

# Overcoming Policy Paralysis to Reduce Out-of-School Children (OOSC) in Nigeria <sup>1</sup>

## Executive Summary:

This brief examines the link between underfunding and high Out-of-School Children (OOSC) rates in Nigeria. It argues that insufficient budgetary allocation and inefficient resource management contribute to policy paralysis in the education sector. The brief proposes solutions including data-driven budgeting, involvement of education professionals, and exploration of alternative funding models to increase educational access and achieve SDG 4 (Quality Education).

## Introduction:

Nigeria faces a challenge regarding out of school children. According to recent estimates, approximately 20.2 million children are out of school. According to UNICEF, Nigeria is home to one-fifth of the global population of out-of-school children. One key factor is insufficient funding for basic education, despite recommendations and commitments like the UNESCO 15-26% budgetary benchmark. This persistent underfunding stems from policy paralysis manifested as low spending, lack of reform, and mismanagement.

## Causes of Policy Paralysis in Education Funding:

### Low Public Expenditure:

Nigeria consistently falls short of the recommended education budget allocation, hindering efforts to improve the quality and accessibility of education

nationwide. Despite the importance of education in driving economic growth and social development, the government's allocation to the education sector remains inadequate. This underfunding directly impacts various aspects of the education system, including infrastructure development, teacher training, and curriculum improvement, leading to disparities in educational outcomes across regions and socio-economic groups.

### Mismanagement and Corruption:

Limited funds allocated to education are further depleted by rampant mismanagement and corruption within the education system. Despite efforts to increase budgetary allocations, inefficiencies and corrupt practices often divert resources from their intended purpose. Funds meant for infrastructure development, teacher salaries, and educational materials frequently disappear due to embezzlement, bribery, and other forms of corruption. This mismanagement undermines the quality of education and exacerbates the challenges that out-of-school children (OOSC) face in accessing learning opportunities.

### Politicization of Budgeting:

Party politics and allegiance often supersede needs-based budget planning in Nigeria, leading to the politicization of education budgeting processes. Budget allocations are frequently influenced by political considerations rather than evidence-based educational needs assessments. As a result, resource

<sup>1</sup> This policy brief is based on the following paper:

Assessing the Phenomenon of Out-of-School Children in Nigeria: Issues, Gaps, and Recommendations. Nwoke, C. Oyiga, S. & Cochrane, L. (under review).

allocation may favor regions or constituencies aligned with the ruling party, while underserved areas continue to face neglect. Moreover, there is often a lack of continuity between successive governments, leading to the abandonment of crucial education projects initiated and budgeted for by previous administrations. This politicization of budgeting exacerbates inequalities in education access and perpetuates the cycle of educational disadvantage for OOSC.

#### **Lack of Data-Driven Allocation:**

The budget allocation process in Nigeria needs more transparency and is not guided by adequate performance data or evidence-based assessments of educational needs. Without accurate data on school enrollment, dropout rates, and learning outcomes, policymakers struggle to allocate resources effectively to address the needs of OOSC. As a result, budget allocations may not align with the areas of greatest need, leading to inefficient use of limited resources and exacerbating educational disparities. Improving data collection and analysis processes is crucial to ensuring that budget allocations are targeted toward addressing the root causes of OOSC and improving educational outcomes for all children.

#### **Impacts of Policy Paralysis on OOSC**

##### **Inadequate Resources:**

The policy paralysis resulting from low public expenditure, mismanagement, corruption, and politicization of budgeting contributes to inadequate resources in the education system, directly impacting OOSC. Insufficient funding weakens infrastructure, reduces teacher availability, and limits access to learning materials, exacerbating barriers to education for marginalized children. Without adequate resources, schools struggle to provide quality education and support services, further marginalizing OOSC and continuing the cycle of poverty and inequality.

##### **Limited School Expansion:**

The inability to expand school infrastructure due to limited funds hinders efforts to reduce the number of OOSCs in Nigeria. Insufficient investment in new school construction and rehabilitation projects, especially in underserved communities, limits access to education for children living in remote areas or marginalized communities. OOSCs cannot access formal education opportunities without adequate school facilities, further embedding educational disparities and social exclusion. Addressing the policy paralysis and systemic challenges in education budgeting is essential to expanding school access and improving educational outcomes for all children in Nigeria.

#### **Recommendations**

##### **Performance-Based Budgeting (PPBS):**

Implementing a performance-based budgeting approach is crucial for improving the efficiency and effectiveness of education spending. By linking funding directly to educational goals and performance indicators, policymakers can ensure that resources are allocated where they will have the most significant impact. PPBS involves setting clear, measurable objectives for education outcomes and designing budgets that prioritize investments in programs and initiatives proven to drive progress toward these goals. This approach encourages transparency and accountability in budget decision-making, as funding decisions are based on evidence of what works. Additionally, PPBS allows for regular monitoring and evaluation of program performance, enabling policymakers to make data-driven adjustments to resource allocation over time to optimize educational outcomes.

##### **Education Budgetary Panel:**

Establishing local panels comprised of education professionals and stakeholders can provide valuable expertise and insight into communities' specific needs

and priorities. These panels can serve as advisory bodies tasked with reviewing and recommending needs-based budgets and projects tailored to the unique circumstances of each locality. By involving educators, administrators, parents, and community members in the budgeting process, policymakers can ensure that funding decisions are informed by grassroots perspectives and aligned with the real needs of schools and students. Education Budgetary Panels can also help foster greater transparency and public engagement in the budgeting process, building trust and accountability within the education system.

### **Explore Alternative Funding Models:**

In addition to traditional government funding mechanisms like the Universal Basic Education (UBE) program, exploring alternative funding models can help

diversify and expand available educational resources. Community-based funding initiatives, for example, empower local communities to take ownership of education projects and mobilize resources to support schools in their area. Needs-based funding models prioritize resources for underserved communities and marginalized populations, ensuring that resources are directed to where they are most needed. By exploring these alternative funding models alongside existing programs like UBE, policymakers can tap into new sources of funding and tailor financing mechanisms better to meet the diverse needs of Nigeria's education system. Moreover, such exploration can stimulate innovation and collaboration in education financing, fostering partnerships between government, civil society, and the private sector to drive sustainable education access and quality improvements.

## **Conclusion**

Addressing policy paralysis through data-driven budgeting, collaboration with education professionals, and exploring alternative funding models presents a promising path for Nigeria to enhance its education system and reduce the number of Out-of-School Children (OOSC). By adopting a performance-based budgeting approach that links funding to educational goals and outcomes, policymakers can ensure that resources are allocated efficiently and effectively to areas where they will have the most significant impact. Establishing education budgetary panels comprising local experts and stakeholders will provide valuable insight into the specific needs of communities and ensure that grassroots perspectives inform funding decisions. Additionally, exploring alternative funding models, such as community-based and needs-based funding, alongside existing programs

like the Universal Basic Education (UBE) initiative can diversify available resources and better address the diverse needs of Nigeria's education system. By leveraging these strategies, Nigeria can increase educational resources, improve access to education, and ultimately reduce the number of OOSCs, thereby contributing to achieving Sustainable Development Goal 4. However, to maximize the effectiveness of these efforts, it is vital to expand the outreach of data collection for OOSC, ensuring that all children, especially those in remote and marginalized communities, are accounted for in education planning and resource allocation. Nigeria can make significant strides toward providing quality education for all its children through a multi-pronged approach that combines policy reform with targeted resource allocation and expanded data collection.