

Study of ESSPIN's Support to Capacity Development in Basic Education in Nigeria



Introduction

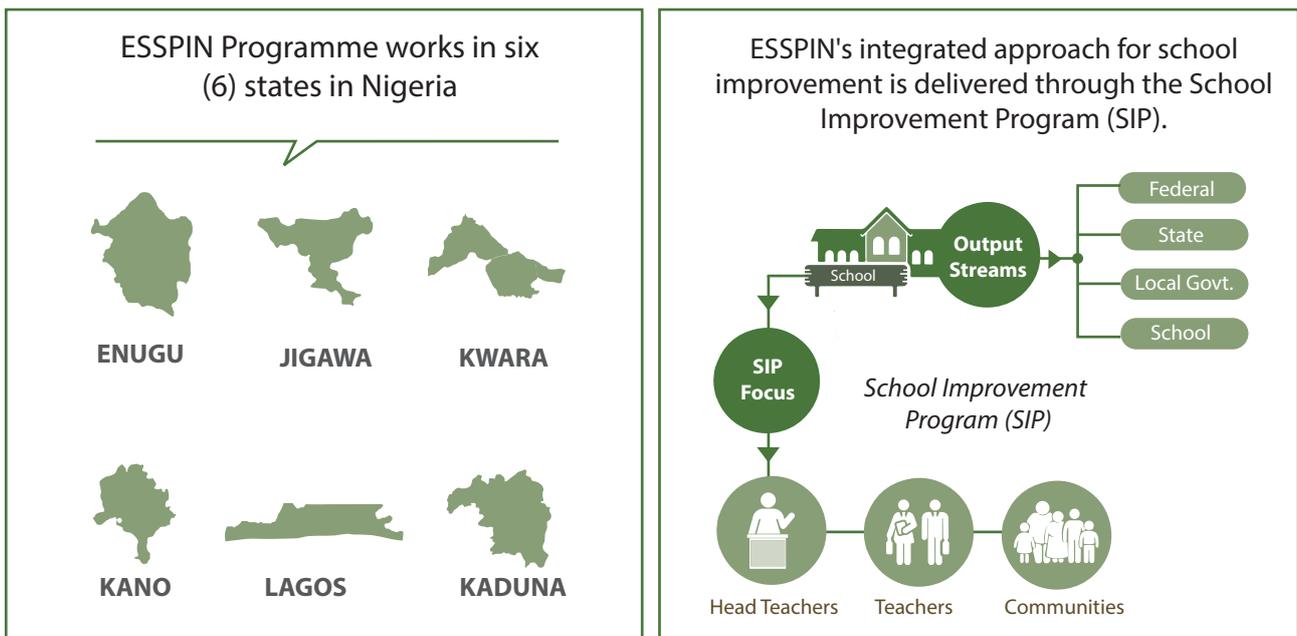
This policy brief outlines the findings of a study of ESSPIN's (Education Sector Support Programme in Nigeria) support to capacity development in basic education in Nigeria. ESSPIN is funded by the UK government's Department for International Development (DFID).

Introduction to the ESSPIN Programme

ESSPIN is a nine-year programme (2008-17) that seeks to bring about sustainable improvements in the delivery of education by building institutional capacity to support school improvement at the federal, state, local and school or community levels in Nigeria. The programme works in 6 Nigeria states – Enugu, Jigawa, Kaduna, Kano, Kwara and Lagos, in conjunction with government partners to deliver governance and systems strengthening reforms.

ESSPIN's integrated approach to school improvement is delivered via the School Improvement Programme (SIP), a package of interventions which includes support to improving head teacher effectiveness, teacher competence, functional school-based management, and inclusive practises.

ESSPIN's work has evolved over the years into four output streams: strengthening federal government systems to support state implementation of school improvement, improving state and LGA capacity for governance and management of basic education, strengthening the capability of primary schools to provide improved learning, and improving community participation in school improvement.



Study Methodology

The study assesses the impact of ESSPIN's support to capacity-building at the federal, state, local government area (LGA) and school levels. 'Capacity' is defined as the ability of agents to perform their functions, where organisations operate within an institutional environment that structures their incentive and scope for action.

Primary data was collected through interviews with government officials (Federal, State and LGA), head-teachers and SBMC members. Secondary data sources include the composite surveys, ESSPIN annual reviews, federal and state-level self-assessment reports, and other programme documents. Detailed case-study visits were also carried out in four LGEAs in Kano and Kwara (two per state).

Evidence at the Federal Level:

At the federal level, ESSPIN provided technical assistance to various federal agencies to strengthen national systems in four main areas:



Improving disbursement of the Universal Basic Education (UBE) Intervention Fund.



Supporting the establishment of national systems and policies for Monitoring Learning Achievement (MLA).



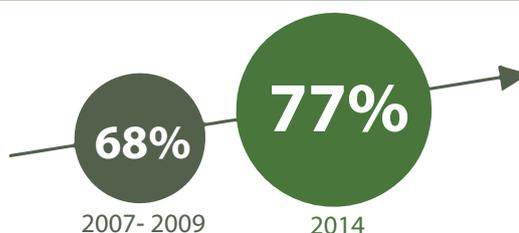
Providing Quality Assurance (QA) to Schools.



Supporting development of School Based Management Committees (SBMCs).

Overall, ESSPIN has been successful in terms of assisting federal agencies to develop improved policies and systems. The most significant progress has been the adoption of ESSPIN's SBMC training model by UBEC and roll-out to all 36 states. Releases of UBEC-IF funds to the six ESSPIN states also improved, from 68% in 2007-2009 to 77% in 2014, although this was impacted by fiscal challenges resulting from the 2014/15 fall in oil prices.

Disbursement of UBEC-IF Funds to the six (6) states improved from 68% in 2007-2009 to 77% in 2014



There has been some progress in development of policies of SBMCs, MLA and QA systems, even though implementation of QA systems has been particularly constrained by limited political will, and weak institutional arrangements, that is, an absence of policies, laws and framework to formally guide collaboration between agencies on financing and implementation of initiatives. For instance, although UBEC and FME worked together on QA systems, there has been no similar collaboration for MLA systems. Similarly, the FME is responsible for implementing the MLA systems but does not have sufficient funds, and so UBEC which has access to more funding is also developing its own national assessments, which could lead to issues of coordination.

Improved Collaboration on Quality Assurance Systems



Universal Basic Education Commission (UBEC) and Federal Ministry of Education (FME) worked together on Quality Assurance (QA) Systems.

Evidence at the State Level:

Education Sector Support Programme in Nigeria (ESSPIN's) most significant state level interventions include support for the establishment of State School Improvement Teams (SSITs), the planning and budgeting process, quality assurance systems, monitoring and evaluation units, and SBMCs.



ESSPIN's 2014 capacity self-assessment exercise concluded that the programme had met its targets in all four areas of capacity building, - with key elements of the major systems in place in all six states to varying degrees, organisational reforms, individual capacity of officers built, and strengthened policies, systems and frameworks. Capacity is strongest in the SUBEBs which are ESSPIN's main state-level partners, with primary responsibility for management and delivery of basic education. However, the 2015 self-assessment notes that more work is required to ensure that new systems are fully used, and that ESSPIN's inputs translate into improvements in performance of key education management functions.

Furthermore, ESSPIN has had notable success in leveraging state resources towards implementing the School Improvement programme (£4.8 million in 2014-15 from the six states) despite budget execution challenges.



One key constraint to progress is ineffective coordination and integration of functional areas within state institutions, and across different levels of government. For instance, delays in carrying out the Annual School Census mean that the Education Management Information System (EMIS) will not be updated for use in the planning cycle. Another constraint is weak budget execution. Improvements in planning and budgeting supported by ESSPIN capacity building in the six states have not always translated into changes in actual spending patterns, due to unrealistic resource projections and irregular budget releases. The situation has especially worsened since 2014, due to the fall in global oil prices, which account for the majority of the country's revenue (Most Nigerian states have limited internally generated revenues, and are heavily dependent on federal allocations, which in turn rely on oil revenues).

Further analysis of state-level trends revealed no clear link between improvements in state-level capacity and progress in learning outcomes as assessed by the Composite Surveys. Several factors may be responsible for this. New policies, processes and systems introduced at the state level are not yet being fully implemented, which limits their school-level impact.

Furthermore, state contexts vary - large increases in enrolments in Kano, Kaduna and Jigawa, and significantly higher levels of teacher subject knowledge in Enugu and Lagos will have implications for learning outcomes. It is fair to conclude that the trends in school-level outcomes do not invalidate ESSPIN's state-level capacity building efforts, and that further continuous interventions will be required before results translate to the school level.



Large increases in enrolments in Kano, Kaduna and Jigawa.

Evidence at the LGEA (Local Government Education Authority) Level:

LGEAs are a critical link in ESSPIN's results chain between states and schools. ESSPIN supports key LGEA functions such as planning and budgeting, monitoring and evaluation, service delivery, quality assurance and community involvement.



Stakeholders who were interviewed agreed that ESSPIN's capacity building work has led to significant improvements in key functions, however other studies have noted that more targeted support is needed to address certain weaknesses. First, capacity building for LGEAs should focus on developing skills for delivering on school improvement concerns and not just administrative tasks.

Secondly, there is need to reform LGEA management structures. Quality Assurance Officers (QAOs), School Support Officers (SSOs) and School Mobilisation Officers (SMOs) play a key role in supporting schools in the school improvement model. LGEAs need support to rationalise work processes, eliminate overlap and clarify responsibilities of QAs, SSOs, and SMOs; as well as a devolution from the states, of resources needed to carry out these responsibilities.

The study also assesses ESSPIN's expectations that capacity building support to SSOs and SBMCS will translate into improved capacity and outcomes at the school level. The study finds that SSOs have improved skill levels resulting from ESSPIN training, and have transitioned from an inspectorial role in terms of school supervision to a more support/advisory function.



School Development Plans created

SSOs have supported schools in the creation of School Development Plans (SDPs) and the process of school self-evaluation (SSE). They have also supported the introduction of Professional Development Meetings (PDMs) in schools, and the creation of school clusters for ease of management.



Positive ratings for ESSPIN support to SBMCs received

In schools visited by the study team, ESSPIN's support to SBMC activity received consistently positive ratings. There are reports of improved community engagement and women's participation in school governance, improvements in female enrolment and retention, improved teacher attendance due to SBMC monitoring, and successes in fundraising for schools. However, the study notes that some SBMC members seek financial rewards for their work, which raises questions about the sustainability of community driven school governance.

Evidence at the LGEA (Local Government Education Authority) Level (contd.)



ESSPIN's impact on learning is constrained



Teachers have limited skills and motivation

However, ultimately the impact of ESSPIN's interventions on pupil's learning outcomes appears to be constrained by factors outside of its control, such as poor teacher motivation and content knowledge, as shown by evidence from the Composite Surveys (CS).

Many teachers have low skills that limit potential benefits from enhanced training opportunities, and there is limited motivation for teachers and head teachers to engage with new processes. There are also weak disciplinary structures, which limit opportunities for addressing negative attitudes of some teachers and headteachers.

Finally, implementation of SDPs is restricted by lack of funding.

Evidence at the School Level

At the school level ESSPIN has been providing school leadership training for head teachers, pedagogy and content knowledge training for teachers, and training and mentoring for SBMCs.



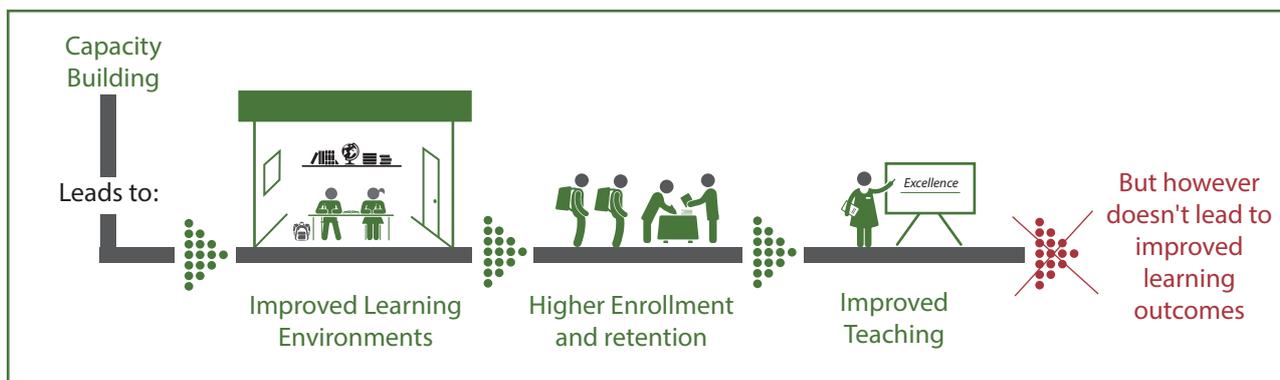
The study found that head teacher training was translating into improved capacity, with head teachers preparing SDPs, SSEs, action plans and annual reports more regularly, and having a better understanding of their role in the implementation of the SIP. However motivation continues to be undermined by low salaries and long delays in salary payments, poor funding, limited resources, poor infrastructure, and political interference in teacher management processes, particularly disciplinary action. Furthermore, CS2 results note that there had been no significant improvement in the number of effective head teachers between 2012 and 2014, which raises a key question about why head teachers' understanding of their roles not reflected in their behaviour in schools.

There is some positive evidence showing that teachers have been attending training and sharing this knowledge with colleagues. However, teacher competency in key areas of literacy and numeracy remains low, and teachers are reluctant to participate in training due to limited financial incentives.

SBMCs also appear to be playing a positive role in terms of monitoring school performance, observing funds, providing teaching resources, scholarships, and raising funds for schools.



Finally, there is some evidence that school-level capacity outputs are translating into better school outcomes. Improved learning environments in schools is leading to higher enrolment and retention of pupils, and improved professionalism of teachers is resulting in increased teaching time in classrooms. However the data from the second composite surveys on pupils' learning outcomes points to little significant improvement or in some cases, worsening of these outcomes.





KEY FINDINGS

ESSPIN's capacity building support had led to significant strengthening of organisational capacity in basic education, especially at the state level. At the federal level, ESSPIN has contributed to improved policies, and systems, although implementation has been limited. At the state level, ESSPIN support has improved states capacity to perform key functions – planning and budgeting, quality assurance, service delivery and community involvement. However, progress has been slower at LGA and school levels. Based on limited evidence, the study draws conclusions about the factors which have influenced ESSPIN's outcomes and impact.

Capacity building at various levels has not consistently translated to improvements in learning outcomes for children due to:



Variations in political will and commitment from government to systematically adopt and implement ESSPIN-led reforms.



Wider institutional factors such as lack of clarity in organisational roles and responsibilities, and weakness of public finance management systems, which lead to poor management of the education system.



Weakness in core skills, competencies and motivations of teachers and head-teachers, which undermines their ability to benefit from ESSPIN's support despite strengthened management

The impact of the SIP package (which focused on professional development for teachers and schools) on learning outcomes has been constrained by factors including:



Limited resourcing, leading to poor school infrastructure and large class sizes, shortages of teaching and learning resources, and erratic budget execution leading to lengthy delays in payment of teachers' salaries and allowances.



Poor HR management, for instance bureaucratic and delayed promotions processes with no clear rewards for high performing teachers or head teachers, which leads to low motivation.



Weak recruitment processes, leading to hiring of teachers lacking basic competencies in literacy and numeracy, and head-teachers with poor leadership and management skills; thus limiting ability of staff to benefit from professional training and support.

Lessons Learnt

1

High level political commitment is necessary to sustain capacity development initiatives.

2

Limited LGA capacity has been an important constraint on performance, thus there needs to be increased focus on decentralisation of functions and resource control, strengthened accountability, and capacity building for LGAs

LESSONS LEARNT



3

HR management for education needs greater attention – issues of teacher recruitment, deployment, professional development and career progression must be addressed.

4

Greater support is needed for primary school teachers (which accounts for low levels of basic skills and knowledge) to improve approaches to teaching literacy and numeracy, in the appropriate language of instruction, and to large classes.

5

Further research is needed to study and document the influence of community-level accountability on school performance, using the case of the SBMCs on primary schools across the country.

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