



Community Stakeholders for Effective Monitoring: Lessons from the Universal Basic Education Funds Tracking (UBEFT) project in Lagos State

The purpose of this policy brief is to share learnings from implementing the UBEFT project and to highlight the potential of stakeholders at the community-level to facilitate citizen advocacy and to also demand public sector accountability and transparency.

Background

Universal Basic Education (**UBE**) is an education reform programme of the federal government of Nigeria established by the Compulsory, Free Universal Basic Education Act, 2004 (**UBE Act**).

The UBE programme seeks to ensure that basic education (for a continuous period of nine years) is freely and compulsorily available to all school aged children in Nigeria. The goal of the UBE programme is to lay the foundation for lifelong learning through the inculcation of appropriate learning, self-awareness, citizenship and life skills. The UBE programme has three components,

- (i) Early Childhood Care and Development Education;
- (ii) Primary Education; and
- (iii) Junior Secondary Education.

From a regulatory standpoint, the Universal Basic Education Commission (**UBEC**) coordinates the implementation of the UBE programme at the sub-national level (i.e., the state and local government) through the respective State Universal Basic Education Boards (**SUBEB**) and the respective Local Government Education Authorities (**LGEA**).

The UBE Act stipulates that the federal government shall finance the implementation of the UBE programme, with a block grant of not less than two percent of Nigeria's Consolidated Revenue Fund (**CRF**). According to Section 80 of the Nigerian Constitution, the CRF is a fund into which all revenues or other moneys raised or received by the federation is paid into (except funds otherwise specifically earmarked). It should be noted that the block grant of the federal government is for the purpose of



UBE projects, and for any state to qualify for a federal government block grant, such a state is required to contribute not less than 50% of the total cost of the project sought to be executed, as its commitment to the execution of the projects. Consequently, each State Universal Basic Education Board is expected to prepare and submit an Action Plan – a document that details the specific infrastructure and furniture projects planned for each year – to UBEC for vetting and approval; contribute 50% of the required funds for the projects to a designated account, and provide a detailed accounting of funds used in the previous year. After approvals and verification, each state receives funds from UBEC and then their State Universal Basic Education Board can begin the bidding processes to hire contractors who will implement the specified infrastructure projects across selected schools in the state.

Aside the FG block grant, other sources of finance as prescribed in the UBE Act are: (a) funds or contributions in the form of Federal guaranteed credits; and (b) local and international donor grants.



The Education Partnership (**TEP**) Centre with support from MacArthur Foundation has been commissioned to track the utilisation of the Universal Basic Education funds in Lagos State in order to improve public sector accountability and transparency. This is in line with the UBE Act implementation guidelines, that states that: *existing capacities in non-governmental organisations (NGOs), institutions of learning, and the civil society shall be fully mobilized for developing and executing the activities of the UBEC and the relevant state and local government agencies*. This policy brief therefore aims to share TEP Centre's learnings implementing the UBEFT project in Lagos state, as well as make a case for sub-national government pathways to institutionalising community stakeholder in monitoring UBE projects.



Overview of the On Nigeria programme and UBE Fund tracking in Lagos state

The On Nigeria programme funded by the MacArthur Foundation is a collaboration with stakeholders from civil society, donor partners, government, and academia with the aim to improve the momentum around Nigerian-led efforts to strengthen accountability and reduce corruption in the public sector. The On Nigeria strategy builds on Jonathan Fox's "sandwich theory," which identifies the relationship between a push from below and a squeeze from above to effect change. The push from below is the "voice," which represents citizens' actions to demand change and develop local solutions for combatting corruption. The squeeze from above is the "teeth," which represents the efforts of government and other high-level actors to develop and enforce laws and regulations, including implementing systems for transparency, monitoring compliance, and using incentives to discourage corruption and sanctions to punish perpetrators of corrupt practices. Given the complex and ubiquitous nature of corruption in Nigeria, the On Nigeria project cuts across five programme areas; Media and Journalism, Criminal Justice, Home Grown School Feeding, Electricity and Universal Basic Education Funds Tracking.

In 2018, Lagos State Universal Basic Education Board (Lagos SUBEB) officially welcomed the intervention of two organisations; TEP Centre and Human Development Initiative (HDI), collaborating to support the work done by the Lagos SUBEB in monitoring and promoting the effective implementation of the UBE programme in Lagos state through the UBEFT project. The UBEFT project which is now in its fourth year has demonstrated that

project monitoring by community actors in target schools, combined with responsive actions by government officials can create the accountability needed to ensure that infrastructure and furniture projects are completed timely and to standard.

The UBEFT project focused on infrastructure and furniture in order to enable effective monitoring of tangible government spending that citizens could easily verify. Our community monitoring strategy involved engaging parents, community-based organisations, school-based management committees and youth groups in target schools in select LGAs across Lagos state. We also carried out advocacy visits to local government, state, and federal officials to discuss corruption preventive measures, and sanctions in response to deviations from the state Action Plan observed during monitoring activities, hence spreading proven transparency and accountability practices to other schools.

Since 2018, TEP Centre has been monitoring UBE-funded projects in Lagos state through community-based volunteers. TEP Centre's approach to strengthening the agency and capacity of these 'Voice' Actors (i.e. community-based stakeholders) in the education sector in Lagos state encompasses a fine mix of community sensitisation and awareness programmes, trainings and workshops, as well as dissemination of Lagos State Action Plans and project monitoring reports.

Community mobilisation

Community mobilisation is a process through which we stimulate action in the communities by engaging with community leaders, groups and organisations on a participatory and sustained basis to monitor and report on education infrastructure in their Local Government Education Area. Typically, community mobilisation starts with a town hall meeting in target communities, then the recruitment and selection of volunteer monitors that have demonstrated sufficient interest in education development through our questionnaires and are also able to show proof of previous or ongoing community development activities they have participated in. Finally, the new cohort of volunteers then join our team of community-based monitors.



Community sensitization and awareness



This process involves creating awareness around the UBE Act and the roles of community stakeholders in its implementation. Consequently, it involves creating avenues for knowledge exchange, experience sharing, as well as contextual understanding of the educational challenges in the communities. This approach has helped us build trust within the communities and understanding that their rights, as enshrined in the UBE Act greatly improves their agency in their monitoring efforts in UBE contractors. Common stakeholder groups include parents, teachers, traditional leaders, youth groups, women associations, partisan and non-partisan groups etc.

Trainings and workshops

One way to strengthen the agency of community-based actors in promoting transparency and accountability is by trainings and periodic workshops that educate carefully selected volunteers on best practices for monitoring and reporting; specifically, within the context of the UBEFT project. Volunteers are also provided with monitoring tools such as monitoring manuals and project location booklets which have proven very useful in tracking and reporting the progress of UBE infrastructural projects in their communities. Across the nine LGAs, teams of community-based monitors have cascaded their learnings to other community volunteers, to enable them monitor government projects not limited to UBE projects.



Provision of Digestible Action Plan



In a bid to promote transparency on the UBE programme, TEP Centre breaks down the Lagos state SUBEB action plan into an 'easy-to-read' format that community members can read and use as a tool in locating and tracking UBE projects within their domain. The Action Plan being a mandatory document in accessing the UBE counterpart fund usually details project description, unit and total costs, beneficiary school, and duration of execution. Making this information easily accessible to the communities has spurred them to ensure that these projects are delivered timeously, and to also hold authorities accountable for deviations from the Action Plan.

This schedule of continuous trainings, workshops, sensitisation programmes, provision and distribution of Lagos SUBEB action plans has effectively helped to provide community stakeholders with the requisite skills, and information required to monitor UBE projects, thereby strengthening their agency and promoting accountability.



Rational for leveraging organised community groups to improve transparency in the implementation of UBE programme in Lagos state

The Lagos SUBEB is now in its fourteenth year (2005-2018) of accessing and utilising the UBE matching grant. Thus far, it has received the sum of ₦21,137,529,685.62 (Twenty-one billion, one hundred and thirty-seven million, five hundred and twenty-nine thousand, six hundred and eighty-five Naira, sixty-two kobo).

A study (Afolayan, 2014), which reviewed a decade of the UBE programme, concluded that “Nigeria does not possess the required executive capacity to effectively implement the UBE programme because of the overlapping functions of bureaucratic agencies”

The Nigerian education sector is set back by weak capacity at the institutional, organisational and individual levels. Graft, and lack of accountability in Nigeria have far-reaching impacts on access to and quality of public services, the well-being of Nigerians, and overall development. Hence the need for private sector, civil society organisations intervention to promote transparency in the UBE programme by holding the various actors accountable.

Globally, studies (GEP, 2008, Mbagwu F.O, 2016) have also shown that strengthening the agency of community stakeholders in the management and improvement of schools in their environment can ensure significant improvement in the development of school infrastructure, general welfare, learning outcomes and security. The federal government, in a bid to ensure effective utilization of the two percent of the CRF for UBE programme implementation, made significant efforts in mainstreaming the community self-help approach which was implemented under the World Bank-supported Primary Education Project II (**PEP II**). The approach

provided communities with opportunities to collaborate with ministries, departments and agencies (**MDAs**) in initiating funding and the execution of access, equity and quality-driven school development projects. Following the significant achievements of this programme, it was further sustained by the commission to encourage, organise and empower community stakeholders for improved active participation in the UBE service delivery.

Since 2018, TEP Centre through community partnership has tracked and monitored UBE spending in over 220 schools in several communities, impacting millions of lives across 10 local government areas in Lagos state.

Given our years of experience in promoting transparency and accountability on UBE Funds tracking programme through community actors that include members of school-based monitoring committee, parents' forum, community-based organizations, community youth association, school teachers and parents in the community.

we have learnt that providing community actors with valid information on the details of government expenditure (e.g. location of project, amount allocated, contractor in charge, etc.) is vital to strengthening the agency of community actors to support effective delivery of UBE projects in beneficiary communities

Furthermore, periodic community engagement and technical workshops which involve bringing together committee members of beneficiary schools, government officials and key community actors to discuss project implementation status and training them on monitoring best practices, including use of project monitoring tools, has helped to address issues of project diversion,

abandonment and incomplete delivery as well as aid the government's understanding of how to allocate resources based on the education needs of the community and to improve service delivery.

Hence, institutionalising community-based monitors should be considered as one of the pathways in achieving sustainable implementation of the UBE programme in Lagos state. Programmes are more likely to succeed if they reflect the development needs of the wider community and if community actors are involved in the delivery of these programmes. Potential benefits of institutionalising community-based monitors include:

- Improved quality and sustainability of public sector education service delivery.
- Potential contributions to the solutions to complex challenges such as out-of-school children, school security, pupil attrition etc.
- Enhanced prospects for public private partnerships in delivering development projects.
- Improved confidence in state government's ability to effectively respond to citizens' needs.

Policy Recommendations

Based on insights gained from supporting the UBE programme in Lagos state, TEP Centre makes the following policy recommendations for public sector actors:

- Leverage the existing community structures such as the School Based Management Committees, Parent Forums and youth groups to identify and select interested individuals to establish community-based monitoring teams.
- Establish technology enhanced reporting structures that would aid real-time notification of monitored activities carried out by community-based monitors.
- Encourage and facilitate public-private partnerships to provide opportunity for capacity development for the leadership and staff, across both sectors.
- Incorporate capacity building into the work plan so that knowledge is transferred and retained at the institutional level regardless of staff turnover.

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