


The Role of UNICEF in the Educational Development of the Federal Capital Territory, Nigeria



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ABSTRACT

Education is a major driver of national development in different parts of the globe. It is the fundamental factor that determines human capital development. Unfortunately, in many developing countries, the factors needed for educational transformation tend to be lacking, thereby undermining the intellectual empowerment of the masses. Consequently, UNICEF, an international governmental organisation has for decades continued to empower the minds of learners across the globe. This study used secondary literature to analyse the contributions of UNICEF to the development of education in the Federal Capital Territory (FCT), Abuja, Nigeria. It found that UNICEF has contributed multi-dimensionally in transforming education in the FCT. The study is significant because it will contribute to the body of literature on the role of international organisations and nation-building in Nigeria while promoting scholarly works in the area of educational development.

Keywords: Children, Education, Federal Capital Territory (FCT), UNICEF Nigeria

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INTRODUCTION

Education is one of the social institutions which helps to transform a nation. It is a weapon that has helped many sovereign states of the world to achieve their national goals. It prepares individuals and societies to cross the bridges that daily confront man, in the political, social, economic, environmental and general aspects of life.

Unfortunately, while education has developed quantitatively in Nigeria, its qualitative growth has remained challenged by numerous factors. To worsen the situation still further, economic decline in Nigeria since the early 1980s has impoverished the overwhelming majority of Nigerians and made qualitative education an unaffordable luxury for many families.¹ The implication becomes that only the elite class send their children to expensive private schools that are currently being built across the country for capitalist purposes. Unfortunately, the commercialisation of education in Nigeria has grown from the grassroots or basic schools to the university levels, where payment is made in millions of naira per year. Hence, the basic education in Nigeria reveals mixed results as regards the status of early child care, primary and non-formal education. The chief of these results was inter alia, a negligible provision of child care centres, and increasing uncondusive learning environments across the country due to a marked deterioration of physical facilities in many primary schools, absence of health and sanitation

¹ Owan Enoch, *Handbook of Educational Foundations* (Jos: Challenge Press, 1987). 104.

facilities, inadequate instructional material, unmotivated teachers due to extremely poor and uncompetitive salaries and gender/ religious disparities in different schools.

However, tremendous efforts to re-engineer the educational sector of Nigeria by the succeeding government have informed programmes like the Universal Primary Education (UPE), the Universal Basic Education (UBE), the Mass Literacy Programme (MLP), to mention a few. Equally, the education sector has correspondingly created institutions and bodies to facilitate the functionality of the educational system, but the best that the country has to show for these efforts is its marginal position in the world literacy chart, as one of the nine most illiterate countries in the world.²

It is obvious that some countries at the national and international levels have been more concerned about the falling standard of education and are using all resources within their reach to enhance educational development. Similarly, at the United Nations regional and sub-regional levels, efforts have been made to aid educational development. Government, as well as non-governmental interest and pressure organisations have not relented in their efforts towards this social development.

It is expedient at this juncture to posit that one of such organizations that has been at the forefront of global educational development in Nigeria is the United Nations Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF). UNICEF was created by the United Nations General Assembly in 1946 to meet the emergency needs of children in the aftermath of World War II. UNICEF believes that the protection of children is crucial to their survival, health, and wellbeing. And in October 1953, the organization became a permanent part of the UN system with a wider role to respond to the long-term needs of children, especially in the education sector.

It is expedient to note that the important task of the UNICEF is to work with the governments of nations to train teachers and make primary education free and compulsory for every child in the global village. It is in the light of the above that this research engaged in a historical investigation into the role of UNICEF in the educational development of FCT. Since the inception of UNICEF in 1946, the organization has not relented in its efforts to eradicate illiteracy and promote the development of education to some extent. What baffles most people is that after five decades of such efforts, the cases of falling standard of education are still on the increase, thus putting the lives of millions of children in danger not only in a country like Nigeria, but also among the developed countries of the world at large. The aim of this research is to assess the role of UNICEF in the educational development of F.C.T., Nigeria, from the year 2000-2008.

This research work is important because it will shed light on a number of educational activities which UNICEF has carried out in the Federal Capital Territory. Besides, the knowledge of this research will help in furthering our cognition on the working of international organizations within the Nigerian State. The work will add to the existing literature on international organizations, the UNICEF and foreign contributions to educational development in Nigeria, giving attention to the Federal Capital Territory.

METHODOLOGY

This study is a qualitative study. It is developed from a collection of interactions with existing ideas in a bid to create a new intellectual niche in the area of UNICEF and educational development. Consequently, the researcher searched the existing primary and secondary literature in a bid to identify the gap in existing literature. In the quest to identify these research gaps, data were collected from journals, books and edited books, as well as newspapers and other sources. These collected data were analysed and interpreted in a bid to select relevant parts. Those parts that were relevant for this study were further collated thematically and presented in the appropriate parts of this study in a bid to develop the content.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

It is imperative to posit that this research adopted an interdisciplinary theoretical interpretation in a bid to achieve the set objectives of the study. Hence, the study adopted the functionalist theory of

² Lea Garki, "Universal Primary Education," *Ref. No. KAC/LEA/UPE/3436* (Abuja: FCT, n.d.).

international relations as the guiding framework in the historical analysis of UNICEF and educational development in Nigeria.

The foremost theorist of functionalism, David Mitrany, was able to link functionalism to the prevention of war in the system. He maintained that international cooperation in terms of national co-activities is what could bring war and conflict to an end. The functionalists advocate for functionality of the units (be it political, economic, social, technical, educational, etc) in a more political sense. The functionalist deviated from the idealist and traditionalist, which concentrated on the war problems and essentially the push and pull effects of power relations within a system. Mitrany thus developed the doctrine of *ramification*, which Ernst B. Haas explained in his concept of *spillover*. He referred to it as “the expansive logic of sector integration” and suggests that if actors in international relations, on the basis of their interest, as well as inspired perceptions, “desire to adapt integrative learning in one context to a new situation, the lesson will be generalized.”³ The functionalist idea of Haas led Schmitter to hypothesize that “successive spill-overs or package deals encompassing new issues, as well as less conspicuous forms of spill-around, may provide the basis for a major push toward political integration.”⁴

However, the functionalist theorists were more concerned with the fact that cooperation within the international system in the areas of social, economic, political, and humanitarian matters, etc, is the major prerequisite towards solving the problems of war.⁵ However, they claimed that there is a need to define the roles of relative units in a system in order to maintain the system. Some of the advocates of this theory are Gabriel Almond, David Mitrany, Harold Laswell and David Easton, to mention but a few.

David Mitrany continued to develop the theory of functionalism in his works. According to Mitrany, the world in the 20th Century is characterized by growing numbers of technical, economic and social problems that could be resolved only through international cooperation across state boundaries.⁶ These global challenges could be managed through a team of highly trained experts and technicians, who would rather work with the leadership of states in managing a given existential challenge. Functionalists believed that the emergence of technical and socio-economic challenges across states would lead first to the international need for durable cooperation, devoid of political as well as conflictual postures and would be assigned to technical experts whose approaches would essentially be based on apolitical considerations. According to the theorist, therefore, those areas in the international system that constitute a common problem for the state should be brought together rather than ensuring political division among nations, and also shy away from the situation of vertical division of human society, which is characterised by the state's advocacy for social and economic demands of its citizens.⁷ As Mitrany observed, “the problem of our time is not how to keep nations peaceful apart, but how to bring them actively and responsibly together.”⁸ He thus advocated for a world body with its various organs. The functionalist sees the condition of illiteracy, diseases, poverty and other special maladjustments as a major contributory factor to war, pestilence and social instability. And to eradicate this, they call for a replacement by layers of social, humanitarian and economic activities which will address those problems causing world instability.

Today, pressing international problems are addressed by global actors outside the full-time politicized context of ideology or nationalism. Functionalists argue that international cooperation would increase the growth of institutional webs, structures, policies, organizations and attitudes that would lead to the management of the universal problem of mankind. Dougherty and Pfallzgraff documented that “successful cooperation in one functional setting would enhance the incentive for collaboration in other

³ Ernst B. Haas, *Beyond the Nation-State* (CA: Stanford University Press, 1964).

⁴ Philippe C Schmitter, “A Revised Theory of Regional Integration,” *International Organization* 24, no. 4 (1970): 836–68, <https://doi.org/DOI: 10.1017/S0020818300017549>.

⁵ Scott Burchill and Andrew Linklater, *Introduction: Theories of International Relations* (Palgrave MacMillan, 2005).

⁶ David Mitrany, *A Working Peace System* (London: Royal Institute of International Affairs, 1943); David Mitrany, *The Progress of International Commitment* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1933); David Mitrany, “A Political Theory for a New Society,” in *Functionalism: Theory and Practice in International Relations*, ed. A. J. R. Groom and Paul Taylor (London: University of London Press, 1975).

⁷ K.M. Ferike, *International Relations Theories: Discipline and Diversity* (Dunne: Kurki and Smith, OUP, 2020).

⁸ David Mitrany, *The Functional Theory of Politics* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1976).120-130.

fields. To the extent that tasks in specific functional arenas could be successfully completed, attitudes favourable to cooperation in other sectors would be developed.”⁹

Again, based on the summation of functionalists, they attempt to build that habit of cooperation in mankind and focus its attention on the interrelated functions of the various components that make up the world system. Again, for any social system, there is a set of functional requirements and operational conditions that must be satisfied if the system is to function effectively. The functionalist preaches the need to replace mutual international suspicion with growing international will and collective developmental trust. The idea is that sustainable apolitical international cooperation on one functional issue would in itself contribute to the rise of attitudes in favour of greater international cooperation over a widening spectrum of issues. From functional cooperation would come necessary international institutions in the form of organizations and regimes based on multilateralism in the terminology of Mitrany’s intellectual successors.¹⁰

It is obvious that UNICEF’s role towards meeting long time needs of children such as good health, provision of quality education to every child, training of primary school teachers, eradication of illiteracy in Nigeria that could cause backwardness and calamities, prevention of school drop out from school due to poverty etc are exhibition of functions of the UNICEF which is in line with the theory of functionalism. Domestic and international cooperation between UNICEF and other partner agencies has led to national and international alliances in the process of promoting children's welfare and needs in Nigeria, and the FCT in particular. These alliances are designed by UNICEF Nigeria to facilitate the attainment of child-friendly goals.

THE ROLE OF UNICEF

Before World War II, the world's children were facing increasing hunger, ill-health and poverty. After World War II, millions of people were still without proper shelter, fuel, clothing and food. The impact of this lack of basic resources of life on children and women was tremendous. The United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration (UNRRA) was established in 1943 to provide aid to many war-torn people across Western and Eastern Europe. “The creation in 1946 of the United Nations International Children’s Emergency Fund was an accident of early Cold War politics.”¹¹ Consequently, when the UNRRA was to wind up, people agitated at its final meeting in Geneva that the resources of the UNRRA should be used to improve the lives of children across the globe. The idea was that children of both the victor and vanquished camps need international aid, support and attention.

It has been shown that “UNICEF’s mission in Nigeria is to help government at all levels, organizations, communities and families to provide every child with education, equality and protection.”¹² Today, UNICEF is tackling the needs of children in Nigeria and other parts of the world alongside those of their parents, especially the mothers, in what could be seen as a comprehensive approach to children’s needs. UNICEF Nigeria is now increasingly managing children’s broader intellectual and psycho-social needs. It is this aim of UNICEF Nigeria to promote children’s intellectual needs that has motivated their support for formal and non-formal education in Nigeria.

It is because of the importance of education to national transformation that the government of Nigeria formulated the *National Policy on Education* in 1977, which was reviewed in 2004, to put education on a sound footing.¹³ Therefore, the cardinal objective of education in any given society remains the enhancement of individual human personality, which includes the transformation of mental capabilities, skills and abilities as well as the development of vital attitudes necessary for the attainment of societal needs and management of how human wants in a given geopolitical space would be attained optimally. Education is an important process in human behaviour since it pervades all human activities. Moreover, human perception of the world, customs, attitudes and beliefs, as well as personality traits

⁹ James E. Dougherty and Robert L. Pfaltzgraff Jr., *Contending Theories of International Relations: A Comprehensive Survey*, 4th ed. (New York: Longman, 1996).

¹⁰ J. P. Sewell, *Functionalism and World Politics* (London: Oxford University Press, 1966); Paul Taylor and A. J. R. Groom, *Global Issues in the United Nations Framework* (London: Macmillan, 1989); Paul Taylor, “Functionalism: The Approach of David Mitrany,” in *Framework for International Cooperation*, ed. A. J. R. Groom and Paul Taylor (London: Pinter Publishers, 1990), 125–38.

¹¹ Sewell, *Functionalism and World Politics*.

¹² UNICEF Nigeria, “Unicef In Nigeria,” Unicef for every child, accessed October 21, 2010, <https://www.unicef.org/nigeria/>.

¹³ Federal Republic of Nigeria, *National Policy on Education, NERDC* (Federal Press: Lagos, 2004).

and goals in life, are all influenced by education. Generally, education refers to the gaining of knowledge, understanding of skills through study, instruction or experience within a formal or informal environment.

Education is a tool for preparing people to face the long-term challenges that daily confront man. Therefore, quality education is a panacea to productivity and a source of potential for individuals and, by extension, the society at large. There is no gainsaying that Nigeria has had a glorious history of scholarship and academic achievement since the introduction of Western education during the colonial period. This is because many people in Nigeria have become literate in the country, while the citizens of the country are increasingly scattered across the globe, where they increase their human capital development and contribute to the societal development of host nations.

According to “Education is also a key to increased national and international productivity, population control, and other social goals. Promotion of education remains primarily a national function, but there are a number of international efforts.”¹⁴ UNICEF is one of the international actors that increasingly promotes the education of children. Salaudeen also states that “towards this end, UNICEF is guided by the goals of the World Summit for Children (WSC) and the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), now ratified by 190 countries and the world’s most universally ratified human rights treaty.”¹⁵ UNICEF is one of the international agencies promoting education in different countries of the world. The national and international efforts of UNICEF are paying off in the field of formal education.

It is worth noting that UNICEF is supporting all forms of education amongst Nigerian children. They try to improve the opportunities of many school-age children in Nigeria, towards their educational empowerment. UNICEF works in Nigeria to promote child-friendly schools. UNICEF has been increasing the building of boreholes in schools. These boreholes are cost-intensive and of fundamental importance to the health needs and environmental cleanliness of schools in Nigeria. Considering that children are inclined to play and get dirty, UNICEF intervention in the area of providing clean water helps in preventing the outbreak of sicknesses that are connected with dirt. Similarly, UNICEF has also engaged in the construction of separate toilets for male and female students, while encouraging the establishment of health clubs in many FCT schools. The construction of toilets in schools helps in managing the reckless pollution of the school environment due to indiscriminate defecation. UNICEF Nigeria equally initiated the establishment of School-Based Management Committees (SBMC) in many localities within the country. The idea of School-Based Management Committees (SBMC) is to bring in community partnership and contribution, as well as supervision of the formal education process in many schools across the country. Community leaders and members of the Parents Teachers Association (PTA) are therefore brought closer into the school development, management and protection process.

UNICEF also supports the Federal Government of Nigeria in the teacher development process. They support the teachers' training and re-training process. They provide school bags to students, textbooks, notebooks, teaching aids and other recreational materials. It is a regular sight to witness the presence of teaching aids and learning materials that are completely developed by UNICEF Nigeria in many schools in the FCT.

UNICEF assists in policy formulation in the field of basic education in Nigeria. This is because there is still a lack of systematic and reliable data within the Nigerian education sector. Hence, UNICEF gives aid, grants, and research assistance to support, strengthen and improve education data management and has helped in developing a new education management information system in Nigeria, especially in the field of basic education or children-centred educational issues.

UNICEF has built non-formal education centres in the FCT and across the country.¹⁶ The non-formal education centres are aimed at supporting and providing income generation skills to children, girls and women without the chance for formal education.¹⁷ Non-formal training of mothers and

¹⁴ John T. Rourke, *International Politics on World Stage*, 9th ed. (Dushkin: McGraw-Hill, 2003).

¹⁵ Nusirat Bola Salaudeen, “UNICEF and the Rights of Children: Nigeria’s Perspective” (Ahmadu Bello University, 2005).

¹⁶ Geoffrey Njoku and Samuel Kaalu, “UNICEF and Partners Launch Girls’ Education Initiative in Nigeria,” 2010, www.unicef.org/infobycountry/media_43620.html.

¹⁷ Njoku and Kaalu, “UNICEF and Partners Launch Girls’ Education Initiative in Nigeria.”

unskilled women is vital because, unless the mothers of children are skilled and healthy, they cannot care effectively for their children. “In focusing attention on these overarching principles and making clear that children cannot be seen in isolation from their families, communities and the larger environment in which they live.”¹⁸ Hence, it becomes a lever that is used to address the biting effect of poverty on children in FCT in particular and Nigeria in general.

In Nigeria, UNICEF started the implementation of International Inspiration with the British Council, the Federal Ministry of Education and the National Sports Commission in three states of Lagos, Kano and Sokoto, as well as the Federal Capital territory, Abuja. In these geopolitical areas, UNICEF Nigeria would bring their technical expertise to bear on the training of teachers on sports, develop training programmes and materials, refurbish school sports facilities and train community members on the dynamics of organizing and coaching young players.

UNICEF is a strong promoter of children’s right to engage in sports and recreational activities as enshrined in Article 31 of The Convention on the Rights of the Child. It could be argued that school sports and recreational activities amongst pupils and students promote the overall development of children, while boosting school enrolment and retention percentage, as well as encouraging teamwork and building leadership skills amongst students. School sports programs and the promotion of girl-child involvement in sports reduce the degree of school drop-out among boys and early marriages among girls. It equally motivates the morale of the physically challenged students in the teaching and learning process, thereby creating room for educational and social integration of all classes of children in our society.

UNICEF Nigeria has initiated and drafted the performance contract between state governments and local government area chairmen. “UNICEF and national donors have made large educational sector loans and grants to the government and to private aid agencies to assist with the financing of human resources development.”¹⁹ UNICEF has engaged in giving “aid to local contractors in relation to making of textbooks and teaching materials, which are known to be more cost-effective, freely and widely available.”²⁰ UNICEF Nigeria is a strong partner in the developmental transformation of children's education, especially in the Federal Capital Territory. UNICEF has been bridging the gap between children across the country. They have been steering the career path of learners in Nigeria.²¹

RECOMMENDATIONS

As a matter of national policy, the case of the millions of Nigerian children who are yet to find their way into the formal education mainstream of formal education should be placed at the forefront of educational planning. There is a need for improving the capacity and capability of children to initiate, sustain and replicate educational development plans that are not only relevant but should have a direct and massive impact on children’s needs across the country. The role of government in this connection is unique in many regards. First, policy guidelines emanating from the government’s blueprint on children's education would enhance UNICEF child-centred activities in FCT in particular and the country at large.

Flexible institutional structures of teaching and learning should be established through UNICEF-led private and public partnership, in order to respond to the needs of the physically challenged children in FCT and Nigeria at large. A comprehensive development network has to be established to help prioritize the needs of physically-challenged children in order to minimize the wastage of human capital amongst this class of children in the FCT.

¹⁸ Salaudeen, “UNICEF and the Rights of Children: Nigeria’s Perspective.”

¹⁹ Walter W. McMahon, “Investment Criteria and Financing Education for Economic Development,” in *Education, Society and Development: National and International Perspectives*, ed. B. G. Jandhyala and T. Lak (New Delhi: National Institute of Educational Planning and Administration, 2003), 479.

²⁰ Bruce Fuller, “What School Factors Raise Achievement in the Third World?,” *Review of Educational Research* 57, no. 3 (September 1, 1987): 255–92, <https://doi.org/10.3102/00346543057003255>; Paul Glewwe, “Schools and Skills in Developing Countries: Education Policies and Socioeconomic Outcomes,” *Journal of Economic Literature* 40, no. 2 (June 2002): 436–82, <https://doi.org/10.1257/002205102320161258>.

²¹ Kelechi Johnmary Ani, “Towards a Renaissance in African Studies: Bridging Divides and Advancing Collaborations,” in *African Renaissance*, vol. August Special Issue, 2024, 375-389.; Joseph C. H. and Anikelechi Ijeoma Genevieve, “Steering the Career Path of Nigerian Youths in a Recessed Economy For Nation Building,” *Journal of Nation-Building & Policy Studies* 3, no. 1 (June 13, 2019): 7–20, <https://doi.org/10.31920/2516-3132/2019/3n1a1>.

Though national and international government agencies have given cognisance to the all-important role of the girl-child and women at large, in the drive towards a better tomorrow, for now, satisfactory achievement has so far not attended this noble goal and effort. Increased private-public partnership, which should be led by UNICEF, should promote the eradication of the girl-child marriage and child pregnancy in order to eradicate the masculine domination and educational injustice based on sex discrimination.

CONCLUSION

Education is a fundamental tool for human capital development and societal transformation. It is the strength of the formal and informal education culture within a country that drives the speed of societal and national transformation of such a country. Consequently, this study has focused on the role of UNICEF in the educational development of Nigeria with a special emphasis on the FCT. The study traced the origin of UNICEF and documented a number of critical contributions of UNICEF in the area of material and non-material educational aids that have helped in strengthening the teaching and learning culture within the country. It also presented the curricula and co-curricula initiatives of UNICEF towards the transformation of the human capital development of Nigerians, especially in the FCT. The study concludes by advocating increased partnership between government as well as non-governmental agencies and UNICEF in the bid to continue to promote the intellectual and attitudinal transformation of Nigerians.

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