

SCALING UP SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT IN NIGERIA — results of ESSPIN’s programme in 6 partner states

Improving standards of equitable access to education, school quality and learning outcomes is a key priority for the Nigerian government. Strong evidence suggests that consistent application of the state government School Improvement Programme (SIP) makes a significant difference to positive outcomes. With half a million more children now enrolled in schools through the SIP and community action, many of them disadvantaged or marginalised, a concerted effort is required to raise teaching standards and learning outcomes across states. Continuous state financing for SIP interventions is crucial to ensure all children in these expanded cohorts gain the knowledge and skills while in school to lead productive and fulfilling lives ahead.

This briefing summarises the findings of surveys conducted in 2012 and 2014 to assess the effectiveness of the School Improvement Programme, and identify where ongoing interventions should be concentrated. Funded by the UK and Nigerian governments, the SIP receives technical assistance from the Education Sector Support Programme in Nigeria (ESSPIN), which works to increase equitable access and quality for children of basic education age in six focus states – Enugu, Jigawa, Kaduna, Kano, Kwara and Lagos.

The full reports can be accessed on ESSPIN’s website www.esspin.org

THE KEY FINDINGS ARE:

Learning outcomes are better in schools supported by ESSPIN, though have declined on average

Pupil learning, especially in literacy, appears to be better in schools that received more ESSPIN intervention, despite a trend of worsening outcomes overall across the six focus states.

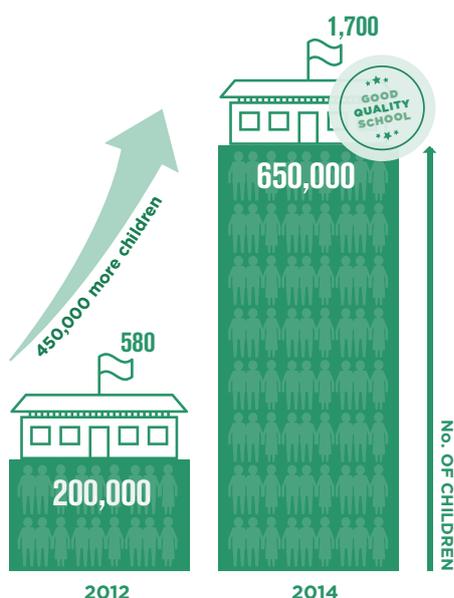
“Few students in all schools are meeting basic standards in literacy and numeracy.”

Some children have particular difficulties in writing at Grades 2 and 4, and reading, multiplication and division at Grade 4.

School quality is greater and improving faster in targeted schools

The number of schools reaching overall quality standards increased significantly from 580 (3%) to 1,700 schools (10%). Only 1% of schools not receiving support met the quality standard, compared to over 30% of those that did. Better school quality is an essential precursor to better learning outcomes for all children.

“450,000 children are studying in schools which have reached the quality benchmark between 2012 and 2014; 90% of which is attributable to the ESSPIN School Improvement Programme.”



The impact of increased enrolment numbers and thus mixed abilities of newer students on teacher performance and school quality requires greater examination. It does appear to reduce average overall performance, whilst offering an education to many disadvantaged children for the first time.

Headteachers and teachers receiving training are performing better and spreading this to others

Use of teaching aids, more praise than reprimands and a variety of individual and group lesson formats all increased between 2012 and 2014, especially in the SIP schools. Progress across states is still slow, though even teachers not directly trained but in ESSPIN-supported schools are more competent, suggesting a positive diffusion effect of training through headteacher academic leadership and feedback.

Many teachers still struggle with primary school questions, especially Grade 5 materials, teaching literacy concepts and writing. Though less than 20% of headteachers met the effectiveness standards overall, the majority are now better at school development planning and supporting more functional and inclusive School Based Management Committees (SBMCs).

School management is improving and women and children's participation increasing

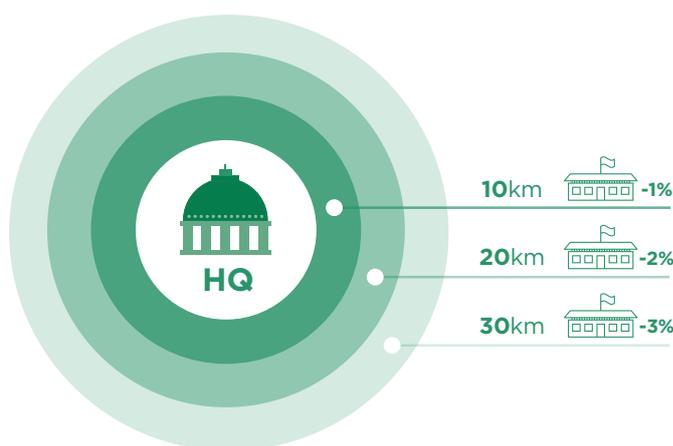
In the SIP schools, 62% of SBMCs met the functionality standards, compared to 13% of other schools. They were also more likely to be inclusive of women and children, with 48% meeting standards, compared to 2% in other schools. Overall inclusiveness in Nigeria's

schools continues to decline, with further barriers to education related to gender, wealth and location.

There is a significant gender gap in schools and difference in performance between rural and urban pupils

Although the gender gap declined rapidly between 2009 and 2013, imbalances are still high in northern Nigeria despite girls learning just as well as boys once they are in school. In Jigawa, there are only 76 girls enrolled for every 100 boys and this may be related to a lack of female teachers (14%). Female teachers and headteachers across states are more likely to encourage equal participation of girls and boys. On average, children in urban schools perform 20% higher than those in rural schools.

“For every increase of 10 km between the school and headquarters of the local government authority, average test scores dropped around 1%.”



Wealth inequalities result in starkly different learning outcomes, though School Improvement Programme schools are closing the gap

Pupils from the richest 20% of households are doing twice as well as those from the poorest 20%, particularly in English literacy. The poorest children are benefiting the most from the School Improvement Programme, with the wealth gap in attainment almost closed for pupils attending schools with the most SIP inputs.

Minority languages spoken at home do not seem to affect learning outcomes. The one third of over-age students across states, despite usually being associated with low scores and high drop-out rates, are performing better in the SIP schools than other children in their Grade.

There is strong evidence that the SIP improves equitable access to better quality education for Nigeria's children. State governments need to consistently fund school improvement in their states to raise standards across schools and improve long-term prospects for Nigeria's economic and social development.