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## **Universal Basic Education Programme and Extent of Achievement of Millennium Development Goals for Sustainability in Abia State**

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**By**

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### **Abstract**

*This paper examined Universal Basic Education and extent of achievement of Millennium development goals for sustainability. Concept of Universal Basic Education was explained. Objectives of Universal Basic Education were enumerated. Millennium development goals were highlighted. Importances of Universal Basic Education in the achievement of millennium development goals were discussed. Problems militating against Universal Basic Education in the achievement of millennium development goals were identified, such as: non-participation of parents in school activities, non-utilization of instructional materials, inadequate number of qualified teachers and diversion of funds. Recommendations were made such as: parents should participate fully through provision of school materials to their children, teachers should try as much as possible to utilize instructional materials sent to schools, state ministry of education should set up a committee to monitor judicious use of the monies allotted for implementation of Universal Basic Education programme for sustainability of millennium development goals in Nigeria.*

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Education is an excellent instrument for national growth and development. That is why the Federal Government of Nigeria (2004) in her national policy on education described education as an instrument par excellence for effecting national development. On that note, Oyedepo (2011) stressed that education has proved to be the vehicle for national transformation in human history. This means that every nation should aspire to ensure that majority of her citizens are educated.

To achieve this, the nation set out so many strategies to ensure the education of her citizens. This paper is therefore looking into Universal Basic Education programme and extent of achievement of millennium development goals for sustainability in Abia State.

This will be treated under the following sub-headings:

1. Concept of Universal Basic Education
2. Objectives of Universal Basic Education
3. Millennium Development Goals
4. Importance of Universal Basic Education in the achievement of millennium development goals.
5. Extent of achievement of millennium development goals in Abia state using UBE programme.
6. Problems militating against Universal Basic Education in the achievement of millennium development goals.
7. Conclusion and recommendations.

### **Concept of Universal Basic Education**

Universal basic education is education meant for every Nigerian child. Nwana (2000) viewed basic education as the fundamental education or foundation buton line education upon which every other education whether formal, informal, or non-formal can be built, and without which any educational structures erected will not have chances of success. Borishade (2002) described Universal basic education as: an ambitious educational programme, which was launched and executed by the government and people of Nigeria to eradicate illiteracy, ignorance and poverty as well as stimulate and accelerate national integration. It is important to identify the general objectives of Universal basic education.

### **Objectives of Universal Basic Education**

Universal basic education has many laudable objectives. Borishade (2002:7) identified the objectives as:

1. *Developing in the entire citizenry a strong consciousness for education as a strong commitment to its vigorous promotion;*
2. *The provision of free, Universal basic education for every Nigerian child of school going age;*

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3. *Reducing drastically the incidence of drop out from the formal school system, through improved relevance, quality and efficiency;*
4. *Catering for the needs of young persons who for one reason or another have had to interrupt their schooling through appropriate forms of complementary approaches to the provision and promotion of basic education; and*
5. *Ensuring the acquisition of appropriate levels of literacy, numeracy, manipulative, communicative and life skills, as well as the ethnical, moral and civic values needed for laying a solid foundation for life long learning right from early childhood.*

To ascertain the extent of achievement of millennium development goals using universal basic education, one has to identify the millennium development goals.

#### **Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)**

National Youth Service Corps, British Council and World Bank Institute (2007:7) identified the millennium development goals as:

1. Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger
2. Achieve universal primary education
3. Promote gender equality and empower women
4. Reduce child mortality
5. Improve maternal health
6. Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases
7. Ensure environmental sustainability
8. Develop global partnership for development

Having identified the MDGs, it is essential to find out the importance of UBE in the achievement of the millennium development goals.

#### **Importance of Universal Basic Education in the Achievement of Millennium Development Goals**

Importance of Universal basic education in the achievement of millennium development goals cannot be underestimated. Universal basic education emphasized free and compulsory education. Observing this, Olubor and Unyimadu (2001) saw Universal basic education as a response to the Universal Declaration of Human Right (1948) which stipulated the right of every citizen to education. In fact, by emphasizing provision of free education for all citizens, UBE satisfied the quest of the Federal Government of Nigeria in her National policy on education (2004) where it stipulated that every Nigerian child should be educated irrespective of the tribe, state of origin and any disability. No wonder, Dibal (2001) described UBE as the right programme with mission for the Nigerian child. It is important to note that by so doing, UBE has helped in the achievement of millennium development goal 'two' which is to achieve universal

primary education. UBE equally moved free education of Nigerian children up to junior secondary 1-3. What a laudable programme!

UBE is equally important because it is an enlarged view of education intended to integrate formal and informal possibilities for the development of all human potentials thereby making the child functional to himself and society. This means that when Nigerian children are educated free from primary education to junior secondary three, integrating formal and informal possibilities, extreme poverty and hunger will be eradicated. This is possible because when one is educated; potentials of how to survive in the society will be developed. When the potentials are developed through education, extreme poverty and hunger will be eradicated. This is another way UBE programme is helping in the achievement of millennium development goal 'one', which is eradicating extreme poverty and hunger.

Universal Basic Education (UBE) is also important because as noticed by Okon and Uko (2008), UBE is a highly rated programme by the Nigerian government with the avowed intention of using it to inculcate literacy, numeracy, manipulative, communicative as well as life skills in children and youngsters-15years and below. It is important to note that when permanent literacy, numeracy and manipulative and communicative skills as well as life skills are inculcated in Nigerian children, there is no environmental problem Nigerian children cannot solve for themselves. This shows that UBE programme have helped in the achievement of millennium development goal 'seven', which is to ensure environmental sustainability.

Accordingly, UBE is also important in that it provides education for rural population, challenged individuals, nomadic population and those physically isolated settlements. Obi (2008) also remarked that among others, UBE provides for those in urban slums, adult illiterates, street children and people with special needs, and other special areas, removing every barrier from the education of the girl child. This provision of UBE is an indication that UBE programme is designed to assist in the achievement of millennium development goal 'three', which is to promote gender equality and empower women.

Discussing the importance of UBE programme in the achievement of millennium development goals, Mbakwem (2006) remarked that UBE is geared towards equipping individuals with such knowledge, skills and attitudes that will enable them live meaningful and fulfilling lives, contribute to the development of the society, derive maximum social, economic and cultural benefits from the society and discharge their civic obligations competently. Mbakwem (2006) further stressed that as learners graduate after completing their junior secondary school, it is expected that they would come out sufficiently prepared to face the challenges of the environment and survive without resorting to delinquents acts. If the Nigerian child is prepared to face

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the challenges of the environment through UBE programme that means that UBE programme had been designed to help MDGs to achieve its goal 'seven', which is to ensure environmental sustainability.

In fact, UBE in all its ramifications have helped a great deal in the achievement of the Millennium development goals. Basically, UBE advocates for free and compulsory education. Some of the implications of UBE programme towards the achievement of MDGs have been summarized by NYSC, British Council and Work Bank Institute (2007) thus:

- i. When a person is educated, extreme poverty and hunger will be eradicated. This is because an educated work force tends to be able to earn more money and avoid extreme poverty.
- ii. MDGs emphasized promotion of gender equality and empowerment of women. This means that when there is gender balance in education, there will be equality in terms of skills gained and opportunities to use the skills in securing better jobs and better incomes. Further more, educated women tend to be empowered and better able to advocate for themselves and their families.
- iii. MDGs stressed on the need to reduce child mortality. To UBE people with at least primary education are more likely to know the basic of hygiene, immunization, nutrition and methods of preventing communicable diseases such as HIV/AIDS. They also have the literacy skills to appreciate awareness campaigns on risky behaviors and how to protect one self from contracting any of these diseases, thus helping in the achievement of MDGs goal 'six', which is combating HIV/AIDS, malaria and other related diseases.
- iv. MDGs also have as one of its goals ensuring environmental sustainability. This can as well be achieved through universal primary education. UBE's target of free and compulsory universal primary education is very important because people who are educated better understand the need to protect the environment. This can easily be achieved because many primary schools curricular contain basic information on the importance of the environment and how people can take steps to protect it. People with at least a basic education are better able to find jobs that provide enough income to afford alternatives to environmentally degrading practices, for example, they can substitute gas for wood when cooking.

Having examined various ways UBE programme with its provision of free universal and compulsory basic education for every Nigerian child of school age is helping in the achievement of millennium development goals, the paper moved further to highlight the extent of achievement of millennium development goals in Abia state using UBE programme.

### **Extent of Achievement of Millennium Development Goals in Abia State Using UBE Programme**

Implementation of UBE programme started fully in Abia state in the year 2000 after a one-day workshop on the state readiness for the implementation of UBE programme in Abia state organized by the Abia state primary education board in Umuahia. Ever since then, the state has taken so many steps to ensure and encourage free and compulsory education in the following ways:

- a. Tuition free education: From the year 2000 till date, Abia children have been enjoying tuition free education from primary one-senior secondary three.
- c. Provision of school buses: Abia state government has provided school buses to transport children to school.
- c. The Nigerian security and Civil Defense Corps have been empowered to arrest children of school age found in the street hawking during school hours. These children are arrested and their parental/guardians are cautioned.
- d. Mass literacy campaign: The Abia state government is on with mass literacy campaigns. This campaign is carried on even in churches, market places, village squares, governmental and non-governmental offices. Fliers and posters are being posted with such inscriptions: “illiterates become slaves to their mates”. All these inscriptions and campaigns are geared toward making people to see the need for going to school to benefit from UBE programme.
- e. Provision of school materials: the Abia state government has spent a lot of money on provision of school materials such as textbooks and notebooks as well as other reading and writing materials for the students. Many facilities such as tables for teachers and desk for school children are also provided, many classrooms were renovated and new ones were built by the state government in order to assist school children stay comfortably in school environment and study. This is to promote UBE programme and to help in the achievement of MDGs.

All these instances among others show the extent UBE programme is helping in the achievement of millennium development goals for sustainability in Abia state.

### **Problems Militating against Universal Basic Education in the Achievement of Millennium Development Goals**

In spite of the numerous importance of UBE in the achievement of millennium development goals, there are many problems militating against UBE in the achievement of MDGs especially in Abia state. These include:

#### **1. Non-participation of Parents in School Activities**

This is one of problem facing effective implementation of UBE in Abia state. Many parents do not take active participation in education of their children and wards. Observing this, Akintelure (2007) complained that a situation where some parents do

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not provide food and school materials for their children before going to farm or market is a cog on the child's learning that day. He thus suggested that a consistent family routine for meals, bedtime, home work, leisure and personal hygiene will help to improve the child's health and reading but this is not done yet.

**2. Non-utilization of Instructional Materials Sent to Schools**

It is unfortunate to note that most of the instructional materials supplied for schools are not being utilized for effective implementation of UBE programme in Abia state so as to achieve fully the MDGs. It is not a thing of joy to hear that most of instructional materials such textbooks and computers and other ICT facilities are kept somewhere outside the school compound sometimes in the houses of PTA chairman and Ndi-Ezes. When asked, head teachers and principals will say it is for security purposes. What an alarming situation. This is a very big problem militating against UBE programme in Abia state.

**3. Inadequate Number of Qualified Teachers**

This is another problem militating against UBE programme in Abia state. Most schools especially in the rural areas do not have enough qualified teachers for effective implementation of 9-year basic education curriculum especially in the junior secondary schools. Noticing this problem, Gwany (2006) lamented that competent and highly committed teachers are grossly inadequate in the Nigerian teaching profession. Onyeachu (2008) further complain that in most junior secondary schools, very few teachers are in existence to the extent that in most cases, teachers are compelled to teach subjects that are not their areas of specialization. In a situation such as this, how can effective curriculum implementation take place? When the implementers are inadequate, the bulk of the work that needs to be done will not be done.

**4. Unconducive Learning Environment**

This is one of the major problems that militate against UBE programme in Abia state. In most schools, the environment is not conducive for learning. Some buildings are dilapidated, this negatively affects learning. This is because as Onyeachu (2006) had earlier observed, if the environment of the child is good, the child will learn better, but if the on the other hand, the environment of the child is not conducive, the child will not learn well. No wonder Idowu (2002) earlier asserted that the extent to which a child could reach in academic attainment is dependent upon the existence of certain environmental conditions. That is why Eke (2006) clearly stated that, the teachers' environment as well as the learning environment is important in determining whether the child comes to school remains in school and benefits from school work.

**5. Non-participation of Some Communities in Education**

This is one of the problems militating against UBE programme in Abia state. It has been observed with dismay that most communities do not participate fully in any issue concerning education of children found in their locality. This is a very big problem militating against UBE programme. On that note, Shekarau (2007) complained that inability of most communities to organize themselves to operate schools for their children have affected effective implementation of UBE programme. Many communities in Abia state are still interested in quickest way of getting money, thereby paying little attention in education of their children. No wonder Onyeachu (2006) lamented that, the desire to get rich quick otherwise known as get-rich-quick-syndrome had adversely affected education of Nigerian child.

**6. Diversion of Fund**

Funds refer to money needed for carrying out a project. Recognizing this, Esu, Asim and Eni (2006) stressed that funding in any programme is very vital if such a programme must succeed. They further remarked that UBE programme is not an exception. No wonder Onyeachu (2009) emphatically remarked that no organization functions effectively without fund. This being the case, there is every need to ensure effective use of the monies allotted for effective implementation of UBE programme. Strict utilization of any fund meant for UBE is extremely important because in most cases, funds specifically meant for UBE programme are diverted to other programmes. What a big distraction to the achievement of millennium development goals.

**7. Inadequacy of Information and Communication Technology (ICTs) in Implementation of UBE Curriculum**

In most of UBE schools, there are no ICT facilities for students and teachers' use. This is necessary because as Kanno and Onyeachu (2009) had noted, ICTs had enabled learners to see things and master them faster than it was in the olden days, hence, there is every need to ensure its existence in schools. Unfortunately, it is only in very few schools that these ICTs can be found.

**Conclusion**

All the stakeholders in education, the state Ministry of Education, school administrators, commissioners for education, teachers, parents, philanthropists, churches, ex-students, school counselors, parents, community leaders and even students should put their heads and hands together towards effective implementation of UBE programme. Doing all these things will help in effective implementation of UBE which will lead to the great achievement of MDGs for sustainability.

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**Recommendations**

For effective implementation of Universal Basic Education programme in order to achieve greatly the millennium development goals, the following recommendations are made.

1. Parents should provide materials supports to the child and the school.
2. Parents should feed their children properly before going to farm, market or even offices and provide their school materials as well.
3. Abia state Ministry of Education should set up monitoring teams that visit schools from time to time to ensure that materials sent to schools are in school compounds for effective utilization.
4. Abia state government having provided those instructional materials to schools should assist in building of standard laboratories for keeping those resource materials.
5. Communities should help in security of properties sent to their village schools.
6. The government should employ security men to assist in the security of instructional materials sent to the schools.
7. Parents' Teachers Associations should as well help in sponsoring security men sent to the schools.
8. Alumni of schools should as well help in renovation of building meant for ICTs and its facilities and other instructional materials sent to their Alma Mata.
9. Development unions in the villages both home and aboard should put their heads together towards ensuring that school properties sent to their villages are freely protected and utilized for effective implementation of UBE programme.
10. Philanthropists should equally assist in as much as in most cases, philanthropists assist in supplying instructional materials to schools, they should as well assist in security of those materials sent to the schools.
11. School counselors should as a matter of urgency talk to students and parents during education week and career week on the importance of ensuring security of properties sent to their schools for effective teaching and learning.
12. Teachers should utilize those instructional materials for effective teaching and learning so that students will see the relevance of those materials to their educational efforts so as to ensure the security of those properties.
13. Students should not see instructional materials sent top their schools as government property rather they should see such materials as theirs.
14. P.T.A chairmen should not accept keeping school properties in their houses rather they should ensure that school compound and its building are well secured for safeguarding of school properties.
15. School environment should be very conducive with well ventilated classrooms, comfortable chairs and tables for students and teachers use. This is necessary because environment influences the learners especially at the lower level such as primary and junior secondary schools.

16. Every community should carry out series of campaign on important of education and the benefits derivable from the education of children. Doing this will help to improve children enrolment.
17. Communities should provide security for teachers by preparing adequate housing for them.
18. Communities should actively attend school meetings to learn about children's learning progress and classroom behavior.
19. Communities should equally form village education committees to help in effective management of the school properties.
20. State government should employ more teachers. When such teachers are employed, they should be posted to rural areas; in fact, this should be made known to them during interview for employment.
21. P.T.A should help teachers posted to their villages by providing good accommodations for them.
22. Abia State Ministry of Education and Abia State Universal basic Education Board should urgently set up a monitoring team that monitors to ensure strict utilization of the fund meant for UBE programme in the state.
23. Provision of ICTs and its facilities should be a combined effort of the state government, parents, governmental and non-governmental organizations, and alumni of schools. By so doing, all the schools in Abia state will be filled up with computer and its facilities for effective teaching and learning.

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