

ESSPIN
Experiences

**Planning for better schools:
Developing Medium-
Term Sector Strategies**



esspin

Education Sector
Support Programme
in Nigeria



UKaid

from the Department for
International Development

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An effective education system requires a comprehensive network of plans covering all aspects of education service provision at all management levels. Over the past two years, ESSPIN has been supporting six Nigerian states, Jigawa, Kaduna, Kano, Kwara, Lagos and Enugu, in reforming and improving their education systems.

The development of a hierarchy of closely integrated plans for improving the education service has been fundamental to these improvements.

The starting point for ESSPIN's support was the preparation in 2009 of a three-year rolling plan for each state – rolling because each year it is extended for one further year. This rolling plan is known as a 'Medium-Term Sector Strategy' or MTSS.

This initial support has led to a planning revolution in the six states. The MTSS has involved all the state-level institutions involved in delivering education, from the universities and colleges of education to the Ministries of Education, the State Universal Basic Education Boards and the other agencies and parastatals.

Those individual institutions recognised that they needed their own strategic plans, in order to contribute effectively to state education planning and these are now being finalised both at state level and in many of the Local Government Education Authorities. The strategic plans have in turn led to more detailed departmental work plans along with plans for organisational restructuring, personnel and financial management. Underpinning this work is the development of school development plans by local communities and their School-Based Management Committees.



Left
Decades of neglect
have destroyed
school infrastructure –
but not the spirit of
the children.

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There had been previous educational plans in the Nigerian states. Some had prepared ten-year plans based upon visionary state-wide assessments of their needs. But any plan must be based on a careful analysis of the needs that the plan is intended to meet – in planning terms this is often called a 'situational analysis'.

In the absence of solid evidence of those needs and accurate supporting data, plans became little more than wish-lists with planners basing their analysis on anecdotes and hunches. Priorities were determined by the numerous demands of the most articulate community members and the most influential politicians and the wish-lists grew. Where data had been collected, the findings were uncomfortable, so the tendency was to suppress them – better to plan in a void than be labelled as a failing state. And the plans contained no serious assessment of the funding required to deliver them.

Consequences of poor planning

The consequences of poor planning can be seen in every corner of each of the states. In the absence of sound educational plans, resources have been withheld from education – why provide money when we don't know what it will be used for? And in the absence of evidence-based plans, politicians have made arbitrary and sometimes illegitimate decisions about the resources earmarked for education, diverting them into vanity projects or private pockets.

So the schools have deteriorated. In some local government areas most primary schools have no potable water and few, if any, toilets. Without planning, teacher distribution bears no relation to pupil numbers – in some primary schools there are as few as seven pupils per teacher, while in others there are over 100. Most disturbingly, parents are responding to the poorly planned, under-resourced education system by fleeing to the private sector, spending hard-earned income on extra tuition to overcome the deficiencies of the classrooms or moving completely to the rapidly increasing number of private schools.

Below
Classes of 100
plus are common
in some areas.

Far below
On average, one-
third of the schools
in ESSPIN focused
states do not
have functioning
blackboards.

Right
Two-thirds of
primary schools
in some states
have no toilets
at all.



All State Ministries of Education have Departments of Planning, Research and Statistics. But, as one Director of PRS said: 'We don't plan, we can't carry out research and we have no reliable statistics'.



Section 2: The challenge of the first MTSS – ESSPIN's approach

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The first round of MTSS preparation in 2009 had to cope with the absence of data and the reluctance of planners to make hard choices. Any effective MTSS requires evidence of needs, specification of priorities over the next three years in meeting those needs and some indication of the funds likely to be available – the 'budget envelope'. The really difficult task is to match the highest priority needs with the limited funds likely to be available.

Setting goals

The planning teams shaping the first medium-term strategies worked long and hard to trim their needs to the likely budget envelopes. The planning procedures started by bringing together education stakeholders, in an initial orientation workshop with broad representation, to spell out their key needs in terms of educational provision across the board. These were then shaped into a number of 'goals' – the end towards which the plan is intended to progress. Separate work groups were then formulated for each goal. Their task was to analyse that goal to determine a number of key objectives – the key policies intended to achieve the goal.



Left
A decent blackboard
can make a
big difference.

What is an MTSS?

- 1**
It is a three-year articulation of the education sector's goals and objectives.
- 2**
It contributes with the MTSS of the other sectors to the state-wide Medium-Term Expenditure Framework.
- 3**
It includes a detailed annual plan and budget for Year One and less detailed frameworks for Years Two and Three.
- 4**
It is updated annually, drawing on MDA plans, monitoring and evaluation evidence and emerging State-wide and national budgetary constraints and opportunities, so that during Year One the Year Two framework is reviewed and adjusted to become the new Year One annual plan/budget, while a new Year Three framework is added to the second MTSS.
- 5**
It comprises two closely-linked activities – planning and costing, to be undertaken by State Ministry task groups led by those whose work responsibilities/job descriptions specify these activities.
- 6**
The recommendations from these task groups must be shaped by the likely 'budget envelope' and reviewed and reconciled by the most senior policy-makers.

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Objectives, targets and activities

The MTSS is a three-year plan, so the next step was to set year-by-year targets whereby the objectives could be achieved over the three years. The activities needed to reach those targets were then identified and broken down into specific tasks. At this level, each of the tasks could be costed and the total cost of the plan calculated. The separate work groups came together again to review the objectives, targets, activities and tasks, and to compare the total costs with the likely budget envelope. In some of the states, an education planning simulation was used to assist this, but without accurate data inputs it proved to be of only limited usefulness.

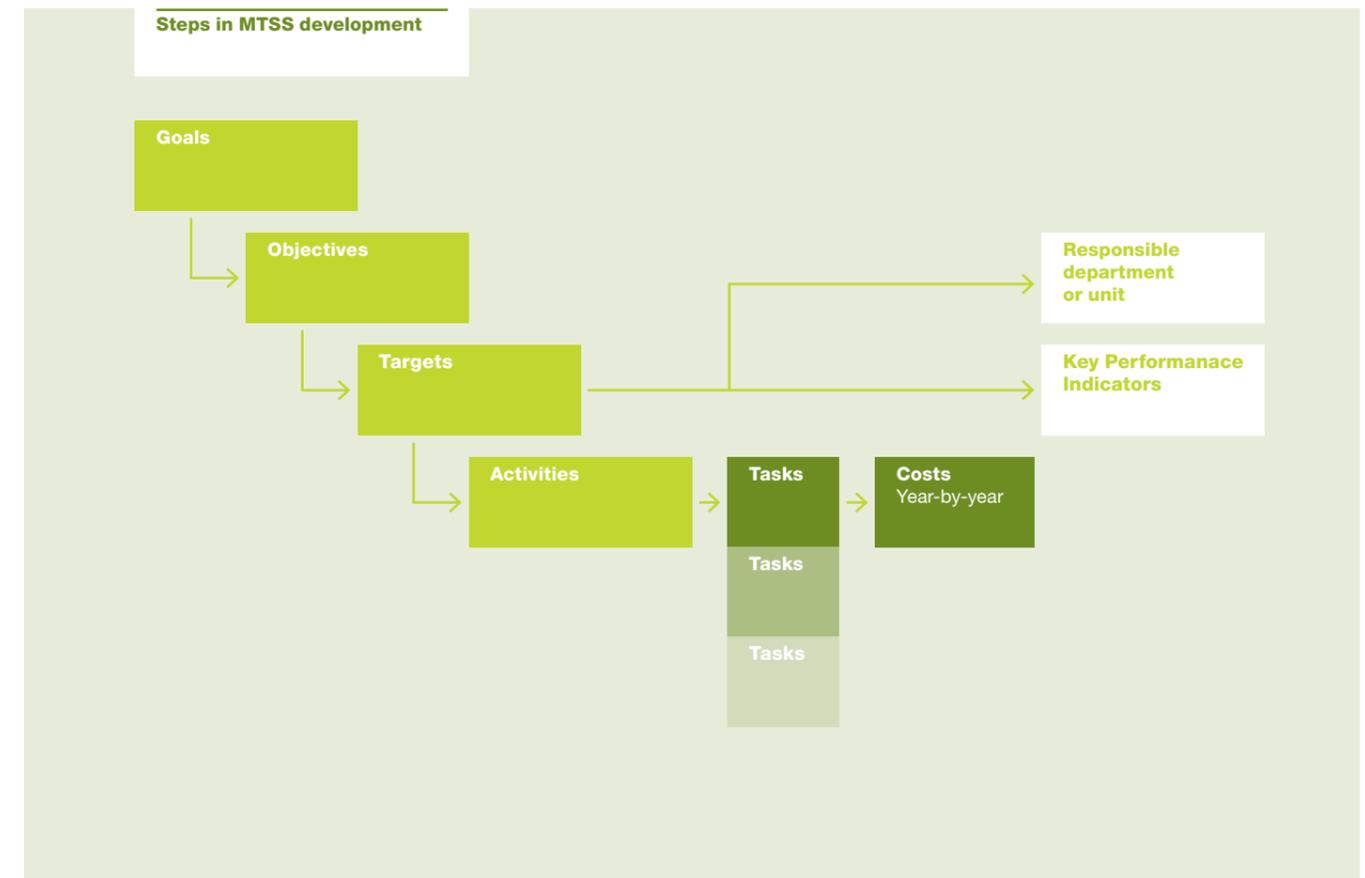
In most states, the hard task of selecting only the highest priorities from those prepared by the work groups was left to a ‘Policy Sub-Committee’, comprising the most senior policy-makers. Intensive analysis of costs and likely benefits from given cost levels led to the selection of three tiers of activities – highest priorities, next highest and the rest. Working with the senior policy-makers in this way, the initial wish-lists were prioritised and the highest priorities selected to match the likely available funds.

This was prepared in advance of the State budget allocation to the education sector, so that a relatively generous allocation could fund more than just the highest priorities. In other words the state 2010 education budget could be built on the basis of the MTSS.

Meanwhile, the technical staff completed the MTSS document by drafting the narrative. This included an overview of the challenges and problems facing the state, to be addressed through the MTSS, and a short executive summary to persuade policy-makers without the time to read the full report. They also took each of the targets and specified the ‘Key Performance Indicators’ (KPIs) for each target. These specify the amount of year-by-year improvement towards achieving the target and the means for measuring that improvement. For example, the plan might specify a target of 80% of primary schools to have functioning chalkboards over the three years. The KPIs might state a shift to 65% in Year 1; 75% in Year 2 and 80% in Year 3, with the data coming from the annual school census.

The final step in the MTSS development process, as indicated below, is the identification of the department or unit within the Ministry or agency responsible for achieving the agreed targets.

Right
Good teaching and learning needs resources to get to schools.



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Costing and funding problems

Inevitably, the initial overall total costs of the planned activities were way above the likely available funding, as indicated by the State Ministry of Economic Planning. (Where this was not available, the planning teams used the total money in the current year's education budget as a rough and ready guide as to the likely budget envelope).

In Nigeria, as elsewhere, the preparation of annual state budgets is a very political process. Allocations to the state Ministries are preceded and followed by intense lobbying by groups within and outside the relevant Ministries. Although in theory the carefully costed plan for Year One of the MTSS should form the basis for the education annual budget, in practice this has not necessarily happened. The higher education lobby will press for more funds, buildings and facilities for the tertiary colleges. Those with a vested interest in early childhood education will press for nurseries and kindergartens. Construction firms will press for more spending on infrastructure. As elections approach, politicians are particularly susceptible to such pressures.

In consequence, only in one of the initial five states did the eventual education budget match closely the first year costs of the MTSS. Planners and finance staff then had the job of revisiting the MTSS to determine the activities and programmes that could be funded. Given the three-year planning framework, those high priority programmes that could not be funded had to be rolled forward to Year Two or shrunk to match the available funds.

This was complemented by an analysis of the eventual budget, to identify precisely which elements of the MTSS could be delivered, given the budget allocations. This should be obvious but isn't. The MTSS is structured according to specific activities and tasks, each costed and grouped into activities or 'programmes'. But the central Ministry budget is prepared and published on traditional lines, based not on activities but on allocations for personnel and 'overheads' that do not relate to the activities they are needed for. The budget analysis supported by ESSPIN has reconciled the two approaches and points to the programmes and activities that are possible within the allocated budget.

Even then the problems were not over. The adjustments made as a result of the mismatch between the planned 1st year of the MTSS and the eventual budget allocation had to be incorporated. These adjustments were compounded by the state's failure to release the funds anticipated in the eventual budget allocation. The budget allocation by the state – a notional figure specified at the start of the financial year – was not the same as the funds actually released.

Budget releases are commonly substantially less than the sums anticipated under the original budget allocation. Worse still, they frequently arrive late in the financial year.

Any programme typically requires certain activities to be carried out in the first quarter, so that other activities can follow in the 2nd and 3rd quarters. If the funds are not released for the 1st quarter activities until later in the year, the whole plan is disrupted and some or all the planned activities have to be carried forward to the next year.

Typically, school construction will require initial site preparation, then building costs, then furniture and equipment. If the funds for site preparation arrive only in the final quarter of the year, the project cannot be completed even if later funds become available. This is a massive problem across all the states. A college of education provost explained that all his development activities first included in the agreed 2007 budget were rolled forward into the next year's budget for three years – simply because the promised moneys were not forthcoming.

Right and below
An environment
conducive to
learning will help
children succeed.



Planning and budgeting made easy in Enugu

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'I see this as divine favour in getting correct data to plan education in Enugu state... ESSPIN brought new innovations, and told us we could use Microsoft Excel to input the data and this simplified things. They trained our staff to use the software to input and analyse data. The 2009 ASC was the most accurate of all education census conducted years before'.

Emmanuel Eneje, Director of Planning Research and Statistics, Enugu State Ministry of Education



Above
Emmanuel Eneje, Director of Planning Research and Statistics, Enugu State Ministry of Education participated in the ASC training and collation of data. He is enthusiastic that the data will enhance education planning in the state.

Data for development – Annual School Census in Enugu

'...there is a big difference between what you know well to do and what you used to do just for the sake of doing it. Now I have been equipped, thanks to ESSPIN'.

Benedicta Onyia, Chief Executive Officer for the budget in the Enugu State Universal Basic Education Board (ENSUBEB)

Delivering better education services – Improved planning for Kano schools

'We analysed, argued and agreed on the functions of each department. And then ESSPIN made us agree on the responsibilities of units and even individuals within departments. We developed better communication chains to avoid duplication and make appropriate use of our limited resources. It wasn't easy but now I see why it had to be done. It's about knowing exactly what is expected of you and knowing that you will be held accountable'.

Amina Umar, Deputy Director Public Relations, Kano SUBEB

'The State Universal Basic Education Board (SUBEB), Kano, now has a clear vision and mission as well as structured functions and responsibilities for its various departments... The reform has been long-awaited. It will certainly assist the system to overcome the long period of stagnation'.

Mallam Bala Inuwa, Permanent Member II, Kano SUBEB

UKaid, through the Education Sector Support Programme in Nigeria (ESSPIN), facilitated a review of SUBEB's mandate in order for it to improve delivery of quality basic education to every child in Kano State. The directors, board members and other senior officials of SUBEB were supported by ESSPIN in undergoing a corporate planning process. The process, which took months of detailed participatory work, is beginning to pay off as departments are now planning activities in a more strategic way and are communicating more efficiently between themselves and with the local education authorities.

The corporate planning review led to an official request to ESSPIN for financial management training to improve the disbursement of government funds to schools. SUBEB also agreed to a payroll audit to address the issue of ghost workers.

There is a will in Kano to create better schools and a better Nigeria. As these ongoing tasks and reforms bear fruit, we will witness improvements in the management of school fund transfers, teachers' salaries, infrastructure improvements and the supply and distribution of teaching and learning materials. These are factors that will positively affect the 2.5 million children in Kano's 7,055 primary and junior secondary schools, encouraging further enrolment and longer periods of attendance, and improving the quality of education they receive there.

Right

Mallam Bala Inuwa, Permanent Member II, Kano SUBEB now has a better understanding of the organisation's vision and can easily link the functions of the various departments to this.



Section 3: Beyond the MTSS – the planning hierarchy

The MTSS is not just a vehicle for setting the budget. It is only the first of a whole series of interlinked planning activities from state level down to planning at school and community levels. The diagram opposite indicates the linkages between this hierarchy of plans and related activities.

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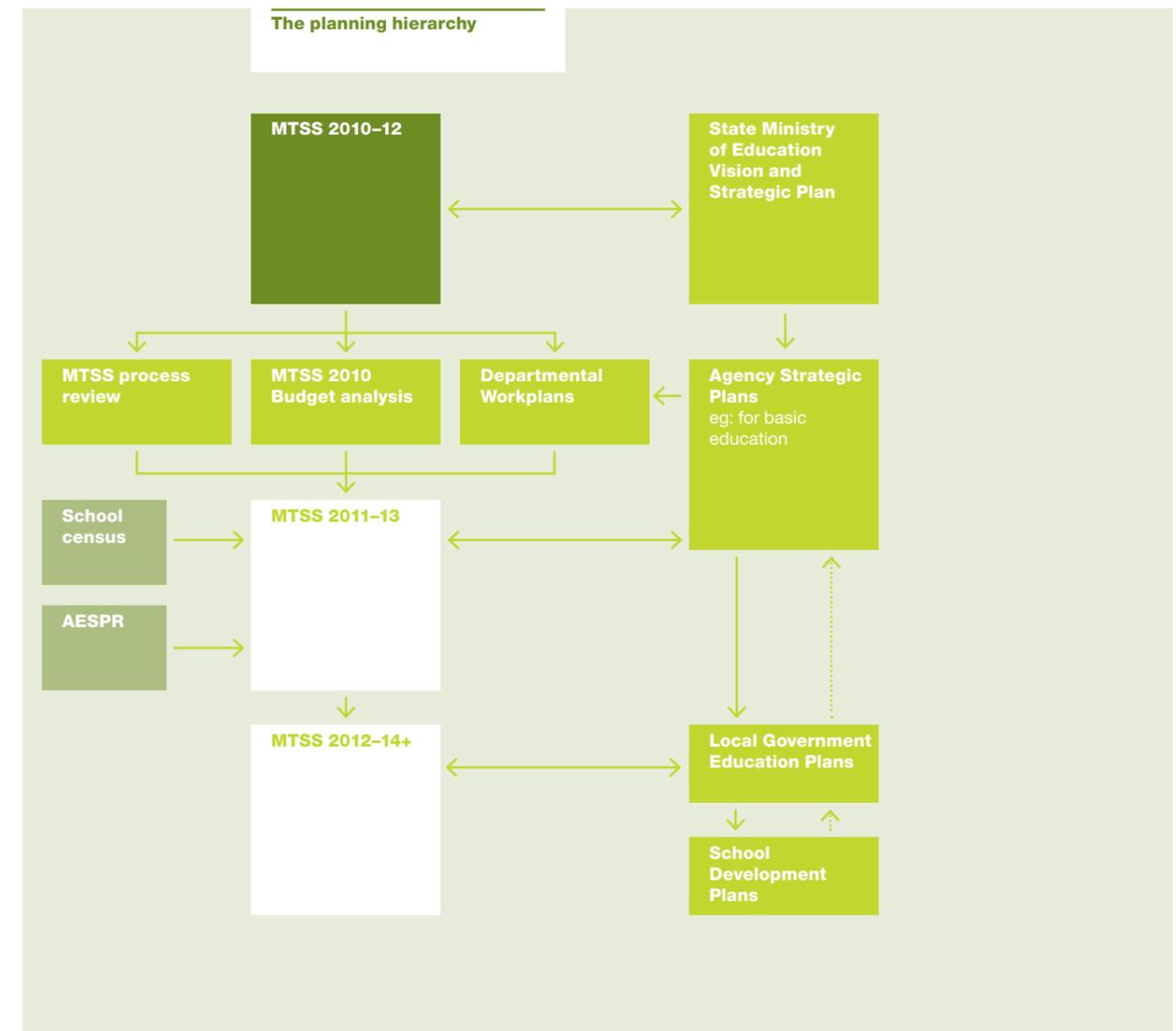
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Right
One toilet per 300 pupils is the state-wide average in some parts of the country.



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Institutional planning and visioning

The MTSS has enabled each State Ministry of Education to prepare its own strategic plan. This is a master plan based on the mandate, vision, mission statement and goals of the Ministry and is considered in more detail below. It specifies the Ministry’s main policy objectives and the strategies needed to fulfil those objectives. The steps in the planning process are shown opposite.

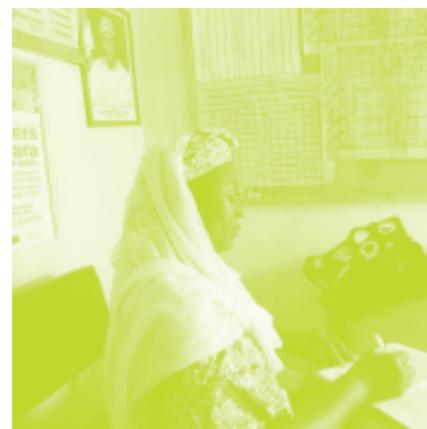
The Ministry of Education Strategic Plan has clarified the mandate of the Ministry and its agencies. Gaps and duplications have been identified that in some states that might only be resolved by legislation. So a new Education Act is being prepared in some states to increase government effectiveness and efficiency.

After clarifying the mandate, the strategic planning process has gone on to define (or re-define) the vision and mission statement for the Ministry: the vision being the desired end state and the mission statement a summary of the actions that will take the education service there. In response to the two questions ‘what do you believe in?’ and ‘what should you be judged upon?’, the planners identified some ‘core values’ and ‘key result areas’.

The next step in drafting the Strategic Plan is to specify the goals and objectives designed to deliver the mission and mandate. Strategic activities are then identified – the actions required to deliver the objectives within three years. This step-by-step planning progression is demonstrated opposite.

At this stage the Plan becomes an agenda for action. The next MTSS will take this action further, reviewing the activities to specify in which of the three years they will take place and indicating and costing the tasks included in each activity.

Below
Planning starts at school level, with the head teacher and the school development plan.



Step-by-step planning procedures

Clarify the mandate



Define the vision



Prepare the mission statement



Agree on the core values



Specify the key result areas



Define the goals and objectives



Indicate the strategic activities over the next three years



Draft Strategic Plan



Functional Review



Human Resource Management Review



Establishment Plan with job descriptions

After the Strategic Plan – Functional and Capacity Review

As the diagram demonstrates, the Ministry Strategic Plan has other purposes besides shaping the MTSS. An analysis of the Ministry’s functions (a ‘Functional Review’) follows, to answer to the question ‘Is the current organisational structure appropriate for delivering this Plan?’

The Review is likely to propose some re-alignment of departments and units along with some redistribution of responsibilities. If and when the Ministry accepts that these reforms should be made, the next question is, ‘Do we have the people in post with the knowledge and skills to operate this reformed structure?’ This is answered through a review of the Ministry’s human resource management, comparing the competences needed with those available. In order to fill the gaps and remove the likely overlaps and duplications, a personnel plan follows. This indicates the numbers and competences of staff required by the new structure, and leads to the preparation of job descriptions for all of these positions. Staff can then be located to match their skills or re-trained to enhance their capabilities so that they can undertake the new jobs. It might also be necessary to recruit new staff with skills not available within the current structure.

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State Universal Basic Education Board strategic plans

Another spin-off from the Ministry strategic plan is the planning work in each of the Ministry of Education agencies or ‘parastatals’. Within the Ministry policy framework and strategic plan, each agency for which the Ministry is responsible should develop its own strategic plan, spelling out its contribution to those policy objectives at the operational level. ESSPIN, with a specific responsibility for improving basic education provision, is working closely with the agency responsible in each state for basic education under the Ministry – the State Universal Basic Education Boards or SUBEB.

Each SUBEB has prepared its own Basic Education Strategic Plan. These provide not only a basis for identifying basic education requirements in the next MTSS but also an action plan with which to bid for funding from the Federal Government through its Universal Basic Education Commission or UBEC.

Departmental workplans

In parallel with these developments, the MTSS and the Ministry Strategic Plan enable other detailed planning activities to take place. The detailed and costed tasks within the MTSS enable departments and units within the Education Ministry and its parastatals to prepare departmental work plans. These specify the activities to be undertaken on a monthly or quarterly basis; the resources needed to carry out those activities; and the people responsible for each activity or task. They enable each department and unit to prepare its own action plan, indicating the work programme over the year. They also point out – for the first time – the consequences of not releasing funds as specified in the budget allocation; the work that cannot be completed and the staff under-employed because of funding difficulties. The planning hierarchy diagram (page 15) indicates the linkages between all of these planning activities.

Local Government Education Authority action plans

Most basic education delivery is the responsibility of local government, through the Local Government Education Authorities (LGEAs). The Planning Departments of the SUBEBs are now assisting each LGEA to develop its own action plan. These will structure the work programmes of the LGEAs and will indicate to the SUBEBs the greatest needs and priorities of the individual LGEAs – to be analysed and assembled together in the next SUBEB strategic plan.

School development plans

The most fundamental stage in this planning hierarchy is also being supported by ESSPIN. Schools and their local communities (though their School-Based Management Committees or SBMCs) are now preparing their own school development plans. These will provide a basis for bidding for some direct funding for the schools, as well as enabling the LGEAs to aggregate and analyse the school development plans in order to prepare their own action plans.



All images
School plans spell out the teaching and learning materials needed to drive forward school improvement.

Section 4: Evidence-based planning for the next MTSS

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The comprehensive reform programmes in the six Nigerian states that are supported by ESSPIN are impacting on the planning processes. The first MTSS was prepared despite unavailable data, unreliable previous plans and under-resourced Planning Departments. All this is now changing. Evidence is now being collected that demonstrates graphically the major needs.

Annual School Census

A national annual school census backed by ESSPIN gives planners comprehensive and detailed data. We now know where schools have the fewest toilets and the most pupils for every teacher. It tells us how many children enrol in school in the first Primary school grade – and how few of those stay in school until the 6th grade and then transfer to the subsequent junior secondary school. It tells us how few teachers have teaching qualifications; while other data tells us how many teachers can pass assessment tests designed for 4th grade primary pupils – disturbingly few in some areas.

Annual Education Sector Performance Review

An annual review of the evidence available then pulls together the available data and highlights the trends, needs and problems. This Annual Education Sector Performance Review, or AESPR for short, analyses the available evidence and points to issues to be addressed in future plans. It provides pointers for planners in preparing the next year's MTSS both in monitoring the extent to which planned targets are being achieved and in identifying the key issues and problems to be addressed in the next plans.

MTSS review

An ESSPIN-supported review of the first year's MTSS preparation process has provided valuable evidence on improving the planning processes and highlighted elements of the preparatory work that were more or less successful and ways in which the work could be streamlined next time around. The review of the first MTSS found that the use of the education planning simulation model referred to above was unsustainable, depending as it did on a heavy international consultant input, despite training provided to local planning officers. In consequence, the model has not been used in preparing the 2011–2013 MTSS. The process review identified that there is general recognition that the MTSS preparation should be the responsibility of the Planning Departments and should be undertaken in a fairly brief period of time before the budget preparation period.

The evidence gap is now being filled. The process review pointed to the next priority need – the skills gap. Planners now have much of the information needed to prepare their plans and set their priorities. But can they? The process review indicated areas of professional development for specialist finance and planning staff across the MDAs, including generic planning skills as well as specific needs such as budget analysis and the preparation of unit costs.

Lessons from the first MTSS for education

Policy-makers must be involved in steering the MTSS process and setting education priorities.

MTSS preparation should be the responsibility of the Planning Departments.

MTSS should be developed in a short period before the budget preparation.

Finance and Planning staff need general and specialist skills developed.

The education planning simulation model was overly dependent on international consultant input and unsustainable.

The first MTSS process was led by international and national consultants, supported by Planning and Management (P&M) specialists recruited by ESSPIN, working with large planning teams drawn from across the Ministry and its agencies. In the second year, consultant support has been reduced and the planning process led by the Directors of the Planning departments, supported by the P&M specialists. The work has been far less than in the first year, because only one extra year – the new Year Three – has been added to the MTSS prepared.

With these improvements, a second MTSS has been prepared and costed in each state, based on budget envelopes provided by their Economic Planning ministries. The MTSS has been used to prepare each Education Ministry's budget submission. At the time of writing they are waiting to find out whether those submissions are fully reflected in the 2011 state budget.

Section 5: Challenges and changes – the impact of planning

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The shift from an essentially ad-hoc approach to management to a plan-based approach is a difficult one but, despite remaining challenges, it is possible to see significant changes for the better.

Challenges

The biggest barrier that ESSPIN has had to tackle in supporting strategic planning in the six states has been the failure to fund the MTSS. Many of those involved in and committed to the preparation of the first MTSS were seriously disillusioned when the eventual budget allocation did not match the bid made in Year One of the MTSS. That disillusionment was intensified when funds were not released even in line with the diminished availability of resources, political (and in the past military) interference and the endemic corruption make it not only difficult to plan for more than a few weeks ahead but engender an attitude of ‘what’s the point in planning?’ in the belief that the resources will never be made available to deliver the plan.

So there has been a danger that strategic planning is seen as a developed-world luxury, that states pay lip-service to in order to continue to get donor support – but not something to take too seriously. This manifests itself when a key planning meeting, requiring top policy makers, is called. At the last minute the intended participants are required to attend to some local issue – urgent perhaps but not particularly important – so they send their junior staff along who have no understanding of the policy framework that they are asked to help develop.

Changes

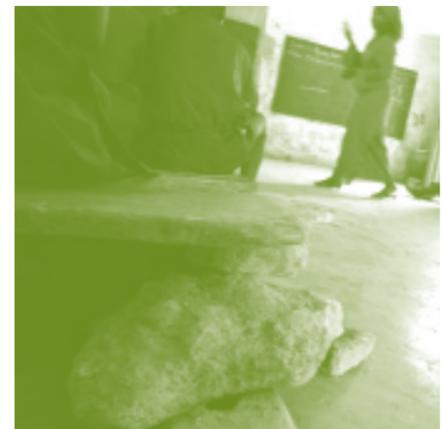
After nearly two years things are changing. The emergence of the key plans, first the MTSS then the Ministry strategic plans, has been welcomed by the most senior policy-makers. Indeed, there is even a danger of a rush into planning with demands from the top for everyone to be planning at once.

This at least has the payoff that the most senior policymakers now see the planning process as something with which they need to engage. And it is now becoming recognised by some policy-makers, that it is easier to ensure that personal priorities get included in the plan by attending the key planning meetings.

Equally importantly, the need for capable planning officers in strong PRS departments is beginning to be recognised. These departments will need to have the capacity and the commitment to collect, analyse and utilise evidence of the state’s needs. For this reason they are, with ESSPIN help, setting up units within their departments with responsibilities for data collection through the Ministry Education Management Information System (EMIS) and monitoring and evaluating progress towards the targets set in the MTSS through a Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) Unit. Planners in the PRS Departments will then use this evidence to identify the highest priorities and prepare properly costed plans to tackle those high priority needs and challenges.

Below

Tables and chairs, blackboards and teachers; they all need to be planned for at local government and state ministries.



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Managing evidence

Directors of Planning Departments are used to getting by with little or no accurate or up-to-date data. The initiatives of the last two years are resulting in a flood of new, good quality evidence pouring into those departments. So the Directors are now asking for help in developing the analytical skills within their departments so they can manage all this information.

The third MTSS, for 2012-2014, will be greatly helped by evidence from the second annual school census and AESPR and by the preparation of the over-arching Ministry of Education Strategic Plan. The key planning officers across the MDAs now have more competence and more confidence in preparing realistic, evidence-based plans that address the education sector's most important needs.



Evidence of improvements in school

It takes time for plans to manifest themselves through school improvements. But already there are signs that the new evidence-based planning initiatives are having an impact, initially in the services supporting schools. These are being reorganised in some states, as traditional and ineffective Inspectorates are revitalised as Quality Assurance Bureaus that analyse evidence of school needs and focus attention on those in greatest need.

State School Improvement Teams, based in the local government areas, are developing schemes for supporting schools, and their activities form part of the LGEA work plans.

The school development plans, shown in the planning hierarchy diagram (page 15), aim to highlight the distinctive needs of individual schools. Some direct funding to those schools can then be used to meet (some of) those needs.

Early in 2011, a second process review will investigate the impact of the approach taken in 2010. It will go further and assess the skills of those centrally involved and the capacity-building needed to ensure that the MTSS planning becomes central to the work of each Planning, Research and Statistics department. It is only in this way that the hierarchy of closely integrated plans can be sustained after the ESSPIN support is withdrawn.

Right
The provision and use of something as simple as a set of scales needs planners and educationalists to determine the necessary resources.

Left
Linking plans through school, local government and state systems means that parents will see the value of sending their children to well-equipped schools.



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The reforms that ESSPIN is supporting will only lead to tangible changes in the schools when these conditions are met.

Planning Departments must **take responsibility** for the technical steps needed to develop plans including the MTSS.

The staff in these departments must have the **capabilities to undertake the technical planning and budgeting tasks competently** and make evidence-based recommendations for action.

Policy-makers at the political level must have the **ability to review options** presented by their civil servants and **make reasoned and defensible policy decisions**.

The network of education plans currently being developed with external support must be **sufficiently sustainable** as to be maintained and improved without help from ESSPIN or other external agencies.

This will only be sustainable when budget allocations and releases **respond to the priority needs clearly articulated through evidence-based plans**.

Patience is required. Changes at school level cannot be instant and tangible benefits from current planning improvements will not be visible for at least two or three years.

The Medium-Term Sector Strategy – Better planning and budgeting for education

Jogai Isaac says the education sector Medium Term Sector Strategy (MTSS) is a great achievement. ‘It has taught me evidence based budgeting and activity based costing. I can now help to set targets for my department and work towards achieving them.’

The UKaid through its Education Sector Support Programme in Nigeria (ESSPIN) is focused on improving the overall planning and management of education activity. This is being done by assisting the Kaduna State Ministry of Education to develop properly prioritised and costed 3-year rolling plans, known as the Medium Term Sector Strategy (MTSS). There is a history of ‘plans’ in Kaduna within the last 15 years, but many of them have failed to be implemented, being wildly optimistic. Inaccurate costing has contributed to this level of unreality.

An MTSS requires inputs from education officials at different levels, for example, overall policy guidance will come from the commissioner and senior management staff; while specific strategies and the phasing of targets will be determined by the permanent secretary and departmental directors. Inputs from junior technical staff within education departments are essential for each activity to be properly costed and the plan to be realistic.

The current MTSS process supported by ESSPIN is empowering staff to understand the importance of detailed planning and budgeting. One such official is Mr Jogai Isaac, a 40-year old middle technocrat who works in the Planning, Research and Statistics Department of the State Ministry of Education. ‘I used to work with statistics that were out-of-date and often wrong. We didn’t have the proper information for planning,’ he recalls.

But now, with access to relevant data and up-to-date unit costs, he and his colleagues are able to work out detailed and accurate cost estimates for all activities. This may not be the most exciting or glamorous work, but it is vital if the MTSS is to be legitimate. And, with ESSPIN’s help, Jogai can declare ‘I now enjoy costing!’.

The impact of Jogai Isaac’s work is not apparent in a short-term, obvious and easily quantifiable sense, but with accurate costing work an MTSS can be realistic, and sustainable improvements in basic education service delivery are possible. The potential long-term impact is therefore substantial.

Work to develop Medium-Term Sector Strategies is only part of our education sector work in Nigeria. The ESSPIN programme in Jigawa, Kaduna, Kano, Kwara, Enugu and Lagos states is improving teaching and management skills in schools and the governance of education at State and Federal level.

Contact

ESSPIN Abuja
Orji Uzor Kalu House
1st Avenue
Off Ahmadu Bello Way
Central Business Area
Abuja

Telephone
080 5800 8284

SMS
070 6347 9077

Email
info@esspin.org

Website
www.esspin.org

Photography

Cover, pages
3/5/7/9/11/15/16/18/
19/23/24/25
Jide Adeniyi-Jones

Page 5
Richard Hanson

Page 12
Grace Udoh-Ukaegbu

Page 13
Fatima Alkali