



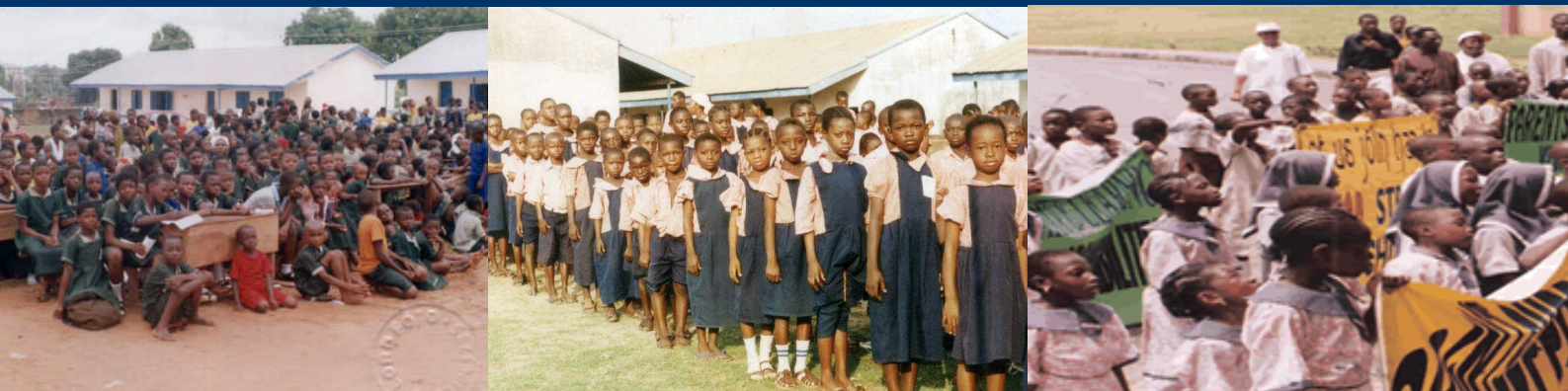
**Consortium for Research on  
Educational Access,  
Transitions and Equity**

**Politics and the Dilemma of Meaningful  
Access to Education: The Nigerian Story**

**Pai Obanya**

**CREATE PATHWAYS TO ACCESS  
Research Monograph No. 56**

**January 2011**





Consortium for Research on  
Educational Access, Transitions & Equity

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The Consortium for Educational Access, Transitions and Equity (CREATE) is a Research Programme Consortium supported by the UK Department for International Development (DFID). Its purpose is to undertake research designed to improve access to basic education in developing countries. It seeks to achieve this through generating new knowledge and encouraging its application through effective communication and dissemination to national and international development agencies, national governments, education and development professionals, non-government organisations and other interested stakeholders.

Access to basic education lies at the heart of development. Lack of educational access, and securely acquired knowledge and skill, is both a part of the definition of poverty, and a means for its diminution. Sustained access to meaningful learning that has value is critical to long term improvements in productivity, the reduction of inter-generational cycles of poverty, demographic transition, preventive health care, the empowerment of women, and reductions in inequality.

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## **List of Acronyms**

BE	Basic Education
CPI	Corruption Perception Index
CREATE	Consortium for Research on Educational Access, Transitions and Equity
EFA	Education for All
EMIS	Education Management Information Systems
FCT	Federal Capital Territory
GER	Gross Enrolment Ratio
HDI	Human Development Index
LGEA	Local Government Education Authority
MLA	Monitoring Learning and Achievement
NCE	Nigerian Certificate in Education
NER	Net Enrolment Ratio
NERDC	Nigeria Educational Research and Development Council
NIEPA	National Institute for Educational Planning and Administration
NTI	National Teachers' Institute
OVI	Objectively Verifiable Indicator
TI	Transparency International
UBE	Universal Basic Education
UBEC	Universal Basic Education Commission
UIS	UNESCO Institute for Statistics
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNESCO	United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation
UPE	Universal Primary Education
SUBEB	State Universal Basic Education Board

## **Acknowledgements**

I hereby express my gratitude to Angela Little and Keith Lewin for inviting me to seminars in Brighton and London the content of which gave rise to this monograph. Angela also found time, in spite of an extremely busy work programme, to go through the first draft of the work and to offer insightful suggestions. Keith, Angela and the editors of the CREATE PTA have contributed to enlivening my years of 'active retirement'. They all have my sincere appreciation. My deep appreciation also goes to Lalage Bown, whose abiding interest in Nigeria made her role as discussant at the London CREATE annual lecture in January 2010 a memorable learning experience.



## **Preface**

I am very pleased that Professor Pai Obanya agreed to share with CREATE his considerable experience of the politics of education policy and implementation in Nigeria, and elsewhere in Africa, through the delivery of the annual CREATE lecture in London in January 2010 and its subsequent development into a CREATE monograph. In thinking about the politics of education Obanya distinguishes ‘good’ politics (effective leadership for the public good) from ‘bad’ politics (divisive politicking designed to acquire and maintain power) and links these, hypothetically, to a series of policy, planning and implementation characteristics and outcomes in education. Obanya also offers a useful synthesis of CREATE’s initial work on meaningful access to education and the Zones of Exclusion and his own and UNESCO’s work in the 1990s on the dimensions of inclusion and exclusion – economic access, physical access, sociological access, psychological access and cultural access – a synthesis that generates a fresh definition of meaningful access.

His empirical base for his conceptual arguments focuses on the post independence period. He characterises this period as one in which nation-building has not been promoted, ethnic and religious loyalties have become entrenched, popular participation in politics has been discouraged, federal power has become over-centralised and divisions between the North and the South of the country have been maintained. In the education sector he focuses on the policies, plans and implementation of the Universal Basic Education Programme, launched in 1999 and their links with the politics of the day. He concludes by outlining future challenges that need to be addressed if meaningful access to basic education in Nigeria is to be achieved.

Professor Angela W. Little  
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## Summary

This paper makes a case for ‘good politics for good education’, with special reference to Nigeria. It surveys the impact of good and bad politics on the attainment of Meaningful Access to education with special focus on Nigeria’s Universal Basic Education (UBE) programme.

Good politics is to be likened to what the French call ‘*la politique au sense noble du terme*’ (politics in the noble sense of the term – or statesmanship) while bad politics is to be likened to ‘*la politique politicienne*’ (mere divisive politicking, or politics in its raw form). Politics in its raw form is concerned with seeking power for self-aggrandisement while politics in its noble form is concerned with seeking power for public good.

In situations where good politics prevails, educational policies, programmes and delivery processes tend to produce the desirable outcome of ‘children passing through school and the school also passing through them’.

By combining the seven exclusion zones used in the work of CREATE (Lewin, 2007) with the five dimensions of access identified in the author’s earlier work, the paper defines meaningful access as: *full and unfettered educational opportunity devoid of all manners of Exclusion; that which is crowned by successful learning and improved life chances for all classes of beneficiaries whose improved knowledge and skills, positive values and attitudes should contribute to reducing socio-economic inequities and poverty in the wider society.*

The sum total of the politics of Nigeria is one in which democracy is yet to take firm roots. Nigeria has also remained an imperfect and lop-sided federation in which decentralisation is yet to translate into de-concentration and devolution of powers. This political situation has not helped the cause of education.

The UBE programme, introduced in 1999, anticipated the Dakar EFA goals and its objectives are close to the ideal of meaningful access. Such a programme requires rigorous planning, extensive resource mobilisation and judicious use of available resources, and most importantly, transformational management. All this did not happen for reasons that were not unconnected with ‘bad politics’.

According to UNESCO Institute of Statistics (UIS), in 2007 (seven years into the operation of the programme) GER and NER have remained below the regional (African) average. Transition to the secondary cycle is low, while pre-primary education is available only to 16% of children.

UBE would therefore require serious re-positioning for it to be able to move Nigeria towards the EFA goals. This should be predicated on a paradigm turnaround from bad to good politics. The marginal increases in enrolment have not tackled the problem of Exclusion, as a large proportion of school-age children are still un-enrolled. To achieve the EFA goals efforts should go beyond ‘getting the children to school’ to really ‘getting them successfully through school’.

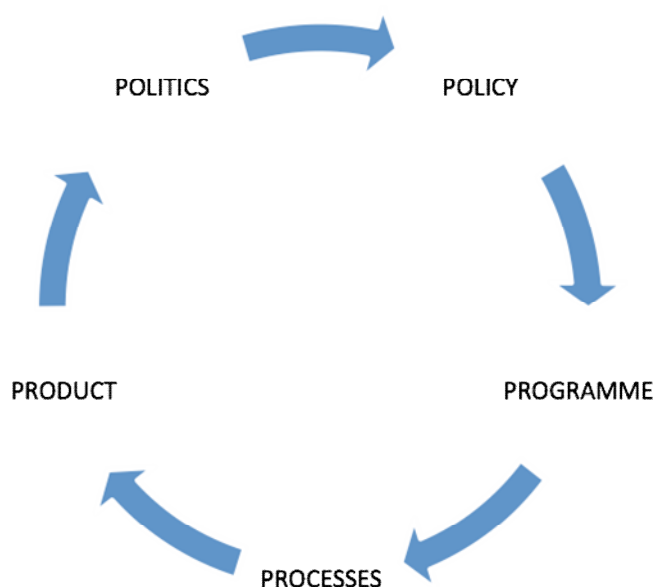
# Politics and the Dilemma of Meaningful Access to Education: The Nigerian Story

## 1. Introduction: Education in Relation to Good and Bad Politics

This paper draws on ideas presented in the 3<sup>rd</sup> annual CREATE lecture delivered in London in January 2010, a CREATE seminar held in Sussex during the same month, and an earlier conference paper (Obanya, 2009). It makes the case for ‘good politics for good education’, with special reference to Nigeria and the impact over time of its politics on access to education. The paper surveys the impact of good and bad politics on Nigeria’s education development with special focus on Universal Basic Education (UBE)

Discussions of the political aspects of education tend to contrast them with the technical aspects of educational development. The message of such discussions tends to be that the political and technical dimensions of education are always in competition with each other. However, this paper suggests that politics is fundamental to education. Figure 1 presents a 5-point chain of the education process<sup>1</sup>.

**Figure 1: Education as a 5-P chain process**



Political directions are at the root of education policy, which in turn informs the direction of education programmes. The programme is subsequently ‘processed’ at the school and classroom levels, to turn out the required products of education. In ideal situations, the 5-p would be a cyclic process, with the nature of the product leading to constant reviews of all other Ps in the chain.

Experience has also taught us that Politics can be either ‘good’ or ‘bad’. By ‘good politics’ this paper refers to effective leadership for public good, while ‘bad politics’ refers to the type of divisive politicking that is concerned only with the acquisition and maintenance of power.

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<sup>1</sup> An idea developed in Obanya, (2009).

**Table 1: Decisive Education Factors in Contexts of ‘Good’ and Bad’ Politics**

<b>Decisive Factors in Education</b>	<b>Bad Politics Context</b>	<b>Good Politics Context</b>
Policy development methodology	Haphazard	Participatory
Policy thrusts	No clear directions	Responsive to national development thrusts
Plan for educational development	Non-existent/exists as mere piece of paper	Derived from policy thrust, with strategic focus areas
Management	Over-centralised Hierarchical	Decentralised, with de-concentration of authority
Human resources	Management: not professionalised/ over-bloated bureaucracy Teaching: not professionalised/inadequate (quantitatively)	Management: professionalised/constant and systematic re-skilling and re-tooling
Funding	Non-sustainable Wastage and corruption-prone	Sustainable Targeted funding Functional mechanism for expenditure tracking
Curricula	Inappropriate Non-responsive Out-dated Imposed from above	Appropriate Responsive Relevant Internalised and readily operated at school level Dynamic, with participatory approaches to evaluation and constant review
Physical facilities	Inappropriate Inadequate Little or no maintenance	Appropriate Adequate Culture of maintenance firmly upheld
Pedagogical facilities	Scarce Inappropriate Out-dated No bearing with curricula	Adequate Appropriate Up-to-date Closely related to curricula
Teaching-learning Methods	Frontal teaching Teacher-centred Memorisation/regurgitation	Activity-based Flexible classroom arrangements Learner-centred Participatory
Outcomes	Children merely passing through school Absence of effective learning	Children passing through school AND the school passing through them Effective learning

Table 1 lists ten decisive factors in education that work in concert to produce the outcomes of the process. In situations where good politics prevail, every one of the ten decisive factors (which are in fact derivatives of the 5-Ps in Figure 1) are more likely to fall in place and consequently produce the desirable outcomes of ‘children passing through school and the school also passing through them’ as a result of the ‘effective learning’ that must have taken place. On the other hand, in situations of power for the sake of power (bad politics), the development of educational policies and programmes are most likely to be less responsive and participatory. Consequently, the ten decisive factors would most likely not fall in place, leading to the less desirable outcomes of ‘children merely passing through school’ due to the absence of ‘effective learning’.

## **2. What is Meaningful Access to Education?**

In preparing for a pan-African conference on the education of girls in 1993, the UNESCO Regional Office for Education in Africa (UNESCO/BREDA) presented a 'beyond access agenda' indicating that attention must shift from 'girls' enrolment' to 'girls participation in the real sense of the term'. This became the guiding principle for the entire conference and influenced its recommendations for policy directions in African member states.

The concept was re-affirmed by the African Union Commission and its International Centre for Girls and Women's Education in Africa (CIEFFA) in 2009 while making a distinction between gender parity, gender equity and gender equality in education in the following words:

Gender Equality in education is to be distinguished from gender parity (equal enrolment of boys and girls), gender equity (comparable education experience for boys and girls). It is a concept that goes beyond mere enrolment or physical access to attendance, progression and successful completion. It also includes equality of after-school experience and covers all opportunities for self-fulfilment, through opportunities for lifelong learning and the pursuit of careers and other forms of socio-economic life (CIEFFA/AUC, 2009)

This concept has been further expanded in our work on developing girls' and women's education strategies with seven states in northern Nigeria in 2003, in which five dimensions of access were distinguished. It should be noted, however, that all these dimensions of access apply to challenges faced by both girls and boys.

*a. Economic access:* Poverty and poor economic conditions, especially at the household level, create great problems in generalising access to basic education. Even though basic education is meant to be 'free', education always has some overt/hidden, direct/indirect, legal/illegal costs for individual families. There are also cases in which parents are not able to forgo the contributions made by children's work in the home, in the fields, and in petty trading.

*b. Physical access* (or *geographical barriers to expanding and generalising access*). The problem is usually one of long distances between home and school. In the Nigerian context, this situation can manifest in a variety of forms:

- Lack of places in schools in the immediate neighbourhood of the child.
- Difficult and impenetrable terrains separating human settlements, such as in swamps, creeks, hills and mountains, desert environments, forests,
- Sparsely populated areas.
- Groups that reject the educational facilities in their immediate neighbourhood

*c. Sociological access:* Even when educational facilities are (physically or geographically) within reach, the potential beneficiary's social conditions could be either help or hinder access to education. Examples here include:

- Groups that have been excluded from formal education for generations.
- Groups, which normally do not come together but are forced to share common educational facilities.
- Children who are forced or tempted to leave school prematurely, most usually for 'petty' employment or commercial/family activities, or to contribute to household work.

*d. Psychological access:* Educational facilities are ‘accessible’ only when the school is able to respond appropriately to children’s learning needs and learning styles. Problems related to psychological access (children being physically in school but not learning sufficiently well) are a common feature of the educational scene of Nigeria, and the following are illustrative examples:

- Under aged and over aged children, both of whom are likely to have a feeling of ‘not fitting in’
- Children with disabilities and special learning needs
- Children who are new comers to the community in which the school is located
- Children who have not been adequately prepared in the home for school learning
- Children who may receive insufficient attention from the teacher because of inherent bias
- Children who find classroom activities not relevant to their daily lives and circumstances.

*e. Cultural access.* Cultural issues as barrier to access have arisen mainly from aspects of colonial education, some of which have persisted in spite the spate of post-independence reforms. Examples include:

- The school day and the school calendar do not always match with the *cultural day* and the *traditional societal calendar*
- The language of the school can be different from that of the community
- The school may not accommodate different religious beliefs and practices
- The school may not be sensitive to the social and religious practices of various communities in its neighbourhood.

(Obanya, 2003)

The Consortium for Research on Educational Access, Transitions and Equity (CREATE) has developed a framework for the analysis of ‘meaningful access’ that is possibly the most comprehensive and most empirically researched to date. According to Lewin (2007) Initial access has little meaning unless it results in:

1. Secure enrolment and regular attendance;
2. Progression through grades at appropriate ages;
3. Meaningful learning which has utility;
4. Reasonable chances of transition to lower secondary grades, especially where these are within the basic education cycle.
5. More rather than less equitable opportunities to learn for children from poorer households, especially girls, with less variation in quality between schools

For CREATE, ‘access’ is the opposite of ‘exclusion’ and this goes beyond being denied enrolment in school. CREATE has consequently developed a conceptual framework based on a comprehensive concept of exclusion, with seven ‘zones’ as follows:

0. Children who are excluded from pre-schooling
1. Children who have never been to school, and are unlikely to attend school;
2. Children who enter primary schooling, but who drop out before completing the primary cycle

3. Children who enter primary schooling and are enrolled but are “at risk” of dropping out before completion as a result of irregular attendance, low achievement, and silent exclusion from worthwhile learning
4. Children who fail to make the transition to secondary school grades
5. Children who enter secondary schooling but who drop out before completing the cycle
6. Children who enter secondary schooling and are enrolled but are “at risk” of dropping out before completion as a result of irregular attendance, low achievement and silent exclusion from worthwhile learning (Lewin, 2007).

Reflecting on CREATE’s conceptual model of zones of exclusion and the five dimensions of access outlined earlier, a working definition of meaningful access can be:

*Full and unfettered educational opportunity devoid of all types of exclusion; that which is crowned by successful learning and improved life chances for all classes of beneficiaries whose improved knowledge and skills, positive values and attitudes should contribute to reducing socio-economic inequities and poverty in the wider society.*

While a basic view of access says ‘get the children *to* school’, an expanded definition of meaningful access says ‘take them *through* school and ensure that they actually learn’. The argument of this paper is that the type of politics and the existence of political will can be the difference between exclusion, access to make up the numbers and genuine meaningful access to education. In the next section, the political history of Nigeria will be briefly described.

### 3. Politics over the Years

#### 3.1 The Country

What most people know about Nigeria is its physical size and large and vibrant human population of some 148 million people – Africa's most populous country. It is a country whose greatest wealth is its diversity, in terms of people, languages, cultures, ecology, natural resources and geographical features. It is a Federation of 36 states (and a Federal Capital Territory). Each state is divided into a number of local government areas (774 local government areas in all). The political arrangement of the country also includes the concept of *geo-political zones* (a loose political description of geographically contingent and sometimes linguistic-culture-sharing States) of which there are six - North West, North East, North Central, South East, South West, South-South). Figure 2 shows the country and its political divisions.

**Figure 2: Map of Nigeria (the 36 States and Federal Capital Territory- FCT)**



Potentially, Nigeria is a rich country and is a major exporter of petroleum. Its 'huge human potentials' have remained under-developed while its huge earnings from petroleum have not



translated into improved living standards for the people, as seen in the country's low rating on most of the indices used for UNDP human development reports (Table 2).

The most revealing aspect of Table 2 is the third column that shows Nigeria's global ranking on selected indices of human development. The country does not figure among the top 100 countries in all the indices; it ranks in fact abysmally low on Human Poverty Index (114 of 135 countries), Life Expectancy at Birth (167 out of 182), overall Human Development Index (158 out of 182), GDP per capita (141 out of 182), and access to potable water (142 out of 182) (UNDP, 2008).

**Table 2: NIGERIA – Selected Human Development and Human Poverty Indices**

Index	Value	Ranking (out of 182 countries)
Human development Index (HDI)	0.511	158
Life Expectancy at birth (years)	47.7	167
Adult Literacy (% of age 15 and above)	72	112
Combined gross enrolment ratio (%)	53	150
GDP per capita (PPP US\$)	1,969	141
Human Poverty Index (HPI)	36.2	114 (out of 135 countries)
Possibility of surviving till age 40)	37.4	146
Adult Illiteracy	28	112
% lacking improved water source	53	142
Proportion of children underweight for age	29	112

UNDP, 2008

## **3.2 Politics in Nigeria**

### **3.2.1 Pre-Colonial Nigeria**

The numerous communities that occupy the geo-political space now known as Nigeria have always had political organisations and politics, as the sheer struggle for power and in the form of use of power for social good, has always been part of the life of the people. While many of the early social and governmental organisations remained 'fragmented' at the village, town and clan levels, a good number became established as kingdoms, while some expanded to become empires. For example, the Hausa states, the Fulani, Ife, Benin, Oyo, Nupe, Wukari, Kanemi-Borno and Borgu, etc were both economically and militarily powerful and wielded enormous local and regional influence. The 'fragmentary' states operated a kinship system in which the elders of the community played a regulatory role. The kingdoms had largely hereditary kings who were supported by chiefs to whom specific portfolios were assigned. In some cases chieftaincy positions were also hereditary. The empires had a wider expanse of territory with vassal kings in charge of specific provinces and with strong combat-ready armies (Obanya and Binns, 2009).

### **3.2.2 The Colonial Period**

British colonisation began in the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century with progressive 'pacification' of traditional territories that subsequently came under a 'Protectorate'. Early in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the entire geographical space was occupied by the British and administered as two different entities – the Protectorate of Northern Nigeria and the Protectorate of Southern Nigeria. The two were 'amalgamated' into a single Colony and Protectorate of Nigeria in 1914.

The British colonial government recognised the diversity and plurality of Nigeria and accorded a degree of respect to the cultures and traditions of the various communities, including traditional systems of government and forms of politics. This was perhaps the reason for breaking the country into districts, with a group of districts constituting a division, and a group of divisions constituting a province. There was also a geographical grouping of provinces into Eastern, Western and Northern.

The British instituted a system of Indirect Rule, meaning that the traditional systems of government and social organisation continued to function. Thus, 'native' courts co-existed with British-type judiciary, as did Muslim Sharia courts. The Native Authority (often under the headship of traditional rulers) was the grassroots level of governance. Nigerian indigenous languages were used in local administration, in native authority courts and in public enlightenment campaigns and in the early years of formal education.

Islam (as a religion and as a way of life) was well established in the north eastern and north western zones of the country penetrated into the north central and south western zones. British colonial government did little to interfere with well-established Islamic practices, particularly the judicial and education systems that had gained grounds well before the advent of colonial rule.

While recognising and respecting the ethnic and cultural diversities within the country, British colonial rule did introduce some unifying factors. First among these was communication by rail, road and telecommunications. Second, was a national security force (the police and the army). Third, was the civil service. Fourth was the rise of coastal and inland cities that brought people from different parts of the country living and working together. Fifth was the use of the English language for administration outside the native authorities, as well as in schools (beyond the very early years); thus giving the country what is now called its 'national language'. Thus, the British enforced a 'one Nigeria' concept while according a pride of place to local differences in culture, language, religion and socio-political organisation.

The years immediately following the Second World War (1939-1945) saw an upsurge of nationalism - a phenomenon that had been evident from the early years of colonial rule. Initially, the anti-colonial movement was a unified force seeking political independence for the country. It was also broad-based in that it included labour, youth and the local elite classes of the time. It did not respect ethnic boundaries. For this reason, and because a strong 'wind of change' was already blowing all over the colonial world, the anti-colonial movement was able to progressively wrest political power from the British in the decades of the 1940s - 1960s.

During this period, Nigeria witnessed intensive political mobilisation of its indigenous population. There was the rise of political parties whose agitations led to the abolition of special privileges for whites (e.g. the change from 'European Reservations' to 'Government Residential Areas' change of 'European Hospitals' to 'Senior Service Hospitals'). More and more Nigerians rose to European (senior) positions in the civil service, the Army intensified the training of Nigerians for the officer corps, and there was a progressive increase in the participation of Nigerians in the national legislative council.

A three-region structure came into being in 1951, the same year as the regional elections that ushered in Nigerian-led governments and cabinets. Things then moved fast, with self government in 1956/1957 and independence in 1960 (Obanya and Binns, 2009).

### **3.2.3 Post-independence Nigeria**

Since independence in 1960, the politics of Nigeria can best be described as shaky and unsteady. The shaky start in 1960 was brought about by the revival of ethnic rivalries in the form of party politics. Each of the three regions was dominated demographically by one of the three largest ethnic nationalities in the country (Hausa-Fulani in the North, Igbo in the East, and Yoruba in the West). In each of the regions, the ruling party drew the bulk of its membership and supporters from the dominant ethnic nationality. At the same time, each region had a sizeable opposition that was drawn mainly from minority ethnic nationalities on its territory. Thus, there were two levels of bitter power struggle – the struggle for control of federal (national) resources by each of the three dominant ethnic nationalities and (within each region) a government-opposition dichotomy with strong ethnic colorations. In the North, the dichotomy also took inter-religious colorations.

In each region, the minority group clamoured for its own autonomous region – an ambition that was often repressed by the dominant party/ethnic nationality, but supported by rival parties from the other regions. These inter-ethnic/inter-regional rivalries shook Nigeria to its very foundations. Conducting a national census in 1963 became an uphill task, as no group in the country found the figures acceptable. The conduct of elections in 1964/65 was the straw that finally broke the camel's back. Disagreement and condemnation greeted the results, violence and civil disobedience followed, creating an excuse for the first in what was to become a series of military *coup d'états* in January 1966.

The January 1966 coup also had an ethnic element. A majority of its perpetrators were Igbo while most of the military men and politicians killed were Hausa-Fulani and Yoruba. It was therefore no surprise that a 'retaliation coup' took place in July of 1966. Political dialogue failed to resolve the resultant inter-ethnic skirmishes, and a bitter civil war, setting the rest of Nigeria against the Igbo-dominated Eastern region (that had seceded to proclaim a Republic of Biafra in May 1967) from August 1967 to January 1970.

The period 1967 to 1979 placed Nigeria firmly under a series of military regimes. The successful prosecution of the civil war helped in 'keeping Nigeria one', while the succeeding military regimes ran the business of the federation in a non-federal style that tended to weaken the constituent states. From three regions in 1951, the country moved to four in 1963 (with the creation of a Mid West region). Shortly before the outbreak of the civil war in 1967, the Federation was 'split' into 12 states. The number of states was increased to 19 in 1976, to 21 in 1987, and eventually to 36 (and a federal capital territory) in 1991.

While the creation of 36 states (and of 774 local governments) was intended to 'bring government closer to the people' it has had the undesired and perhaps, undesirable, effect of severely weakening the constituent units of the Nigerian federation, while over-centralising real power at the federal level.

Military regimes also introduced the practice of decrees, edicts and directives ('with immediate effect') in place of political dialogue. Opposing views were often stifled, or at best

simply ignored. Virtually every aspect of national life came under direct government control – banking, insurance and the mass media.

The high point of centralised federal power has been revenue from petroleum. A revenue allocation formula that gave the bulk of what is known as ‘federally collected revenue’ - tax on extractive industries, petroleum tax, custom and excise, value-added tax and telecommunication fees) to the central government has tended to deny revenue (and development projects) to the geographical areas that produce the revenue. The distribution of revenue from petroleum has in fact remained a sore point of serious national development and political concern.

In 1979, there was a civilian inter-regnum (operated under a constitution presided over by the Military). This was abruptly terminated by the Military in 1983. After a succession of coup d’états, and other faltering political steps, the country returned to democratic governance in 1999.

An eleven-year period of unbroken civil rule between 1999 and 2010 has had positive and negative effects. On the positive side, that civil rule has even lasted this ‘long’ is considered a plus. Civil society groups are beginning to come alive. The press has become more pluralistic, more independent, and more vibrant. Tele-density has improved, due to the introduction of cellular technology. Internet connectivity is on the rise. Above all, Nigeria is no longer considered a pariah nation by the international community and international development assistance and foreign direct investment have been trickling into the country.

On the negative side, good politics is yet to take roots. Political discourse is yet to begin to focus on issues. Elections are still ‘flawed’ and there is a general feeling by the people that their votes do not count. The people are asking ‘where does the money go’, as huge earnings from oil do not seem to have impacted positively on people’s lives. Corruption is still rampant, and Nigeria still ranks high on the corruption perception indices of Transparency International (Box 1).

### **Box 1: Nigeria’s Corruption Perception Index**

Corruption has increased in Nigeria with the country currently ranking 130th out of 180 countries surveyed in the 2009 Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI) released by Transparency International (TI).

In 2009 Nigeria scored 2.7 points and took 121st position out of 180 countries but this year the country’s CPI score dropped to 2.5 ranking at on the same position Lebanon, Libya and Mauritania.

CPI ranks countries in terms of the degree to which corruption is perceived to exist among public officials and politicians.

Nigeria’s CPI index in the span of an eight year period dating back to 2001 did not improve until 2006 when it ranked 142nd out of 163 countries. Before then the country ranked second to last for four years consecutively with its lowest CPI.

Source: Daily Trust newspaper – September 2009 cited in allAfrica.com

There is everywhere in the federation a call for ‘true federalism’ – a shift of responsibilities and resources to local and state governments. This goes along with a call for ‘fiscal

federalism’ – a change in current revenue allocation formula that is heavily tilted towards what has become known as the ‘federal might’

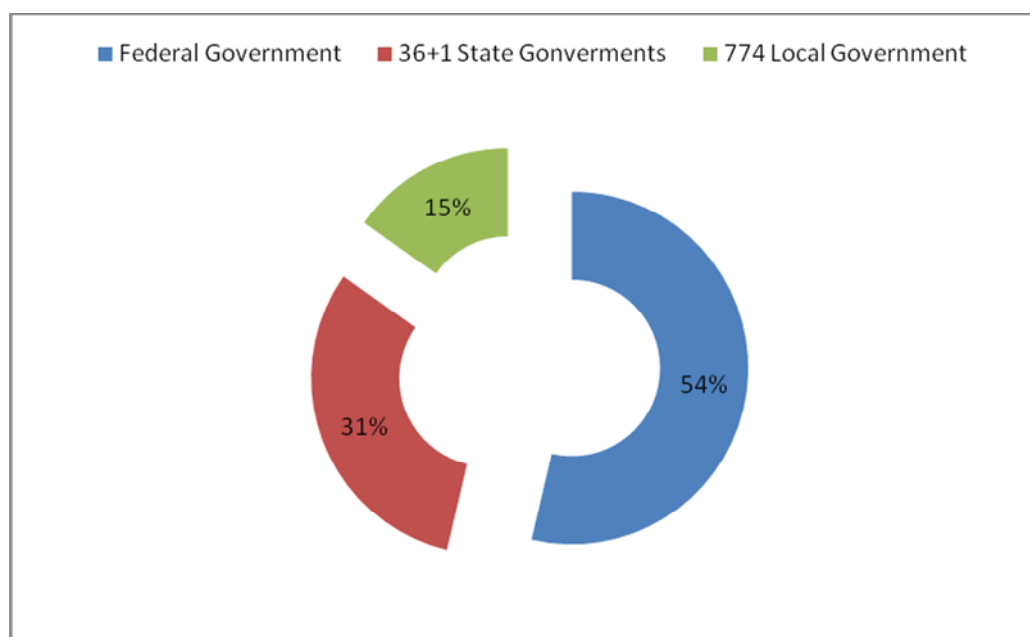
As Figure 3 shows the federal government appropriates to itself 55% of all centrally-generated revenue, the thirty-six state governments combined receive 31%, while the 774 local governments receive only 15%. The argument in favour of ‘true fiscal federalism’ is that governments at the sub-national levels (states and local governments) is that since matters that touch on the lives of the people like education, health and related social services are best provided at the grassroots levels, governments at these levels should receive the bulk of the revenue available.

The lowest point on Nigeria’s negative political score is the deepening of inter-ethnic and religious intolerance. This has led to recurrent cases of civil unrest and violence in the past ten years, particularly in the northern parts of the country.

The Niger Delta, where the bulk of Nigeria’s oil is produced, has also been a theatre of violence. This is due mainly to prolonged neglect of the region by successive governments. Political solutions are currently being applied to the situation and the ardent hope is that this would work. Efforts would need to be made to ensure appropriate follow through actions. One also expects that good politics would be installed as a means of securing sustainable peace in that region.

The sum total of the politics on Nigeria’s in the post-independence era is one in which democracy is yet to take firm roots, one in which old ethnic and religious loyalties are still strong, one in which political discourse is yet to address issues of national development. It is above all, a good example of an imperfect and lop-sided federation in which decentralisation is yet to translate into de-concentration and devolution of powers.

**Figure 3: Nigeria-Revenue Allocation Formula**



Source: Federal Ministry of Finance, 2009

Politics in Nigeria has not been directed at nation-building, which would have entailed:

1. The emergence of national political heroes, instead of ethnic heroes
2. The institutionalisation of participatory democracy
3. Operating federalism to the letter by devolving adequate authority to sub-national levels of governance
4. A human development mission for the country, as a platform on which the development of education would have been built.
5. Diversifying the financial resource base of the country
6. Channelling resources to areas that are most likely to lay the foundation for sustainable human development

These are elements of good politics that would have given a boost to access to education. What has happened so far is the perpetuation of bad politics and this has had a negative impact on education. That meaningful access has eluded Nigeria largely because of bad politics is the subject of the next section.

## **4. Politics in Nigeria and Access to Education**

This paper posits that societies governed by good politics are more likely to provide meaningful access to education than those in which bad politics reigns. Nigerian politics has passed through several phases, as shown in the last section, and is characterised by a number of imponderables. The strong entrenchment of ethnic and religious loyalties in a situation in which national cohesion is needed is one manifestation of these imponderables. Lack of popular participation in a political process classified as multi-party democracy is yet another manifestation. Yet a third is a federation characterised by over-centralisation of power. A fourth is that the north-south divide in Nigeria has remained a stark reality, even though both sides were ‘amalgamated’ by the British way back in 1914.

All these political imponderables – and more – have had some impact on the development of education in Nigeria, and have not favoured meaningful access. For ease of presentation, the impact will be discussed in the chronological sequence in which the politics of the country was discussed in the previous section.

### **4.1 Colonial Education Politics**

Christian missionaries had penetrated the coastal regions of Nigeria before the advent of colonial rule, and were able to penetrate most of the southern and the non-Muslim sections of the north by the decades of 1920-1940. The Christian push into the hinterland led to the introduction of ‘western’ education in all areas of missionary activity. There were varying degrees of resistance to western education, but it progressively gained roots as those who benefited from it became the new elite of colonial Nigeria.

In the north of the country, Islam had gained ascendancy for centuries and there were strong traditional forces to back up the religion and its form of education. The British authorities played the good politics of respecting local traditions and not interfering with the status quo. Missionary schools were supported in the south, while Native Authorities controlled the few western (but not Christian) schools in the north. There was also no interference with the well-entrenched Islamic education system of the north. Children of the indigenous elite of the north benefited from both Islamic and western-type education.

The impacts of these ‘good politics’ were not that good. They created an ‘uneven educational topography’ in the country. This phenomenon was described by Obanya and Binns (2007) in the following words:

The result is that what has become known in the discourse on education in Nigeria as ‘educational imbalance’ is not simply a pedagogical issue but one with strong political undertones. Education power has to some extent translated into economic power, and a very strong current in Nigeria’s political power play has been how to avoid a situation in which all the powers (educational, economic and political) are enjoyed by (or vested) in the same geographical zone.

This political gimmick has been translated into educational policy in two ways: the classification of some parts of the Nigerian federation as ‘educationally disadvantaged States’ and, related to this, the adoption of a quota system (better known as ‘federal character’) for student admission to federal government institutions. Federal character is also in force in every other aspect of national life, it is a feature of the constitution, and

there is a Federal Character Commission to enforce its provisions' (Obanya and Binns, 2007:84).

British politics of indirect rule – not upsetting the apple cart of traditional political systems – had its impact on social cohesion. The village, town and clan solidarity mechanisms that predated colonisation became a strong force among groups that migrated from one part of the country to other parts, to take advantage of the new economic opportunities brought about by colonialism. This phenomenon was a common feature of the Igbo, the Efik, the Izon and other south eastern communities, whose 'town unions' became a strong force in spreading western education. Successive post-colonial governments capitalised upon this self-help spirit. By allowing the existence of what was known as 'voluntary agency' schools, some of which received government subventions, following strict quality and performance guidelines. The spirit has however since died down due to some bad politics to which we shall return later.

British colonial politics also attempted to reach out to the people through selected elites that were to be educationally well groomed, exposed to British standards but not 'assimilated' as the French attempted to do with elites in their colonies. For this reason, the expansion of educational opportunities was at a rather slow pace, especially at the secondary and tertiary levels. For the same reason, standards were relatively high; schools cared for the head, the heart and the hands. What was perhaps the best result of this policy was that most western educated Nigerians remained culturally Nigerian. This has remained a major character trait of Nigerians.

The reverse side of this political move should not however be ignored. There was some education 'thirst' (social demand, in professional parlance) that was not quenched, especially at the secondary and tertiary levels. As a response to this unmet social demand, secondary commercial and vocational schools sprang up in the major cities of eastern Nigeria, in Lagos and parts of today's south western zone. These were however accorded a lower status than conventional 'grammar schools'. In the 1970s, the 'commercial' schools fell into the mainstream education structure, as their products fitted more neatly into the private sector job demands.

The politics of educational elitism was most evident at the tertiary sector. For example, the University of Ibadan, founded in 1948 as a College of the University of London, offered – up till 1962 – only a conventionally narrow range of courses in the arts and the pure sciences, medicine and agriculture. Only a fraction of eligible students got admitted, as competition for entry was keen. The founding fathers of the university have documented the battering they received from nationalists and Nigerian newspapers on the perceived elitist nature of its structure, management and programmes (Mellamby, 1958)

In this particular case, the positive side must be heralded. Largely because of its world-class standards (staff, programme, products) the University of Ibadan was well regarded internationally. In fact, the University still carries its good name, even in these days of less successful fortunes.

## **4.2 The Post-Colonial Experience**

*The immediate post-colonial years* allowed the new leaders of Nigeria to practise the politics they had preached in their criticisms of British colonial rule. The period also witnessed



increased political rivalry among the three regions and the three major ethnic nationalities in the country being manifested in nearly every aspect of national life, including the politics of educational development.

A prominent feature of education politics during this period was Free Primary Education of 1955-56-57. It was presented as a desirable gain of independence. It was also an enactment of regional political rivalry, attempting to show which part was providing 'life more abundant' to its people. It operated according to peculiar regional circumstances. In the North, education was free, but neither universal nor compulsory. In the East, it was bandied as a vote-catching slogan, but was quickly abandoned apparently for lack of 'resources' since the term was interpreted narrowly to mean financial resources. No account was taken of political and social will as important resources.

The West was able to tell a success story of its free primary education programme, for reasons that have been highlighted in Obanya and Binns (2007), as follows:

- As part of the ruling party manifesto, the electorate was aware of the scheme long before it became official government policy.
- The formal proposals came, as a bill, before a regional assembly that had a very strong opposition. It was therefore subjected to wide ranging debate.
- The citizenry had already embraced western-type education and saw its advantages, especially for the upward mobility of the younger generation. Support from the citizenry was assured.
- The scheme brought schools nearer to rural and urban slum communities.
- The Western region was the richest region in Nigeria at the time and therefore could fund the programme.
- There was some thought given to what would happen to the children after primary education, as there was an upsurge in the number of secondary grammar (5-year classical programmes) and secondary modern (3-year general education) schools. Local communities and voluntary agencies (mainly religious bodies) were fully mobilised for this purpose.
- There was also an upsurge in the number of teacher training institutions - to train teachers rapidly (mainly in 2-year post-junior secondary colleges) to cope with the envisaged increase in enrolment. (Obanya and Binns, 2007:87)

Nigeria's new political parties (at independence) were critical of the colonial University of Ibadan for being elitist and for offering a narrow range of courses. The government of Eastern Nigeria was the first to attempt an alternative (American) higher education model, with the establishment of the University of Nigeria, Nsukka on Independence Day in 1960. Nsukka opened its doors to a wide number of students with a wide range of courses in fields that Nigerians had never had the opportunity to study (such as psychology, sociology, education, engineering, architecture, journalism, home economics, accounting). The response of the other two regions was to establish their own universities two years later— Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria by the North and University of Ife by the West. A second federal university also came on board in Lagos the same year (1962), bringing the total number of universities to five.

This development was beneficial to the nation in a number of ways. It absorbed a couple of thousands of university-ready students who had been denied the opportunity for higher education. It led to the introduction of new courses that were needed in the fast growing

public services. The new universities strove towards international standards bringing in experienced academic staff from Europe and America, and training their Nigerian staff in the most prestigious universities abroad. There was some serious planning and expansion was more or less measured. There was above all a clever political balancing act that enabled each of the three regions of the time to own and run a university. These regional universities were in fact open to all Nigerians (staff and students), even though student enrolment showed a preponderance of people from its proprietor region.

However, this politically well intentioned and fairly well engineered development was to set the scene for a phenomenon of undue proliferation in later years. Bad politics was also to infiltrate the system later, often leading to ethnic polarisation of staff and students and government assault on university autonomy.

*The intervening military years (1966-1979; 1983-1999)* witnessed military-type politics guiding the development of education. There were however some instances of good politics (in terms of people-oriented approaches to policy development) by the Nigerian military that stand out as distinct points in the evolution of education in the country, and these deserve due recognition.

Nigeria's National Policy on Education was developed under the military. It was published in 1977, after wide-ranging stakeholder dialogue that began in 1968 with a national curriculum conference. The policy document was supported by detailed implementation guidelines developed with external technical assistance. There was also a technical secretariat to monitor its implementation. It has been subjected to revisions by successive governments and has remained the major education guidelines instrument for the country. Its political credential is that it was an integral part of efforts at re-building Nigeria after the civil war and was for that reason closely linked with the national development plan of the mid 1970s.

In spite of this unique evidence of people-oriented policies, educational development in the military years had its negative side, characterised by the following features.

1. Military-type unified command structure
2. Proliferation of higher institutions
3. Misapplication of the federal character principle
4. Detachment from the people
5. A Cult of inefficiency
6. Assault on institutional autonomy

*Military-type unified command* was exhibited in the progressive take-over of state (regional) higher institutions by the federal government. It was always not a case of negotiations, or the states declaring their inability to run the institutions concerned. The federal authorities would declare a 'take over' creating panic among staff and students and taking a number of years to clean up the mess created.

*Proliferation of higher institutions:* As the number of states grew, so did the number of higher institutions. The development of such institutions relying on reverse-order planning, some home work after the emergence of the institution, rather than planning before take-off. Most

of these institutions eventually became preoccupied with internal wrangling for power, and intrigues geared at attracting the attention of political leaders, while academic issues occupied a back seat.

‘Federal Character’ is Nigeria’s political invention intended to give each section of the country a sense of belonging. At the federal level, positions are ‘zoned’ to specific geo-political zones. Within the states, the senatorial districts (of which there are three) become the parameter of zoning. In education development terms, federal character is used to determine the location of institutions, the headship of institutions, the distribution of staff, the award of scholarships, the distribution of facilities, etc. It does often create a sense of ‘this is ours’ in Nigerian communities; just it also creates a feeling of ‘we are being cheated’ in others. In almost all cases, complaints about being cheated never stop and merit is often neither recognised nor promoted.

*Detachment from the people* is the major characteristic of non-democratic regimes. It is a practice that abhors people’s participation. Political management of education by the Nigerian Military progressively replaced stakeholder consultations by military decrees and edicts. This is the origin of today’s practice of ‘sensitising’ the people to accept an already packaged programme, instead of carrying them along during the process of its development. It was also a major explanation for the very limited success of the UPE (Universal Primary Education) programme that the military floated in 1976.

*A Cult of Inefficiency* – Unbridled expansion in the military years led to the rise of over bloated bureaucracies and the proliferation of executing agencies (para-statal) of the education sector, often with conflicting roles and interests. It has also led to a situation that emphasises merely spending on education (dwelling on white elephant projects and servicing the bureaucracy), instead of investing in education (channelling resources on those things that would make a difference – teachers, pedagogical materials, infrastructure, etc)

*Assault on institutional autonomy*– The military’s ‘joint command’ approach was extended to the education sector in the years following the civil war. It began with universities being brought into the public service salary structure and pension scheme. It then continued with government having the last say in the appointment of vice chancellors. With new universities springing up all the time, the government did appoint the pioneer vice chancellors. They then went on to deny university lecturers the right to negotiations and ordered them out of their campus homes in 1975. This was followed in 1976 by the mass sacking of academics (as part of a national public service purge). The process continued in a variety of forms throughout the years of military rule.

#### **4.3. The last eleven years of unbroken civil rule**

Politics, in relation to access to education in Nigeria since the return to civil rule in 1999, seems to have borrowed heavily from the politics of old times, right from the pre-colonial period. Old ethnic and religious loyalties, which often mean divisive politics in the context of building a modern nation, are still a fact of national life. This is often nicely expressed as the politics of equal sharing of the national cake, and giving practical expression in the ‘zoning’ of political posts. Thus, since 1999, the post of minister of education has rotated between the South West and the South East, while that of deputy minister (minister of state) has rotated between the North East, the North West and North Central. Experience and competence have

not often been considered as worthwhile criteria, and orderly development of education has been the victim.

Political instability over the years has contributed to retarding national development, including the development of education. Instability has also meant frequent changes in policies as well as in the movers of such policies. In the education sector, the head of a parastatal recently expressed deep frustration in ‘working with eleven ministers and 14 permanent secretaries in the past eleven years’.<sup>2</sup>

The minister who was in office from 1999 to 2001 was preoccupied with seeing through the Universal Basic Education (UBE) programme. His successor was more concerned with ensuring the take off of the National Open University. His successor focussed on curriculum reform and the review of the National Policy on Education. After him came a minister who vigorously pursued structural reforms of the sector, an effort judged as taking on too many tasks in a single swoop and not involving stakeholders fully (Obanya, 2007a). The minister who came after that (2007-2008) was pre-occupied with ‘reforming the reforms’, while the minister currently in post has as pet project a national educational ‘Roadmap’ project.

Over-centralisation was a creation of the military and has raised the spectre of ‘true federalism’. It is characterised by the federal government dictating to the states and leaving very little room to the local governments to attend to socio-economic needs at the local level. Its other characteristic is for the federal government to blame state and local governments for the failure of initiatives that are not theirs.

Most of the education initiatives of the federal government since return to civil rule have failed to respect the true federalism principle. For example, the Universal Basic Education programme of 1999 was first launched by the federal authorities before being introduced to the states. With the reforms of 2002-2003, the current education sector road map, and the curriculum review efforts, federal authorities took the initiatives, and then sold these to the states, which were expected to ‘buy into them’.

Proliferation of institutions has continued, mainly for the old reason of ‘fair geo-political spread’, and often without any rigorous test of viability. For example, on the surface, private participation in the provision of higher education is good politics, as it was supposed to contribute to expanding access to higher education. In the Nigerian case, the weight of the private sector has attained some 40% of higher education. In September 2010, there were 102 universities in the country, 41 of which were privately owned. Of the 61 public universities, 27 were federally-owned while 34 were owned by state governments.

Private ownership of universities has however simply increased the number of institutions and has had very little to do with broadening access in terms of increased opportunities for higher education, especially for the poorer segments of the population. Neither have there been increased opportunities in terms of the range of courses offered.

Some prominent features of politics in Nigeria are at play in the proliferation of universities. First, ‘federal might’ must be felt in all parts of the country, while the location of institutions must reflect ‘federal character’. Second, each state while ostensibly trying to meet social

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<sup>2</sup> Interview with Prof. Taiwo Ajayi, Director, National Institute for Educational Planning and Administration, Ondo-Nigeria—11 January 2010

demand for higher education of its citizens, also sees the possession of a university as a political status symbol. Third, the ownership of private universities must reflect diverse political interest groups – Christian groups (different denominations), Muslim groups, business interests, cultural groups, powerful political forces, etc. In the final analysis, it is genuine access to university education that suffers.

Population censuses are a part of the political power play in Nigeria. Census figures are fiercely disputed as each group sees itself as ‘undercounted and other groups ‘inflated’. Since high figures mean improved shares of the ‘national cake’, accurate statistics are a rarity. The problem becomes really compounded when funding of government programmes is the issue. There are therefore hardly any accurate figures on the funding of education in the country. Every tier of government claims to be spending a ‘huge chunk of its annual budget’ on education, but the question that is being raised by the people is ‘where does the money go?’

There is a growing feeling that the political governance of education (ministers and their entourage, board members of parastatals and governing councils of government institutions) are beginning to ‘chop’ a huge proportion of the money voted for education. In situations of good politics, more of the financial resources could have gone to teacher development, infrastructure and teaching-learning resources, thus giving prominence to ‘spending on education, as against the prevailing politics of merely ‘investing in education.’

One major heritage of the colonial and immediate post-independence era is self-help, which is closely tied to community involvement. It was a heritage that helped the development of grammar school education in western Nigeria. It became well entrenched in the life of the Igbo, through their town and clan unions, that gave financial and material support to Christian missionary education endeavours and also established and managed independent schools for Igbo resident in northern Nigeria.

The self-help/community participation zeal was lost to the bad politics of the post civil war military regime. Government saw the takeover of non-government schools as key to its efforts at promoting national unity. In some cases, governments changed names of schools (in the mid west region, for example) to permanently erase the memories of their original founders. The federal government political message at the time was ‘government can do it all alone’. The result was total abandonment of responsibilities by parents and communities. The present civilian government has since been preaching another doctrine, that of PPP (Public-private-partnerships). It has given directives for enforcing school management committees (SMCs) in schools, but public reaction has at best been lukewarm. This is because the bad politics surrounding policies which mean that ‘free education at all levels’ offered by most state governments is not understood to include any form of contribution (funds, materials, ideas, labour, etc) by parents and communities.

In summary, Nigeria’s education politics has changed very little over the years. The return to democratic rule does not seem to have erased the political memories of the past. Regimes may have changed but the political players have not. Reforms have been introduced in different directions, there have been increases in numbers, as well as increases in spending but the demand for education is has not been sufficiently stimulated; where demand has been stimulated, it is yet to be met. This legacy of bad politics makes it difficult for education policies to be implemented effectively. In the next section, the Universal Basic Education programme undertaken in newly democratic Nigeria in 1999 is discussed to illustrate this point.

## **5. UBE (Universal Basic Education) – A Case in Point**

The UBE programme came along with Nigeria's return to civil/democratic rule and was intended as one of the 'dividends of democracy' promised to the citizenry. It preceded the Dakar EFA goals and had wider ranging scope and objectives than the universal primary education (UPE) of the past regimes. Table 4 presents its objectives as being closer to the ideal of meaningful access discussed above, as it emphasises both increased enrolment and attention to issues concerning quality and efficiency. Its scope covers both formal and non-formal education and addresses the issue of exclusion from the angle of care for marginalised groups, especially girls.

An ambitious programme of this nature requires rigorous planning, extensive resource mobilisation and judicious use of available resources, and most importantly, transformational management. All this did not happen for reasons that were not unconnected with 'bad politics'.

First, politics was given prominence over policies and programmes. This was manifest in two forms, activities surrounding the enabling legislation and Nigerian-type federal-state power play. While the programme was officially launched in September 1999 and the structures for its implementation set up in January 2000, the enabling law was not passed at the federal level till 2004, while the 36 states of the Federation of Nigeria took their time, some passing their enabling acts as late as 2007.

Second, the enabling legislation laid more emphasis on the political governance of the programme than on its substance. There was emphasis on such issues as the creation of two posts of deputy executive secretaries for the Universal Basic Education Commission (UBE) and the establishment of zonal offices of the Commission in each of what is known as the 'six geo-political zones of the Federation'.

Third, the enabling acts retained the existing multiplication of structures for the management of basic education by the retention of a national commission for nomadic education and another for mass literacy. This arrangement runs against the spirit of the expanded view of basic education embodied in the original objectives and scope of UBE that put all forms of modes of delivery of basic education under a single umbrella.

Fourth, and worse still, Nigeria still went on in 2000 to establish an EFA (Education for All) secretariat in spite of the existence of UBE. This had the responsibility for developing the national EFA plan in the perspective of year 2015. The structure did engage in some planning activities, mobilising national expertise at all levels. Its deliverable (Nigeria's EFA Plan) is however yet to be produced.

**Table 3: Objectives and Scope of UBE**

Objectives	Scope
Developing in the entire citizenry a strong consciousness for education and a commitment to its vigorous promotion.	Programmes/initiatives for early childhood care and socialisation.
The provision of free, universal basic education for every Nigerian child of school-going age.	Educational programmes for the acquisition of functional literacy, numeracy, and life-skills, especially for adults (persons aged 15 and above).
Reducing drastically the incidence of drop-out from the formal school system (through improved relevance, quality, and efficiency).	Out of school, non-formal programmes for the updating of knowledge and skills for persons who left school before acquiring the basics needed for life-long learning.
Catering for the learning needs of young persons, who for one reason or another, have had to interrupt their schooling, through appropriate approaches to the provision and promotion of basic education.	Special programmes of encouragement to ALL marginalised groups: GIRLS AND WOMEN, nomadic populations, out-of-school Youth.
Ensuring the acquisition of the appropriate levels of literacy, numeracy, manipulative, communicative and life skills, as well as the ethical, moral and civic values needed for laying a solid foundation for lifelong learning.	Non-formal skills and apprenticeship training for adolescents and youth, who have not had the benefit of formal education.
	The formal school system from the beginning of primary education to the end of the junior secondary school.

Source: Federal Republic Of Nigeria/Federal Ministry of Education, (2000)

Fifth, the political management structure at the state (regional) level is such that it promotes conflict of interests, instead of collaboration and synergy. In each state of the federation both the commissioner (minister) for education and the ‘executive chairman’ of the State Universal Basic Education Board (SUBEB) are appointed directly by the governor. While the commissioner is responsible for education in the state, he/she cannot give directives to an executive chairman who is responsible directly to the state governor

### **5.1 Reverse Order Planning**

Lewin (2007) refers to prevailing methods of educational planning as largely ‘aspirational’ and criticises them for their tendency of leading to a dead end that he calls the ‘Zone of Improbable Progress’ (ZIP). He therefore suggests the alternative of ‘*Target generating planning* based on the estimates of the highest sustainable rate of expansion that does not degrade quality to unacceptable levels’ (Lewin, 2007:7). Nigeria’s UBE seems to have invented a third model which publicises a product before any serious thought is given to the shape it is likely to take and the exact purpose it is intended to serve. Thus, the sequence of ‘planning’ for UBE was as follows:

1. Adoption of UBE by Government at the federal level – first week of September 1999
2. Formal launching – third week of September 1999
3. Appointment of a national coordinator – December 1999
4. Mobilising the constituent states of the federation – January 2000 onwards
5. Formalising the structures of its operations – January 2000 onwards
6. Flurry of activities to make the programme ‘visible’: January 2000 onwards
7. Passing of the enabling legislation -2004
8. Formal constitution of Universal Basic Education Commission (UBEC)

9. National school census and a national EMIS policy - 2005
10. Medium Term Targets – 2006
11. UBE Commission ‘Charter of Service’ - 2006
12. Passing of enabling Acts in the States – 2004 to 2007
13. Integration of UBE into the strategic education plans of some states – since 2005 and on-going

The medium term targets (Box 2) begin with Access (in the conventional sense of simple enrolment). UBE mid term targets also include quality improvements, emphasising teacher qualifications and the setting up of mechanisms for monitoring ‘teaching and learning processes at all levels’. It then goes on to list goals for curriculum, information technology in schools and HIV/AIDS. The setting of the targets does not seem to have resulted from any attempt at rigorous situational analysis. Moreover, most of the targets also lie outside the constitutional mandates of a federal institution, since they are challenges that are best addressed at the local level.

The Charter of Service of the Universal Basic Education Commission (2006) represents an improvement on planning-related activities of UBE. It is also much more focussed on the mandates of the UBE Commission as a federal (general guidelines and coordinating) agency. It lists the focus areas of the commission from 2006 to 2008 as:

1. Policy guidelines – formulating policy guidelines for the successful implementation of the UBE Commission (possible intention: the UBE programme)
2. Receiving (and disbursing) block grants and allocations
3. Prescribing of minimum standards for basic education
4. Establishing a data bank on basic education
5. Teacher development for UBE
6. Curriculum development and instructional materials
7. Sensitisation and mobilisation for basic education
8. Development partners’ intervention
9. Monitoring and Evaluation of Basic Education
10. Capacity Building for managers of basic education in Nigeria

There are two major problems with the ‘wish list’ in the service charter. Some of the items on that list are capable of setting the UBE Commission on a collision course with other education service delivery agencies. Curriculum (for example) is the mandate of the Nigerian Educational Research and Development Council (NERDC), training of managers is the mandate of the National Institute for Educational Planning and Administration (NIEPA), while teacher development is the major activity of the National Teachers’ Institute (NTI). The second problem has to do with encroachment on the constitutional responsibilities of the constituent states of the Nigerian federation. Social mobilisation (a truly grassroots affair) is a perfect example. The same applies to ‘monitoring teaching and learning at all levels.’



## **Box 2: UBE Midterm Targets: 2006 – 2008**

**\* Access:**

- \* 100% to graduate from Basic Education (BE) in situations, possessing literacy, numeracy and basic life skills so as to live meaningfully in the society and contribute to national development.

**\* Quality:**

- \* 80% of B.E. Teachers to have the Nigerian Certificate in Education (NCE).
- \* 50% of B.E. Schools have conducive teaching and learning environment.
- \* 60% of Head and Assistant Head-Teachers undergo training in School Management.
- \* *Establish an efficient institutional framework for monitoring learning and teaching process at all levels.*

**\* Periodic Review and Effective Implementation of Curriculum:**

- \* Complete Revision of B.E. Curriculum to conform to the reform agenda.
- \* Produce educational materials
- \* Establish libraries and information resource centres
- \* Involve local craft people in the delivery of vocational education in schools.

**\* Promote Information Technology:**

- \* 10% of BE graduates are computer literate
- \* 50% of school managers are computer literate
- \* 50% of BE teachers are trained in computer skills.

**\* Improve Gender Equity:**

- \* Eliminate gender disparity in BE by 2008.

**\* Reduce Spread of HIV and Mitigate the Impact of AIDS:**

- \* Achieve 100% awareness by 2008.

**\* Mobilize and Develop Partnership with International Partners, Private Sector and Local Community to Support and Fund Education:**

- \* Improve collaboration
- \* Achieve 80% community involvement in management of schools.
- \* Achieve 60% private sector involvement in managing and funding Basic Education.

## **5.2 Impact of UBE on the Ground**

Reports from the Universal Basic Education Commission are limited to funds disbursed to states, training programmes organised, local and overseas conferences attended by staff, and advocacy visits to various categories of stakeholders. They are silent on progress being made towards the attainment of EFA goals through the UBE programme.

Adepoju and Fabiyi (2007) assessed the perceptions of stakeholders on a scale that ranged from 5 (very high) to very low (1) and concluded -as Table 4 shows- that there was low perception of UBE, with the exception of one aspect- teacher availability. It is particularly interesting that UBE is perceived as very high on politicisation.

**Table 4: Stakeholders' Perception of Significant Aspects of UBE**

Significant aspects of UBE	Stakeholder Rating
Mobilisation of local communities	1 (very low)
Politicisation of programme implementation	5 (very high)
Teacher availability	4 (high)
Teacher motivation	2 (low)
Crowded classroom	5 (very high)
Conducive classrooms	2 (low)
Learning outcomes	2 (low)

Source: Adepoju and Fabiyi (2007)

Obanya, (2007b) showed that UBE has made gains in terms of net enrolment but that there were still challenges concerning:

- Equity
  - Geographical inequity with a clear north-south dichotomy (geographical and gender inequities).
  - Gender inequity, with a national average GPI of 0.82, but with wide geographical diversities, with GPI in favour of girls in the South-eastern zone of the country.
- Quality
  - Primary school survival rate (rising from 83% in 2002 to 87% in 2006 for boys, but declining during the same period from 83% to 71% for girls).
  - Teacher-Pupil Ratios at the primary level – a national average of 44, but with wide differences among states (91 in Bayelsa state, 104 in Bauchi).
  - Qualified Teacher-Pupil Ratios – a wide range of below 40 in some southern states to over 210 in the extreme north of the country.
  - Results of the latest Monitoring Learning Achievement (MLA) exercise – 2003 – still show low performance at the primary (grade) four level, even though there were slight increases in scores in all the skills tested compared with 1999 results.
- Relevance - This is with specific reference to the Curriculum that was developed with minimum input from teachers and which also generally considered to be overloaded.

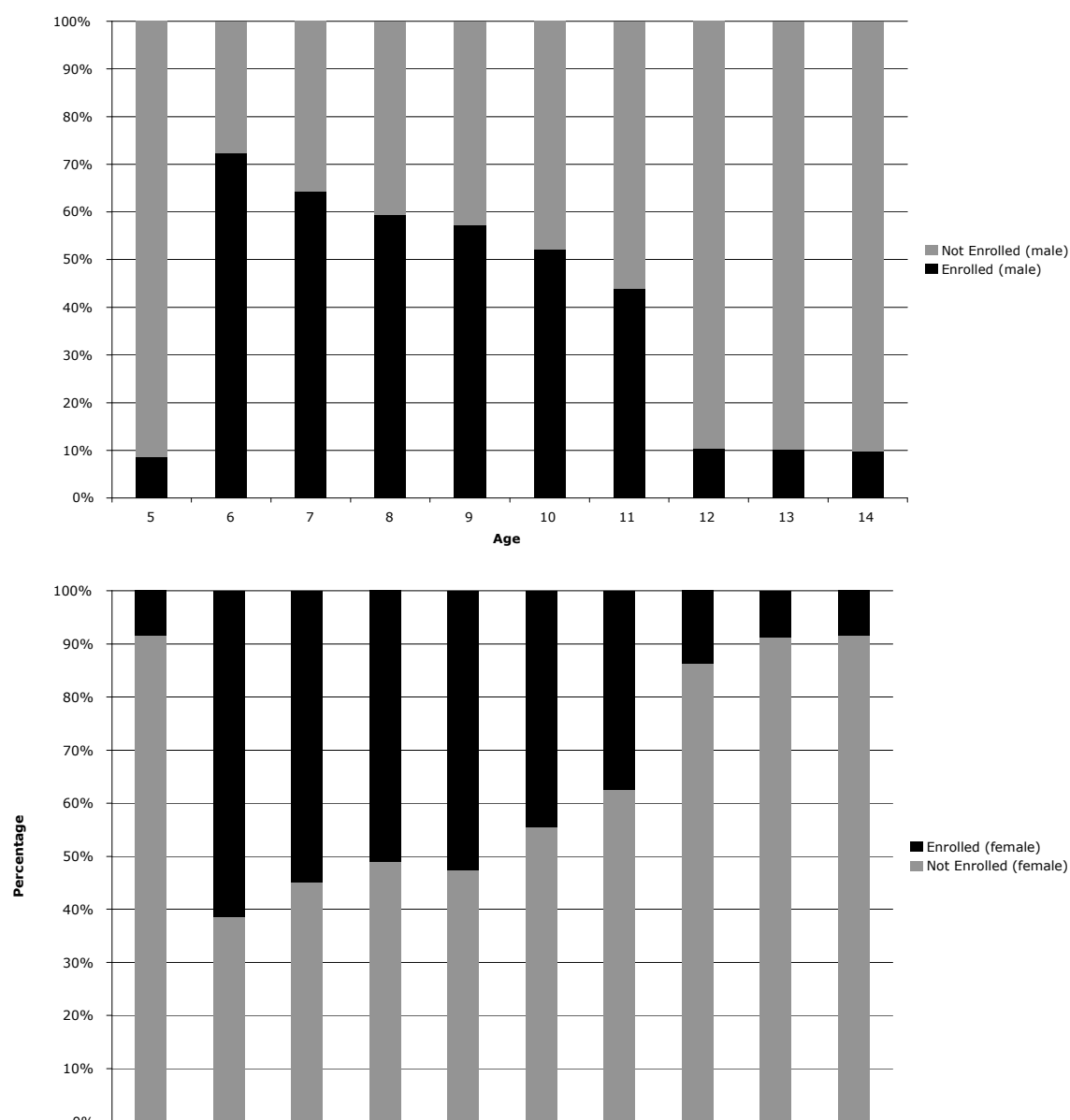
**Table 5: Nigeria's 9-Year Basic Education Programme - Official Curriculum**

Level	Core Compulsory Subjects	Electives
Lower Basic (grades 1-3)	English Studies A major Nigerian language Mathematics Basic science and technology Social studies Civic education Cultural and creative arts Religious studies Physical and health education Computer studies	Agriculture Home economics Arabic language  <i>Pupils must offer 1 elective, but not more than 2</i>
Middle Basic (grades 4-6)	English studies A major Nigerian language Mathematics Basic science Social studies Civic education Cultural and creative Arts Religious studies Physical and health education French language Computer studies	Agriculture Home Economics Arabic language  <i>Pupils must offer 1, but not more than 2 electives</i>
Upper Basic (grades 7-9)	English studies A major Nigerian language Mathematics Basic science Social studies Civic education Cultural and creative Arts Religious studies Physical and health education French language Basic technology Computer studies	Agriculture Home Economics Arabic language Business studies  <i>Pupils must offer 2, but not more than 3 electives</i>

Table 5 shows the extent to which subjects have been added on and on to the basic school curriculum. Implementation has not been possible, mainly because the schools simply cannot cope with the demands of an overloaded school timetables. This is a situation in which integration of knowledge (e.g. integrating civic and social studies) would have made more pedagogic sense. In some cases, the specialised teachers required are not available in the system, for example, agriculture, Arabic and French languages.

Up-to-date data on education in Nigeria is quite an expensive commodity, while there is hardly any systematic monitoring of the progress of education. Conclusions and inferences therefore have to be drawn from 'the latest year available'. The latest year available (2005) (Figure 4) shows the weight of the out-of-school (or not enrolled) school-age population. Girls are the major victims of being 'not-enrolled'.

**Figure 4: Age-Specific Enrolments (%): 2005**



source: EMIS, (2006)

UNESCO Institute of Statistics (UIS) however has data to show that even in terms of enrolment, the UBE programme does not seem to have made much positive difference. Table 6 shows that, in 2007, (seven years into the operation of the programme) GER and NER have remained below the regional (African) average. Transition to the secondary cycle is low. Pre-primary education is available only to 16% of children, evidence that exclusion sets in right from the early years of the life of the child.

**Table 6: NIGERIA – participation in education**

Pre-primary GER (%)		1999	2002	2007	2007 regional average
	MF			16	16
	M			16	16
	F			16	16
Primary (GER %)	MF	91	95	93	98
	M	101	104	90	103
	F	81	85	87	90
Primary (NER %)	MF	60		61	74
	M	66		64	76
	F	54		58	71
Secondary (GER %)	MF	24	35	30	33
	M	25	34	34	37
	F	22	25	27	29
Secondary (NER %)	MF			25	
	M			28	
	F			22	

Source: UNESCO Institute of Statistics

UBE would therefore require serious re-positioning for it to be able to move Nigeria towards the goals of Education for All, which has to be at some later date, as international development watchdogs have already indicated that the country is unlikely to achieve both EFA and MDGs by the year 2015 (UNESCO, 2009).

## **6. Conclusions: Ways and Actions Forward**

### **6.1 Developing Good Politics For The Benefit Of Good Education**

Nigeria's wealth is neither agricultural products, nor solid minerals, nor oil. Its wealth is the people. Denied meaningful access to education, the country's huge population becomes a mere crowd; but empowered through unfettered access to education, the population becomes the country's major resource. Education is the key to transforming the huge population into the solid intellectual and skills base on which Nigeria's possible participation in the knowledge economy of the present century can be premised.

A paradigm turnaround from bad to good politics would be the beginning of wisdom here, and the task that lies ahead would do well to consider the following political-type concrete steps

1. Electoral reforms, to reduce the incidence of flawed elections, to ensure that the people's votes really count, and as a first step in the emergence of governments that would reflect and represent the people's will.
2. Good governance that enshrines accountability and espouses a philosophy that public office is to be held in trust for the people.
3. Return to 'true federalism' – eliminating over-centralisation and giving strong political and financial muscle for the management of basic human development needs to local and state governments
4. Drastically reducing wastage and corruption in the entire system, to release energies and resources for genuine national development endeavours.

Such political-type reforms would provide more fertile ground for the development of education, where the major focus should be on strategic planning and the development of strong institutions for educational service delivery, particularly at the local and state levels. Meaningful access to education is best assured in a situation in which education just doesn't happen; that is, one in which education is planned and managed.

There is also the need to capitalise on established/inherited traditional institutions, as was practised by the British colonial government. These are the most effective mobilisers to stimulate effective demand for education. They are also efficient monitors of programmes, as well as the viable channels through which the authorities can get to the people.

Social organisations, like the town unions among the Igbo, the trades' guilds among the Yoruba, the Islamic clerics and powerful traditional rulers of the north do wield strong political influences in the country. They will have to be used to bring back community participation in the development of education.

Coming down to the purely technical dimensions of educational development and service delivery: planning, curriculum development, teacher continuing professional development, etc.) there is need to 'democratise' the process by really involving (not merely consulting or informing) all classes of stakeholders.

Finally, Nigeria must eliminate ‘census politics’ from the education. Orderly development of education cannot take place in situations of either absolutely no data or the prevalence of unreliable/unusable data

## **6.2 Re-kindled Meaningful Access through the UBE Initiative**

A re-kindled meaningful access strategy is one that:

1. Spreads the message of meaningful access among stakeholders;
2. Makes meaningful access the goal of EFA-related programmes;
3. Ensures the inclusion of the various dimensions of meaningful access into its strategic framework;
4. Probes deeply into the various zones of exclusion to determine their root causes;
5. Builds its intervention on addressing the root causes of exclusion in various zones;
6. Incorporates action research-monitoring and evaluation procedures that dwells on progress towards the attainment of meaningful access.

### **6.2.1 Strategic Planning of UBE**

For this to work in the Nigerian setting, would require a shift from the current practice of *Reverse Order Planning* to the institutionalising Strategic Planning of UBE- a process that should include:

1. An over-arching sector-wide approach that fits UBE into the broader scope of an all-embracing education sector strategy.
2. Systematic and strategic planning from the local level upwards.
3. Plans based on the identified UBE/EFA deficits of every LGA and every state of the federation, focusing on identified barriers to meaningful access.
4. Implementation strategies adapted to the specific requirements of every local government and every state of the federation.
5. Carrying the people along all through the process.
6. Built in monitoring-reporting-review mechanism, built around an action-research agenda.

To ensure that future UBE plans (to be developed mainly at the state and local government levels) do not stop at merely ‘getting children to school’, it would be advisable to go ‘beyond physical access’ and factor in other challenge areas that would need to be carried along in ensuring meaningful access. Table 7 shows the five main challenge areas to be addressed to ensure that planning UBE works in the direction of meaningful access. These include equity issues that in themselves touch on various dimensions of exclusion. They also include quality issues in the comprehensive sense of ensuring the quality of inputs and processes as a means of working towards quality outcomes. It is equally important to include issues related to teaching and learning, management issues, as well as adequate resources for UBE. These all factors that contribute to ensuring that children do not simply pass through school, but more importantly, that the school also passes through them.

**Table 7: Beyond Physical Access Issues in Planning UBE**

Access and Equity	<p>Enrolment at various levels/forms of education</p> <p>Attendance/dropout/repetition/completion/success/transition to next level</p> <p>Opportunities for education out-of-school</p> <p>Gender parity and equity in educational opportunities (all levels/all forms)</p> <p>Geographical and social coverage of educational opportunities</p>
Quality and Relevance	<p>Educational INPUTS (policy, management framework, teachers, materials, infrastructure, curriculum, funding)</p> <p>Educational PROCESSES (school level management, teacher-pupil classroom interactions, opportunities for out-of-class learning, inspection/supervision/quality control measures)</p> <p>Educational OUTCOMES (student learning, examination success rates, learner-behaviour/values/attitudes, types of skills acquired through education)</p> <p>Level of appropriateness of education to children and society's current and future needs</p> <p>Relationship between school curriculum and the world of work</p>
Teaching and Learning	<p>Teacher education level/qualifications</p> <p>Teacher competence/knowledge</p> <p>Teacher experience</p> <p>Teacher effectiveness/work ethics/level of creativity</p> <p>Gender sensitivity among teachers</p> <p>Learner readiness/attitudes/study habits/work ethics</p> <p>School and classroom environment/including gender-friendliness levels</p> <p>Guidance and Counselling services</p> <p>What students actually learn/or fail to learn</p> <p>Parental/societal support for school learning</p>
Management and Efficiency	<p>System level management</p> <p>Institutional level management</p> <p>Decentralisation/devolution of authorities in educational management</p> <p>Society involvement</p> <p>Wastages in the system (in what forms at different levels)</p> <p>State of education data</p> <p>Structures and mechanisms for education service delivery</p> <p>Level of synergy among parastatals and agencies and department</p>
Resourcing	<p>Sources of resources for education</p> <p>Extant policy on resourcing education</p> <p>Education budgeting methodology</p> <p>Overall education sector budgetary allocations</p> <p>Sub sectoral allocations within the education sector (basic/secondary/higher education/non-formal education)</p> <p>Education service-related budgetary allocations (teachers, infrastructure, materials and equipment central and LG/EA administration).</p> <p>Targeted budgeting for girls' and women's education</p> <p>Fund release methodology</p> <p>Auditing and education budget tracking</p> <p>State and conditions of non financial resources</p> <p>Resource availability and use at the school level</p>

## 6.2.2 Strategy-Directed Management

Strategy directed management simply means management aimed at achieving agreed strategic targets. In this specific case, the strategic targets would be inputs-processes-



outcomes that have a strong bearing on getting children through school and ensuring that they learn. In practical terms, and in Nigeria's peculiar circumstances, this would translate into:

1. Streamlining the policy direction and coordination mechanisms at the central (federal) and regional (state) levels.
2. Eliminating micro-managing by the central authorities.
3. Appropriate re-skilling of local level managers (local government education authorities, school management committees, etc).
4. Devolving financial and technical resources to the local level.
5. Developing of objectively verifiable indicators (OVIs) on inclusion and meaningful access.
6. Monitoring of progress towards inclusion and meaningful access in a systematic manner.
7. Conducting regular policy dialogues at all levels, based on the results of action-research-based monitoring.
8. Ensuring a shift from reporting mainly on 'how-much-has-been-spent' to reporting on 'how we are moving towards meaningful access'.
9. Ensuring sustainable funding - This is an item with multiple facets. It simply means that UBE has to be funded as one of the conditions for its success and this must be assured at all times. Funding however stands the chance of being sustainable when certain golden rules are respected, for example:
  - Scientific budgeting procedures based on correctly assessed needs and performance/delivery expectations;
  - Accurate investment and expenditure plans to match programme goals;
  - Diversified and reliable resource base;
  - Timely release of funds;
  - Transparency and accountability;
  - Using funds for the purposes for which they are intended;
  - Targeted funding for specific programme goals;
  - Emphasis on concrete results;
  - Built-in expenditure tracking;
  - Emphasising investing in education (funding high impact and positive multiplier-effect items; over the tendency to merely spend on education (directing funds to areas of doubtful results).

One major problem with Nigeria's ambitious UBE programme is that access was seen in its restrictive sense of enrolment figures. While there have been marginal increases in enrolment, issues concerning equity, quality and efficiency have not received adequate attention. The enrolment increases have not even tackled the problem of exclusion, as a large proportion of school-age children are still un-enrolled. Thus, UBE cannot be said to have 'taken the children to school'. To achieve the EFA goals Nigeria has 'get the children to school' and also 'get them through school'. A re-positioning framework has been suggested to inform future directions of UBE. This includes adopting the meaningful access principle, the institutionalisation of strategic planning, and the adoption of strategy-directed management of the entire process.

In addition, re-positioning UBE cannot do without functional EMIS (Educational Management Information Systems) at all levels of governance (federal, state and, local government). It also has to benefit from sustainable funding, with the emphasis shifting from reeling out the quantum of the budgetary provisions, the amount of money released, etc to showing clearly what the money is invested in and the extent to which the results of the investment is leading the nation towards the attainment of its UBE/EFA goals.

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### Report summary:

This paper surveys the impact of good and bad politics on the attainment of Meaningful Access to education with special focus on Nigeria's Universal Basic Education (UBE) programme. The sum total of the politics of Nigeria is one in which democracy is yet to take firm roots. Nigeria has also remained an imperfect and lop-sided federation in which decentralisation is yet to translate into de-concentration and devolution of powers. This political situation has not helped the cause of education. The UBE programme, introduced in 1999, anticipated the Dakar EFA goals and its objectives are close to the ideal of meaningful access. Such a programme requires rigorous planning, extensive resource mobilisation and judicious use of available resources, and most importantly, transformational management. All this did not happen for reasons that were not unconnected with 'bad politics'. UBE would therefore require serious re-positioning for it to be able to move Nigeria towards the EFA goals. This should be predicated on a paradigm turnaround from bad to good politics.

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