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Sub-theme: Reflecting on Global Agendas, International Targets and Goals: Lessons Learned

Abstract: A strait-jacket or summit to climb? Imposing targets on a programme to improve Nigerian education

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Nigeria has the largest out-of-school population of children in the world (www.data.worldbank.org). It is clear that neither the Millennium Development Goals nor the post-2015 agenda will be achieved unless Nigeria improves education enrolment, participation and learning outcomes. In 2008 DFID launched the Education Sector Support Programme in Nigeria (ESSPIN) to address this challenge, in partnership with federal and six state ministries of education.

Initially conceived as a sector governance and capacity development programme, by the time of the 2011 independent mid-term review of ESSPIN, DFID’s priorities had shifted towards service delivery, evidence-based aid and value for money. A comprehensive revision of the programme design resulted in a newly-articulated theory of change and challenging stretch targets for roll-out of the pilot School Improvement Programme through leverage of state funds. Underpinning the revised programme is a complex, expensive and ambitious research programme to simultaneously measure teacher competence, head teacher effectiveness, school governance, inclusivity and pupils’ learning outcomes in a representative sample of intervention and control schools.

This paper critically assesses what has been learnt in the process of changing education for development targets mid-stream, the challenges of satisfying the demand for reliable data on school improvement towards MDG targets, reflects on the impact on education quality and outcomes of this mode of working, and considers the implications for the post-2015 themes of equity, measurability and finance (www.unesco.org).

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