

POLICY BRIEF

Implementing Nigeria's Universal Basic Education Act: The case of Adamawa State

The Education Research in Conflict and Protracted Crisis (ERICC) Research Programme Consortium is a global research and learning partnership that strives to transform education policy and practice in conflict and protracted crisis around the world – ultimately to help improve holistic outcomes for children – through building a global hub for a rigorous, context-relevant and actionable evidence base.

ERICC seeks to identify the most effective approaches for improving access, quality, and continuity of education to support sustainable and coherent education systems and holistic learning and development of children in conflict and crisis. ERICC aims to bridge research, practice, and policy with accessible and actionable knowledge – at local, national, regional and global levels – through co- construction of research and collaborative partnerships.

ERICC is led by the International Rescue Committee (IRC) with Academic Lead IOE, UCL’s Faculty of Education and Society, and expert partners include Centre for Lebanese Studies, Common Heritage Foundation, Forcier Consulting, ODI, Osman Consulting, Oxford Policy Management and Queen Rania Foundation. During ERICC’s inception period, NYU-TIES provided research leadership, developed the original ERICC Conceptual Framework and contributed to early research agenda development. ERICC is supported by UK Aid.

Countries in focus include Bangladesh (Cox’s Bazar), Jordan, Lebanon, Myanmar, Nigeria, South Sudan and Syria.

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Audience

This Policy Brief is intended for Nigeria’s Federal Ministry of Education, the Universal Basic Education Commission, the Adamawa State Ministry of Education and State Universal Basic Education Board, and other stakeholders concerned with the implementation of universal basic education in areas affected by conflict and protracted crisis in Nigeria.

Executive summary

Nigeria’s Universal Basic Education Act, 2004 (UBE Act) states that basic education should be free, compulsory and universal. (UBE Act, 2004). However, its implementation in Adamawa State has been significantly disrupted by the Boko Haram insurgency, which has caused mass internal displacement. The return and resettlement of previously displaced communities provide opportunities to implement the Act fully, and in doing so to improve access to and the quality and continuity of education in the State.

The Education Research in Conflict and Protracted Crisis (ERICC) programme considers existing factors influencing educational provision at policy and local levels in areas affected by conflict and crisis. The programme aims to guide interventions that will improve policy–practice coherence, which will lead to greater access to and improved quality and continuity of education in these contexts. Nigeria is one of six countries involved in the research programme. The focus here is on the factors that enable or hinder the implementation of the UBE Act in Adamawa State.

There has been very limited research to date on the provision of basic education in this context of return and resettlement, which limits the opportunities for policy–makers and others to make evidence–informed decisions on basic education. ERICC seeks to fill this research and knowledge gap.

This policy brief summarises the findings, implications and recommendations of research conducted in Madagali Local Government Area (LGA) in northern Adamawa State. A comprehensive evidence review was conducted to identify evidence gaps (Mishra et al., 2023), complemented by extensive consultations with federal and local stakeholders in Nigeria (Akogun et al., 2023) to understand the educational context in Adamawa and draw out recommendations. Further research will inform the design of interventions to improve the provision of basic education in the State.

A. Methodology

The research comprised systematic and ongoing literature reviews and a mixed–methods approach. Quantitative research carried out in Madagali LGA included: (i) a household survey (HHS) involving 107 households and 517 school–aged children; and (ii) community and learning facility checklists. Qualitative research included: (iii) 14 key informant interviews (KIIs) conducted with federal, state and local government officers, and with representatives from development and implementing partners;

- (iv) 22 KIs with community leaders and school and learning centre representatives in Madagali LGA;
- and (v) focus group discussions with 80 children and 82 parents.

B. Key findings

Communities have returned to and resettled in Adamawa State, but the threat of violence continues to impact education. The HHS revealed that the conflict has disrupted the education of over half of school-aged children and that fears of renewed violence persist.

'The conflict that occurred in this area has greatly affected us. It made our children live in constant fear... There are times when they will just start running and come back home earlier instead of staying in school because someone said he heard or noticed a strange movement or noise' (parents of schoolchildren).

In this context of conflict and protracted crisis, implementation of the UBE Act is better than might be expected. The majority of children of primary and junior secondary school age are either in school in the formal education sector (92.5%) and/or they access learning in the non-formal sector (2.5%) through Qur'anic schools and businesses offering vocational training (Figure 1). Only 5% of children are out of learning. There are no significant enrolment differences between girls and boys.

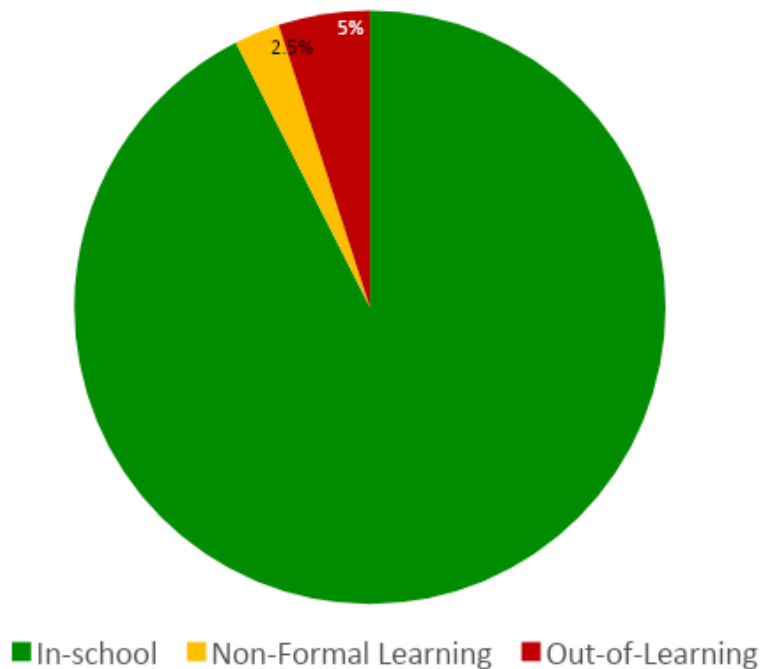


Figure 1. Proportion of children in formal vs non-formal education in Adamawa State

While these numbers are encouraging, they cannot disguise the exclusion of the most vulnerable groups of children, nor can the numbers disguise some underlying problems with implementation of the UBE Act.

- *Basic education is not free.* Although it is true that public schools do not charge fees (which would contravene the UBE Act), they do require families to pay Parent Teacher Association (PTA) levies before their children can attend school. Private schools are entitled to charge fees and Qur'anic schools and businesses offering vocational training may either charge fees or accept donations. PTA levies charged by public schools represent a significant barrier to children's access to basic education.

"I don't have such money to pay. I have to just allow the children to stay at home. Apart from the money charged by the community, there is money charged by the schools. Please where will I source the money?" (parent of out-of-school children)

- *Basic education is compulsory, but this is not widely acknowledged or regulated.* There is no legal enforcement of the UBE Act, for example. However, communities in Madagali LGA compel children to attend school or other learning institutions because they see education as a way to prevent children from becoming radicalised and recruited by Boko Haram. Enforcement is typically addressed through community engagement, with school and community leaders explaining the importance of basic education to the families of out-of-school and out-of-learning children.

"The committee will visit parents of children not in school to discuss why the child is not in school. This has yielded a positive result because it came to a time when you won't even see a child to send on an errand during school hours because they will all be in school by then." (community leader)

- *Basic education is not universal.* Governments and communities promote basic education, but the education sector fails to reach and engage with the most excluded and vulnerable children. There is insufficient provision for the most impoverished children, young mothers, children living with disabilities and former abductees. More than half of out-of-school children (56.4%) in the HHS and nearly two-thirds of out-of-learning children (61.5%) are from the lowest economic status bracket. Most of these children want to attend school but their households cannot afford the PTA levies or donations. Limited funding and suitable facilities restrict access for children with disabilities.

"... the physically challenged, and those whose parents do not have the means to sponsor their children's education are the ones who are likely to have limited or no access to basic education." (community leader)

- *Access to basic education is good but limited in scope.* Most school-aged children in Madagali LGA are in school and/or in learning but security concerns still disrupt learning opportunities. Access to education is especially difficult for remote and rural communities, and the cost of attending school (particularly the PTA levies) remains a barrier for some families. Economic and socio-cultural issues continue to limit opportunities for the most excluded and vulnerable children to engage in basic education.
- *The quality of basic education has been undermined considerably by the insurgency.* There are not enough schools, classrooms or instructional materials in the formal education sector. In the surveyed schools, four in five teachers are qualified but only a third are registered with the Teachers Registration Council of Nigeria. Schools rely on volunteer teachers recruited and supported by communities. Pupil-to-teacher ratios average 33:1, but this ranges from 11:1 to 83:1 across the surveyed schools and the figures do not take account of teacher absences. Those absences explain in part why fewer than one quarter of HHS respondents said they are satisfied with the numbers of teachers available to teach their children. The quality of teaching in the non-formal sector is affected by similar issues, while in both sectors quality of education remains overshadowed by the threat of violence. There is a heavy reliance on community-based organisations (CBOs) and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) to support the quality of education in the formal and non-formal sectors, including through the delivery of accelerated learning programmes (ALPs) and social and emotional learning (SEL).

"The quality of education is not up to expectations. We are still left behind. The problem is that you can send your child to school from primary 1 to 3 and they don't know how to read... The lack of teachers has made it so that a secondary school child cannot spell his or her name".
(community leader)

- *The continuity of education has been disrupted significantly by the insurgency but efforts are being made.* Schools in the formal sector try to accommodate children returning to education following displacement and to place them in appropriate classes. In the non-formal sector, communities are encouraging local businesses to offer vocational training, which is increasing the number of providers and therefore improving continuity of education. CBOs and NGOs provide a range of educational interventions, including ALPs and SEL, which also help the continuity of education.

"Education in this community is so worrisome. Children are lagging behind because of the insurgency that happened. The whole school was destroyed... There is nothing that will even motivate the children to go back to school. I can't estimate the number of children in school but it has dropped very low." (parents of schoolchildren)

- *Policy-practice coherence is limited.* Governments and communities often work separately to deliver basic education when they could be working together. Governments support the provision of basic education, but their efforts are insufficient: basic education is not free, compulsory or

universal. Community efforts result from frustration at this limited support from government (e.g., they recruit and support volunteer teachers) and/or from security needs (e.g., they compel children to attend school to limit the influence of Boko Haram).

C. Policy implications

These findings highlight key issues that need to be addressed to improve access, quality and continuity of basic education in contexts of conflict and protracted crises.

- *Access to basic education:* Governments should continue to engage with communities, CBOs and NGOs to ensure that all children can access basic education. Working with CBOs and NGOs, governments can create learning facilities in the most remote communities, develop programmes that incorporate foundational skills in non-formal education, engage communities in the development of appropriate learning opportunities.
- *Quality of basic education:* Local communities need to be engaged in the design and development of appropriate educational solutions, including: (i) a curriculum that emphasises foundational skills and SEL; (ii) gender and disability sensitivity; (iii) pedagogies suitable to the needs of displaced and resettled children; and (iv) engagement of the non-formal education sector. Teacher recruitment, deployment and retention practices should fast-track appropriately qualified Indigenous volunteer teachers who are more likely to remain in post and who better understand the context-specific needs of children.
- *Continuity of basic education:* Governments should prioritise the Accelerated Basic Education Programme and expand it to all areas affected by the insurgency. Investment should also be prioritised in community-level support programmes to improve the overall well-being and integration of vulnerable and marginalised children returning to or starting education in both the formal and non-formal sectors.
- *Coherence of policy and practice:* Existing accountability frameworks need to be applied and enforced to ensure the coherence of policy and practice. The practice of government schools charging PTA levies needs to be investigated (and, if necessary, tested through judicial review or in court) to ensure free basic education. The practice of communities encouraging families to send their children to school needs to be backed up by the legal sanctions specified in the UBE Act. Greater awareness is needed about the legal rights of children to education, including the most vulnerable and marginalised children, and stakeholders need to be educated about the UBE Act and its provisions. Better data collection, analysis and use should facilitate a more equitable distribution of limited government resources to improve the learning outcomes of all children.

Key stakeholders at the federal and state levels considered these findings during their KIIs and recommended that:

- research should be conducted to develop a strategy for implementation of the UBE Act that recognises and takes account of the specific conflict- and crisis-affected context of Adamawa State;

- communities should have greater ownership of basic education – including input into the curriculum, the school calendar, and teacher recruitment and management – so their needs are better met.

The next phase of the ERICC programme in Nigeria will support governments and communities to co-produce the evidence required to implement these recommendations.

Policy-makers and other key stakeholders should reflect on how they can engage with and support communities, as they develop local approaches to improve the provision of basic education and enhance learning outcomes for all children.

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