

# THE NEED FOR COMMUNITY ORIENTED SCHOOL LIBRARY SERVICES FOR THE EFFECTIVE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE UNIVERSAL BASIC EDUCATION PROGRAMME IN NIGERIA

By

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## **UBE: the promise**

Basic education for all is an essential pre-requisite for an efficient and equitable development process. Therefore all societies have to ensure that every citizen is equipped with the basic tools of learning and basic knowledge and life skills relevant for his/her own environment so that each can have a fair start in life. Basic education for all, therefore, is a battle cry against the unhealthy prevailing pattern of elitism and selectivity in education that offers much to a few at the expense of a common core of learning for all.

Popular participation and mobilization are the key elements in the Universal Basic Education (UBE) programme, which must engage people widely and actively as beneficiaries and contributors. Participation has come to be recognized as a basic principle of action, an overall development strategy in national development efforts including educational development. It is both a means and end of development.

UBE is education for all, which is the responsibility of all. It is conceived as a people-oriented programme. According to its guidelines, government expects people to play the following roles amongst others. Initiating and participating actively in continuing policy dialogues on the programme; mobilizing all and sundry to contribute ideas, funds, logistics and moral support, where possible.

The people are major stakeholders in the UBE which is seen in its all-embracing sense as it encompasses the following:

- programmes/initiatives for early childhood care and socialization.
- education programmes for the acquisition of functional literacy, numeracy and life skills especially for adults aged 15 years and above.
- special programmes for nomadic populations,
- out-of-school non-formal programmes for up-dating the knowledge and skills of persons who left school before acquiring the basics needed for life-long learning;

- non-formal 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.

The implication for all these targeted UBE beneficiaries is that **any** provision made for the programme should take care of each group in order to succeed.

As part of the E-9 countries (which are the most highly populated with the greatest concentration of illiterates), Nigeria has participated and affirmed all the various agreements and declarations to make UBE a reality. The task before Nigeria is to ensure that all needed resources are galvanized towards achieving the noble goals of the programme. One way of doing this is to provide the necessary enablers for teaching in both formal and non-formal situations. Libraries/Resource centers are critical for the UBE programmes and should be regarded as basic requirements for quality and sustainable education.

#### **Community participation in the UBE programme**

Community participation in education is not new in Nigeria because in many parts of the country we have seen community primary and secondary schools. Even in the 1960s after independence, communities contributed to education through that Assumed Local Contribution Initiative whereby host communities tasked themselves to provide classroom blocks, teachers' houses, and even paid fees collectively for their children. The situation has not changed. As A.R. Yunusa, Head of Nigeria's delegation to the second E-9 Ministerial Review Meeting at Islamabad, Pakistan, 14-16 Sept. 1997 noted in his speech;

Experience has shown that communities are prepared to contribute collectively, often substantially and at some sacrifice to themselves, to support and sustain schools for their children...

The concept of "mobilization" which describe the efforts to galvanize and motivate a country's population into action for their own and common good underlies the views of other delegates at that meeting. Wazir Ali, Special Assistant to the Prime Minister of Pakistan affirmed that to provide meaningful education to the masses, education has to be a mass movement, which also has to be indigenous.

Responsive to the needs of the people designed, planned and managed by the people themselves. The former Director-General of UNESCO, Federico Mayor had also observed that Education for all implies education by all.

From all these observations, we can see that education is now a huge public enterprise and no longer the sole responsibility of the government. Virtually all countries now advocate the need to forge alliances with multiple partners both internal and external to ensure that education for all succeeds.

Each Nigerian community has several groups, which can help fund and support the UBE programme for the benefit of its people, if they are made aware of the need to do so.

**Bodies from the community, which can assist in funding education, including libraries, are the following:**

- i Local government Council Members (past and present)
- ii The Village Development Association/Union
- iii The Town Development Association/Union
- iv Religious Groups/Organizations within the Community (Christian & Moslems)
- v Political Parties/Groups
- vi Age Grades
- vii Vocational Groups e.g. Motor Mechanics, Carpenters, Blacksmiths.
- viii Alumni/Old Students' Association or Clubs
- ix Business/Social Organizations or Clubs-Rotary, Lions' Club, Sports Club.
- x PTAs of schools (very good)
- xi Prominent Citizens/Philanthropists
- xii Board of Governors of schools

#### **Libraries for the UBE**

In different parts of the world especially in developing countries in Asia, Latin America and Africa, libraries are mentioned as one of the facilities needed for quality assurance of the UBE programme. They are also seen as strategies for democratizing education and serving various groups, which are targeted by the programme.

Library provision in these countries is however, below standard. As statistics from literature show, in Africa, Public Libraries serve only a tiny percentage of the population – In Botswana, which is one of the best (7.5%), Kenya (2.3%).

Tanzania (1.2%). Nigeria (less than 1%). I believe that the picture for school libraries or community libraries is more dismal. The obvious implication of these libraries cannot play the much-desired role of being a primary agency for ensuring the success of the UBE programme.

#### **What can be done?**

##### ***Examples from outside Nigeria***

Since the UBE is a community – oriented programme, libraries serving it have to be community – targeted. Examples of this are found all over Africa and Asia and Latin America. Nigeria can learn from their initiatives. In Africa,

Egypt, Botswana, South Africa, Mali, Ivory Coast and Zimbabwe have all devised ways of providing libraries for their people especially those living in remote areas. Quickly summarized, these include:

- Mobile library services to remote schools using the book vans donated by DANIDA (the Danish International Aid Agency) Zimbabwe).
- Camel Library Service for pastoral Nomads in Kenya to fill their information gap as marginalized populations.
- Village Reading Rooms project of the Botswana National Library Service supported by the Swedish International Development (SIDA).
- Suzanne Mubarak's Reading for All Festival and Mobile Library Services to remote districts and hamlets in Egypt since 1994. There are now over 8700 such libraries, which operate even during vacations. Training is organised for staff.
- The Centres for Reading and Cultural Activity in Ivory Coast aimed at promoting literacy services in rural communities, by lending books, toys, games to children, showing films, organizing debates, reading circles, cultural activities like music and dancing. They also have A-V resources, CDs, cassettes, tapes, films to serve all members of the communities.
- The rural Audio Libraries in Mali (The Operation Lecture Publique), which span over 46 zones in the country and operate as a network of community libraries, lend books, reference works and tapes generated from oral tradition in many topics. They help to make education accessible to their disadvantaged population.

A lot of other interesting and successful initiatives also exist in Thailand, Vietnam, Turkey, etc. in Thailand, the Department of Library Services in Chiang Mai University, that is lecturers, technicians have organised voluntary library services to support education for shut-ins, orphans, orthopedic patients, blind students, juveniles delinquents, low income families and the rural populace. They deliver books, tell stories and read aloud to children. They also organise puppet shows, riddles, singing sessions, paper folding, drawing and painting for them. Children are also given opportunity to express themselves and tell their experiences. Another initiative in Thailand which also supports literacy (lifelong and non-formal education), is the Village Reading Centres where villagers are trained to serve as resource persons especially retired persons like teachers and civil servants. Supported by the Popular Books Donation Project initiated by the Department of Non-Formal Education, this initiative is managed by the 15-member Village Education Committee, with members from the PTA, Alumni and Foundation Committees.

In Vietnam, Public Information Organizations, Religious bodies, Women's associations, Cultural and Artistic groups, individual or groups of individuals at home and abroad and international agencies have all contributed to providing libraries in different parts of the country to support the UBE cause. They are not folding their hands waiting for the government.

In Turkey, the Turkiye Education Foundation comprising 120 businessmen have created a non-traditional model of education to help boost the ideals of the UBE. They establish what they call EDUCATION PARKS AND SMALL LEARNING UNITS with facilities like textbooks, computers, libraries and multi-media technology. Participant pays a token monthly fee.

We can go on and on to cite examples from other places but the issues are: WHAT DO WE DO IN NIGERIA CONCERNING COMMUNITY CENTRED LIBRARIES FOR IMPLEMENTING THE UBE PROGRAMME?

Nigeria is abundantly endowed with all categories of educated personnel that can help provide library services to all the groups benefiting from the UBE. It is also important to take a few tips from the examples cited in this paper. Therefore based on the objectives suggested that we adopt a grassroots approach to library development to ensure maximum participation by all as we do the following:

- Mobilize the entire citizenry using the mass media, print, and traditional media to galvanize support for providing libraries in each community to cater for the needs of everyone.
- Encourage citizens to donate a title each to school/community libraries based on compiled lists or recommendations for use by youths and adults in formal and non-formal education.
- For pre-school children, establish toy libraries with a few picture books to stimulate the reading habit.
- For neo-literates, provide books written in the mother tongue as well as books in Basic English.
- For special interest group like farmers, artisans, teachers, nurses, retired persons, etc provide books related to their professions as well as newspapers and magazines. They can also help to improve the collection.
- For pastoral nomads, provide library services using camels as means of transportation in places where cars cannot reach.
- For those living in riverine areas, provide boats for distributing reading material for library services and information.

In providing library services to the UBE clientele, it is necessary to remember that the programme is for everyone, that is, all-inclusive and non-elitist. This implies that all the disadvantaged groups should be included- disabled persons (special groups), street children, shut-ins (eg. prisoners), fishing communities, nomads and the blind. The idea of lifelong learning should be strongly emphasized. Nobody should feel too old to use those libraries. Another important point is to remember that innovative approaches are needed for providing these services, for example, somewhere in South Africa, people's shops were used as library distribution points for street children who were being encouraged to read.

Education for All, means All for Education. We in Nigeria should be guided by this philosophy so that the UBE programme can be supported by sustainable library services which have been conceptualized, planned, set up and managed by the people themselves for their own benefit and that of society. With needed inputs in place and properly managed, this programme, which is a priority of the present government will succeed.

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