



EDUCATION DIALOGUE

Combating the effects of COVID-19 on education in
Nigeria: the role of ICT and alternative energy

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PREAMBLE

Act Hub Africa held her signature programme The Policy Dialogue. The event which was organized virtually on Wednesday, June 3, 2020, focused on the topic: **“Combating the effects of COVID-19 on education in Nigeria: The role of ICT and alternative energy”**. The justification for this dialogue is to bring to fore the salient issues around the ever-increasing gap in education between the urban and rural people and how government can creatively reduce this gap through the use of ICT and alternative energy in the hard-to-reach community.

The dialogue had in attendance participants from all over Nigeria with John Oluwafemi OLLA, Team Lead Act Hub Africa an Associate of Accountability Lab Nigeria as the host and moderator.

Our brief:

Nigerians currently experience epileptic power supply, not in the rural communities alone but the urban centres. It is an obvious truth that quite a high percentage of about 40% Nigerians are without power supply as the government continue to find a lasting solution to the problem of power in Nigeria.

Power is one major component that drives all sector of the economy such as trading and industrialization, communication, agriculture, service delivery, banking, ICT, education to mention a few.

Our policy note focuses on the relationship between power and education as well as flattening the spike in education and the digital gap that exist between urban and rural people.

At Act Hub Africa we believed the increasing access to power which has been taken for granted for a very long time will continue to be the major factor that will be increasing the gap education between "The haves and Have nots" in our society.

Background to our recommendation

Access to reliable and affordable power is fundamental to the attainment of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) which was signed into by the Nigerian government. It is, therefore, a race against time (2030) for all member state in the attainment of the 17 goals of the Sustainable Development Goals geared towards holistic development for both the developed and the developing nation of the world.

Quality education is one of the global goals designed to help entrench quality education for all, without leaving no one behind. The education solution proposed is geared towards bridging both education and digital education as well as creating a standard that's basic enough for children to forge ahead in life. Therefore, access to an uninterrupted power supply is an essential ingredient in driving the process of delivering quality education (SDGs 4). Just as education is a social service, the government need to work on how to make it qualitative which is partially dependent on access to electricity for learning institutions at all level, although this appears to be a must for a developed country where all instructional and educational materials are powered by electricity. It is therefore expedient for government in the developing nation (with a focus on Nigeria) to design home-grown solutions that can address the issue of lack of access to power in our schools and society at large.

Our Premises

According to research done in Bangladesh, solar power bulbs led to an increase in children's evening study time. Both boys and girls studied for 7-8 minutes more with the systems. (Samad et al., 2013). Access to grid electricity in rural Vietnam helped to improve educational outcomes. World Bank study of

over 1,000 households over three years found that rural electrification helped to increase school attendance for both boys and girls. The research also found that grid access boosted household incomes (Khandker et al., 2013).

Solar lighting increased study hours in India. An early study in India estimated that using a 5-7 watt panel almost doubled the average number of study hours per night from 1.5 to 2.7 hours. Teachers report improvements in performance, attendance, and motivation from solar lighting in Tanzania and Kenya. (Solar Aid, Sunny Money, Impact Report, autumn 2015).

It is obvious that there is a strong link between the power supply (energy) and educational outcomes, this is based on the premises that availability of light enables students to study after school hours, thereby improving educational outcomes.

It has often been argued that providing bright, clean lighting can help children do their homework more effectively than alternatives such as dim kerosene candles or no lighting source. Some of the potential pathways that could explain a link between household energy access and educational outcomes include:

- Lighting enables studying after school hours. Solar lamps might help children focus on homework better compared to kerosene and candles which are dim, pollutant, and have high marginal costs. A common reason students report for not finishing their homework is the lack of kerosene.
- Energy improves the productivity and efficiency of other work, so more time is available for education and studying.
- Energy can power devices or IT services that enable learning (educational media, etc.).
- Energy can improve educational outcomes indirectly through improving health and well-being. Solar lamps may improve indoor air



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quality and health, for instance, making children better able to study and attend school.

- Application of technology in classroom arouses the interest of students to attend class and be glued to lesson instructions.

Our recommendation for educational improvement during COVID-19 and beyond

We believe that if the problem of the gap between the rural and urban children in terms of education and digital education is going to be reduced we need to start looking for a way to create a model where the people in the Rural community can have their chance to access digital and quality education without extra cost. This will be possible if there is provision for a sustainable and home-grown technological solution that can work in a no-tech or low-tech classrooms.

During our education dialogue the discussants recommended that the following solutions should be employed in solving digital education problems in the hard-to-reach communities:

- It was recommended that a central database (big data) should be designed in such a way that curriculums and subject contents are uploaded in the central database which will be robust enough for multiple nodes to access it.
- We suggested that for the government to solve the problem of digital gap between the urban and rural children; the government must work on creating a mobile service where technology can be taught in a mobile and open-space situation.
- The government can adapt and adopt the Opon-Imo model tablet which will be designed and customized as well as preloaded with the necessary educational content desired for the children in the state.
- We suggested that a big screen can be made available for each community with



connectivity to the main database which can be used to facilitate in the hard-to-reach communities with the help of well-designed network which may not necessarily be the internet.

- It was also suggested that renewable energy powered devices can be designed which can last for times two (2x) of the time they were charged.
- We suggested provision of alternative energy that can power innovative education such as wind energy, hydro-energy, solar energy etc.
- We also suggested that the buy-in into the adapted-solution driven by existing civil societies these hard-to-reach communities without having to reinvent the wheel which will promote collaboration in achieving both quality education (Goal 4) and the sustainable development goals (SDGs)
- It was recommended that government should uniformly develop digital education content that can speak and address the employment and economic demand.
- enrolling teachers in low-cost innovative and or digital education by partnering with organizations who are ready to support the government in various countries such as Microsoft, Google, Facebook etc.
- Train teachers on how to use low-technology in no-technology classrooms in delivering their learning instructions.

Conclusion

Although COVID-19 seems to hit the world unexpected leaving everyone to every to a situation of combating the effects of COVID-19 especially on education. The effect was not devastating on education the other developed nations of the world whereas reverse is the case for us in Nigeria because before COVID-19 Nigeria had not fully introduced

ICT into the process of learning and instructing. Although the government took the bull by the horn by using mass media to educate the pupils and students in Nigeria but this can only solve the problem for those who have access to constant electricity and or those who can afford to fuel their generator. Therefore, it is import to consider this dialogue recommendations concerning innovative solutions that government adopt and adapt to bridge the gap in digital education created by lack of access to power or alternative energy.

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