

FUNCTIONAL LOCAL GOVERNMENT SYSTEM IN NIGERIA: A PANACEA FOR THE SUSTAINABLE MANAGEMENT OF UNIVERSAL BASIC EDUCATION (UBE)

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Abstract

This paper examines the place of local government councils and their relevance in the management of the Universal Basic Education (UBE) in their areas of authorities. Universal access to education has been the prime target of Nigeria since the middle of the 1970s when the Universal Primary Education (UPE) scheme took off. Later on in 1999 the Universal Basic Education (UBE) was launched. The local councils as the third tier in government have critical roles to perform in the management of UBE programmes as stipulated by Decree No 3 of 1991. It states inter alia "Decree No 3 of 1991 essentially marked the handover of primary school education to the local government. According to section 2 (1a) of the decree, one of the functions of a local government education authority is the management of primary schools in the local government area". It looked at the history of UBE and its objectives. These include, developing in the entire citizenry a strong consciousness for education, provision of free basic education for every Nigerian child, reducing drastically the incidence of school drop-outs, and ensuring the acquisition of appropriate levels of literary, numeracy, manipulation, communication and life skills. Unfortunately, as laudable as this programmes is, a major problem of implementation was observed. Obanya (2000) therefore suggested the devolution of powers to state and local governments in keeping with the constitution as essential for the achievement of any sustained impetus in the realization of the objectives of UBE. The critical areas that would guarantee sustainable management include appropriate harnessing of human resources, management of learners, financial resource management, community relations management and management of available facilities. It also examines the institutions involved which include; federal ministry of education, state ministries of education and the local education authorities. Intervention strategies for making local council functional include; possessing direct access to recipients and parents, close supervision, availability of teachers within the catchment areas and useful and effective community-school relationships were also discussed. The paper concluded by suggesting the way forward as; UBE schools should be under the control of local councils, special funds provided, strategic planning at that level enhanced and that inspectorate division staff should be qualified.

A repositioning of the level government education departments remains the only alternative to the success of UBE in Nigeria.

Keywords: UBE, Local Government Council, Nigerian Constitution, Management.

1. INTRODUCTION

Local government is defined by (Hornby 2006:867) as the system of government of a town or an area by elected representatives of the people who live there or the organization that is responsible for the government of a local area and for the providing services etc. There are various definitions of local government but for the purpose of this paper, I will adopt the definition of the Nigerian Government which sees local government as:

Government at local level exercised through representative councils established by law to exercise specific powers within defined areas. These powers should give the council substantial control over the local affairs as well as the staff and institutional and financial powers to initiate and direct the provision of services... (FRN, 1976:1).

Management on the other hand has been described as the "process of planning, organizing, stimulating, controlling, supervising and appraising the activities of an organization (Aghenta, 1989). In the same vein, Litchfield opines that management includes; decision-making, programming, communicating, controlling and

reappraising (as was cited in Ejiogu, 1990). Management at the local government level would then involve the planning and execution of programmes that concern a specific area within the country and these functions are expected to emanate from established laws. The management of primary school education Decree No 3 of 1991 happens to fall into this category.

The transfer of the management of primary school education in Nigeria to the local government council by the Babangida administration in 1991 marked a turning point in the administration of education at that level. Prior to this, primary education has been a tripartite affair between the Federal, state and the local governments. The 1991 transfer emanated from the thinking by the Federal government that since primary education touches more on the life of the locale of an area, it was better for a government that understands the peculiar needs of a people to directly manage education at that level. This is particularly true because "education is probably the most important aid the rest of the society can give to an individual" (Aminu, 1986).

1.1 Rationale for Decree No 3

Decree No 3 of 1991 essentially marked the handover of primary school education to the local government. According to section 2 (1a) of the decree, one of the functions of a local government education authority is the management of primary schools in the local government area. Before this decree, primary education was under the management of a Primary School Education Commission (PSEC) established by Decree No 31 of 1988. This commission came into existence mainly due to the state of primary education in Nigeria and the Federal Government's desire to ensure that schooling at that level did not collapse.

Despite the Federal Government enthusiasm in setting up the PSEC and contributing ₦800 million in 1988, it had no intention of running primary schools (Abdulkai, 1993). The Federal government was simply trying to help the state and local governments in funding education at that level. But the state and local governments saw matters in a different way. These two levels of government defaulted in their own contributions. The PSEC, however insisted on getting these two levels of government their own contributions to primary education in order to carry out its functions effectively. As a result of this insistence by the PSEC, there grew a strong pressure on the federal government to abolish the commission (Abdulkadir, 1993).

Decree No. 3 of 1991 in its section 2 (1a & d) authorized the local government through its education authority to manage and fund primary education. Particularly section 2 (1b & j) required the local government education authority to recruit teachers into the teaching service in their area of jurisdiction as well as pay them their monthly salaries. The reason informing this is the belief that since the local government to the grassroots, the management and funding of primary education which deals mainly with people in a particular locality would be enhanced under them. It was also felt that the local governments would find it easier to adopt education to suit the peculiarities of their places as well as be in a better position to appreciate the need for better management of education at that level.

1.1.1 Functions of Local Government Councils in Nigeria

The local government is the third tier of the administrative structure in Nigeria. Presently there are 774 local government areas (LGAs) in the country and their functions as spelt out in the constitution are as follows:

- 1 a) Consideration and making of recommendation to the state commission on economic planning or any similar body on economic development of the state, particularly in so far as the area of authority of the council and of the state are affected;
 - b) Collection of rates and radio and television licenses;
 - c) Establishment and maintenance of cemeteries, burial grounds and homes for the destitute or infirm;
 - d) Licensing of bicycles, trucks (other than mechanically propelled trucks), canoes, wheel barrows and carts;
 - e) Establishment, maintenance and regulations of markets, motor parks and public conveniences; plus 1 (g-k).
2. The local government councils also work hand-in-hand with state government on issues such as:
- a) The provision and maintenance of primary education;
 - b) The development of agriculture and natural resources, other than the exploitation of minerals and
 - c) The provision and maintenance of health services.

However, events following Decree No. 3 of 1991 demonstrated that local governments cannot manage the

primary schools in their jurisdiction effectively.

1.1.2 HISTORY OF UNIVERSAL BASIC EDUCATION

In its Article 26, the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights enunciated on the 10th of December, 1948 decrees inter alia as follows:

Everyone has the right to education. Education shall be free, at least in elementary and fundamental stages. Elementary education shall be compulsory. Technical and professional education shall be made generally available and higher education shall be equally accessible to all in the basis of merit (U.N.O., 1948).

The African Charter in Human and People's Rights drawn up in Banjul, Gambia on the 19th of January, 1981 by the "Africa states members of the Organization of African Unity (O.A.U, 1981) and ratified by Nigeria on the 17th of March, 1983. Subsequently, the Federal Republic of Nigeria in 1983 affirms in her article 17 that "every individual shall have the right to education" in pursuance of the above charter, the UBE was then launched on the 30th of September 1999 by the then Head of state, General Olusegun Obasanjo. Its major focus was to eradicate illiteracy by providing free, compulsory and universal primary, secondary and adult education programmes as reinforced by section 18 of the 1999 Nigerian constitution.

1.1.3 Objectives

The Federal Ministry of Education (2000) outlined the following as the objectives of the scheme:

- Developing in the entire citizenry a strong consciousness for education and a strong commitment to its vigorous promotion;
- Provision of free basic universal education for every Nigerian child of school-going age;
- Reducing drastically the incidence of dropout from the formal school system (through improved relevance, quality and efficiency);
- Catering for learning needs of young persons who for one reason or the other, have has to interrupt their schooling, through appropriate forms of complementary approaches to the provision and promotion of basic education;
- Ensuring the acquisition of the appropriate levels of literacy, numeracy, manipulation, communication and life skills as well as ethical, moral and civic values needed for laying a solid foundation for life-long learning.

Unfortunately, as laudable as this programme is, a major problem of implementation was observed. Some important issues that need to be addressed were the percentage of children who are presently in school as a result of this, involvement of rural communities and whether education in Nigeria at the primary level is actually free in practice. According to Ochoma (2008) attention had been drawn to the issue of children learning in the open air, under trees, in dilapidated classrooms and with some sitting on the bare floor. Therefore, one wonders how free this system of education could be, when it cannot offer basic infrastructural facilities for its effective implementation.

Obanya (2000) therefore suggested the devolution of powers to state and local governments in keeping with the constitution as essential for the achievement of any sustained impetus in the realization of the objectives of UBE.

2 CRITICAL AREAS FOR SUSTAINABLE MANAGEMENT OF UBE BY THE LOCAL GOVERNMENTS

The 1999 constitution of Nigeria is very clear in the matter of policy demarcations of responsibilities of managing UBE programme at all levels. It is practically clear that local government councils in Nigeria do not only need encouragement from the state and federal governments but must be woken up by efforts of the academia and professionals to sensitize them on the imperatives of managerial areas that suggest a way out to making them functional on the management of UBE programme.

The areas include:

2.1 Appropriate Harnessing of Human Resources

Human resources development is the process of equipping individuals with the capacities, skills and knowledge in meeting the demands of his country. It is aimed at ensuring that the right quality and quantity of personnel is employed to do the work involved in meeting the national objectives. Wyn (1979) asserts that

human resources is aimed at achieving the following objectives:

- a) Helping the individual to make the most of his abilities and thus do as well as possible in his career;
- b) Helping the service as a whole by providing the motivation and effectiveness of the teacher.

According to Peretomade (2005), human resources include all the human beings that function to aid teaching and learning. They include the teacher, non-teaching staff of the school, the learners, members of the community and other resource persons in the community viz carpenters, mechanics, accountants, etc.

The Universal Basic Education as a massive programme requires enormous amount of human resources. Majority of the staff strength for the management of UBE programme are supposed to be sourced locally. It is therefore very important that local government councils should have a reservoir or access to qualified personnel to mobilize in a continuous basis for sustaining the management of the programme.

Hence local governments must be on their toes to ensure the following:

- a) Continuous creation of establishments for recruitment.
- b) Making the staff responsible and participating in decision making.
- c) Provide material incentive to the staff.
- d) Induction of new staff members.
- e) Staff development.
- f) Appreciating innovative initiative from staff.
- g) Assigning duties to staff.

2.2 Management of the Learners

Management of the learners remains an important responsibility of the local governments which unfortunately is often taken for granted at that level. Teaching and learning materials, classroom and school facilities and the current school feeding programme are critical requirements bordering on learners management. These areas should be monitored adequately to ensure sustainability.

2.3 Financial Resource Management

Money is an important variable for the successful management and planning of UBE. Local government councils are not financially fortified to meet the high financial demands for effective management of the programme. In view of this, the effective management of the available resources becomes imperative. Adesina (1980) therefore suggested the need for prudence in the management of funds and later added that “the fundamental principles in school finance is not how much money is allocated to the system but how well the available funds are effectively put into use”.

2.4 Community Relations Management

Community relationship is the interactive relation between teachers, principals and the community where the school is located (Cibulka, 1998). Okam and Bozimo (2001) also stated that school community relationship is the inter-linkage association and cooperation between a school and the host community. Good school-community relationship should be seen in two ways. One way is where the community members use school resources for its events, provides support for staff and pupils, holds school in high esteem and invites school staff and pupils to participate in community programmes. The other is where the school communicates well with the community, presents the pupils to render services to the community (e.g. chorale and dance group, respect the members and their values, invites the members to school programmes and keeps the leaders abreast of happenings in the schools).

The UBE guideline indeed stipulated that “Government expects that the entire Nigerian populace will patriotically assume ownership of the programme by full involvement in all forms of monitoring activities intended to ensure continuing relevance in the programme” (FME, 2000).

2.5 Facilities Management

It is imperative to reposition local government councils in Nigeria to assume their constitutional responsibilities of managing the UBE programme. Etanga (2005) maintains that the availability and use of these instructional materials have significant effect on the academic performance of the pupils. UNESCO

(2000) equally states that instructional materials are very important in the actualization of the objectives of UBE. Adesina (1980) asserts that one potent index for evaluating educational standard and quality is an examination of physical facilities for learning. These facilities according to Ozigi and Cantiam (1979) and Oluchukwu (2000) include learning space, the library, dining hall, multi-purpose hall, health facilities, school ground and school offices. Others include tables, desks, chairs, lockers, cupboards, etc. Close monitoring of the maintenance needs of these facilities could be easily done by the local government officials in conjunction with the educational administrators of the education offices.

3 INSTITUTIONS INVOLVED IN THE MANAGEMENT OF UBE PROGRAMME IN NIGERIA

A number of institutions and stakeholders are involved in the management of Basic education in Nigeria. These include, the Federal Ministry of Education, State Ministries of Education and Local Education Authorities. However, most of their functions are usually delegated to their controlling agents which are the Universal Basic Education commission, and the state Universal Basic Education Boards.

3.1 Roles of Local Education Authorities (LEAs) in the Management of UBE

At local government level, the management of Universal Basic Education is entrusted on a stationary body called the Local Government Education Authority- whose head is the Education Secretary. This means that the local government manages the Universal Basic Education through her agency called Local Education Authority. The functions of the Local Government Education Authority are to see;

- a) The day to day administration of Early Child care Education Annexes, Primary and Nomadic Schools and JSS I – III in their area of jurisdiction and making recommendation to Board on policy issues.
- b) Registration and supervision of Quranic and Islamic schools;
- c) The appointments, postings, transfers, promotions and discipline of teaching and non-teaching staff on grade 01-06;
- d) Making recommendations to the Board on promotion and discipline of teaching and non-teaching staff on grade levels 07 and above in its area of jurisdiction.
- e) Submission of annual estimates, annual account and monthly returns to the Board.
- f) Payment of salaries, allowances and benefits to all teaching staff in its area of jurisdiction.
- g) Acquisition and distribution of materials and equipments to all ECCE centres, Primary and Nomadic Schools, Traditional Quranic institutions as well as JS I-III in its area of jurisdiction.
- h) Undertaking general maintenance of ECCE centres, primary schools and nomadic schools as well as JS I-III school buildings and infrastructure in its area of jurisdiction.
- i) Stimulating, promoting and encouraging communal participation in the running of ECCE centres, primary schools, Nomadic schools and JS I-III in its area of jurisdiction.
- j) Taking all reasonable steps to ensure full enrolment and attendance in ECCE centres , primary schools Nomadic schools and JSS I-III in its area of jurisdiction;
- k) Providing regular feed back to the Board on people's reaction to government education measures in its area of jurisdiction;
- l) Ensuring that quarterly and annual reports are rendered to the Board on all activities of the Authority during the preceding year in its area of jurisdiction.
- m) Supervising all Education committees in its area of jurisdiction and
- n) Performing such other functions as may be delegated to it by the board (NAESN, 2007:4)

3.2 Intervention strategies for making Local Governments functional

There is need for intervention strategies so that local governments will be functional in the management of UBE programme. Dan (2006) listed such strategies as;

- a. Local government possessing direct access to the recipients and their parents.
- b. Close supervision of the programme.

- c. Availability of teachers with their catchment area.
- d. Useful and more understanding of the communities where the schools are located.

3.3 The Way Forward

To make these intervention strategies more efficient and effective, very urgent policies should be evolved to ensure the following;

1. UBE schools should be under the direct control of local government councils.
2. Special funds should be allocated to local councils for the execution of UBE projects.
3. Strategic education planning should be integrated into the local government system.
4. Local government councils should be compelled by relevant legislations to give monthly progress reports on UBE project implementation.
5. The inspectorate sections of LEAs should be well staffed with qualified education supervisors to foster adequate implementation of UBE programmes.

4 CONCLUSION

The UBE scheme in Nigeria as of present is the right step in the right direction towards solving the problems of basic education at the grassroot. However, the enhanced involvement of the local governments must be addressed if the gains are to be sustained and to stand the test of time. A repositioning of local government education departments remains an imperative.

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