dieter (1992) warned countries which are implementing the policy of Education For All (EFA) that success cannot be achieved by a simple policy of “more of the same” which means that we cannot implement UBE in the same way and manner in which we implemented other educational programmes. It is necessary for the UBE implementers to identify its primary and secondary target audience in implementation. Also, research should not be regarded as a tertiary to UBE success. Probably, past programmes failed because of lack of research information. Therefore, the UBE should see itself as in good marriage with tertiary institutions competent in this area. The stakeholders, however minute their roles, should be involved both at the village, town, local and state levels. Personal and group contact may be necessary to compensate the use of the media. Without consolidating all these into the planning and organisation of UBE programme, its sustainability will be shaky.

Inadequate Welfare of Human Resources

Human resource development is the process of equipping individuals with the capabilities, skills and knowledge in meeting the demands of their country. In this context, the welfare of the teachers is of paramount importance. If the teacher’s salary is not paid as and when due, even with adequate infrastructures and physical facilities, definitely teachers’ performance will be ineffective. In line with this, Attoe (2000:11) remarked that only the improvement of the welfare can guarantee the success of the UBE. According to him, teachers are important stakeholders of the scheme and should be motivated and paid to be able to live above poverty level. This will enable them to think well, do their job with commitment and enthusiasm, and transfer knowledge correctly to the learners. But, with the present pattern of payment of teachers, the programme will not be taken seriously by them. They will have divided interest such as engaging in other activities to meet their financial needs. The programme will therefore be jeopardized seriously. Taylor (1970) is of the opinion that successful education and the achievement of any educational policy depends on the type of teachers and their conditions of service. If these two areas are not seriously taken care of, the programme is better not initiated because it will be ineffective.

Instability of Policy in Nigeria Affecting International Donors

Most of the time, international agencies such as the World Bank, UNICEF, UNESCO and UNDP are prepared to help developing countries to sort out some of their pressing problems on education. This will contribute tremendously in sustaining some of their projects on educational programmes. But a number of reasons have bedeviled the sustainability of many projects/educational programmes in Nigeria. These include: the relative instability of the political situation in the country; unrealistic
plans of operations; frequent changes in educational policies; friction between the federal government and the international community; and, lack of effective in-built monitoring and evaluation process. For example, frequent changes of ministers, commissioners and institutional governing councils have led to frequent changes in educational policies. Hence, when the negotiation for the World Bank credit facility for primary education began in 1991, the National Primary Education Commission which was identified as the implementing agency was at the height of its glory. In December 1991, it was summarily dissolved in the President’s budget speech thus throwing the implementation into disarray (Yoloye, 1998). Such a situation demoralizes the international donor agencies in enhancing the sustainability of the projects or programmes in Nigeria.

**Strategies for Sustaining the Programme**

There are many ways in which the UBE can be sustained. These suggestions are as follows:

**Improved System of Fund Distribution:** The management of UBE has its own pattern of fund allocation to its programme; and there is general complaint about lack of money for implementing the programme at some levels. While the normal channel of government for spending money may be satisfactory to the government, there is need to recognize the loopholes and block them. The grassroots administration of the programme must be exposed to some accountable funds for emergency, repair and replacement services rather than moving to the government for every little problem. Release of such funds is often difficult due to protocols or bureaucracy. The stakeholders, down to the grassroots such as parents and teachers should be involved in managing money for providing school facilities for which they should be held accountable. This will create open-door awareness among the citizens and also motivate and sensitize them to uphold the programme with seriousness.

**Provision of Equipment:** It is expected that the Universal Basic Education scheme must equip the formal and non-formal educational system with modern machines like computers, electric typewriters and cooking utensils. Such facilities will enhance their functional literacy skills and formal basic literacy skill to a high esteem.

**Political Commitment from the Grassroot:** At the grassroot, there is a lot of politicisation of the Universal Basic Education with little commitment to its management and success. Politicians should inform the electorate at their local level what they would do for the success of UBE; and become committed to their promise at the end of the election if they succeed. If the successful politicians are committed to UBE, the programme will be sustained for a long period. The onus then lies on the electorate to devise strategies to ensure that the politicians fulfill their pledge(s).

**Alternative Source of Income Generation for the UBE:** Although the government has accepted the responsibilities for the UBE, its funding and management should not be left to her alone. Workshops should be mounted at the local level to identify activities
that could be carried out by the community, the teachers, the pupils and the parent-teacher association to generate some resources in cash or kind that could help complement the government effort on UBE. With the cooperation from various levels, the programme is bound to be sustained.

**Effective Monitoring Oufit:** Monitoring, here can be seen as a continuous management activity that helps a programme or project achieve its defined objectives within a prescribed time frame and budget, and continue without experiencing breakdown in its existence. Monitoring on-going programmes/projects is an activity that is not commonly emphasised in developing countries of which Nigeria is one. Instead, it is seen at the same as evaluation. Both terms are used interchangeably. UNESCO (1982) pointed out the error indication that monitoring and evaluation appear to be used interchangeably but there are great differences between them. Most educational programmes initiated and implemented in Nigeria seem to be very poorly monitored. Lack of effective monitoring adversely affects the sustainability of these programmes. The UBE must be saved from this situation. Immediately the programme starts, a monitoring team must be set up, trained and deployed to follow up the programme. The aspects of the programme to be monitored are learners, the methods which implementers adopt, the impact of the programme on the learners and their attendance and drop-out patterns. Also, the community members should be encouraged to monitor the programme in their communities and make their views and observations known.

**Conclusion**

UBE is an educational programme which is seen globally as imperative to the process of democratization of education especially in the third world countries where a high level of illiteracy has tremendously affected the sustainable development of various social programmes. Effective planning, organisation and monitoring enhance the sustainability of any programme such as UBE. Although various factors discussed in this paper can hinder the implementation of the UBE programme, concerted effort of the implementers, non-governmental, organisations and community-based organisations can enhance its sustainability.

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