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Chapter 5

UPE and UBE in a federal system – What happened in Nigeria

Preliminary

The three previous chapters have provided in-depth and detailed studies of the UPE experience of three countries, one from Western, one from Eastern and one from Southern Africa. This chapter and the next are designed to add two outlines – of Nigeria as the most populous African country and Tanzania as a case where scarce resources did not inhibit educational development. For reasons of time and resource constraints, these two cases were not studied so deeply, but the research team believe that the narratives that follow will enrich and illuminate the whole issue of sustaining and maintaining UPE.

Uniqueness and complexity of Nigeria

Nigeria presents a unique context for study of universal primary education (UPE), with its huge population, federal style of government and numerous thrusts towards UPE. It not only has Africa's largest population (2006 estimate of 140 million), but must also contend with over 350 distinct languages and two main religions, Islam and Christianity unevenly dispersed in the north and south respectively thereby, creating a cultural north/south divide. As a federal republic, Nigeria has a president and states administered by elected governors and federal and state houses of assembly. Ministers in the federal and state governments are appointed by the president and governors respectively and are not often elected members of the assemblies.

This chapter examines briefly the ups and downs of UPE in Nigeria in the light of the country's geographical, social, and political complexity. It considers the extent of success of UPE to date, notes lessons learned for sustainability and that may inform future policy.

Accordingly, we present a broad outline of the education policy climate in Nigeria, highlight the country's uneven 'education topography' then sketch a history of the country's UPE adventures, and the lessons from those experiences. This is followed by a more detailed focus on the Universal Basic Education (UBE) programme currently being implemented. We note the UBE goals in the broader context of global Education For All (EFA) initiatives, teething problems, and achievements so far. Finally, we consider the concept of sustainability and how best to apply it in the Nigerian context with a view to leading to the ultimate success of the UPE/UBE initiative.

Education policy climate

Before considering the education policy climate, it is necessary to highlight some statistics that illustrate the context against which Nigeria is trying to achieve UPE (and universal basic education); it is one of poverty and ongoing mass illiteracy, neither of which is even-

ly distributed across the country. The sheer numbers make any kind of educational initiative a huge logistical nightmare and one requiring vast sums of revenue as well as slick administration at the three levels of government. Data are sourced from the 2006 Global Monitoring Report and summarised in Box 5.1 below.

Box 5.1. Statistical data for Nigeria

Total population 2002*	120,911,000
Annual growth rate 2000–05	2.5%
Life expectancy	51 years
GNP per head 2002	$300
Population living on less than $2 per day	90%
Adult literacy rate	66.8%
Number of illiterates 2002	Over 22 million

*Recent estimates suggest a population of over 140 million.

Education is a responsibility shared by the three tiers of government in the Federation of Nigeria, that is, the federal, state and local governments. The constitution of the country refers to this as belonging to the concurrent legislative list, meaning that both the federal and the other two tiers of government can legislate on it. This is in contrast to some subjects which are on the exclusive legislative list such as Defence, which is the sole preserve of the federal government.

In the years since independence in 1960, Nigeria has gone through a number of changes in government, including over 30 years of military rule, as well as a number of changes in government structure, although it has retained a federal system throughout. From a federation of three regions at independence, it has been divided again and again, until there are now 36 States and a Federal Capital Territory. Each State has a number of local governments and there are at present 774 local governments. From 1952 (the year of limited self-government) to the first military coup in 1966, the three regions (East, West and North) enjoyed a great deal of autonomy. The period is often referred to as that of 'a weak centre and strong regions'. Education during the period was a strongly regional affair, particularly at the primary and secondary levels. Competition was a feature of the relationship between the regions and was especially keen in the field of education.

The first military coup was followed swiftly by another that installed General Yakubu Gowon as Head of State. The ensuing civil war, in which the Eastern Region attempted secession as the state of Biafra, was bitter and bloody, ending in the defeat of Biafra in 1970. Then followed a period of political instability with a succession of military and semi-military regimes; the succession of military leaders included General Murtala Muhammad, General Olusegun Obasanjo and culminated in the deeply unpopular General Sani Abacha. During this long period of military rule that ended in May 1999 government was characterised by a very strong centre and relatively weak States. The situation is explained largely by the unitary command structure of the Army, and also by the economic weakness of the States.

In the pre-military coup era, the States had a much stronger control over the revenue accruing from the export products originating from their geographical territory (an arrangement known as the 'derivation principle'). As the economy became more dependent on one single export, oil, the military rule altered this arrangement to the advantage of the centre (the federal government). Civilian rule has not significantly altered the military-era revenue allocation formula but State governments are asking for greater devolution of power and a consequent increase in control over resources.

Just as military rule, whatever its failings, had the salutary effect of keeping Nigeria one it has also helped with the emergence of a unified National Policy on Education; first published in 1977, it was a late outcome of a national curriculum conference held as far back as 1969. All three tiers of government subscribe to the ideals of the national policy, even though there has been a tendency to emphasise its framework (the 6-3-3-4 structure), rather than its substance (the major reforms the policy was intended to effect such as diversification of secondary level curricula and continuous assessment).

The States still enjoy a large measure of autonomy and, in principle, a State can carry on the business of education in its own way. The system does however provide for a coordinating mechanism, which operates at two levels: the professional and the political. For an initiative from any quarter to become nationally accepted, it has to go through professional screening by the Joint Consultative Committee on Education (JCC) and then be subjected to political backing by the National Council on Education (NCE), a forum of the thirty-six State Ministers (Commissioners) of Education and the Federal Minister.

In spite of this apparently neat coordination arrangement, the practice has been dominated (since the advent of military rule) of 'knocking down' education policy on the citizenry. This is a practice by which new policy is announced by the authorities with the clause 'henceforth, the following will be the policy'. Such announcements are sometimes followed (but hardly ever preceded) by some form of policy dialogue, often termed consultation, with major stakeholders. How consultative this process actually is may be questionable. Meanwhile, the day-to-day running of primary schools is in the hands of the local governments, notwithstanding some federal interventions noted below.

One major management policy change that began with the military, and which was 'knocked down on the citizenry' was the proliferation of education sector parastatal organisations. These were executing agencies for a number of government education programmes such as teacher education, universities and primary education. By 1999, when the country returned to civilian rule, there were 21 education sector parastatals. These included special commissions for example nomadic education, teachers' colleges and, in due course, Universal Basic Education. While the main government structure was, as has been said, one of horizontal tiers, there were a number of vertical arrangements cutting through the State and local jurisdictions.

Another major change was the occasional assumption of responsibility by the federal government for state-owned tertiary institutions. This extended to the federal government intervening heavily in the management/ownership of secondary institutions, some 108 'unity colleges', as at the last count. A further extension of the federal intervention syn-

drome was the decision of the Babangida regime of the 1980s to intervene directly in primary education and adult literacy programmes. Responsibility for these programmes had hitherto belonged to the third tier of governance, the 774 local governments. National parastatals were accordingly established.

As noted earlier, these tendencies to centralisation have continued under civilian rule, in much the same way as has the habit of launching policies before they have been democratically X-rayed. This was to become the subject of legal challenges by State governments and impinged on the smooth take-off of the Universal Basic Education (UBE) programme that was launched in 1999.

An uneven education topography

In terms of natural vegetation belts, Nigeria can conveniently be divided into two broad zones. These are the equatorial forest (South) and the tropical grassland (North). The South faces towards the Atlantic Ocean and has for many centuries had international communications via the sea, while the North faced the Sahara desert and its main communication routes were towards North Africa. The Northern zone represents about two-thirds of the whole land area of the country. The two zones had two broad types of pre-colonial experience; they were in the early days of British rule, two distinct 'protectorates' (with Lagos as a Crown Colony) until they were merged into a single protectorate in 1914. They were administered in two different ways by the colonial government, and remain in many ways distinct socio-cultural, economic and political zones nearly five decades after independence. Further, in addition to the actual distinctions, there are quite serious divisions of perception by one ethnic group of another.

The North witnessed the penetration of Islam around the 14th century. It was home to the great Jihad of the early 19th century and nourished a flourishing Islamic empire at the advent of colonialism early in the 20th century, when it became known as the (British) Protectorate of Northern Nigeria. It was then administered by 'indirect rule', a system in which traditional authorities exercised direct control over the people, while the British authorities supervised from a comfortable distance.

Indirect rule was also applied in the South, but the native authorities did not enjoy the same level of autonomy as their counterparts in the North. The South had come under strong Christian missionary influence before the advent of British rule. Christian evangelists recognised that they could influence the children by getting them to school and thereby hoped to influence the parents. Thus the missionaries spread literacy (both in English and indigenous languages) and laid the foundation for primary schooling.

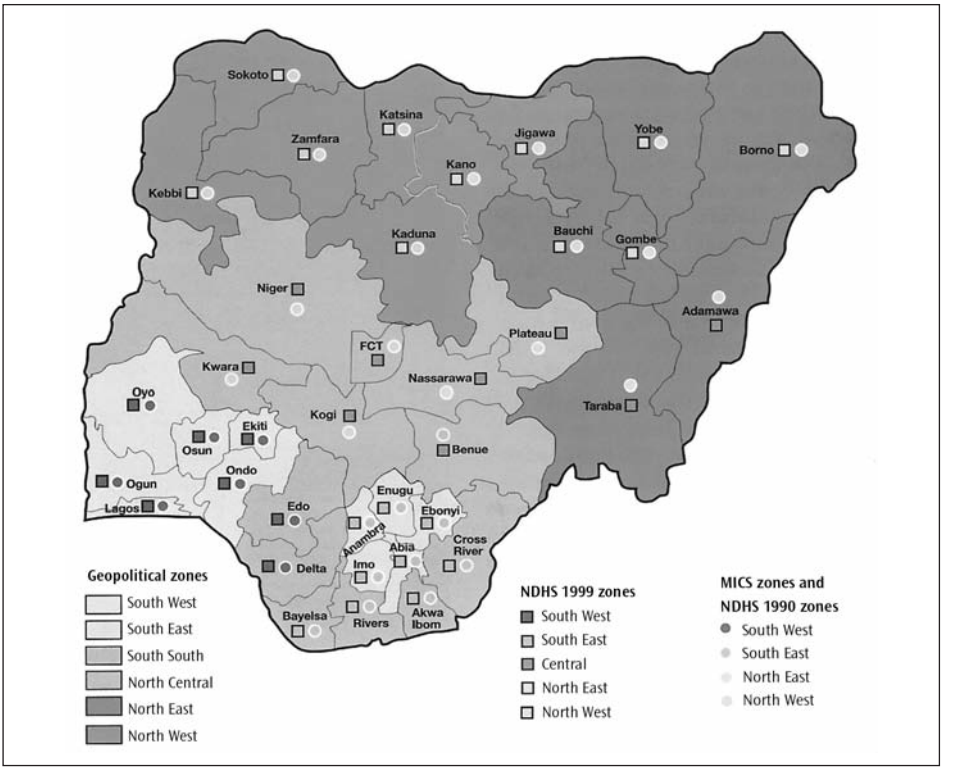
By the time the British colonial government began officially to promote western-type formal education, there was already fertile soil for its ready acceptance and spread in the South. In the North, the soil was not as fertile, perhaps because of the initial antipathy of those steeped in the Islamic learning traditions towards western-style education (Bray, 1981). By 1965, there were 12,234 primary schools in the south compared to 2,743 in the north and nearly two and a half million pupils enrolled in the south compared to less than half a million in the north.

This 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 about avoiding a situation in which all the powers (educational, economic and political) are enjoyed by (or vested in) the same geographical zone.

This has been translated into educational policy in two ways: firstly the classification of some parts of the Nigerian federation as educationally disadvantaged States and, secondly and related to this, the adoption of a quota system (better known as federal character) into 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.

There is also a realisation in Nigeria that the division into North and South was too simplistic and too broad to reflect the diversity and complexity of the country. Therefore, the term 'geopolitical zones' has crept into national political discourse, and Nigerians have come to accept that one certain way to ensure equity in development activities, in the distribution of federal government patronage, in determining who holds specific political offices and so on is to have representation from all six geopolitical zones. The map of Nigeria in Figure 5.1 below illustrates the division of Nigeria into six geopolitical zones.

Figure 5.1 Map of Nigeria, showing the six geopolitical zones of Nigeria, the 36 States and the Federal Capital territory



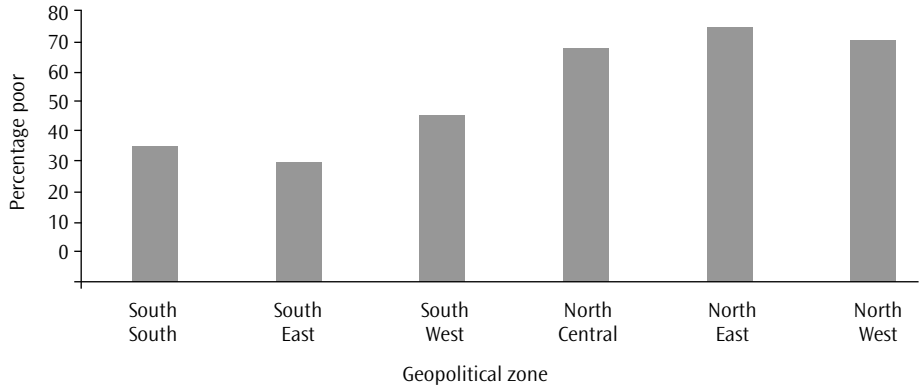
The notion of geopolitical zones pervades all tiers of government. Every State distributes its political and social amenities with due respect to equity among its three senatorial zones (each State is represented in the Nigerian senate by three senators). The local governments also have their own arrangements for ensuring geopolitical equity

Let us consider what the relationship between geopolitical zones, education in general and UPE in particular has been. First, one major objective of UPE programmes implemented over the years has been to bridge the zonal divides in access to schooling. Secondly, the northern section of the country has remained largely educationally disadvantaged. Since that status comes with increased federal financial aid to education, it is, ironically, to a State government's benefit to be classified as educationally disadvantaged.

How far the policy of evening out imbalances has succeeded is not yet entirely clear; but certain disparities within the system are still very noticeable. Participation rates continue to be lower in the three northern zones than in the three southern zones and gender imbalance is high in the former, whereas parity has almost been achieved in some of the States in the latter. Table 5.1 gives an indication of these phenomena.

The uneven education topography seems also to be correlated with poverty levels, which tend to be higher in the northern zones than in the coastal zones, as illustrated in Figure 5.2 below, sourced from Nigeria's 2005 MDG Report.

Figure 5.2. Nigerian regional variations in poverty levels



Nigeria's UPE adventures

The term adventures seems very appropriate here, for even though the initiators of UPE in Nigeria over the years meant well, and set out to address a serious educational problem, the programmes were not always well thought out. This is to say that the groundwork necessary for effective execution of UPE was not given the attention it needed. However, the efforts made were not all in vain. As the following review will show, progress was achieved as well as mistakes made, and there are useful lessons to be recorded for informing UPE in Nigeria (and perhaps elsewhere as well) and for suggesting ways of making the achievements more sustainable.

Table 5.1. Average participation rates and girls' participation in primary education in Nigeria

Geopolitical zone	State	% girls in primary education	Average participation rate %
North West	Sokoto	19	32.5
	Katsina	33	
	Kano	39	
	Kaduna	42	
	Jigawa	36	
	Kebbi	33	
	Zamfara	26	
North East	Yobe	31	37.5
	Borno	42	
	Bauchi	35	
	Gombe	39	
	Taraba	36	
	Adamawa	31	
North Central	Niger	35	43
	Kogi	49	
	Kwara	47	
	Benue	45	
	Plateau	42	
	Nassarawa	39	
South West	Oyo	50	48
	Oshun	46	
	Ogun	50	
	Lagos	50	
	Ondo	45	
	Ekiti	48	
South East	Enugu	50	51
	Ebonyi	50	
	Anambra	52	
	Imo	50	
	Abia	53	
South South	Cross River	49	49
	Akwa Ibom	51	
	Rivers	?	
	Delta	49	
	Edo	47	
	Bayelsa	?	
FCT	FCT	42	42

Source: UBE: 2001

UPE at Independence

Nigeria's first UPE programme came in the wake of internal self-government in 1955 (the pre-cursor to full political independence). This was also the era of resource control at the regional level and of competition in the three constituent regions and the elected governments of the two coastal regions both made a commitment to UPE. It was part of the election manifesto of the party in power in the then Western Region (the Action Group) that also wanted free medical services for all citizens under the age of 18.

The free, compulsory primary education scheme in Western Region took a pragmatic approach, reducing the normal eight years of education to six in an effort to keep a balance between financial constraints and maximising the number of children benefiting from the scheme. This led to criticism about lowering standards (Abernethy, 1969). Though some quality may have been sacrificed, a number of characteristics made it workable:

- 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.

Despite the years of planning, however, enrolment projections were grossly under-estimated. It was said that while provisions were made for 170,000 children, 391,895 showed up on the first day of school in January 1955 (Abernethy, 1969, Okedara, 1979). One reason for this was that over-aged and under-aged children also turned up for registration. The other reason is that accurate population projection had been impossible due to the lack of reliable population data. The Western Region Government's response to the overcrowding was (without explicitly saying so) to remove the term compulsory from the scheme. This meant that, while primary education remained free, it was not legally obligatory for parents to enrol their children in school.

As well as being overcrowded, the schools were in a poor state, lacking equipment and enough trained teachers. In spite of such difficulties, enrolments in primary school in the region increased from 35 per cent in 1954 to 90 per cent in 1960 but, as numbers crept

up, so did textbook fees, building levies and examination fees. Numbers fell again after 1960; disillusionment regarding work prospects is considered one of the reasons for this (Bray, 1981).

The Eastern Nigerian government, in keeping with the nationalist mood of the time, also embarked on a universal primary education scheme in 1956, but it encountered less success. It retained the eight-year education cycle with the intention of making the first four years universal. Local communities were expected to share in the cost. Unfortunately the scheme suffered from poor planning and the creation of government schools led to opposition from church schools and further rivalry between Catholic and Protestant (Abernethy, 1969). It neglected both the socio-political and the technical homework. Huge numbers of youngsters enrolled overwhelming the system and poor financial planning soon became apparent; fees were reintroduced and this led to demonstrations and riots, children were kept at home for the sake of safety or because they could not pay the fees, uneconomic schools were closed. The disappointing outcome was blamed on insufficient planning, religious and political rivalries, administrative inexperience and corruption (Bray, 1981). All the same, this region remained almost on a par with the West in the promotion of education, largely because community participation (in the form of cohesive town and village unions) was a strong feature of social organisation in the region.

In Lagos, at that time the Federal capital, a further push at UPE was established as politics had kept it out of the Western scheme. This small scheme was relatively successful though it required the introduction of double and even triple shifts to accommodate the youngsters. By 1964, however, nearly 88 per cent of primary school children were in school.

Primary education had always been free in the Northern Region, but participation had also always been limited. In the Middle Belt and in the areas with mixed populations like Kaduna and Jos, the spread of educational facilities (and the acceptance of 'western' schools by the people) was closely related to the level of Christian penetration.

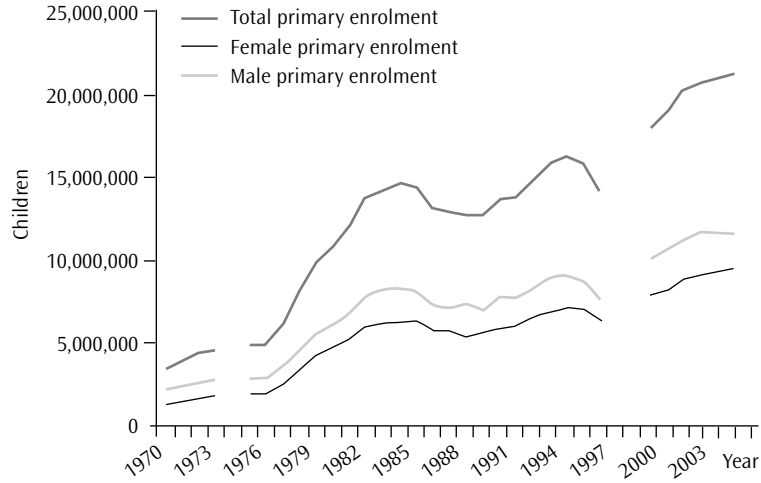
After 1966, political instability prevented Nigeria from capitalising on the initial gains of UBE. Quality and efficiency issues did not receive due attention, but numbers in primary school remained high and continued to grow as illustrated in Figure 5.3.

UPE under military rule

In 1974, General Yakubu Gowon announced in a major speech in Sokoto, to the surprise of his officials, that his administration was intending to launch UPE. Planning was set under way but the launch was delayed. In 1976, Obasanjo, having usurped Gowon, launched UPE in the September. The promotion of UPE in 1976 was in the wider context of the National Policy on Education, as officially published in 1977. The policy saw education as a huge national enterprise, and an undertaking solely the responsibility of government. It came during Nigeria's oil boom years and was to be entirely funded by the federal government.

The primary education sector was projected to increase five-fold over a ten year period; 108,000 new primary school classrooms were planned for the northern states and 43,000 for the southern states, while teacher training places were set to increase five-fold

Figure 5.3. Total primary enrolment in Nigeria, 1970–2004



with the aim of having nearly 250,000 places by 1980. At the same time, the government planned expansion of the other sections of education in an effort to maintain the balance of flow through the system. This was a hugely ambitious and very expensive undertaking.

The scheme received a good deal of publicity generated by the government propaganda machinery, the entire country was geared up for mobilisation and funds were made available to State governments. The achievements, however, did not live up to expectations for a number of reasons:

- The plans seriously underestimated the numbers of youngsters enrolling, particularly the over-age children;
- They also underestimated the cost, having not included the recurrent burden on the budget;
- Social mobilisation by the military regime did not penetrate successfully to the lowest levels;
- The States had no systematic UPE development plans and the monitoring of needs and efforts of the States was poorly done. States tried to inflate figures based on needs (to attract more federal government funds) and at the same time inflated the figures on achievements to impress the same federal government.

The 1976 UPE created a boom in publishing. Books for UPE were written by government agencies and private companies who did brisk business capitalising on the programme. However, the books did not always get to the learners, leading to the loss of potential improvement in the quality of the education.

Another threat to quality at the time was the UPE teacher-training programme that saw tremendous expansion in the facilities in teacher training colleges. It was however an emergency type of training programme that recruited students who had not successfully completed secondary education, whose training was too short and considered too shallow. Even using distance education to train teachers quickly and without keeping them out of the classroom did not result in a sufficient supply of qualified teachers. A study in

the 1980s in fact showed that UPE teachers were not warmly received in schools (Obanya, 1982). Nevertheless, it should be said that though the educational establishment often considered these teachers to be second rate, research in Nigeria (Ismaila et al. 2004) has indicated that the local communities where these teachers live recognise the effort it takes to study while working by assisting in the organisation and communication of the programmes being implemented (Binns and Wrightson, 2006).

The UPE programme of 1976 was introduced in haste and had had no clearly articulated policy and no clearly elaborated plan. It was a federal government initiative that did not fully carry the States and local governments with it. The oil boom period was also the time of big spending by the Nigerian government, a period dominated by emergency contractors, who collected mobilisation fees on government contracts that were later abandoned mid-stream. UPE classroom construction became a victim of the abandoned project syndrome, and many of these projects remain abandoned to this day.

Perhaps the most difficult challenge of the period was that there were no reliable data to aid planning. Once again the poor data from the population census left much to be desired and there remained low technical capacity for planning in the entire system.

The UPN version of UPE: 1979–83

The South-Western States carried a continuing memory of the free education policy of Awolowo's government and still favoured his party, the UPN. That policy was proclaimed again on 1st October, 1979 (Independence Day) by the governors, on their inauguration, in each of the five States controlled by the UPN.

As it had done in 1955, the 1979 thrust for UPE fell on fertile ground:

- It was part of a party manifesto that grassroots communities had bought into, and therefore it enjoyed popular support;
- It was implemented in a territory that had already benefited from free education; a society for which free education was already an accepted idea.

However, like many over-politicised education policies, UPE in 1979 was announced, and was being widely backed before its technical details had been worked out. Worse still, the programme was over-ambitious as its aim was to provide free education at all levels. In the process, examinations for selection into secondary schools were abolished and all 12-year-olds and above were free to walk into nearby secondary schools. In addition, schools were forbidden from collecting even a *kobo* (a penny) from parents, everything was to be free including books, stationery and uniforms. The effect of this manifested itself in a number of ways:

- There was much less emphasis on the primary education sub-sector;
- Hundreds of thousands of over-aged boys and girls (including apprentices, the unemployed and others) enrolled in secondary school;
- Secondary schools were quickly planned (though not established) to absorb the swollen demands for secondary education;
- Primary school teachers were drafted into teaching in secondary schools;

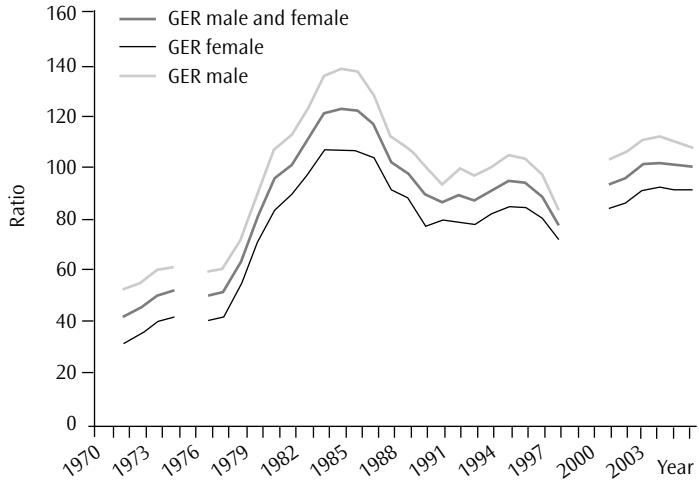
- Inexperienced secondary school teachers became founding principals of secondary schools that were randomly set up;
- Elementary/basic facilities (classrooms, desk/seats, chalk, textbooks) were in very short supply;
- As schools were government-owned and government propaganda advertised that education had become free at all levels communities were no longer motivated to contribute to the system;
- The contractor mentality that began in Nigeria during the civil war years (1967–1970) had become well-entrenched by 1979. Contracts for educational supplies went to party faithful, who regarded these as patronage and did very little to meet their contractual obligations.

By 1983, when the military took over political power once again, the 1979 version of UPE in the South-West had succeeded once again in expanding access, but quality had suffered tremendously.

Lessons from the UPE adventures

We see from the early attempts that successive Nigerian governments, Regional, Federal and State, have placed considerable importance on education and in particular primary education. We note that there was also public demand for an expansion of the education system and that there was some recognition of the political urge to address education at all levels. With the return of civilian rule, Nigeria is currently embarked once again on an expansion of its schooling system and it would be wise to learn from the lessons, the successes and failures, of the past. The country has succeeded in increasing the numbers of children in primary education (See Figure 5.3 on page 89) but it still has major difficulty in sustaining efforts on the large scale needed or at the huge cost required to deliver good quality education through well-trained teachers and well-equipped schools (see Figure 5.4 below).

Figure 5.4. Gross enrolment ratios (GER) in Nigeria, 1970–2004



With the benefit of hindsight, the following appear to be the most important lessons:

1 **Development initiatives (in this case, UPE) require rigorous planning.** It is now a common saying in Nigeria that to fail to plan is to plan to fail. Planning for UPE in Nigeria requires a combination of socio-political awareness raising and technical research and analysis. Successful mobilisation of the citizenry was largely responsible for the widespread support accorded the first UPE experiments in the Western and Eastern Regions in 1955. UPE under the military regime might have been more sustainable had the public championed it; after all Nigeria was in a strong position to pay for educational expansion, since it was enjoying the oil boom revenue at the time.

2 **Technical research and analysis requires rigorous methodology and suitable tools.** Demographic data on the school age population and school enrolment, and geographical data on the distribution of populations and so on have been in short supply in Nigeria and when they have been available they have also been unreliable and this has turned planning into day-dreaming. With reliable data it becomes possible to make projections and do accurate forecasting thereby calculating trends and enabling planning in accordance with such trends.

3 **Enlightened forecasting helps in determining future needs and plans can be made in anticipation of such needs.** When we know how many children are due to enter primary school we can plan for the number of classrooms and teachers required to service those children. However, it will remain very difficult to estimate the number of over-age children who will try to enter school late if there is a sudden softening of the terms of attendance.

4 **Technical information enables us to take due account of the unexpected.** A variety of scenarios can be planned for and costed. For example, rapid population growth, decline in government revenue, unanticipated political events, changes in the international scene, impact of donor funding and the impact of such funding coming to an end. Thus it becomes possible to plan how to mitigate some of the problems that may arise and forestall UPE.

5 **Kicking with both legs at one and the same time does not pay.** It could be said that Nigeria took on too much when it started the pursuit of compulsory, free primary education for all. UPE might have benefited from addressing key strategic objectives in a staged or stepwise manner.

6 **Investment planning,** based on 1 to 5 above, might be a way of ensuring that estimates of the required funding (and of every other necessary input) are as accurate as possible and that resourcing strategies are carefully worked out and agreed in advance.

7 **Phased Implementation.** Tackling a number of problem areas at a time and progressively broadening the scope of UPE might ensure that specific goals are addressed by a given time and that implementation at each phase builds on upon lessons learned at an earlier phase.

8 **The nearer the policy pole is to the people the greater the impact.** UPE administered from the centre as a huge, federal initiative has proved difficult to manage, even under the strong influence of the military. In a federal Nigeria, diversity might be seen as an asset, enabling emphasis of different issues in different places and adjusting communication to local cultures. Also assigning key monitoring roles to local education authorities might ensure more intensive local involvement and community ownership of UPE; there is evidence of the influence of community involvement through the activities of the national advocacy organisation, Civil Society Advocacy Consortium for Education for All (Nigeria) CSACEFA, with its branches in the various States.

9 **Government should not aspire to fund UPE 100 per cent.** Despite Nigeria's oil wealth it has been unable to sustain the funding required to promote good quality primary education for all. The dependence on the oil and gas industries also leave it vulnerable to the volatility in oil prices. Nigeria's experience raises a question about how free is free, or better still, how free should free be? History shows that the Government underestimated the financial requirements of UPE but it has not acknowledged publicly its inability to fund 100 per cent. It was once said that *good politics is good for good education*. Good politics would dictate that government reaches agreement with the people on how free is free as a policy development strategy.

10 **Management capacity, above everything else.** For UPE to be successful there must be the capacity, at the respective government levels, to manage the policy development process, the technical planning process, the implementation process, the input of resources, the finances and so on. To date, this kind of management has been sadly lacking in Nigeria's UPE adventures.

The paradigm shift to UBE

In September 1999 Nigeria launched yet another attempt at UPE. This time it is part of an ambitious programme of UBE.

Nigeria is part of the EFA movement that came out of the Jomtien Conference on Education for All of 1990. That conference championed the concept of basic education as the foundation level of education that consolidates the acquisition of literacy and numeracy, life skills, and lifelong learning skills. As every nation of the world was expected to define its own basic education package, Nigeria, soon after Jomtien, designed a nine-year basic school policy. This concept directly and indirectly influenced the post-military return of UPE to Nigeria. Government commitment to UBE continues following the recent, 2007, elections though it seems likely that the new administration wishes to stamp its own authority on it. The donor community also remains committed to supporting Nigeria's initiatives in UBE.

UBE, in keeping with the requirements of the global EFA movement, is an enormous undertaking, judging by its objectives and scope (see Table 5.2). The paradigm shift here is clear to see:

- while UPE is concerned with primary education, UBE embraces all formal schooling from early childhood to junior secondary,
- UBE also embraces mass literacy programmes, as well as
- all forms of non-formal education, including
- non-formal apprenticeship programmes.

Table 5.2. Objectives and Scope of Nigeria's UBE

a	Objectives	b	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 up-dating 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: UBE Implementation Guidelines: 2000

Early thinking on UBE in federal government circles dwelt much on avoiding the mistakes of the past, and the implementation guidelines claim to be guided by this maxim. The chronology of UBE does not fully match this claim, as shown by the following sequence of key UBE events:

- 9th September 1999: Meeting between federal ministry of education and the States to discuss the re-launching of UPE (a presidential initiative). The meeting agreed to recommend a programme of UBE, an idea immediately accepted by President Obasanjo and approved by the federal executive council;
- 30th September 1999: Formal launching of UBE by the President;
- 29th October – 1st November: National Mini Summit on UBE.

Consultation and planning followed the announcement. A national coordinator for UBE was appointed in December 1999. He submitted a memo to the Minister of Education,

entitled 'Ensuring the Success of the UBE Programme', relying heavily on government's desire not to repeat the mistakes of the past and this document was transformed into draft implementation guidelines and was then used for a series of stakeholder consultations between January and March 2000 with:

- agencies of the federal ministry of education;
- state primary education boards;
- development partners;
- Nigerian Union of Teachers;
- National Parents' Teachers' Association of Nigeria.

These consultations led to drastic revisions in the draft implementation guidelines. The revised version was then used for six zonal-level consultations in April 2000 and 31 (out of 36) State-level consultations in May. These led to more revisions of the guidelines, which were then further discussed at a national press briefing on 30 May 2000. Then followed a national pupils' registration exercise and monthly consultations with the States (expanded to include State mass literacy and nomadic education commissions).

By August 2000, the Governors of the 36 States had come together with the Presidency and formed the National Council on UBE which met regularly to consider matters arising from the UBE process. Two concerns were prominent on the list of the matters arising. The first was over the enrolment figures – a matter on which there was never agreement. The Council in fact eventually resolved to use 1991 figures, as these were considered the most politically acceptable. The second matter regarded the extent to which the federal government could remain the conductor of the UBE orchestra, with the States always insisting on the need for devolved responsibility.

Federalism at State level was put to the test when, early in 2001, the federal authorities decided to contribute 1548 blocks of six classrooms (two blocks equally distributed to each of the 774 local government areas (LGEAs) of the federation). The States had argued that it was not the business of the federal government to award contracts for the construction of these classrooms. In the end, a compromise was struck, and State authorities were allowed to award 50 per cent of the contracts.

Progress of the UBE initiative

UBE has been actively pursued in Nigeria now for nine years, even in a tumultuous political terrain. One reason for this is a series of Supreme Court rulings that seem to have properly delineated the constitutional powers of federal and state governments. For UBE, this has meant limiting the powers of the federal government to policy coordination and devolving financial and technical support to States, along with overall monitoring of implementation.

Achievement on the ground (mainly in terms of increased enrolments) has been captured in the 2005 Millennium Development Goals (MDG) report of the Nigerian government in the following words:

> 'Trends in enrolment from 1999 to 2003 show that on average, enrolment

consistently increased over the years for both males and females from 7 per cent, 8 per cent, 11 per cent and 14 per cent in 2000, 2001, 2002 and 2003 respectively. Primary school enrolment rates were, however, consistently higher for boys than for girls. The general increase could be as a result of the launching of the Universal Basic Education (UBE) programme established in 1999 with the sensitisation, mobilisation and advocacy carried out by the federal government.

The efficiency of primary education has improved over the years. The Primary-six completion rate increased steadily from 65 per cent in 1998 to 83 per cent in 2001. It however declined in 2002 only to shoot up to 94 per cent in 2003.

Completion rate for boys has been higher than that of girls except in 2000 and 2001.'

Closely related to the above is the encouraging signal that Nigeria might be in the process of moving away from its recognised lack of data on education. Technical capacity for data collection and analysis is being progressively strengthened through concerted donor assistance. In fact, figures from the national school survey of 2003 (Table 5.3) are generally adjudged satisfactory by stakeholders.

Table 5.3 also shows, however, that the data problem is not over yet. Access cannot be determined from the table, as it does not give any clue on gross enrolment rates. There is also no indication of the extent to which UBE has helped to make the education topography more even, as State figures are not easily available.

Table 5.3. Nigeria primary school enrolment by Grade and gender (national): 2003

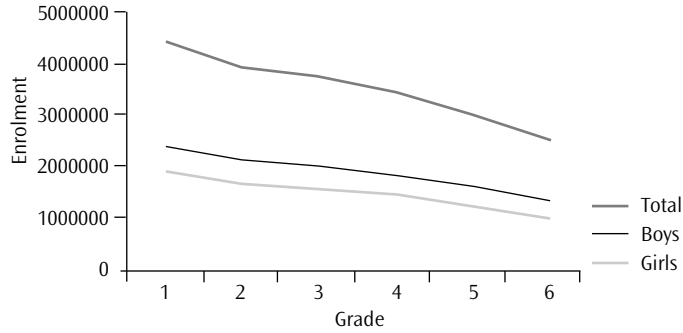
Grade	Total enrolment	Boys	Girls
Primary One	5,505,886	3,063,436	2,442,450 (44.36%)
Primary Two	4,960,968	2,797,272	2,163,696 (43.61%)
Primary Three	4,369,498	2,466,359	1,903,139 (43.56%)
Primary Four	3,746,721	2,103,585	1,643,136 (43.86%)
Primary Five	3,313,227	1,853,333	1,459,894 (44.06%)
Primary Six	2,876,788	1,607,310	1,269,478 (44.13%)
Total	**24,773,088**	**13,328,075**	**10,881,793 (43.93%)**

Source: UBE, Abuja, 2003 NSC (quoted from Nigeria – Federal Ministry of Education (2004) Education Sector Analysis – Diagnostic Report)

It is also not clear the extent to which the 'grade gradient' shown in Figure 5.5 – larger numbers in the lower grades – is due to UBE. These data plot enrolment in the Grades of 2003.

Once again large numbers of youngsters are enrolling in school, but improvement in terms of quality and efficiency is being hampered by a number of factors. These factors include policy challenges, dissipation of effort, unclear lines of authority, lack of involvement of local government and communities, poor management capacity and the lack of data.

Figure 5.5. Grade gradient in primary school enrolment in 2003



UBE policy challenges

The policy framework on UBE was enshrined in legislation by the Compulsory, Free Basic Education Act, passed by the National Assembly in 2004, which deals mainly with the governance and management structures and duties of UBE commissions at the federal and state levels, as well as punishments to be meted out on parents who fail to send their children to school and to persons collecting fees from pupils. Despite the policy and an implementation strategy, roll-out of the programme has been uneven and it is questionable whether or not the citizenry fully understands the changes going on around them.

As noted earlier, guidelines for implementation were drawn up and these included a possible sequential implementation as indicated in Box 5.2.

Box 5.2. A sequential implementation strategy for UBE

Detailed, strategic planning is still needed to ensure the unqualified success of the UBE programme. One way of ensuring success would be a process of sequential implementation that starts by focusing on the primary I cohort of 2000/2001 and progressively introduces quality education for them over a nine-year (formal) education cycle. The progressive (and cumulative) nature of this strategy might be as follows:

UBE year I	Primary I of 2000/2001
UBE year II	Primaries I and II of 2001/2002
UBE year III	Primaries I, II, III of 2002/2003
UBE year IV	Primaries I–IV of 2003/2004
UBE year V	Primaries I–V of 2004/2005
UBE year VI	Primaries I–VI of 2005/2006
UBE year VII	Primaries I–VI and JSS I of 2006/2007
UBE year VIII	Primaries I–VI and JSS I and II of 2007/2008
UBE Year IX	Primaries I–VI and JSS I–III of 2008/2009

Source: Implementation guidelines for UBE

The formal launch of the programme was made much of by the government, a priority undertaking coming soon after the then administration came into office in 1999. It took off quickly and by August 2000, some 11.5 million children had been registered (as

claimed by the States during a field verification exercise by federal authorities). These youngsters were expected to be the first batch of UBE pupils to benefit from nine years of compulsory and free basic education. Annual registration exercises have continued since then, but these are no longer coordinated at the federal level.

Implementation across the States has been uneven; by the year 2006, when UBE was supposed to be in its sixth year (see Box 5.2), the authorities were talking of preparations for the take-off of UBE and some states were being scolded for not being prepared. Some of them are in fact (as at August 2006) yet to establish basic education commissions and work out implementation plans. The donor community is assisting in the development of ten-year educational plans which will help these states to move forward in UBE.

The authorities have also been talking of a change in educational structure from 6-3-3-4 to 9-3-4, to reflect the 9-year basic school concept of UBE, but this has not gone down well with the populace.

Dissipation of effort

The paradigm shift from UPE to UBE was made in the overall context of EFA. UBE is a significant part of EFA and yet UBE and EFA in Nigeria seem to coexist rather than be part of a whole. The institutional structures for both are separate. EFA has engaged in data collection and consultations at all levels since it became operational in mid-2001. A draft state and national EFA plan with the 2015 deadline for achievement has been drawn up. What is not clear is whether EFA will now be integrated into UBE or UBE into EFA and there is a lack of clarity about the roles of each and how they should relate to each other.

The same dissipation of effort is seen in the continuing existence of commissions for nomadic education and mass literacy alongside the universal basic education commission. As shown in Table 5.3, mass literacy and nomadic education fall within the scope of UBE, but programme activities in these areas are carried out outside the ambit of UBE. The lack of rationalisation of administrative structures and consequent tendency for inefficient use of resources has potential to hold back development of UBE.

Unclear lines of authority and vague distribution of responsibilities

The lines of authority and the distribution of responsibilities are not clear, particularly in the States, where there is a permanent conflict between ministries of education and State Primary Education Boards (SPEB) which were set up in the early nineties in response to the shambles created when, in 1991, the federal government transferred full responsibility for primary education to the local governments. Following serious strike action by teachers, the federal ministry re-established the National Primary Education Commission and required states to establish SPEBs. In each of the 36 states the Commissioner (minister) for education should, in principle, be in-charge of the entire education sector, but the prevailing situation is one in which a SPEB is headed by an executive chairman, who reports directly to the State Governor. With the transformation of SPEBs into State Universal Basic Education Boards (SUBEBs), much of the school system is liable to escape the direct control of the ministries of education in the States.

Edging out local governments and beneficiary communities

In the days of true federalism, all types of primary social services (for example, primary health care, primary education and primary (rural) roads) were the responsibility of local government. Over the years, this has become a responsibility in name only. The 774 local governments still have their supervisory councillors for education and their local government education authorities (LGEAs), but they are nearly all poorly funded. Meanwhile, the relatively better funded State governments have been progressively usurping the roles of LGEAs in the management of education.

The effect of this unconstitutional trend on UBE is that the initiative is in danger of becoming removed from the grassroots communities that it is intended to benefit. Since all major decisions are made from far away (geographically and politically), there is little commitment from some members of local communities, particularly as the better-off take advantage of the parallel, strong, and ever-growing private primary education sector.

Poor management capacity at all levels

The low level of capacity to manage the planning and implementation of UBE has been the major focus of external assistance to the programme. The need to address this issue was raised in the publication of a World Bank study (Orbach, 2004). The report highlighted a number of issues:

- Heavy and clumsy bureaucratic structures both in the ministries of education and in the education sector parastatals;
- Over-staffing of existing bureaucracies with non-professionals – a heavy preponderance of 'junior' staff, most of whom have no modern skills;
- Poor decision-making tools, in the absence of reliable statistics;
- Outdated working tools, in an atmosphere in which computers are a luxury;
- Near-absence of training facilities in management, accounting, planning and project monitoring.

Most of the on-going donor-funded technical assistance focuses on institutional capacity strengthening. However, technical assistance can best operate in a situation of strong political will to effect civil service reforms, as well as profound reforms in governance practices.

The data problem

The issues around data collection, analysis and use of the reports generated have both political and technical dimensions. Population censuses have always been a politically charged issue. For this reason, projections based on population figures (such as net and gross enrolments) have remained in the realm of conjecture. At the technical level, the human capacity is still seriously deficient. There is even an attitudinal/behavioural dimension to the problem, arising from a general apathy towards record keeping and to using facts and figures for planning and decision-making.

There is no doubt that some progress has been made in recent years. In 1988, Civil Service reforms led to the creation of the Education Data Bank (EDB). EDB started by

undertaking a school census every year from 1988 to 1992. The project ended in 1993 and there are no data for 1993 to 2001. World Bank loan support enabled a baseline 1999 to 2001 census and 2002 and 2003 school censuses to be completed but ownership of, and access to, the data was fragmented. The current strategy is to decentralise the education management information system and this is showing some promise.

A sustainability path for UPE/UBE

A 2005 study of Anglophone African countries identified the following enabling factors to explain the relatively fast move of a number of African countries towards the attainment of EFA goals (Obanya, 2005):

- Political stability – a pre-condition for everything else;
- Long-term strategic planning – UPE/EFA as an integral part of an over-arching national vision;
- Developing UPE/EFA in a systemic context – along with the post-primary sector of education;
- Paying special attention to the out-of-school population – thus the need to carry UPE/EFA along with non-formal basic education and literacy;
- Adopting an inclusive approach – access, equity, relevance, quality and efficiency promoted from the very beginning;
- Strong civil society involvement;
- Broad growth strategy – expansion of educational opportunities along with expansion of other socio-economic services;
- Building national capacity for planning and execution.

These points echo what was said in the early days of promoting UBE in Nigeria (Obanya, 2006).

The sustainability path for UPE/UBE in Nigeria must lie in the country genuinely taking steps to avoid the mistakes of the past and drawing on the experience of its own UPE/UBE history. Borrowing from the promising experience of the African top scorers on the EFA league table (see EFA Monitoring Reports) would be one way of building sustainability safeguards into its on-going efforts to bring basic education to all and, through education, contribute to the attainment of the MDG goals.

Conclusions

The discussion in this chapter should be understood in the context of the geographical, political, and socio-economic complexity of Nigeria. It should also be seen in the context of the huge development burden that Africa's most populous country has had to carry.

Even with these harsh political and socio-economic and even demographic realities, the country has made some bold steps over the years and undertaken a series of UPE adventures. Political instability has been a major drawback to the country's development over the years, and experience elsewhere in Africa shows that stability is the number one condition for sustainability of UPE/EFA initiatives. Given Nigeria's oil wealth (and now that

indebtedness is not a hindrance), lack of funds is not likely to be a disenabling factor; while there are at present great fluctuations in the oil market, past history seems to indicate that the trend is upwards over the long term.

Nigeria is slowly and steadily returning to political stability. Its debt burden has been considerably reduced, while recent increases in petroleum prices have enhanced its income. Reforms are going on in many aspects of national life. There is now a national development blueprint, the National Empowerment and Economic Development Strategy (NEEDS). Donor interest is high. The country may benefit from a re-think of UBE. This could be undertaken in the following manner:

- Through a process of enlarged policy dialogue for wide-scale consensus building;
- Placed in the overall national development framework, NEEDS;
- Closely knit with the national and state EFA action plans;
- Implemented in the spirit of true federalism, with State and local governments at the helm;
- With the support of a technically strong, less bureaucratic administrative structure;
- With a functional EMIS, linked to an improved population census and other national statistical data bases; and
- With improved financial management.

These steps might require going back to the drawing board on a number of issues, but since a few months spent on this kind of planning might enhance sustainability considerably, it would be worth investing time, energy, political and social engineering to put UPE/UBE squarely on course for success.