

Access to Basic Education: Implications for the attainment of Sustainable Development Goals in Nigeria

Alabelapo Kadri AKOGUN

Department of Educational Foundations,
Kwara State College of Education, Oro, Nigeria
akogun25@gmail.com; 08038216832

&

Sunday Babalola ABOLADE

c/o Department of Arts Education,
University of Ilorin, Ilorin, Nigeria
aboladesunday2010@gmail.com 08038868562

Abstract

This paper discusses the issue of access to basic education and implications for the attainment of Sustainable Development Goals in Nigeria. In the process, it considers children's access to basic education in the era of Millennium Development Goals (MDGs); and discusses what attention should be given to quality access to basic education, based on the United Nations declaration of 2030 in terms of Sustainable Development Goals. Most of the goals, including the educational goal of ensuring quality education (goal 4) are expected to be pursued substantially by 2030. The discussion features historical analysis of issues, making use of primary and secondary sources of data in the fashion of historical research. It was found that Nigeria was unable to attain the millennium development goal of free universal basic education by 2015 in spite of its intention to do so as expressed in the National Policy on Education. The paper concludes that with the necessary political will, Nigerian government should pursue more realistically, the issue of quality education which features as goal 4 of the SDGs. It is only then that other development goals would naturally lend themselves to easy implementation for the attainment of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and consequently, robust national development by 2030.

Key words: Basic education, Goals, Millennium development, Sustainable development

Introduction

Education occupies a crucial place in the socio-economic and political development of a nation. To this end, it is a formidable tool for national development, as no nation of the world has ever attained any meaningful development without education as a driving force. In this connection, education for sustainable national development must, of necessity, begin with the issue of access to basic education. Thus, quality access needs to be accorded a priority attention if the goal of education for all would not be a

mirage in Nigeria. This is because adequate access to basic education or exposure to the right kind of education would contribute to eliminate or at least, reduce persistent inequality, prejudice and renewed armed conflicts, whereas, inadequate access would not (UNESCO, 2011).

According to Hornby (2015) access refers to the state of being accessible; being easy to reach; a way or means of approaching or entering; an entrance; a passage. Access to education therefore, implies that education should be within the reach of every citizen of a country (Asiyai, 2012). Access to education means the provision of education for all who requires it. It is the opportunity to participate in the education sector formally or informally (Ehiematalor, 2005). Obanya (2001) views access to education as making education physically, socially and economically available to all. Access to education consists of two major dimensions. They include:

- Opportunity to benefit from educational provisions available in one's community, state or country, irrespective of the person's socio-economic background, sex, ethnic origin, political affiliation, religion and intellectual capacity; and
- Opportunity not only to enroll or be admitted into an educational institution or school but also to receive the best quality education available (Omoregie, 2011:8).

Basic education, according to the National Policy on Education (FRN, 2013) refers to the education given to children of 0-15years of age. It also covers early childhood education of children aged 0-5 years and 9 years of formal schooling, comprising 6 years of free primary education, and 3 years of free junior secondary education. Regardless of what other educational experiences that may follow, it is important to note that basic education is generally formative and lasting. The goals of basic education therefore, remain serving as the foundation for lifelong learning for all sections of the population, whatever be their conditions in life (Ajayi & Fayomi, 2017). Nigeria has, since independence in 1960, given some attention to the issue of basic education in different forms. The free primary education policy of the old Western region of Nigeria, later adapted by other parts of the country before the military takeover of power is well documental. Moreover, the 1976 Universal Primary Education (UPE) and the Universal Basic Education (UBE), launched in September, 1999 represented some of the efforts of government at universalizing basic education in Nigeria.

At the international level, Nigeria is one of the countries of the world that signed educational agreements which justified the issue of basic education. Some of these international agreements (using the Universal Basic Education and Human Rights of 1948 as a reference point) include: the World Education Crisis Conference (1968), the Jomtien (1990) Conference on Education For All (EFA), the New Delhi (1991) Declaration on the E-9 countries, the Ouagadougou (1992) Pan-African Declaration, Minidaf VI/VII (1991, 1998), the Salamanka Conference (1992), the Amman Re-affirmation (1995), the OAU Declaration of Education in Africa (1997-2006), the Durban (1998) statement of commitment to the promotion of education for All, the Recife, Brazil (2000) and Dakar EFA Forum (April, 2000) on Agenda for Education in the 21st Century (Oyelade & Abolade, 2018; Asiyai, 2012).

In the year 2000, the United Nations considered education for all to be of crucial importance. This is why goals 2 and 3 among the 8 Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) of the United Nations Declaration, considered the need to pursue the attainment of free and compulsory primary education and equal educational and employment opportunities for men and women (Oyelade, 2011). The target year for the attainment of the two goals (i.e. goals 2 and 3- eradication of extreme poverty and achievement of universal primary education) was 2015, which tallies with the target year for attaining Education for All (EFA) by its initiators in Thailand in 1990.

The Universal Basic Education remained Nigeria's strategy for attaining Education for All (EFA), Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) numbers 1 and 2, and the National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategies (NEEDS). Nigeria's commitment to the universalization of basic education is driven by her desire to meet both the EFA and the MDGs by the year 2015. Access to basic education lies at the heart of development. Thus, sustained access to education is critical to long term improvement in productivity, reduction of poverty and hunger, achievement of universal basic education, gender equality, reduction of child mortality, improvement of maternal health, combating HIV/AIDS, ensuring environmental sustainability, developing global partnership for development (Athanasius, 2017). As at the year 2015 however, not all the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) were realized. This necessitated a further

projection that was made towards year 2030, giving birth to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Access to Basic Education in the Era of Millennium Development Goals

The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) featured the issue of basic education as the second of its development goals. The United Nations Declaration therefore considered the need to pursue the attainment of free and compulsory education with vigour such that every child in the world would receive a full course of primary education by 2015.

A major factor in measuring access to education is the enrolment rate, and the two important indicators usually employed include: Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) and Net Enrolment Ratio (NER). Educationists are also interested in the Net Attendance Ratio (NAR), retention ratio within a specified level, completion rates and level of transition rates (Asiyai, 2012). The Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) is the ratio of total enrolment regardless of age to how the population of the age group (boys and girls) officially corresponds to the level of education (UNESCO, 2011). It reflects the total number of persons enrolled at a particular level of the education system, irrespective of age group divided by the number of the age group with corresponding level. In Nigeria, a report by UNESCO (2011) shows that the nation had a gross enrolment ratio of 95% in the primary education level, being the least among selected countries of the world. This is in view of the fact that in Nigeria, upon completion of primary six, there is automatic transition policy of pupils to junior secondary school.

The Federal Ministry of Education (2010) revealed that between 2003-2008, there were major disparities in pupils' access to primary and junior secondary education in Nigeria, with rural areas at greater disadvantage than the urban areas. Some southern states, including Akwa-Ibom, Anambra, Cross River, Delta, Edo, Imo, Lagos, Ogun, Osun, Oyo and Rivers had net attendance ratio of 80%. Some northern states such as Jigawa, Katsina, Kebbi, Sokoto, Yobe had primary school net, attendance ratio of less than 25%. Borno state during the same period had 17% of children who never attended school (FME, 2011).

The worrisome proportion of out of school children for junior secondary education in Nigeria posed serious challenges on the attainment of Education for All and

the Universal Basic Education which consequently deterred the realization of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) by 2015. Despite the fact that there was (and still is) the automatic transition from primary school to junior secondary school level, only 36% of children were in school at the junior secondary level (FME, 2011). This indicated that not many of the children who completed their primary education actually continued up to junior secondary school.

Moreover, as at 2010, the total number of out-of-school children in Nigeria stood at 8,649,620.0 with male population of 4,023,402.0, representing 40% and female, 4,626,218.0, representing 46% (World Bank, 2010). The EFA Global Monitoring Report (UNESCO, 2011) revealed that Nigeria was at the risk of having 56 million children out of school by 2015. It stated further that the gender gap at the elementary level was widest in sub-Saharan Africa with Nigeria having over 10 million out of school children roaming the streets. From all indications, Nigeria was unable to attain the Millennium Development Goal (Number 2) of a realistic universal primary education by 2015. This occasioned a further projection towards 2030 with the birth of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Access to Basic Education: Implications for Sustainable Development Goals in Nigeria

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) constitute the new global agenda which succeeded the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). It is otherwise referred to as Agenda 2030, signifying the timeline for the attainment of Sustainable Development Goals globally (Kumar, Kumar, & Vive Kadhish, 2016). The SDGs provided a comprehensive framework consisting of 17 goals, 169 targets, and well over 200 indicators. The SDGs provided a global five “Ps” agenda: people, prosperity, planet, peace and partnership meant for all nations of the world. In an abridged form, the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) which are broad based and interdependent include: No poverty; No Hunger; Good Health; Quality Education; Gender Equality; Good water and Sanitation; Renewable Energy; Good Jobs and Economic Growth; Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure; Reduced inequalities; Sustainable cities and Communities; Responsible consumption and production; Climate Action; Life Below

Water; Life on Land; Peace and Justice; Partnership for the Goals (Sustainable Development Goals- Wikipedia, 2020).

In line with the provision of universal basic education, Nigeria has a National Policy on Education that is interested in the pursuit of this laudable goal of quality education (goal 4). This is in appreciation of the fact that full and unhindered access to quality education is the first necessary step to achieving other development goals, including poverty eradication, gender equality and women's empowerment among others. Hence, there is the need for sound investment in quality education by ensuring that primary and secondary schools are free for every child by 2030. In Nigeria however, basic education could not be said to be enjoying robust implementation for the attainment of Sustainable Development Goals vision 2030 with reference to quality education. This is because the necessary political will for realistic attainment of the objectives of UBE on the part of the State Executives (i.e. Government) is copiously lacking. Most of these State Executives are opposed to the centralization of basic education sub-sector in Nigeria (Oyelade & Abolade, 2018).

A cursory look into the issue of access and general objectives of the Universal Basic Education (UBE) implies that appropriate opportunities are provided for every Nigerian child of school going age. In this connection parents and guardians have the responsibility of ensuring that their children and wards avail themselves of the opportunities, and that sanctions await persons, societies, or institutions that prevent children and youths from benefitting from the UBE scheme (Oyelade & Abolade, 2018; Athanasius, 2017). Nigeria government deserves commendation for this laudable initiative which though, with its attendant challenges still holds bright prospects for the attainment of the Sustainable Development Goals in Nigeria by 2030.

With a view to enhancing access, the UBE Act 2004 in its policy objectives states that transition from primary to junior secondary schools would not only be automatic, but would also be total. Thus, there is emphasis on free, compulsory and uninterrupted 9-year basic education. Furthermore, the abolition of National Common Entrance Examination is observed to be a laudable attempt at enhancing access and implementation of the universal nature of the UBE. This is meant to ensure 100% transition rate from Primary VI to JSS1 (Adeyemi & Adu, 2018). In spite of the automatic transition policy from

Primary VI to JSS1, official records have shown that not many of the primary school leavers continue their education up to the junior secondary school level. If the trend is not appropriately addressed, Nigeria may not be able to attain the Sustainable Development Goal of quality education by 2030 (Athanasius, 2017; Kumar, et al, 2016).

Conclusion

The advent of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) has, no doubt brought some relative improvement in the number of children enrolment in basic schools. However, it is pertinent to note that gaining access to education cannot be construed for having access to quality education. Therefore, in Nigeria, greater milestone still exists for the attainment of Sustainable Development Goals of providing quality education. This is evidence in the lack of adequate educational facilities required for learning by pupils such as well-ventilated classrooms, poor funding among others at the basic level, all constitute major challenges to the attainment of Sustainable Development Goals in Nigeria.

Recommendations

The Universal Basic Education should be allowed to enjoy robust implementation by providing quality access. It follows that equality of educational opportunity for children aged 6-15 should be pursued vigorously by government to the utmost level. This is because Nigeria has been observed not to have reliable data. This situation has given rise to a great deal of imperfection and lapses in published educational statistics which could not be of good use in planning. It is recommended that:

- i. With the necessary political will, the government should pursue more vigorously the provision of reliable and relevant education database such as school population of children, school enrolments and enrolment projections.
- ii. Thus, for Nigeria to pursue realistically the goal of quality education which features as goal 4 of the SDGs, it needs to address more realistically, the issue of quality access to free and compulsory basic education and mass literacy.
- iii. It is only when this is achieved that other development goals would naturally lend themselves to easy implementation for the attainment of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and consequently robust national development by 2030.

References

- Adeyemi, T.O. & Adu, E.T. (2018). Enrolment analysis and the availability of physical facilities for the universal basic education programme in Ekiti State, Nigeria. *Nigerian Journal of Educational Administration and Planning*, 8 (1): 22-34.
- Ajayi, S. & Fayomi, J. A. (2017). Gender equity in education: a tool for peace building and sustainable development in the Niger – Delta region of Nigeria. *Benin Journal of Gender Studies*, 2 (2):1-10.
- Asiyai, R.I. (2012). Access to Basic education in Nigeria: implications for the attainment of Millennium Development Goals by 2015. *Journal of Research in Education*, 2(1):130-142.
- Athanasius, J. (2017). Problems and prospects of universal basic education in Nigeria Available at: <https://infoguidenigeria.com/problems-prospects-universal-basic-education-Nigeria/> Accessed 20th December, 2022.
- Ehiematalor, E.T. (2005). Issues of Access, Equity and Private Sector Participation in the Deregulation of Education: Deregulating the Provision and Management of Education in Nigeria. Lead Paper Presented at Nigerian Association of Educational Administration and Planning (NAEAP) Conference, University of Jos, 28-30.
- Federal Ministry of Education (2011). Nigerian National Television News, 15th June.
- Federal Republic of Nigeria (FRN) (2013). *National Policy on Education*. Lagos: NERDC press
- Hornby, A.S. (2015). *Oxford advanced learner's dictionary of current English*. New 9th edition. Oxford: University Press.
- Kumar, S. Kumar, N. & Vivekadhish (2016). Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) to Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs): addressing unfinished agenda and strengthening sustainable development and partnership. *Indian Journal of Community Medicine*. 41 (1): 1- 4.
- Millennium Development Goals* - Wikipedia the Free Encyclopedia Available at: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/MDGs> Accessed 13th November, 2010
- Obanya, P.A.I. (2001). UBE as a necessary first step. In Nwaokolo, P. et al (eds). *Universal Basic Education in Nigeria*. Asaba: Federal College of Education Technical.
- Olubodun, J.B.O. (2008). Universal Basic Education and Education Reforms in Nigeria. In R. Lawal, S.A. Jimoh and N.Y.S. Ijaiya (eds) *Education Reforms in Nigeria: past, present and future*. Ibadan: Stirling Horden Limited.

- Omoregie, E.O. (2011). Access and Management of Education in Education in Nigeria. *Research in Education* 17 (1): 1-17.
- Osokoya, I.O. (2008). Contemporary issues in educational history and policy in Nigeria. Ibadan: Laurel Education Publishers Limited.
- Oyelade, A.F. & Abolade, S.B. (2018). Historical Development of Universal Basic Education in Nigeria: Challenges and Prospects (1999- present) *KIU Journal of Social Sciences* Kampala International University, 4 (2) 235-241.
- Oyelade, A.F. (2011). Nigeria in the 21st Century and Educational Development. *African Journal of Historical Sciences in Education*, 7(1): 155-159.
- Sustainable Development Goals – The Global Goals for Sustainable Development. Wikipedia the free Encyclopedia Available at: http://www.globalgiving.org/sdg/?rf=ggad_15&gclid=EAIaIQo... Accessed 30th December, 2020.
- UNESCO (2011). *EFA Global Monitoring Report: the hidden crisis, armed conflict and education*. Paris: UNESCO
- World Bank (2010). Gross Enrolment Ratio in Nigeria Available at www.tradingeconomics.com/Nigeria/childrenoutofschoolprimary. Retrieved 27th June, 2013.