



Research Title:

“Increasing Access to Quality Education for Rural and Marginalised Children in West Africa - A Study of Accelerated Education and Girls Focused Programme in Nigeria”

Political Economic Analysis

Kashema Bahago, Ayodotun Ayorinde, Chinedu Ifionu, Ucheoma Ekejiuba, Fidelis Obaniyi, Adedeji Adeniran and Chukwuka Onyekwena

Submitted by

Centre for the Study of Economies of Africa (CSEA)

<https://cseaafrica.org/>

Tel: (234) (0705)891 8568 or 0244 255 170

Email: enquiries@cseaafrica.org

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Executive Summary

The number of out-of-school children in Nigeria has been consistently increasing, positioning Nigeria with the highest count of out-of-school children in both West Africa and globally. This alarming statistic has raised concerns among stakeholders, prompting significant investments in educational innovations such as the Accelerated Education Programme, a donor-led non-formal education initiative. The Accelerated Education Programme aims to compress the time required to impart basic education, focusing on literacy and numeracy skills, with the ultimate goal of mainstreaming these children into the formal education system.

Recognizing the educational interventions initiated by donor agencies, this study delved into an examination of the impact of relevant government policies, institutional frameworks, and political structures in galvanizing support for accelerated education programs. The Government of Nigeria expresses a commitment to addressing the challenges posed by out-of-school children through various policies and interventions. However, there is a notable absence of specific policies, dedicated investments, and institutions tailored to the Accelerated Education Programme (AEP). This deficiency in policy support, funding, and institutionalization of AEPs stems from policymakers' limited understanding of their effectiveness in addressing out-of-school challenges.

However, there is a positive shift as policymakers increasingly grasp the impact of AEPs, particularly evident through pilot testing in select states in Nigeria. This initiative receives support from donor agencies and the Nigerian Education Research Council. A curriculum for AEPs has been developed, and advocacy efforts are underway at the subnational level to garner support and commitment from policymakers. Despite these advancements, the sustainability and scalability of AEPs face constraints arising from the absence of specific policies, budget allocations, and dedicated institutions for AEPs. These factors pose challenges for stakeholders, including governments at the national and subnational levels, as well as communities.

Acronyms

AEP: Accelerated Education Programme
 ECD: Early Child Development
 EMIS: Education Management Information System
 PEA: Political Economy Analysis
 OOSC: Out-of-School Children
 UNESCO: United nations educational, scientific and cultural organization
 INGO: International nongovernment organisation
 NGO: Non-governmental organization
 DFID: Department for international development, UK
 ECR: Education crisis response
 USAID: United states agency for international development
 NERDC: Nigerian education research development council
 ABEPC: Accelerated Basic education programme curriculum
 IRC: International resccue organisation
 SAME: State agency for mass education
 LGA: Local government area
 KABHUDA: Kanem borno human development association
 COCOSOHDI: Communal conservation friendly health and social development support Initiative
 TCDI: Taimako community development initiatives
 HALI: Hallmark leadership initiative
 ROHI: Restoration of hope initiative
 ALP: Accelerated learning programme
 AENN: Addressing education in northeast Nigeria
 NERDC: Nigeria educational research council
 UBE: Universal basic education
 UPE: National policy on education
 BESDA: Better education service delivery for all
 ABEP: Accelerated basic education programme
 JENA: Joint education eeds assessment
 CPC: Community-based child protection committees

Chapter One: Study Background

1.1 Context of the Political Economic Analysis Study

In the global south, Nigeria stands out as a country grappling with a significant problem of educational exclusion. The situation in Nigeria is particularly concerning due to the high number of out-of-school children (OOSC) within the country. There are at least 10.5 million children who are not attending school for various reasons, including factors like poverty, early marriage, and insecurity, among others. While these out-of-school children can be found nationwide, their concentration is highest in northeast Nigeria, with Borno, Adamawa, and Yobe states being the most severely affected. The insurgency in the northeast region has been a major contributor to the high numbers of OOSC in that area, along with related compounding factors (UNICEF, 2022). The impact of the insurgents has resulted in the destruction of educational infrastructure, as well as the abduction and, in some cases, the killing of school children and teachers. Consequently, these events have disrupted the regular school calendar and led to a significant increase in the number of OOSC.

An intervention was deemed necessary to address the issue of OOSC. To tackle this problem, Accelerated Education Programmes (AEPs) were introduced and have been utilized as an educational innovation in conflict-affected areas and other deprived contexts. AEPs are a flexible, age-appropriate programmes designed to provide expedited access to education for disadvantaged groups, older OOSC, and youth who have missed out on education or had their learning disrupted due to factors such as poverty, marginalization, conflict, and crises (Boisvert, Flemming, & Ritesh, 2017).

Accelerated Education Programs (AEPs) serve as an alternative educational pathway to assist OOSC in completing primary education and in some cases, junior secondary school, enabling them to re-enter formal education, pursue technical or vocational training, or access livelihood opportunities. AEPs are structured to provide learners with certified competencies for basic education, utilizing effective teaching and learning methods tailored to their cognitive development level. These programs condense the duration of an educational cycle, allowing students to attain a certified, equivalent educational level within a shorter timeframe (Egbujuo, 2022). Northeast Nigeria, particularly Borno State, has been a focal point for various program implementations since 2014.

AEPs have demonstrated their effectiveness in Nigeria, and many beneficiaries of this initiative have successfully returned to formal education while others have entered the workforce. This highlights positive learning outcomes for those AEP beneficiaries who transitioned back into mainstream schooling and underscores the practical value of the vocational and literacy skills acquired by those who are now in the workforce.

However, there remain pitfalls in realizing the full potential of AEPs in Nigeria. These shortcomings encompass the learning environment and the issues linked to student attrition. The learning conditions in many schools are subpar, which hinders practical learning activities

and their corresponding outcomes. Children drop out of school due to obstacles related to both supply and demand, including issues like the absence of teaching and learning materials, long distances to school, inadequate infrastructure, financial constraints (poverty), early marriages, parental preferences, and more.

Available evidence suggests that complex development programs, such as AEPs, sometimes do not meet expectations due to a limited understanding of the critical factors required to drive the necessary political support. Specifically, donors offer support for reform processes, and provide technical experts and financial resources, only to witness the planned changes come to a standstill and eventually fade. Typically, this is attributed to a lack of genuine political commitment (Whaites, 2017).

For example, AEPs are primarily funded and executed by international and local non-governmental organizations, with minimal government backing to sustain and scale these initiatives. Consequently, this study was conducted to unpack the issues typically associated with the concept of political will. These issues are expected to influence policies, organizational structures, and the institutionalization of AEPs at the federal and subnational government levels. This project is intended to provide evidence to enable state-level authorities and donor agencies to implement AEPs in alignment with the government's objectives for addressing the challenge of OOSC.

1.2 Research gap and problem statement

A UNESCO report reveals that in Sub-Saharan Africa, more than 20% of children aged 6 to 11, over 33% of youth aged 12 to 14, and nearly 60% of those aged 15 to 17 are not attending school. The region's struggle to provide equitable, high-quality, and affordable education, spanning from early childhood development (ECD) to primary and secondary levels, is exacerbated by disparities related to gender, economic status, ethnicity, and disability. These inequalities in educational access and learning outcomes are intrinsically linked to the widespread poverty in Eastern, Western, and Southern African countries. Furthermore, students from impoverished rural households and informal urban settlements face numerous challenges affecting their learning, including hunger, social stigma, internal exclusion, and more (UNICEF, 2019).

This research project is focused on Accelerated Education Programmes (AEPs) in Nigeria, which exhibit potential for scalability or have already initiated systematic expansion but may not yet be fully sustained by the government. Therefore, the study seeks to conduct a Political Economy Analysis (PEA) of AEPs to gain insights into the government's adoption of AEPs in Nigeria. The report concentrates on the PEA aspect of AEPs, specifically delving into the government's role concerning policy development, institutionalization of AEPs, government investments, and the sustainability and scalability of these programs.

1.3 Research Objectives

The overarching objective of this study is to engage key government and non-government stakeholders in an evidence-building process to assess the extent to which current innovative education approaches can be adapted, scaled up, and sustained to increase participation and attainment of universal primary and secondary quality education for all. Thus, the study assesses the following:

- Country-level commitment, support, and financing in sustaining AEPs and mainstreaming public education (institutionalization, policy/legislation/curriculum endorsement/Government budgets/for AEPs/certification).
- Cooperation between state and non-state actors on scaling up AEPs in Borno state, Nigeria.
- Government willingness to commit funding allocations towards AEPs' (Donor driven, donor-owned) sustainability at national/regional and local government levels.
- Community commitment, support, and finance/contribution towards the AEPs and the role of education innovators in facilitating a community-driven approach.

1.4 Research Questions

The overarching question is: To what extent can Accelerated Education Programmes and Girls-Focussed Programmes be adapted, scaled up, and sustained in different rural communities in Nigeria? The framework of the questions of the study is outlined below.

Institutional Mainstreaming: Government stakeholders at National, Sub-National, Local Government, and Community Levels

1. What policy and planning structures exist for state and non-state collaboration to scale AEPs and Girls' education innovations in Nigeria?
 - a. Is there a budget line within the State government, if not why and how can this be developed?
 - b. Are there government agencies and departments focused on AEPs and Girls' Education models being mainstreamed or scaled up, and if so, are they funded?
 - c. How is the government certifying AEP graduates and maintaining them in the system?
 - d. Are these transitioned learners captured within the EMIS data systems and assessment systems?
 - e. Is the AEP curriculum being endorsed and reviewed by the Government curriculum assessment units?
2. What is the degree of engagement in collaboration with state and non-state actors in evaluating and implementing the innovations, and what best practices and lessons can be learned to reach scale?
 - a. What role do non-state actors play in t AEPs and Girls' Education arena?
 - b. How much are government actors engaging in AEPs and girls' education space, and if so, why?
 - c. What is the extent to which local NGOs update the government on their activities regarding AEPs and why?
 - d. What benefits or outcomes could arise if state and non-state actors were to collaborate more effectively on AEP delivery...how could this be done?
3. What are the most effective approaches to adapting and scaling up the innovative education programs in Nigeria to contribute to universal primary and secondary education for all?

Scaling up and sustaining scale related to AEPs.

- a. What has the local government/state government done in the past to support OOSC and AEPs?
- b. What financial contributions have they made to these programs
- c. How has the local government/district government been monitoring and evaluating the work regarding AEPs/Girls models in their jurisdictions?
- d. Are they willing to support and financially sustain the AEPs in their areas and if so, how?

1.5 Relevance of the Study

The relevance of carrying out the Political Economic Analysis (PEA) cannot be overstated, especially in the context of policymaking, program development, and international development projects. The PEA provides a structured framework for understanding the intricate relationship between political and economic factors that influence policy decisions and their outcomes. By conducting a PEA, policymakers and researchers can gain valuable insights into the motivations, interests, and constraints of key political actors, helping them craft policies that are not only economically sound but also politically feasible. This is especially useful in complex and dynamic environments, such as emerging economies affected by conflict. Our study area of Borno state, Nigeria, is a prime example of an emerging economy that has been impacted gravely by insurgency which has been detrimental to children's education. PEA is a critical tool for mitigating risks and ensuring the sustainability of development initiatives towards the successful implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

PEA is particularly relevant in identifying and addressing challenges in resource allocation and public service delivery. By analyzing the political motivations of decision-makers, PEA can help uncover instances of rent-seeking, corruption, or resource mismanagement that might otherwise go unnoticed. This information is invaluable for promoting transparency, accountability, and good governance, which are essential for achieving equitable and sustainable development. Furthermore, the insights gained from PEA can lead to the design of policies and programs that are more likely to gain the support of key stakeholders, which is essential for their successful implementation.

1.6 Structure of the Report

The report is presented in five main sections. Chapter 1 introduces the report detailing the background, purpose, relevance, and research objectives of the study. Chapter 2 proceeds by describing the methodology including the study design, pre-listing, and the sampling. Chapter 3 presents the findings of the study. Chapter 4 synthesized the result from chapter 3, while chapter 5 summarizes and makes recommendations based on the findings, highlighting key lessons learnt.

Chapter Two: Methodology

2.1 Research Design

The study is crafted to concentrate on major stakeholders, encompassing both state and non-state actors, who possess the requisite knowledge of the learning process of AEPs. Their role is to evaluate the feasibility of adapting, upscaling, and sustaining current innovative educational approaches to enhance participation and the achievement of universal primary and secondary education of high quality for all. As well, the political interactions relating to AEPs by the government at all levels is also highly relevant. Consequently, the study will encompass four distinct categories of individuals representing a range of administrative levels, including national, state, local government, and community tiers. These categories consist of:

Profile 1 - Government officials employed within the education ministries, departments, and agencies.

Profile 2 - International non-governmental organizations that have provided financial support and implemented non-formal educational programs.

Profile 3 - Local non-governmental organizations involved in the implementation of non-formal educational initiatives.

Profile 4 - Community council leaders who have endorsed and facilitated non-formal education programs.

The research methodology adopted is a qualitative and survey-based approach aimed at examining the influence of the political economy in supporting, maintaining, and expanding AEPs. The study employed the utilization of Key Informant Interviews (KII) and Focus Group Discussions (FGD) as the primary means of engaging directly with relevant stakeholders. These interactions involved conducting confidential semi-structured interviews while maintaining anonymity, a strategy anticipated to yield valuable insights into practical aspects. This approach was chosen to supplement the information obtained from formal sources such as publicly available documents. Notably, this choice is significant given that around 50% of the participants could be classified as "elite," whose public statements are more likely to align with corporate messaging (Andreas, 2021).

2.2 Target Population

In total, 35 in-depth interviews were carried out involving high-level participants, representing both government and non-government sectors. Among these interviews, 4 were conducted at the national level, 12 took place at the state level, 11 at the local government level, and 12 occurred at the community level within Borno State, Nigeria.

2.3 Sampling Frame and Procedure:

2.3.1 Criteria for selection based on the knowledge and experience of AEPs

- The government at the national, state, local government, and community levels who oversee the education institutions, laws, and curriculums relevant to AEPs.

- International non-governmental organizations, who have funded and implemented non-formal education programmes.
- Local non-governmental organizations, who have implemented non-formal education programmes.
- Community council/ leaders that have supported the nonformal education programmes.

2.3.2 Criteria for selection at National, State, and Local Government, and Community Levels

The research focuses on Borno state, Nigeria, with particular attention given to three selected local government areas (LGAs): Jere, Maiduguri Municipal Council (MMC), and Konduga. The choice of these LGAs was guided by two primary criteria. Firstly, LGAs were selected based on their prior involvement with AEPs. Secondly, LGAs were chosen for their accessibility and security considerations. During the peak of insurgency attacks, many LGAs faced security challenges and witnessed internal displacement of residents. As a result, a significant number of internally displaced persons (IDPs) sought refuge in safer LGAs like Jere, MMC, and Konduga. Consequently, AEP interventions were provided in these LGAs to address the educational needs of the displaced population.

2.4 Data Collection Tools

Data collection involves a combination of Computer Assisted Personal Interviews (CAPI) and manual methods. Given the predominantly qualitative nature of the study, an interview guide served as the tool for conducting interviews. The proceedings of the interviews were recorded using recording devices to facilitate later transcription. Subsequently, the interview recordings were uploaded to Google Drive, where they could be monitored, evaluated, and transcribed for analysis.

2.5 Data Management and Analysis

The interview recordings underwent a process of translation and transcription, converting the spoken Hausa and Kanuri languages into written English text. These transcriptions were subjected to meticulous review to ensure their accuracy, followed by a thorough cleaning process in preparation for the forthcoming analysis. To conduct the analysis, a dedicated Excel template was designed to serve as a framework for deriving significant insights from the data. This template was instrumental in guiding the analysis process, helping to extract pertinent insights relevant to the various research questions at hand.

2.6 Training of Data Enumerators

For this task, 12 proficient enumerators and 2 supervisors were enlisted. These team members underwent thorough training focused on the research's objectives and methodology. Specifically, enumerators received orientation regarding the research's purpose and design. To ensure their comprehension, practical demonstration sessions were carried out using the actual research tools. Enumerators were also assessed through quizzes to confirm their proficiency in applying the assessment tool. This training and simulation exercise provided enumerators with

a chance to anticipate potential scenarios they might encounter in the field and the appropriate methods for addressing them.

2.7 Research Ethics

The study strictly adhered to established research ethics. Since this was social research involving human participants, the required approvals were obtained from the relevant authorities. Sensitization visits were conducted with government ministries, departments, and agencies at all levels, donor agencies, education innovators, and community leaders. This was particularly vital due to the study's location in Borno state, a region known for its high-security concerns stemming from previous conflicts. During data collection in the field, all essential ethical principles were upheld. The research objectives were transparently communicated to potential participants, and their informed consent was obtained before each data collection session commenced.

2.8 Study Limitations

Political economic analysis uses a qualitative research approach and offers significant value in delving into intricate social phenomena, gaining insights into human behaviour, and encapsulating a wide array of perspectives and experiences. Nevertheless, the wealth of diverse qualitative data can indeed present hurdles when it comes to analysing research outcomes. The nature of this study is inherently subjective and may not be readily generalised beyond the specific context of the investigation. This very subjectivity can lead to a spectrum of interpretations of the same data, making it a formidable task to reach a singular, unequivocal conclusion.

Chapter Three: Results and Findings

3.1 Federal Government Respondents

Policymakers are responsible for crafting, executing, and assessing public policies. Their roles encompass a broad spectrum of tasks and choices to enhance educational results for both individuals and the wider society. The emphasis lies on the guidance, initiatives, and the part the federal government plays in endorsing Accelerated Education Programmes (AEPs). Our survey included participants from the Federal Ministry of Education and the Nigeria Educational Research and Development Council (NERDC), both of which have been actively engaged in AEP initiatives at the federal government level.

3.1.1 AEPs and level of support by the government

At the federal government level, initiatives are underway to establish a supportive framework for implementing Accelerated Education Programmes (AEPs) in Nigeria. This endeavour involves engaging federal-level stakeholders and policymakers to urge their endorsement of the significance and applicability of AEPs. Initial resistance was encountered, but extensive awareness and advocacy campaigns conducted at the federal and state levels have grown acceptance of AEPs among federal stakeholders. Subnational entities have shown enthusiasm for the concept and are prepared to commence AEP implementation in their respective regions. In 2022, the federal government introduced innovations in this regard, and collaborations have been established between the government and international development organizations, with funding support from PLAN International, to enhance the AEP curriculum. While some states have initiated AEP implementation, evaluations are being conducted to assess the progress of these programs.

Furthermore, find evidence from the interviews.

“Advocacy & sensitisation of policy stakeholders at the federal level has been conducted to educate policymakers on the importance of government support towards sustaining AEPs” **(Policy stakeholder)**

“One critical challenge is getting critical stakeholders at the federal level to endorse what AEPs are all about, what AEPs are intended to achieve, because people view AEPs as the usual adult education programme where you have nine months. They do not understand the concept of equivalency of basic education programme” **(Policy stakeholder)**

“When we started pushing for AEPs in Nigeria some 3 to 4 years ago, there was some resistance in terms of how do we make AEPs work in Nigeria? But we were convinced that this is what we really need to do, to address the challenge of the over-aged OOSC and youth in the country ” **(Policy stakeholder)**

“The federal government designs, while the state government implements. There was a design launched by the Nigerian education research development council and it was launched in 2022. Hence, we need to look at the number of states implementing and how the programmes are being implemented. There are few states for now, and that is too small to generalise its workability” **(Policymaker)**

“Covid-19 affected AEPs; we got approval from the National Council of Education in November 2019, with the intention of doing some piloting in 2020, and then we rollout in 2021 and 2022, which was the initial plan. But in 2020, COVID-19 came and disrupted the process”
(Policy stakeholder)

3.1.2 Level of commitment of local government to support/sustain AEP

The issue of children who are not attending school has raised concerns among Nigerian policymakers. Consequently, the government has acknowledged the importance of providing education for all children and has taken measures to reduce the number of children who are not enrolled in educational institutions. Although various government programs and initiatives have been introduced to address the issue of out-of-school children (OOSC), there is currently no specific policy in Nigeria dedicated to Accelerated Education Programmes (AEPs). In 2022, the Federal Government of Nigeria introduced the Accelerated Basic Education Programme (ABEP) with the objective of facilitating the reintegration of OOSC into the education system. This launch was conducted in collaboration with the Nigerian Educational Research and Development Council (NERDC), and financial support was received from the European Union and PLAN International Nigeria.

During the launch, the Minister of Education unveiled three key documents that had been developed over the past three years to assist in the nationwide implementation of ABEP. These documents included a teacher training package, a curriculum, and national policy guidelines. ABEP is designed as a condensed educational program tailored for school-age children who had previously dropped out of school or had never attended school. Additional programs and initiatives implemented by the government, which exemplify the government's enhanced approach and dedication to tackling the issue of out-of-school children in Nigeria, encompass:

- Universal Basic Education (UBE) Program: The program is a policy initiative that aims to provide free and compulsory basic education for all children of school-going age, which aims to reduce the number of OOSC and improve access to quality education.
- Almajiri Education Program: This program is focused on addressing the problem of OOSC in the northern states of Nigeria, where the Almajiri system of education is prevalent. It seeks to provide formal education to Almajiri children and integrate them into the mainstream education system.
- National Policy on Education (NPE): NPE provides the framework for educational policies in Nigeria. It includes provisions for ensuring access to quality education for all children, irrespective of their background or location.
- Better Education Service Delivery for All (BESDA): BESDA is a program supported by the World Bank and the Nigerian government. It specifically targets OOSC, focusing on improving access to education, reducing dropout rates, and enhancing learning outcomes.
- Conditional Cash Transfer Programs: The Nigerian government, in collaboration with international partners, initiated cash transfer programs that provide financial incentives to families to encourage them to send their children to school. These programs aim to reduce the economic barriers that prevent children from attending school.
- Community Mobilization: Various community-based initiatives and advocacy efforts were undertaken to raise awareness about the importance of education, and to encourage parents and guardians to send their children to school.

Excerpts from the field instrument:

“There are several government policies on basic education, but there is no specific policy on AEPs in Nigeria” (Policymaker)

“Accelerated education programme was approved by the national council of education” (Policy stakeholder)

Considering the government's endeavours to introduce programmes and initiatives aimed at addressing the challenges of OOSC, certain obstacles have become apparent in Nigeria. One significant hurdle in mitigating the OOSC issue in Nigeria involves the task of sensitizing relevant stakeholders at the federal government level about AEPs and their potential impact on resolving the OOSC challenge. These stakeholders often perceive AEPs as typical adult education programs with short durations, without fully comprehending that AEPs represent a concept of providing an equivalent basic education program. AEPs have the capacity to offer certified basic education that matches the requirements of children who are older than the typical school age and have been excluded from the educational system, all within a condensed time frame. The key challenge lies in strengthening advocacy efforts with federal government stakeholders regarding the true nature and potential of AEPs. This awareness-building process is pivotal in securing stakeholders' endorsement and engendering their active engagement in championing AEPs as their own projects and initiatives.

Furthermore, the lack of national standardization of AEPs throughout the country, the residual ramifications of the COVID-19 pandemic, and financial constraints present additional hurdles in the effort to address the challenge of OOSC. While there exists a common perception that the OOSC issue is primarily concentrated in northern Nigeria, it is important to recognize that the challenge of OOSC is pervasive across the entire nation. The emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 significantly disrupted the plans related to AEPs. Initially, following approval by the National Council of Education in 2019, there was an intention to conduct pilot programs in 2020, with a subsequent nationwide rollout in 2021 and 2022. However, the advent of COVID-19 in 2020 thwarted this timeline. To address the OOSC challenge, there is a notable level of investment, primarily funded by donor agencies. However, this investment remains insufficient due to the limited or virtually non-existent financial contribution from the government toward mitigating the OOSC challenge.

Excerpts supporting this are presented below:

“We do not like talking about the challenges because the more you talk about it, the more we get discouraged. One critical challenge is getting critical stakeholders at the federal level to endorse what AEPs are all about, what AEPs is intended to achieve, because people view AEPs as the usual adult education programme where you have 9 months. They do not understand the concept of equivalency of basic education programme” (Policy stakeholder)

“When we started pushing for AEPs in Nigeria some 3 to 4 years ago, there was some resistance in terms of how do we make AEPs work in Nigeria? But we were convinced that this is what we really need to do, to address the challenge of the over-aged OOSC and youth in the country ” (Policy stakeholder)

“The problem is how to regularize the Accelerated Basic Education Programme across the country because there is a notion that the out of school children and youth problem is the problem of the north, but from my experience working on AEPs, we see that the problem is across the country. So we are seeing how we can take it across the country” (Policy stakeholder)

“Covid-19 affected AEPs, we got approval from the national council of education in November, 2019, with the intention of doing some piloting in 2020, and then we rollout in 2021 and 2022 which was the initial plan. But in 2020, covid-19 came and disrupted the process” (Policy stakeholder)

“AEP is relatively new to the country and it is not in the budget line. The funding is limited and donor agencies have been supporting, but donor agencies cannot support forever” (Policy stakeholder)

“Federal government needs to own AEPs. Synergy between the federal and state government on AEP needs to be made from the conceptualization and institutionalisation stage” (Policymaker)

“There should be a time frame for the development of policies backing AEP and it should be evaluated to track the progress made” (Policymaker)

3.1.3 Looking forward to what can be achieved to sustain and scale AEP

The depth of sustainability and scalability of Accelerated Education Programmes (AEPs) has not been particularly significant due to several contributing factors. These factors include the non-existence of a supportive framework for AEP implementation at the subnational level, financial constraints, the lack of nationwide standardization of AEPs, and the siloes amongst governmental levels. The responsibility for creating a conducive environment for the implementation of AEPs falls on the Federal Government of Nigeria, facilitated through the Ministry of Education. This involves the development of programmes and work plans aligned with the government's objectives and goals. Furthermore, the institutionalization of AEPs through policy endorsement is crucial for the success of these programs. The formulation of policies and work plans specifically tailored to AEPs is instrumental in driving their sustainability and scalability. Currently, there are established policies related to Universal Basic Education, but none specifically geared towards AEPs.

The formulation of specific policies tailored to AEPs will be instrumental in rectifying the limited government involvement in AEPs. These policies, in conjunction with a well-structured work plan, will facilitate the allocation of budget resources in alignment with the government's goals and objectives for AEPs. This allocation will play a crucial role in the execution of AEPs at the state, local government, and community levels. To raise awareness and garner support among subnational policymakers for AEPs, the Nigerian Educational Research and Development Council (NERDC) conducted a sensitization campaign. As a result of this campaign, several states embraced the concept and expressed their readiness to initiate AEP implementation within their respective states. Under the aegis of the Federal Government, NERDC has undertaken various innovative initiatives related to AEPs, with some currently in pilot and implementation phases. The evaluation of the outcomes of these implemented AEPs will serve as a determinant of the sustainability and scalability of these innovations. The nationwide regularisation of AEPs is essential for countering the perception that the Out-of-

School Children (OOSC) challenge is predominantly concentrated in the northeastern part of the country, and primarily a result of the disruptions caused by the insurgency. It is crucial to acknowledge that the OOSC challenge is a nationwide issue that extends beyond the boundaries of any specific state.

Excerpts from the field instrument:

“For us at the ministry, we are to ensure that the right platform, policy and structure is in place to implement AEPs. We are suppose to design programmes, it is ot the federal agencies and departments that will implement the programmes but the subnational and the donor agencies” **(Policymaker)**

“The ministry is to ensure that whatever intervention has a proper policy background to ensure its institutionalisation and whatever is being done by partners, aligns properly with governments plans” **(Policymaker)**

“There are innovations that have been done, but they need to be properly institutionalised before we expect states or other implementers to carry on” **(Policymaker)**

“The federal government designs, while the state government implements. There has been a design launched by the Nigerian education research development council and was launched in 2022. Hence, we need to look at the number of states implementing and how the programmes are being implemented. There are few states for now, and that is too small to generalise its workability” **(Policymaker)**

“There are several government policies on basic education, but there is no specific policy on AEPs in Nigeria” **(Policymaker)**

“The problem is how to regularize the Accelerated Basic Education Programme across the country because there is a notion that the out of school children and youth problem is the problem of the north, but from my experience working on AEPs, we see that the problem is across the country. So we are seeing how we can take it across the country” **(Policy stakeholder)**

“We conducted advocacy & sensitisation campaign with policy stakeholders at the federal level on AEPs” **(Policy stakeholder)**

“AEP is relatively new to the country and it is not in the budget line. The funding is limited and donor agencies have been supporting, but donor agencies cannot support forever” **(Policy stakeholder)**

3.2 Education Innovators

3.2.1 Background characteristics of education innovators

Education innovators play a pivotal role in ensuring the effectiveness and the intended outcomes of Accelerated Education Programmes (AEPs) that receive funding from donor agencies. These education innovators are local non-governmental organizations (NGOs) with a strong local presence, actively facilitating and achieving the desired outcomes of these interventions. Education innovators, including organizations such as Kanem Borno Human

Development Association (KABHUDA), Communal Conservation Friendly Health and Social Development Support Initiative (COCOSOHDI), Taimako Community Development Initiatives (TCDI), Hallmark Leadership Initiative (HALI), and Restoration of Hope Initiative (ROHI), have implemented a range of AEPs. These organizations work in close collaboration with international development agencies like PLAN International, FHI 360, and the International Rescue Committee (IRC), which receive funding from international donors such as DFID and USAID to implement various development programs.

3.2.2 Experience of operating AEPs and level of support by the government

Accelerated Education Programmes (AEPs) are innovative educational initiatives that have been implemented in northeastern Nigeria to reduce the number of Out-of-School Children (OOSC). AEPs have predominantly been deployed during crisis periods and in conflict zones, such as the Boko Haram insurgency in northeastern Nigeria. This insurgency has resulted in loss of lives and property, the destruction of critical infrastructure, the displacement of millions of people, and the disruption of economic, health, and education systems. The first AEP introduced in Borno state was the Education Crisis Response (ECR), which was launched by Creative Associates. Creative Associates collaborated with various education innovators in Borno state by inviting these organizations to implement educational programs in the region. Education innovators like Kanem Borno Human Development Association (KABHUDA), Hallmark Leadership Initiative (HALI), and Restoration of Hope Initiative (ROHI) were among those who supported the implementation of AEPs in Borno state. These education innovators conducted awareness campaigns on AEPs, educating parents and children about the importance of education. They established AEP classes, each class accommodating 50 learners. AEP facilitators were recruited by the education innovators to impart knowledge and enhance learning outcomes. As a result of these efforts, more than 100,000 OOSC were trained and mainstreamed into the formal education system.

Excerpts supporting this are presented below:

“AEP was started in 2016 during the insurgency period. The first organization that started AEP was the Creative Association which created a programme called the Education Crisis Response (ECR). Creative Associates selected and partnered with local NGOs like Kanem Borno Human Development Association (KABHUDA), Hallmark Leadership Initiative (HALI), and Restoration of Hope Initiative (ROHI). We were sent to various communities and local governments where we set up AEP learning classes. Each AEP class had 50 learners and recruited a facilitator for each class. The learners were mainstreamed into formal schools.”
(Management Staff, KABHUDA, Borno State)

*“An advertisement was made for the which we applied for, and that is how we got involved”***(Management Staff, KABHUDA, Borno State)**

Other AEPs, such as the Accelerated Learning Program (ALP) and the Addressing Education in Northeast Nigeria (AENN), followed a similar strategy by engaging local non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to implement AEPs, in collaboration with international development organizations that receive funding from international donor agencies to carry out development initiatives. These international development organizations implemented AEPs by adopting the Universal Basic Education Program curriculum, which was officially launched by the Government of Nigeria in 2021. The curriculum encompasses AEPs designed for two specific

groups: children who are currently out of school and children who have exceeded the typical age for basic education. The AEP beneficiaries are categorized into three groups:

- Children who have never attended school, aged 9-10.
- Children who had previously enrolled in formal education but dropped out at some point due to various reasons, aged 10-12.
- Children who have never attended school, aged 9-10, and children who had previously enrolled in formal education but dropped out at some point for various reasons, aged 12-15.

Excerpts from the field instrument:

“AEPs are introduced to support OOSCs that have been out of school for years due to several factors such as insurgency and crisis or children that have never attended formal school before. The AEP is aimed at supporting the OOSC with accelerated learning for the children for a period of 1 year and these children are to be mainstreamed either to a formal school or to vocational training depending on the number of years. AEP had been implemented even before the universal basic education programme curriculum, which was launched by the federal government of Nigeria in 2021, which INGOs are currently working with. The curriculum contains AEPs for children who are out of school and children who have gone beyond the age of basic education. There are three levels to the support and they include: 1. Children that have never been to school age 9- 10 2. Children that have been to formal school but dropped out at some point for some reason or the other age 10- 12 2. Children that have never been to school age 9- 10 3. Children that have been to formal school but dropped out at some point for some reason or the other ages 12 - 15” (Borno State Education Manager, International Rescue Committee)

“I started working on AEP in 2017 while working on a DFID project where we had to support over 100,000 OOSC and integrate them back into formal school” (Borno State Education Manager, International Rescue Committee)

A noteworthy aspect of operating AEPs involves the collaboration between international development organizations and the government regarding the educational curriculum for AEPs. The most recent AEP in Borno state was the "Programme on Addressing Education in Northeast Nigeria," which received funding from USAID and was executed by FHI 360. This collaborative effort included a partnership between PLAN International and the Nigerian Educational Research and Development Council (NERDC) to develop the curriculum used to facilitate AEP beneficiaries, with PLAN International providing the financial support. The initial testing of the curriculum, as part of the Opportunity to Learn project, was successfully completed by the International Rescue Committee during the first pilot phase. Currently, the second phase of this testing is underway. It is important to note that AEPs have been in operation for a considerable duration, pre-dating the launch of the Accelerated Basic Education Programme Curriculum (ABEPC) by the Federal Government. AEPs have positively impacted over 50 communities in Borno state, spanning various local government areas, including MMC, Jere, Konduga, Mongona, and Gwoza.

Excerpts supporting this are presented below:

“The last programme was Addressing Education in northeast Nigeria (AENN) the programme was funded by USAID and was carried out by FHI 360” (Management Staff, KABHUDA, Borno State)

“PLAN International is the funder of AEP curriculum in collaboration with NERDC” (Borno State Education Manager, International Rescue Committee)

The first pilot test on the AEP curriculum on the opportunity to learn project has been done by IRC, of which they are currently in their second year” (Borno State Education Manager, International Rescue Committee)

“started in 2022. The Accelerated Basic Education Programme Curriculum (ABEPC) was launched by the federal government. But the normal non formal AEP has been implemented before now. We started using that since in 2017” (Borno State Education Manager, International Rescue Committee)

At least 50 communities have been reached within MMC, Jere, Konduga, Mongona and Goza (Borno State Education Manager, International Rescue Committee)

Sustaining and scaling AEPs have encountered challenges, particularly in overcoming financial limitations. While there is a degree of sustainability associated with AEPs, the financial aspect poses a significant obstacle. Many stakeholders, such as the community and the government, play essential roles in ensuring the continuity of AEPs but face their own financial constraints. Communities find it challenging to provide financial support for AEPs once donor agencies have concluded their involvement, primarily due to high poverty levels and the adverse impacts of insurgency in the northeastern region. Government attention to AEPs has been limited, impeding meaningful government contributions to the sustainability of AEPs. While there is no sense of ownership of AEPs by the Government, during the phase-out of the first cohort of the DFID project, some AEP centres in Biu managed to be sustained by community members. Out of the 300 AEP centres, five of them achieved sustainability. This was made possible as donor agencies shared their exit strategy with the community, and certain community members were trained in resource mobilization. The capacity-building aimed to assist the community in mobilizing resources within their locality to maintain the AEP centres.

Excerpts from the field instrument:

“Sustainability has been a major challenge in the project implementation, nevertheless, we have recorded some successes. A practical example is that in 2018/2019 when we were trying to exit the first phase or cohort of the DFID project, some of our AEP centers in Biu LGA were sustained by community members. The community members were informed of the project exit and the sustainability plan was shared with them. They requested some training and we trained them on resource mobilization on how to source resources within the community to sustain the AEP centers. Out of about 300 AEP centers that we worked in, about 5 have been sustained and they are currently working” (Borno State Education Manager, International Rescue Committee)

“The sustenance is all about finance; lack of funding makes it difficult for the programme to be sustained and the availability of finances make it easy for the sustenance of AEPs” **(Management Staff, KABHUDA, Borno State)**

“There is no government ownership of AEP. Even if there is, where are the resources and how can the government continue to fund AEP when donor agencies have left” **(Programme Manager, COCOSHODI)**

Education innovators have encountered difficulties not only in sustaining AEPs but also in the process of mainstreaming. Following the completion of the nine-month AEP, mainstreaming the AEP beneficiaries in the formal education system presents a challenge. Approximately 20% of the AEP beneficiaries cannot be retained due to economic hardships and the overall economic conditions of the country, undermining the intended objective and overall effectiveness of AEPs. Consequently, additional resources are needed to support the post-AEP phase to prevent the mainstreamed beneficiaries from discontinuing their education. Alternatively, there is a proposal to establish more vocational centres to facilitate the transition of AEP beneficiaries into the world of work.

Excerpts supporting this are presented below:

“We are having a retention problem, such that 20% of our mainstreamed beneficiaries cannot be retained because of lack of resources cause by economic hardship” **(Programme Manager, COCOSHODI)**

3.2.3 Level of commitment of State/local government to support/sustain AEPs

The government at the state and local levels has played a crucial role in creating a conducive environment for the entry and operations of donor agencies. In Borno state, there are 107 partners involved in humanitarian operations, including national and international NGOs, government agencies, and UN agencies (OCHA, 2022). This supportive operational environment has been instrumental in facilitating humanitarian interventions, especially those aimed at addressing the adverse effects of the Boko Haram insurgency in the state. A state government agency known as the Agency for Mass Education (SAME) is responsible for overseeing out-of-school children (OOSC) in the state. SAME provides support to education innovators through resources for capacity building, such as trainers, mentors, teachers, coaching, mentoring of learning facilitators, and monitoring the activities of education innovators. The government's monitoring and evaluation of the activities carried out by education innovators and implementers are often prompted by donor agencies like the International Rescue Committee (IRC). There is a joint monitoring of activities established by AEP implementers in collaboration with SAME, and updates on the activities and operations of AEPs in the state are regularly provided to the government.

Excerpts from the field instrument:

“The state and local governments allowed the operations of the local and international NGOs and to convey awareness to the local government community” **(Management Staff, KABHUDA, Borno State)**

“At the state level, we work with the state Agency for Mass Education (SAME), which is the body in charge of OOSC in the state. Most times, they support the trainers, mentor teachers, the monitoring of activities, coaching, and mentoring of learning facilitators” **(Borno State Education Manager, International Rescue Committee)**

“The monitoring and evaluation of the AEP activities is induced by the donor agencies such as IRC, establishing a joint monitoring of activities with SAME, by inviting SAME to see what we are doing” **(Borno State Education Manager, International Rescue Committee)**

Government support for AEPs has been limited, primarily because these programs have not been given high priority by the Government. Nevertheless, the Government has demonstrated a growing level of commitment and support by making government schools available to AEP implementers as learning centres after regular school hours. These AEP sessions typically take place in the evenings. Moreover, the Government recognizes the value of AEPs by actively promoting the mainstreaming of AEP beneficiaries into formal education, a desired outcome both for the AEP beneficiaries and the funders. The Government's support includes offering AEP implementers access to government school facilities as learning centres and facilitating the mainstreaming of AEP beneficiaries into the formal education system. However, the Government, through SAME, faces limitations concerning the number of beneficiaries it can mainstream into formal education, specifically at primary and junior secondary schools. This constraint presents challenges for AEP implementers in ensuring the successful mainstreaming of all AEP beneficiaries. Additional funding is required to address the needs of AEP beneficiaries who cannot be mainstreamed due to the resources required for their inclusion. The Government has expressed increasing willingness and commitment to support AEPs, and there is an expectation for a more substantial commitment from the Government in the near future, including increased financial support through budgetary allocations, thereby prioritizing AEPs.

Excerpts supporting this are presented below:

“The government did not make any financial contribution, but they absorbed the AEP beneficiaries into the formal school” **(Management Staff, KABHUDA, Borno State)**

“The government has not supported the AEPs financially, however, they have made available government school infrastructure for donor agencies to utilize in the AEP sessions” **(Borno State Education Manager, International Rescue Committee)**

“It depends, if the government is willing to support it, they will fund it, but I do not think they will support AEP” **(Management Staff, KABHUDA, Borno State)**

“No, financial support has been their major hiccups when it comes to AEPs because it is not a priority of the state government” **(Borno State Education Manager, International Rescue Committee)**

“the government through SAME has some limits on the number of beneficiaries it can mainstream into formal education (primary school and junior secondary school)” **(Policystakeholder)**

3.2.4 Looking forward to what can be achieved to sustain and scale AEPs

The sustainability and scalability of AEPs face challenges when donor agencies exit or complete their intervention periods. To ensure the continued success and expansion of AEPs, a collaborative approach involving all stakeholders at various levels as well as financial commitment from the Government through budgetary allocations is crucial. It is imperative that there be synergy among government entities— including national, state, and local government levels— in their support for AEPs. This collaboration will enhance the desired impact that the government aims to achieve in its support for AEPs. Collaborative efforts between government, International NGOs, national NGOs, and communities are fundamental in driving the sustainability and scalability of AEPs, as each entity's contributions complement one another, ultimately facilitating the expansion and long-term viability of AEPs.

Historically, donor agencies have been the primary investors and funders of AEPs in Nigeria, with minimal financial support or investment from the government at any level. Government financial support is essential to assist communities in sustaining AEP centres once donor agencies have been phased out. This financial backing can be provided through increased budgetary allocations for education spending. An augmentation in the budgetary allocation for the State Agency for Mass Education (SAME) will be instrumental in sustaining AEPs. Currently, SAME receives 1% of the education spending budget in Borno state. An increase in this budgetary allocation will empower SAME to maintain and expand its AEP mainstreaming initiatives.

Excerpts from the field instrument:

“Any funding organization that has the extension of imparting knowledge to young ones through AEPs is important in sustaining and scaling AEPs” (**Management Staff, KABHUDA, Borno State**)

“The partnership amongst the Federal Ministry of Education, State Ministry of Education, and SAME. There should be financial support in the funding of SAME, as SAME complained that only 1% of the budget of education spending in the state is allocated to SAME” (**Borno State Education Manager, International Rescue Committee**)

“It is the international NGOs that invested in the programme” (**Management Staff, KABHUDA, Borno State**)

To ensure full government investment in AEPs, with a primary focus on community-level operations, it is essential for the Government to enact legislation for AEPs at the subnational level. This legislative action will prioritize AEPs within the government's agenda, resulting in the allocation of the necessary resources required for sustaining and expanding AEPs when donor agencies phase out their funding. This legislative commitment complements the non-financial support provided by the Government, which includes offering government school facilities to AEP implementers as learning centres and actively participating in mainstreaming AEP beneficiaries into formal education. As a result, the government will extend its support to AEPs in both financial and non-financial forms.

However, achieving full government investment in AEPs necessitates efforts to sensitize policymakers, particularly through interactions with donor agencies. The goal is to convey the effectiveness and significance of AEPs, emphasizing the government's crucial role in their

sustainability after international development organizations have exited. This sensitization of policymakers may involve stakeholder engagements and joint monitoring of activities where policymakers actively participate in monitoring and evaluating the initiatives carried out by AEP implementers. Demonstrating the positive outcomes and effectiveness of AEPs through evidence-based approaches is vital for convincing and educating policymakers about the importance of increased government support for sustaining and scaling up AEPs.

Excerpts supporting this are presented below:

“Having the state assembly enact a law that mandates the state to consider AEP as a priority to the state ministry of education. This will facilitate financial, manpower and structural support for AEPs at the local government and community levels” (**Borno State Education Manager, International Rescue Committee**)

“I think it is proper for the government to invest in the AEP programme by supporting in cash or in kind” (**Management Staff, KABHUDA, Borno State**)

How do you think this could be done in ensuring government fully invest in AEPs

“It can only come by sensitization by the highest donor agencies” (**Management Staff, KABHUDA, Borno State**)

3.2.5 Investments and partnerships by non-state actors

Non-state actors play a pivotal role as the primary investors and supporters of AEPs in Nigeria. They extend their support to AEPs through both financial and non-financial means. International development organizations provide funding for the establishment of learning centres, remuneration of AEP facilitators, provision of scholastic materials, and more for a specified period of years before they conclude their involvement. In the context of AEPs in Borno state, most AEP initiatives have ended, with only one AEP currently in progress within the state.

The unsustainability of AEPs at the end of donor-led interventions diminishes the motivations for children to pursue basic education, due to lack of government ownership of donor-led interventions potentially leading to increased crime and social issues. During the period when AEPs were implemented by donor agencies, education innovators gained valuable experience and built the capacity to reach communities across wards and local governments. They conducted sensitization campaigns on AEPs, recruited AEP facilitators, established learning centres, and more. These non-state actors employ a community-based approach to AEPs, empowering AEP facilitators with non-formal teaching techniques through capacity building. This approach has led to increased AEP enrolments within the community.

Excerpts from the field instrument:

“There has been a lot of capacity development and training for education stakeholders. Infrastructural development by the building of classes by the donor agencies” (**Borno State Education Manager, International Rescue Committee**)

“Most of the programmes have ended, it is only one programmes that is on at the moment” (**Management Staff, KABHUDA, Borno State**)

“I have a lot of experience that I can penetrate into any community, ward, and local government to sensitize them, set up learning centers, and recruit facilitators if the funds are available” (Management Staff, KABHUDA, Borno State)

“It affects the communities and there is no incentive for children in the community to achieve basic education” (Management Staff, KABHUDA, Borno State)

“The impact is that children will be left uneducated, which will lead to crime and social vices” (Management Staff, KABHUDA, Borno State)

Considering the substantial support provided by non-state actors and the limited role of the Government in assisting AEPs, the collaboration between government and non-state actors in the provision of AEPs is critical. It functions as follows: the government offers the use of government school facilities as learning centres and facilitates the process of mainstreaming AEP beneficiaries into formal education. Non-state actors, on the other hand, take responsibility for other essential aspects, including funding AEPs, ensuring capacity-building for personnel, providing structural resources, and more. To enhance the evaluation and oversight of AEP projects, an emergency working group, comprising both state and non-state actors, has been established. This group utilizes a dashboard to streamline the evaluation process of AEPs, granting access to all relevant stakeholders at no cost. Implementing partners use this dashboard to report on their activities, and a monthly report is subsequently submitted to the government, outlining the progress made, challenges faced, and any required support. The establishment of the emergency working group has significantly improved the implementation of AEP projects in Borno state. It has allowed for a detailed understanding of the impact each non-state actor has in specific communities and local governments, preventing duplication of AEP efforts within Borno state. This collaborative approach has resulted in broader AEP coverage across the state.

Excerpts supporting this are presented below:

“The non-state actors provide the funding, the capacity, the manpower, structural resources, and more. The government does not fund AEPs at all for now, it’s the non state actors that support AEPs” (Borno State Education Manager, International Rescue Committee)

“Government engagement with AEP is minimal, as the AEPs implemented by the government are funded by donor agencies” (Management Staff, KABHUDA, Borno State)

“The collaboration has been very good because we have the education emergency working group where all the state and non-state actors come together on a monthly basis to discuss the pros and cons of project implementations in the state. So, I think that the collaborations have been very unanimous and have improved the way projects are being implemented within the state. Hence the education emergency working group has been a major success factor in the collaboration between the state and non-state actors because in the working group, we have the INGOs, local NGOs, and stakeholders from the Ministry of Education” (Borno State Education Manager, International Rescue Committee)

Excerpts from the field instrument:

“The local NGOs have a dashboard for all programmes and it is free for everyone to see how the programmes is run” (**Management Staff, KABHUDA, Borno State**)

“In the emergency working group, there is an update monthly on what each and every organisation is doing, so the WH questions are always answered by every INGO and local NGOs. There is a dashboard where every INGO reports its implementations including local NGOs. On a monthly basis, there are reports to the state government on the project implementations; the progress, the challenges, and the support needed” (**Borno State Education Manager, International Rescue Committee**)

“Why? There are benefits because it avoids double counting of AEP beneficiaries, if IRC is working in Magumeri and PLAN International is working in Magumeri, we need to know where PLAN International is working and where IRC is working so we don’t have replications of efforts. This allows for collaborations between the INGOs and NGOs. It allows for wide coverage rather than small coverage. It allows for continuous sensitization and information of the donor agencies, where we are and what is needed” (**Borno State Education Manager, International Rescue Committee**)

3.3 State Government Respondents

3.3.1 Background characteristics of education innovators

Most of the stakeholders interviewed have accumulated experience in this sector over decades and provided some insight into the structure and dynamics of the Accelerated Education Programme (AEP) intervention in Borno State. AEPs are largely introduced through the Borno State Universal Basic Education Board. Meetings are held initially to determine the AEPs’ objectives, activities, aspirations and considered achievements. AEPs are structured to directly target the out-of-school children (OOSC) challenge.

As part of a collective in the State Agency for Mass Literacy, many AEPs introduce class structures that cater to children who have lost their schooling years due to displacements that follow terrorist insurgencies. Curricula are formulated to allow OOSC to catch up with peers that continued in formal education. Some successes have been achieved over the years, but the problem persists and the need for scalability to conclusively tackle the OOSC challenge is made more pertinent. Stakeholders highlight that thousands have been transitioned into formal education due to AEP interventions since 2019. However, efforts have to be consolidated and better coordinated for even more effective results. Following in italics are supportive excerpts from the discussions with stakeholders.

Excerpts supporting this are presented below:

AEPs are in parts that include: The catchup classes, transition classes, and the OOSC nonformal education classes. Each of these programmes has their names and curriculums that fit into the programme objective. I have been in the formal and non-formal education system for the past 13 years and was trained by the USAID on AEPs training and education emergency programme (**State Coordinator & ED for Civil Society Action Coalition on Education**)

AEPs have been introduced at the basic educational level through the Borno state universal basic education (SUBEB) and through the local government educational authority. Several meetings have been held at the state level and we have been briefed on their activities, what they intend to do and what they have achieved in the school system. Particularly, to assist the OOSC to learn the fundamental skills of literacy and numeracy. Supporting the OOSC which instructional materials like writing material and books **(Policystakeholder)**

AEPs is ongoing in the state and they have been recording success. I have seen over 10,000 children being mainstreamed into formal schools from 2019 till date. I was involved as a master trainer of AEP facilitators, supervisor and monitoring the process of AEPs in Borno state **(Director, Woman Programme Social Mobilization, SAME)**

3.3.2 Knowledge of the out-of-school challenges in the country/pledges and commitments

Innovators possess a comprehensive understanding of the scale of the OOSC challenge, providing insightful ideas and solutions based on firsthand knowledge of the intricacies involved. While considerable efforts are underway to determine the exact number of OOSC, innovators generally agree that the figure likely exceeds one million and may be closer to two million. The Joint Education Needs Assessment (JENA) is actively engaged in delivering up-to-date data and analysis on the OOSC challenge within the BAY area of Northeast Nigeria (Borno, Adamawa, and Yobe), with JENA members contributing to this study. Collaborative efforts between donors, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), the federal Ministry of Education, and state Ministries of Education are underway to address the issue of OOSC in Nigeria. These initiatives focus on OOSC enrolment, conducting awareness campaigns, engaging with stakeholders, and more. The government has implemented a strategy called Better Education Service Delivery, a program specifically designed to transition children from the streets to the classroom. This initiative has proven to be highly effective in enrolling a significant number of OOSC. Accelerated Education Programs (AEPs), operating under the State Agency for Mass Literacy, actively contribute to alleviating the OOSC challenge. Despite government commitment and collaborative efforts, ethno-religious barriers persist, limiting the success of interventions. Some parents resist sending their children to school due to a disdain for Western education, necessitating interventions in adult education and engagement with community leaders to address such ignorance and rigidity.

Excerpts from the field instrument:

Yes, they said Borno State has over 1 million OOSC and the source is UNICEF **(Policystakeholder)**

1.8 million OOSC I am a pioneer member of the education emergency working group in Northeast Nigeria and I am also part of the joint education need assessment to come up with the number of OOSC in Borno state. The government will not accept it, as OOSC are children that have not been mainstreamed with Western education, children roaming the streets, children hawking, and there are thousands of them roaming the streets in the villages stranded and hungry due to the impact of the insurgency **(State Coordinator & ED for Civil Society Action Coalition on Education)**

The policy is the establishment of the state Agency for Mass Literacy, to take care of all forms of non formal education, of which all donors and NGOs must pass through to begin implementation. However, AEPs are inaugurated and implemented during the crisis, because

when there is no crisis, everyone knows where to go to obtain education. The Boko Haram insurgency disrupted the school system (Policystakeholder)

Partnering with donors & NGOs through the federal ministry of education and the state ministry of education to reduce the OOSC in Nigeria. These policies are done through enrollment of OOSC, by conducting sensitization and enlightenment campaigns, interacting with stakeholders and more (Policystakeholder)

Yes, the government has a strategy for OOSC in Nigeria. Better education service delivery is a government programme designed to take children from the street into the classroom. This is the best programme I have seen that has enrolled a good number of OOSC (Policystakeholder)

Nigeria has numerous policies, but the problem is the implementation. For example in Borno State, some parents do not like their children going to school basically because of their apathy for western education and ignorance, such that no matter the efforts you make you will still see some children out of school (Policystakeholder)

3.3.3 Ways the government is addressing the out of school challenge

The Borno state government is proactive in addressing the OOSC challenge despite the constraints that persist. The State governor continues to invest in the infrastructure required for effective education. Despite the importance of the non-formal approach adopted to meet the challenges presented by the OOSC situation, the transition of beneficiaries into formal education has been less than optimal. A contributing factor to the persistence of the problem is the conundrum of parents recognizing the economic value in their children and exploiting this at the expense of further educational development. As such, the government has developed programmes that mobilize parents and communities to pursue the path of education for future benefit. Local leadership is important in communicating the benefits of such initiatives and encouraging community participation. The Borno state governor personally joins enrollment drive campaigns and provides incentives to discourage parents from limiting the potential of their children for temporary gains.

Excerpts supporting this are presented below:

The Borno state governor has built classes that are specific to formal or conventional schools. Recently, he has recruited teachers in order to address these challenges, but there is the challenge of mainstreaming children into formal education. The non formal approach needs to be adopted for the OOSC before transitioning to the formal system (State Coordinator & ED for Civil Society Action Coalition on Education)

The government developed programmes such as: Mobilization of parents and communities, a sensitization programme, an enrollment drive campaign, an incentive programme for mothers, for the mother to allow their children to go to school because mothers depend on their children to hawk, generate money for them to eat (Policystakeholder)

The State Government partly budgets for these initiatives and receives funding from other sources such as grants and charitable donations. The activities of AEPs are largely monitored and coordinated by the appropriate body assigned to handle these non-formal educational activities. Necessary consultations and collaborations are ongoing within the framework of the cooperative purpose of the agency.

Funding remains a major challenge for the advancement of AEPs including a host of other problems. Amongst these problems is the bottleneck posed by parents who do not believe in Western education – this ignorance manifest in many ways including that they restrict their offsprings from benefiting from these programs. This problem is largely driven by religious beliefs, however, by consulting and with traditional and administrative leaders in the community, a compromise has been reached. Hence, Thursdays and Fridays are now dedicated days for teaching basic literacy and numeracy, with other days reserved for Islamic studies.

Elements of terrorism continue in some of these communities and contribute to the persistence of this problem. Additionally, poverty remains prevalent and limits the interest and ability of parents to commit scarce resources to educating their children. Primary needs and concerns remain the priority, such that financial aid remains the only viable option to encourage participation in the educational process.

The Better Education Service Delivery for All (BESD) is a highlighted initiative that seems effective at tackling the OOSC issue. This programme which receives funding from the World Bank provides learning materials for pupils as well as clothing and a feeding incentive to encourage participation. Overall, the current governor recognizes the importance of education and is open to adopting feasible practices aimed at reducing the OOSC challenge.

Excerpts from the field instrument:

“The funds provided by the government are not enough and we have been advocating to the Borno state governor and he is giving us some audience” (Policystakeholder)

“Insurgency, as the insurgency has displaced 2/3rd of the community in the state, many have been killed. Many of the communities are still not accessible, not all of the communities are settled. Some are in host communities that they are not familiar with, hence they are forced out of school. 2. Poverty is the second factor, as most of the displaced parents have no jobs to do, they are just trying to survive by addressing their primary needs, hence, they cannot afford to send their children to school. 3. The support from the community members who are not forthcoming to support the OOSC, is another factor” (Policystakeholder)

“The Matching grant is facilitated partly by the federal and state government. The state government will present and defend the work plan before implementation. Most activities under the work plan are programmes that will attract OOSC to the schools. Sometimes the state governor involves himself to drive enrollment rates in the three senatorial districts. Vice president was in Borno last week to flag off the enrolment drive himself and he offered them some school and writing materials. Better education service delivery for all (BESD) which is supported by the World bank. Several support for OOSC is made through this programme such as: Providing free Uniforms, Shoes, socks, feeding, writing materials. Through this, the traditional leaders, council and administrative communities were consulted and they agreed that Thursdays and Fridays are dedicated days for the teaching of basic literacy and numeracy, while the remaining days, they attend their traditional Islamic classes. The AEP activities are more operational at the LGA level, which the AEP managers are more operational, than the state. They only come to SUBEB when they have problems or advice and they share their work plans when they come for meetings and engagements” (Policystakeholder)

3.3.4 Ways Donor Agencies and NGOs are addressing the Out-of-School- Children Challenge

Donor Agencies have played important roles in driving progress with some of these initiatives. BESD is often mentioned as an impactful programme. Funded by the World Bank, this initiative has provided incentives for children to return to the classrooms. The UNICEF-headed annual enrolment drive has recorded some success and is often referenced as a key initiative aimed at mitigating the OOSC challenge in Borno State. Donor agencies also help fund training sessions for AEP facilitators as well as the provision of teaching and learning materials (TLMs). These initiatives have recorded some success across the state. That notwithstanding, gaps remain that need to be addressed in order to further progress in the bid to limit the OOSC problem.

Excerpts supporting this are presented below:

“The Better education service delivery programmes funded by the World Bank has increased the enrollment rate. UNICEF does an enrollment drive yearly” (Policystakeholder)

“The donor agencies pay volunteer teachers, train AEP facilitators, they provide instructing materials, renting or construction of temporary learning space, hygienic kits for girls, and water wash facilities” (Policystakeholder)

“The Better education service delivery programme and the annual enrollment drive” (Policystakeholder)

Changing dynamics often affect the composition of participants in the programme. There is need for further discussions and planning around the idiosyncrasies that contribute to low learning outcomes amongst some participants in the programme. Also, some reorientation is required to emphasize the importance of education over incentives like feeding and clothing, such that children and parents alike focus on this priority. Better coordination is needed in the donor/NGO space to limit duplication of interventions. Rather, a complementary approach is advised.

Excerpts from the field instrument:

“Child withdrawal and replacement of OOSC during the 3 to 6-month AEP cycle. The replaced children usually have lower learning outcomes because they did not begin the sessions early and because they replaced the children who withdrew. This is because each AEP class has a class of 50 students” (Policystakeholder)

“Parents' mentality; they believe that the children go there to collect the materials given to them such as Juice, sandals, writing materials and more. Which is the objective of the AEPs. (EG, the withdrawal rate is the move from one AEP programme to the other because of the scholastic materials given.). Hence, a mindset of the children and parents to achieve education rather than the materials is when the gap will be closed” (Policystakeholder)

“It is a problem of coordination amongst the donors and NGOs. There exists a lot of duplication in the approach towards AEPs rather than for the NGOs and donors to execute programmes that are complementary to achieve greater impact on the education intervention” (Policystakeholder)

“There are communication gaps. Some of these activities should be publicised as some of them are suspected to be working for themselves and for their interests. They also do not keep to the 25 year development plan of the government and that is making things difficult”
(Policystakeholder)

Donor agencies are important in providing funding and resources that are required to tackle the OOSC problem. However, the absence of such support is a cause for concern and requires creative solutions to address it. Innovators suggest that some of these AEP learning centres and initiatives be annexed to similar government facilities. As such, with a well-deliberated handover process, the government of the day can resume the responsibility for the continuity of these initiatives. A factor that is required in the event of such a transition is the understanding and commitment of the government of the day. Without the political will and funding to assume this responsibility, success is further limited. Another factor is the issue of insurgency which stakeholders suggest is the primary reason for donor and NGO presence in these regions. As long as the security situation persists, the OOSC challenge remains and thus, extends the need for donor and NGO commitments.

Excerpts supporting this are presented below:

“Through an exit and scalability plan from the beginning of the program that hands over the process to either the government or the community through proper legal framework. (EG, AEP learning centres should be built close to a government school, so that when they exit, the government school will use it as an annex, or other campuses”
(Policystakeholder)

“Donors and NGOs complement government efforts as with or without donors and NGOs, it is the government's responsibility to educate its citizens such as buying writing materials, building schools, employing teachers, providing wash materials. With good sensitization, the enrolment rate will rise and overtime we shall see a fall in the number of OOSC. The rush and existence of donors and NGOs in Borno state is because of the insurgency”
(Policystakeholder)

3.3.5 What policy and planning structures are in place to support AEPs

AEPs are a necessary complementary initiative to formal education. The support it provides to mitigate the OOSC challenge is noteworthy and often proves to be effective. Children who have missed years of schooling are accommodated by the curriculum developed by AEPs. Due to the high levels of poverty and desolation in some of these communities, AEPs continue to provide TLMs as essential support in order to encourage children to participate in these educational programmes.

AEPs offer the necessary training to teachers to equip them with the required knowledge to attend to the educational needs in such communities. AEPs also provide for learning centres, providing structures that enable learning over time.

Excerpts from the field instrument:

AEP is very effective as the AEP curriculum has a classification learning system. There are different ways of teaching used by AEP facilitators
(State Coordinator & ED for Civil Society Action Coalition on Education)

“AEPs have been effective in the training and retraining of teachers, the provision of educational materials, sensitization campaigns, and enlightenment, provision of semi-structures or temporary learning centres for learning” (Policystakeholder)

Limited policy and planning structures exist for cooperation and collaboration between state and non-state actors on education innovation. However, further discussions are necessary to develop frameworks that solidify this cooperation and are sensitive to the girl-child educational needs.

The government’s budget on education concerns is primarily focused on formal education and does not provide for these innovations or non-formal education funding needs. Most funding for these innovations comes from donor agencies and development NGOs.

Excerpts supporting this are presented below:

“Yes, there are policies and planning between government and non-state actors. No one has been denied access to develop learning centres in the state to the point of requesting a mainstream of the AEP beneficiaries. There is a good collaboration” (Policystakeholder)

“The education budget line at the state level is focused on formal and conventional education. There is no specific budget line for AEPs” (Policystakeholder)

3.3.6 Mainstreaming of AEP

AEPs have been operational in the country for some years and as such have developed roots in the non-formal education system. AEP-developed curricula have been adopted over the years but may need an update. Innovators note that some ideas may now be “obsolete” and in need of revision. The Borno State Government is trying to adopt the accelerated basic learning curriculum in particular which is well designed and has been implemented at the federal level. Implementation of such innovations at the state level and in Borno state, in particular, is imperative. Such efforts advance coordinating strategies to tackle the OOSC challenge across the region. As stated earlier, the AEP curriculum was under consideration to be adopted. The evidence available is limited as to what extent review and adoption intent is progressing. Details on the certification process by the government are unclear, if any. However, there seems a performance-based approach to mainstreaming successful candidates. As a result, both children and teachers will benefit from a seamless and exciting transition.

Excerpts supporting this are presented below:

“Yes we have a curriculum in the country and that curriculum has been approved, the curriculum has not been revised for some years, because some of the ideas are obsolete. The accelerated basic learning curriculum has been designed by experts and implemented at the federal level. Borno state is trying to adopt it at the state level” (Policystakeholder)

“The children to be mainstreamed were excited to be transitioned and the teachers were excited to accept the mainstreamed candidates. The mainstreaming exercise is done based on the outcome of their performance” (Policystakeholder)

The Nigerian Education Management Information System (EMIS) aims to provide a basis for monitoring the effectiveness and efficiency of the educational system **at all levels** of education. This mandate is not limited to formal education systems and as such each AEP child is expected

to have been captured in the system with a unique ID to show. Typical development concerns and conflict-related issues limit the management of the EMIS. Lack of technical support, ICT support centres, user-friendly platforms at the school and learning centre level and limited training on the operation of the EMIS challenge the efficacy of the system. Efforts are being made to improve the administration of the system to capture educational development on all levels, including the AEP innovation and enable systems monitoring of classroom activities such as attendance, training sessions and others.

Excerpts from the field instrument:

“Yes, they are captured, and each child has a unique ID” (Policystakeholder)

“Borno state has an EMIS data system, but we have been having some challenges. However, efforts are being made to capture the education development: Classroom activities, teachers' attendance, student attendance, teachers' training and more” (Policystakeholder)

3.3.7 Next priority steps in addressing the out-of-school challenges

Collaboration amongst stakeholders is critical to the progress of AEP innovation to aid the advancement of efforts in meeting the OOSC challenge. Partnerships between state and non-state actors are a strategic necessity to tackling the issue of OOSC. More investments are also needed from the state to highlight the importance of AEPs and express a commitment to the sustainability of programmes going forward. However, the current fiscal constraints are evident and may limit allocations toward these initiatives. That notwithstanding, emphasising the importance of such initiatives to meeting the Government's education goals and inducing budgetary commitments from the state is essential for further progress.

Excerpts supporting this are presented below:

“Is for all relevant stakeholders to collaborate on the identified gaps in order to address OOSC. (E.g the withdrawal and replacement of OOSC and the difference in their learning outcome). Some can read and write perfectly while some cannot even read ABC. Some are there for 3 months while some are there for 2 weeks only. That is the problem of non formal learning, children show up when they want to. 2. Strengthen the monitoring team, honest with assessment, more training, honest and dedicated facilitators so we can know exactly where the problem lies” (Policystakeholder)

“There should be a yearly government programme for joint education needs assessment to ascertain the number of OOSC 2. A friendly policy that will capture every child, to know the % of children that will transition into school and the world of work via vocational education. 3. Non State and state actors should exchange ideas on AEPs and OOSC problems” (State Coordinator & ED for Civil Society Action Coalition on Education)

“Strong collaboration between all stakeholders 2. Education implementers should ensure that their desired outcomes are achieved at the end of their funding periods. 3. More efforts should be made by the federal government to support AEPs as the problem of OOSC is more felt at the community, LGA and the state level” (State Coordinator & ED for Civil Society Action Coalition on Education)

3.4 Local Government-Level Respondents

3.4.1 Background characteristics of the respondents:

Respondents were drawn from a diverse array of stakeholders at the local government level, including government officials, SBMC/PTA members, and community and religious leaders, who have all been involved in the implementation of the Accelerated Education Programmes (AEPs). Their collective expertise and hands-on involvement with AEP initiatives have provided a comprehensive perspective on the programme's functioning and outcomes within the local context. Specifically, through their experiences, valuable insights into the impacts of AEPs on communities have been gained, as well as a better understanding of how different stakeholders can contribute to their success.

3.4.2 Knowledge of the out-of-school challenges in the country/pledges and commitments

In Borno state, a promising approach is in place to tackle the out-of-school children (OOSC) challenge. The state shows a clear commitment to addressing this issue through various initiatives. Government policies and strategic funds like the Borno State Education Fund reflect this dedication. At the same time, community-driven efforts play a significant role. Graduates and volunteers actively participate in non-formal education, and night classes provide additional support for AEP beneficiaries seeking to expand their knowledge. However, transparency and accountability concerns in government initiatives have led to skepticism in some communities, highlighting the need for more collaborative and inclusive solutions.

Moreover, media efforts in educating parents and children about the value of non-formal education are making a significant impact. Community-based child protection committees (CPC) also collaborate closely with NGOs to facilitate the enrolment of OOSC in non-formal education programs. This depicts the shared vision in Borno state, emphasizing that education acts as a beacon of hope, leading to economic development and reducing crime rates.

Excerpts supporting this are presented below:

“The government is using the media to enlighten parents and their children on the importance of education and the need to take advantage of the non-formal education to better themselves and their communities” (Head of Adult Education Unit, MMC LGA).

3.4.3 Ways the government has addressed the out of school challenge past and present

The Government's approach to addressing the OOSC problem has evolved significantly. Historically, initiatives like the Universal Primary Education (UPE) program and the Nomadic Education Commission (NEC) aimed to increase access to education for all children, including those in remote and underserved communities. These efforts were commendable steps towards reducing the number of OOSC and making education more accessible through flexible learning methods. Moreover, government policies like the Safe School Initiative prioritise the safety of educational institutions, which is crucial in the parts of the state affected by insecurity. Policies like these ensure that more children can attend school without fear.

Challenges persist, primarily in the form of financial constraints for parents and the enduring impact of insurgency in some parts of the state. However, these challenges have led to increased collaboration between the Government, NGOs, and local communities, promoting community involvement and initiating vocational learning centres which further enrich the current

strategies. Government partnership with organizations like UNICEF, PLAN International, and some other local stakeholders reveal the steadfastness in its mission to create an inclusive and accessible education system for all children to provide a brighter future through learning and skill development.

Excerpts supporting this are presented below:

“The local government Chairman of MMC issues out some money, school and writing materials to complement the efforts made by the donor agency in the AEP programme” (**Head of Adult Education Unit, MMC**)

3.4.4 Ways the donor and NGO sector are addressing the out of school challenge

The donor and NGO sector plays a pivotal role in addressing the OOSC challenge in Borno state. These organizations are the primary financial supporters of AEPs, which are instrumental in reintegrating OOSC into the formal education system. They provide funds and offer training to facilitate AEP sessions, equipping parents and facilitators with the necessary knowledge and resources to support the children once they transition to the formal education system for sustainability purposes. Notable organizations actively involved in these efforts include Save the Children, National Rescue Committee (NRC), PLAN International, FHI 360, UNICEF and the International Rescue Committee (IRC).

These programmes have a significant impact on communities, promoting literacy and numeracy skills among OOSC. However, a common concern raised is the sustainability of these programmes once donor support ends. While government support is suggested as a possible alternative, it is emphasised that a collaborative approach involving all stakeholders, including government and community leaders, is necessary to ensure the continued success of AEPs. Additionally, solving the challenges of poverty, inadequate infrastructure, and communication gaps is vital to effectively addressing the OOSC issue in the long term.

Excerpts from the field instrument:

“Donors are the main financial supporters of the AEP programme in the community. Non-formal education is most effective when donors are actively involved, as individuals from the community will be recruited as AEP facilitators and receive training in non-formal methodologies, leading to salary earnings. Moreover, during this period, more children are enrolled, and there is increased interest in learning among children in the community”. (**Head of Adult Education Unit, MMC**)

“The donor agencies are supportive of providing the parents of the AEP beneficiaries with the required educational needs for their children. This approach is to practically teach the parents on how to support their children through school after they have been mainstreamed” (**AEP Desk Officer, Shokari**)

“The donors and NGOs have been instrumental in funding and initiating the AEPs in communities in Borno State. However, “Donor or no donor, NGOs or no NGO, Government, or no government, the people in Borno State are not illiterates and there are elites that are financially buoyant enough to contribute to AEPs in cash and in-kind.” (**Policy stakeholder, MMC**)

“The Alhaji development community initiative was established by the community to ensure the sustainability and scalability of the AEP program in the community when the NGOs have completed their funding period”

3.4.5 What policy and planning structures are in place to support AEPs

Data on the policy and planning structures in place to support AEPs reveal a mixed picture. On the one hand, there is clear evidence of the positive impact of AEPs, particularly in terms of increasing enrolment in non-formal education and empowering girls. These programs are making education more accessible to OOSC and addressing societal issues like early marriage and child labour. Additionally, there is evidence of collaboration between government, NGOs, and donor agencies, showing a multi-stakeholder approach to supporting AEPs. However, there is a noticeable knowledge gap at the community level regarding specific policy and planning structures, which may hinder effective implementation and monitoring. Inconsistent community investment in AEPs also raises questions about long-term sustainability.

The information provided regarding scaling up AEPs is limited, leaving many questions unanswered regarding the strategies and locations involved. The critical challenge lies in balancing community involvement and external support while ensuring a sustainable and consistent investment in AEPs. To improve the policy and planning structures for AEPs, there is a need for increased transparency in collaborative efforts, enhanced community awareness, and more detailed knowledge about the policies and planning structures governing these programs. Addressing these issues will be crucial in ensuring that AEPs continue to make a positive impact on the education landscape in Borno State and beyond.

Excerpts supporting this are presented below:

“The community saw a growing number of children enrolling in non-formal education, which increased the interest of children in education and learning” (**Head of Adult Education Unit, MMC**)

“The state education trust fund is used to build a budget line for the local development of AEP, indicating collaboration between government entities and NGOs to support AEP initiatives” (**Principal Personal Assistant, MMC**)

“I do not know of any specific policies and planning structures supporting AEPs” (**AEP Desk Officer, MMC**)

3.4.6 Mainstreaming of AEPs and gender implications

In examining the critical theme of mainstreaming AEPs and its gender implications, responses from the interviewees offer insights into the existing practices and challenges. Some responses reveal an uncertainty regarding the presence of a specific curriculum for AEPs, with some noting the existence of government or NGO-developed curricula. The role of AEPs was recognised by some, and while one interviewee indicated that the transition of AEP graduates to the formal education system occurred, specifics regarding this process remained unaddressed. Moreover, it was noted that the transitioned learners are included in Government data systems.

Excerpts supporting this are presented below:

“Yes, there is a curriculum. This curriculum is a product of collaborative efforts, with the active involvement of various stakeholders. Specifically, a committee, which include the PTA members and NGOs, diligently put this together.” (AEP Desk Officer, MMC)

“Yes, I know the AEP trainers in our community; they are about 12 in number.” (Education Oversight Committee Member)

“The adult learners that pass through the state agency for mass literacy will be admitted into the formal system. Hence, they have been mainstreamed” (Policystakeholder, MMC)

“Yes, efforts to track the progress of transitioned learners have been integrated into the government's data systems including EMIS and the NSAT. As such transitioned learners are captured and monitored within these systems to enhance accountability.” (Finance Officer, MMC).

3.4.7 Next priority steps in addressing the out-of-school challenge

Regarding the next priority steps to address the OOSC challenge, responses shed light on the importance of collaborative efforts and partnerships. This shared perspective resonates as a fundamental guiding principle for the next priority steps in tackling the issue. To enhance the effectiveness of efforts to reduce OOSC, the next step is to prioritize establishing a more strategic partnership involving various stakeholders. These partnerships should include government bodies, NGOs, community leaders, and grassroots efforts. By forging these partnerships, a more holistic and sustainable approach to addressing the problem can be achieved.

3.5 Community Level Respondents

3.5.1 Communities’ knowledge and experience of AEP

In the Goni-Kachalari community of Jere LGA of Borno state, the Accelerated Education Programme (AEP) ran until 2021. Since then, classes have been held by the community to sustain the program. While in the Zajeri-Texaco and Mallam-Umari communities, 2019 was the last time an AEP was hosted. In most of these communities, NGOs such as PLAN International, the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC), FHI 360, the Agency for Mass Literacy, Save the Children, and others were responsible for implementing the AEPs. Some of these agencies also provided various assistance including financial, writing materials, and water sources to the communities. The AEP beneficiaries were children between the ages of 9 and 12 who had never had a formal education because they were either poor, less privileged, or orphans. The program improved the learning outcomes of the children and their value for education as those who completed the program were mainstreamed into either primary or junior high school via their performance in the written assessment. Those who couldn't continue with the formal education after graduation moved into the world of work, while others preferred to stay at home.

Excerpts from the field instrument:

“2021 was the last time the AEP program officially ended. However, there are just 1 or 2 classes that are ongoing at the moment and are community-led” (Community coalition member at Goni Kachalari of Jere LGA)

“PLAN International, the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC), and ERD are responsible for the AEP” (Goni Kachalari Community of Jere LGA)

“Addressing Education in Northeast Nigeria (AENN), FHI 360, IRC, Save the Children, Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) and Terre des hommes (TDH)” (Mallam Umari community of MMC(1) LGA)

“Save the Children International, PLAN International, Action Against Hunger, and Red Cross. Provided finance, writing materials, and borehole for sufficient water supply” (Kartari community of Konduga LGA)

“PLAN International, Norwegian Refugee Council, FHI 360, and Rescue provided books and other writing materials” (Women Leader at Goni Kachalari Community of Jere LGA)

“Children who are between the ages of 9 to 12 were selected, and those children who have never attended school” (Mallam Umari community of MMC(1) LGA)

“The children who participated and benefited from the AEP program were poor, less privileged, and orphans” (Goni Kachalari Community of Jere LGA)

“AEP beneficiaries are now enlightened to the point that some of the children were mainstreamed into primary and some into junior high school. Some of the children moved to the world of work and those who could not cope with the non-formal education, stayed at home, nor were they doing anything” (Goni Kachalari Community of Jere LGA)

3.5.2 Communities’ capacity and willingness to contribute and sustain AEPs

The communities were willing to provide assistance and contribute to the AEPs, having witnessed the positive impact of the education programmes on their children's lives. The community coalition takes on the task of identifying children who are not attending school or whose families cannot cover their fees. The coalition also ensures that these children are enrolled in the AEP and integrated into the conventional education system. Sensitization efforts were made to enlighten the parents and key stakeholders on the importance of embracing AEPs and the need to sustain it after the exit of the NGOs. Communities extended support to AEPs by supplying furniture and closely monitoring coordinators to ensure the smooth functioning of the program. Most communities sustained the programme through the efforts of their district heads in collaboration with the AEP facilitators, stakeholders in the non-formal education in the communities, educated youths, elites, and parents. Various cash and kind contributions were wilfully donated by the elites and intellectuals to sustain the program. Elites and educated youths voluntarily supported AEP facilitators in conducting the learning sessions. The community district heads ensured that OOSC children who completed the program transitioned into formal education. Additionally, there were AEP facilitators who remained post-program to assist in guaranteeing the sustainability and scaling of informal education within the community. However, the communities highlighted the need for more skilled and committed AEP facilitators to instruct and support these children, and community volunteers can receive guidance from experienced teachers and facilitators to guarantee the sustainability of this

program. Moreover, there is a need for writing materials like books, pens, and other stationery items.

Excerpts supporting this are presented below:

“The community coalition is responsible for identifying out-of-school children or those whose parents cannot afford to pay for their fees. The community coalition ensures that these categories of people are then enrolled in the AEP program and are mainstreamed into the formal system” (Goni Kachalari Community of Jere LGA)

“The elders in the community ensured that the intellectuals and the elites in the community contributed toward the sustainability of the AEP program. This contribution is in cash and in kind. The educated youth tend to volunteer to teach some sessions and classes during the program while on break or at their leisure time. Sensitization is made by community leaders on parents on the importance of their children attending the AEP program” (Mallam Umari community of MMC(1) LGA)

“The SBMC chairman, District Head, Head Teacher, and community leaders are the go-to to handle issues. All the stakeholders are brought on board to address challenges in the program” (Kartari community of Konduga LGA)

“The community supported the AEP program by providing furniture, and paying close attention to the facilitators to ensure that the program is on track” (AEP Ex-facilitator at Bolori 1 of Maiduguri LGA)

“The district head is the most significant contributor to supporting the community in sustaining AEP. He ensured that the out-of-school children who passed through the non-formal education transitioned and mainstreamed into formal education. He achieved this by engaging with the parents of the beneficiaries and encouraging the facilitators and other stakeholders in the non-form education in the community” (Goni Kachalari Community of Jere LGA)

“Yes, we were told that the program was going to end, however, the community leaders and the AEP facilitators decided to continue with the program to ensure sustainability for the sake of the growing youth in the community, and the AEP facilitators decided to continue working even without pay” (Mallam Umari community of MMC(1) LGA)

“There were AEP members who remained after the program to aid in ensuring the sustainability and scaling of the non-formal education in the community” (Goni Kachalari Community of Jere LGA)

“We need training of AEP facilitators, more AEP facilitators, writing materials, and mechanisms for monitoring the process of the intervention” (Mallam Umari community of MMC(1) LGA)

3.5.3 Benefits of AEPs in the Communities

The communities that participated in the AEPs benefited immensely. The engagements in trade businesses, farm work, or house chores during school hours were significantly reduced, especially for the women and the girls. Before the programme, young girls were prohibited from attending school, as they were often tasked with selling goods and services and managing household chores. However, with the introduction of this program, girls now can receive an

education and become proficient in literacy skills. Some of the children who benefited from the programme were mainstreamed into formal education while others transitioned to the world of work. The programme also increased the children's interest in higher education. After sensitizing the community leaders, parents, and guardians on the importance of education, some of them pledged to sponsor their children after they have been mainstreamed into formal education. The programme also influenced their moral and social lives positively as social vices in the communities reduced tremendously because youths became more productive. The programme also benefited the AEP facilitators as they gained valuable insights from the capacity training on the strategies and techniques of educating and sharing knowledge with the children. The training enhanced their teaching abilities, fostered a deep enthusiasm for education, and built stronger connections with community members.

Excerpts from the field instrument:

“Efforts were made by the community to ensure children in the community benefit from this opportunity. As a result, the number of children engaged in buying and selling, going to the farms, and handling house chores reduced significantly. This is particularly impactful on women or the girl child” (Kartari community of Konduga LGA)

“Yes, before this program. The girl children are not allowed to school, because they are sent out to sell goods and services or at home doing chores, but now, the girl child goes to school, and are literate in reading and writing which we are happy about” (Goni Kachalari Community of Jere LGA)

“The AEP program has been beneficial in the community and has impacted the lives of the children that have passed through it by transitioning to the world of work while some were mainstreamed into formal education” (Goni Kachalari Community of Jere LGA)

“There is a high and growing interest in children towards learning and education in the community. More so, parents, gradience, and community leaders have been educated on the need for and importance of education and they are more willing to support their children to continue with their education after their children have been mainstreamed. We can see a huge improvement in this education in their social lives and how they behave in the family. Their hygiene has changed, they have more regard for their elders, they pay attention to details and more” (Kartari community of Konduga LGA)

“A-risk youth have reduced in the community since the start of the AEP program in the community. As youth have more productive activities to do. They are more interested in education and learning and have no idle time” (Mallam Umari community of MMC(1) LGA)

“I benefited from the capacity training on the approach and methodologies of teaching and imparting knowledge to children” (AEP Ex-facilitator at Kartari communities of Konduga LGA)

“It Developed my teaching skills which instilled my passion for teaching. This is why I volunteered as a facilitator in the community” (AEP Ex-facilitator at Muna, Jere LGA)

“Built more valuable relationships with the members of the community. I am also glad that I am instrumental in the development of my community” (AEP Ex-facilitator at Bolori 1, Maiduguri LGA)

3.5.4 Communities' action towards out-of-school children

In Kartari community there are at least 100 OOSC who did not attend AEPs and 3000 in Jere. In MMC (1), at least 50 percent of the children are out of school, and the effectiveness of AEPs declined significantly compared to its previous performance under the donor agencies. The increasing count of children not attending school is attributed to the loss of parental guidance and the economic conditions in Nigeria, leading to a surge in the number of OOSC within the locality, and efforts to uphold non-formal education within the community are facing challenges due to the current economic conditions. The communities are actively seeking assistance to maintain the continuity of the programme as parents of the children lack the financial capacity to support all their children, particularly those with larger families. Consequently, they can only sponsor some of their children, leaving some without formal education.

Excerpts supporting this are presented below:

“There are children between 8 to 15 years who do not attend the AEP program in the community, and there are about 100 of them” (Kartari community of Konduga LGA)

“There are a lot, and there are at least three thousand (3000) children in the community” (Goni Kachalari Community of Jere LGA)

“YES, there are. They are a lot. They are about 45% to 50% of the children in the community or above 900 children” (Mallam Umari community of MMC(1) LGA)

“The AEP program is not as efficient as it used to be under the donor agencies. We are trying our best to sustain the non-formal education in the community, but the economic situation is making it difficult. Hence, we are seeking support to sustain the program” (Goni Kachalari Community of Jere LGA)

“The number of out-of-school children has been rising, this is due to those who lost their parents/guidance, and the state of the Nigerian economy has caused the rising number of out-of-school children in the community” (AEP Ex-facilitator at Muna, Jere LGA)

“The children's parents are not financially buoyant to be able to sponsor their children. As some of the parents have a lot of children which they can't all sponsor. Hence, they sponsor some and leave out some” (Goni Kachalari Community of Jere LGA)

There is a halt in the continuity of education for young children in elementary school following the end of donor funded programs in the region. Nevertheless, certain non-governmental organizations intervene by selecting adolescents aged 14 and older to provide them with vocational training, enabling their smooth transition into the workforce. Save the Children conducted a survey to identify children who are not enrolled in an AEP. These children were then brought to a training facility where they received education on various entrepreneurial activities, aiming to help them integrate into the workforce. Some of the training included skills in bakery operations, barbering, tailoring, and other vocational pursuits. The communities are seeking partnership with funding organizations and want the donor agencies to initiate a new AEP to support increased enrolment of children in non-formal education. Multiple AEPs tailored to specific age groups should be implemented to motivate older children who are

currently not attending school. Emphasis is particularly placed on children aged 8 to 15 years, with potential pathways for their integration into mainstream primary and junior high schools.

Excerpts from the field instrument:

“Learning stops for children in basic education. However, there are nongovernmental organizations that come and pick children 14 years and above to train them on vocational skills to be able to transition to the world of work afterward” (AEP Ex-facilitator at Kartari communities of Konduga LGA)

“Save the Children came to take the name of out-of-school children who are not attending the AEP programs. They took them to a training center where they were schooled on entrepreneurship activities to be able to integrate them into the world of work. Some were trained in bakery, barbing, tailoring, and more” (Kartari community of Konduga LGA)

“Our suggestion is that the donor agencies should implement another AEP program to help more children attend the non-formal education” (Goni Kachalari Community of Jere LGA)

“There should be several AEP programs based on age cohorts to encourage the elderly out-of-school children. The focus is more on children between the ages of 8 -15 years. Some can transition and be mainstreamed into primary and junior high school” (Mallam Umari community of MMC(1) LGA)

3.5.5 Reflections on what happens in communities that can not support AEPs

Despite the community’s efforts to maintain the AEP classes-local events, and the country's financial and economic circumstances have hindered the community's ability to sustain the AEPs. Parents and caretakers within the community who have not recognized the importance of providing education for their children perceive their children as valuable assets for assistance in agricultural activities and domestic tasks, inhibiting the participation of more children in the programmes. Further efforts are required to raise awareness among parents regarding the importance of educating their children for their own welfare. Additionally, this awareness would enable parents to enrol their children in educational institutions, and once integrated into the formal system, they can provide financial backing for their children's educational pursuits. It is crucial for parents to comprehend that their children's education is vital not only for their future but also for the future of the parents themselves, surpassing the significance of the physical assistance they require from their children on the farms and at home. Insurgency is another major contributing factor hindering most communities in Borno state from fully supporting or participating in AEPs. These factors all contribute to the increase in the number of OOSC in these communities. The discontinuation of AEP initiatives has resulted in a decrease in the enrolment of children who could have been availed of fundamental education and hindered the progression of children to advanced educational stages.

According to an ex-AEP facilitator, a major obstacle that hindered the transmission of information to the AEP beneficiaries was the local language barrier, as some children do not understand English and can only communicate in their local language. Also, the AEP recipients are occasionally contacted by their parents and/or guardians during class sessions, resulting in missed teaching hours. In other cases, some students bring their younger siblings, who are not of school age to the classroom leading to disruptions and noise during teaching.

Excerpts supporting this are presented below:

“The community have tried to sustain the AEP classes for 6 months since the end of the AEP programmes. However, events in the community and the country's financial and economic situation have hampered the community's ability to sustain the program” (AEP Ex-facilitator at Muna, Jere LGA)

“There are still parents and guardians in the community who are yet to see the need to educate their children. They see their children as a source of help on the farm and doing house chores” (Kartari community of Konduga LGA)

“More sensitization needs to be made to parents on the need to educate their children for their benefit. Secondly, this knowledge will allow their parent to send them to school and when they are mainstreamed into the formal system, they can financially support their children in furthering/their education. They need to understand that the knowledge for their children is the future of their children and theirs which is more important than the physical activities they need them for on the farms and at home” (Kartari community of Konduga LGA)

“Insurgency, poverty, lack of understanding of the importance of education for children” (Mallam Umari community of MMC(1) LGA)

“The end of the AEP program has reduced the number of children who would have benefited from basic education and the number of children who would have transitioned to higher education levels” (AEP Ex-facilitator at Bolori 1 of Maiduguri LGA)

“The language barrier is a constraint to impacting the knowledge on the AEP beneficiaries” (AEP Ex-facilitator at Bolori 1 of Maiduguri LGA)

“AEP beneficiaries are sometimes called by their parents and/or guardian when the class is on. Some of the children also come along with their younger ones who are not of age to learn. This act causes noise and distractions during teaching” (AEP Ex-facilitator at Kartari communities of Konduga LGA)

Chapter 4: Synthesis of the Results

4.1 Understanding the Out-of-School Challenges and Pledges at different levels

4.1.1 Federal, State and Local governments' commitment to AEPs

The government at all administrative levels has taken steps to address the challenge of out-of-school children (OOSC) by endorsing and supporting Accelerated Education Programmes (AEPs). Governments' commitment to supporting the implementation of AEPs varies across different levels of governance. The federal government has committed to developing policies and institutionalizing AEPs in alignment with government objectives, while state and local governments are responsible for actual implementation.

At the federal level, efforts have been made to educate policymakers about the nature and significance of AEPs in addressing the OOSC problem. This awareness campaign has garnered substantial support from policy stakeholders at the federal government level, with subnational governments eager to commence implementation in their respective states. The objective of these awareness campaigns is to secure policy support and institutionalize AEPs, which would enable the allocation of budgetary resources for AEP implementation. Various programmes have been initiated to tackle the OOSC challenge, with collaborations established between federal government agencies and international development partners to produce essential documents like teacher training materials, curriculum, and national policy guidelines relevant to AEP implementation.

At the state level, governments have created a favourable environment for the entry and operations of donor agencies, especially in addressing the challenges posed by the Boko Haram insurgency. These initiatives involve partnerships with various stakeholders, including national and international NGOs, government agencies, and UN agencies, to facilitate humanitarian interventions and address issues like OOSC. Government is also working on assessing the number of OOSC in collaboration with the Joint Education Needs Assessment (JENA) and conducting sensitization campaigns to educate parents and children about the importance of AEPs. Government policies and strategies like the Borno State Education Fund reflect a commitment to addressing these challenges.

Additionally, the supervision and assessment of the actions taken by implementing partners are carried out by the Agency for Mass Education (SAME), which is tasked with supervising the situation of OOSC within the state. The Government makes government school facilities available as educational centres and supports the mainstreaming of AEP beneficiaries into formal education.

4.1.2 Government funding allocation and coordination challenges

The Federal Government does not have specific policies or budgetary financial support for AEPs, whereas the Borno state Government has committed to seeking financial resources, including matching grants and charitable donations. The state Government demonstrates its commitment to AEPs through policies and funding strategies, such as the Borno State Education Fund. The Government's primary education budget focuses on formal education and

does not cover the funding needs of innovations or non-formal education. Funding for these innovations mainly comes from donor agencies and development NGOs. The Government's support for AEPs primarily takes the form of non-financial incentives, such as providing government schools as learning centres for AEP implementers in the evenings. The Government also assists in integrating AEP beneficiaries into formal education through the state Agency for Mass Education. Sensitization campaigns are conducted by the Government in collaboration with local governments and community leaders to encourage children to enrol in AEPs and help parents understand their importance. The Borno state governor personally participates in enrolment drive campaigns and offers incentives to discourage parents from limiting their children's potential for short-term gains.

4.1.3 Donor and NGO efforts at the federal and state levels

Donor agencies and NGOs have been the primary financiers and backers of AEPs in Nigeria. International development organizations provide financial support for establishing learning centres, compensating AEP facilitators, supplying educational materials, collaborating with government bodies on AEP curriculum development, engaging with local stakeholders, and more for a specified duration before their withdrawal. They offer funding and conduct training to facilitate AEP sessions, ensuring that parents and facilitators have the necessary knowledge and resources to assist children as they transition into the formal education system, intending to achieve sustainability. These organizations also provide the teaching and learning materials (TLMs) needed for AEP facilitation and the resources used to establish learning centres for AEP sessions in the communities.

Effective partnerships were established between the donors and government entities, as well as collaborations between the donors and non-governmental organizations (NGOs). Donor agencies provided support to the federal government in the creation of the AEP curriculum and the rollout of AEPs and initiatives through the Nigerian Education Research Council. They also worked closely with local organizations and NGOs to achieve their intervention goals. These partnerships with local organizations have empowered them to implement AEPs at the community level. Entities such as Kanem Borno Human Development Association (KABHUDA), Hallmark Leadership Initiative (HALI), and Restoration of Hope Initiative (ROHI) were among the local organizations that donors utilized to execute AEPs in Borno state. These educational innovators conducted awareness campaigns on AEPs, educating parents and children on the significance of education. They established AEP classes with 50 students in each class and recruited AEP facilitators to impart knowledge to the AEP beneficiaries. Thanks to these efforts by the donors, over 100,000 out-of-school children were trained and mainstreamed into formal education.

Following the withdrawal of donor agencies, education opportunities ceased for elementary school children. However, specific non-governmental organizations step in by selecting adolescents aged 14 and above to offer vocational training, facilitating their transition into the world of work. These children were brought to a training facility where they received training in various entrepreneurial activities, to prepare them for entry into the world of work. The training covered skills such as bakery operations, barbering, tailoring, and other vocational pursuits. Local communities are actively seeking partnerships with funding organizations and are urging donor agencies to initiate a new AEPs to support increased enrolment of children in non-formal education.

4.1.4 Community-Level Engagement

The communities, having observed the positive impact of the education programme on the children's lives, were enthusiastic about offering their support and contributing to AEPs. A community-based approach to sensitization campaigns is employed by community child protection committees (CPC), which closely collaborate with NGOs to facilitate the enrolment of OOSC in non-formal education programmes. The community coalition takes on the responsibility of identifying children who are not attending school or whose families cannot cover their fees. Learning centres are provided with furniture, and the community actively monitors AEPs.

The district head is pivotal in collaborating with AEP facilitators and other stakeholders, including educated youths, elites, and parents. Economic and non-financial contributions are voluntarily donated by elites and intellectuals to sustain AEPs. Elites and educated youths willingly assist AEP facilitators in conducting the learning sessions. Despite the community's efforts to maintain AEPs, high poverty levels, the adverse impacts of insurgency in the northeastern region, local events, and the country's economic circumstances have hindered the community's ability to sustain the AEPs. Consequently, the communities are actively seeking assistance to ensure the continued sustainability of AEPs.

Even though the government does not demonstrate a strong sense of ownership regarding AEPs, there were instances of community-driven sustainability during the phase-out of the initial DFID project. In Biu local government, a few AEP centres managed to maintain their operations with the support of community members. Out of the 300 AEP centres, five of them achieved sustainability. This became possible as donor agencies shared their exit plan with the community, and certain community members were provided with training in resource mobilization. The capacity-building efforts were intended to empower the community to mobilize local resources to keep the AEP centres operational.

4.2 Addressing Out-of-School Challenges through Accelerated Education Programmes (AEPs)

4.2.1 Feasibility of National and State Stakeholders Supporting AEPs in Nigeria

There is a growing likelihood of increased government support for AEPs. The awareness campaigns aimed at enlightening policymakers about the role of AEPs in addressing the challenge of out-of-school children have produced positive results. More policymakers are embracing the concept, and subnational authorities are eager to implement AEPs in their respective states. The Government has also introduced and launched various innovations, some are currently in the pilot, and others are in the implementation phases. Collaborations have been established among relevant stakeholders in the government to advance AEP innovations. These collective efforts serve as the foundation for developing specific policies and work plans for AEPs by the Government. These policies and work plans will outline the Government's strategies for AEPs, paving the way for budgetary allocations. This framework will also guide subnational authorities and implementing partners in effectively implementing AEPs with government support to ensure their sustainability and scalability.

4.3 Mainstreaming AEPs into Education System

4.3.1 Actions toward mainstreaming AEPs into formal education system

The State Agency for Mass Education plays a role in creating an enabling environment for the operations of AEPs and facilitates the mainstreaming process on the part of the government. The curriculum serves as the foundation for mainstreaming AEP beneficiaries into formal education, guiding the assessment process. An approach based on performance is employed to smoothly mainstream successful AEP beneficiaries, making the shift enjoyable for both AEP participants and facilitators. The mainstreaming beneficiaries are added to the government's database. Nevertheless, the Government faces limitations regarding the number of AEP beneficiaries it can incorporate into formal education, particularly at the primary and junior secondary school levels. This constraint poses challenges for AEP implementers in ensuring the integration of successful AEP beneficiaries. Funding is required to address the needs of AEP participants who cannot be mainstreamed due to resource constraints. However, the specific details of the mainstreaming process for AEP beneficiaries into formal education remain unclear.

4.3.2 Challenges of sustainability and scalability of AEPs

The sustainability and scaling of AEPs face challenges primarily related to financial constraints and the absence of government ownership. Financial considerations are a critical component for maintaining AEPs. However, due to high poverty levels and the adverse impact of the insurgency in the northeast, communities find it difficult to provide financial support for AEPs after the withdrawal of donor agencies. Additionally, the government has not prioritized AEPs, resulting in a lack of government ownership and financial commitment to sustain these programmes. While there is a certain level of sustainability associated with AEPs, financial limitations represent a significant hurdle. Other stakeholders, including the community and the government, play vital roles in ensuring the continuity of AEPs, but they too grapple with financial constraints.

Chapter Five: Conclusion, Recommendation, and Lessons Learned

5.1 Conclusions

Relevant stakeholders at the federal level are beginning to understand the role and significance of Accelerated Education Programs (AEPs) in addressing the challenges associated with out-of-school children (OOSC) in Nigeria. This progress has been achieved through extensive sensitization campaigns, stakeholder engagements, and the dissemination of research evidence. Notably, robust partnerships are being established at the federal level for AEP innovations in the pilot and implementation phases. These advancements at the federal level mark a significant step toward developing supportive policies that would facilitate the sustainability and expansion of AEPs through budgetary allocations, given the absence of existing policies that earmark budget allocations for AEPs. Presently, education budgets primarily prioritize formal education and do not encompass non-formal education initiatives.

The government at the state and local levels has established a favourable environment for the entry and operations of donor agencies. At the state level, the Agency for Mass Education (SAME) takes on the responsibility of supervising out-of-school children (OOSC) in the state. State-level government support has predominantly been non-financial. To enhance the oversight and evaluation of AEP projects, an emergency working group comprising both state and non-state actors has been instituted. This group employs a dashboard to streamline the evaluation process of AEPs, providing free access to all relevant stakeholders. Various AEP innovations, including sensitization campaigns and the Better Education Service Delivery program, have been implemented to boost enrolment rates. Nonetheless, these efforts often encounter obstacles as a result of ethno-religious issues not directly addressed through AEPs. Some parents restrict their children's school attendance due to their disinterest in Western education, perpetuating the problem. Addressing such views and inflexibility requires interventions in adult education and the involvement of community leaders. The Government's dedication to these efforts is reflected in policies and strategic funds, such as the Borno State Education Fund, while community-driven initiatives also play a significant role.

Communities face difficulties in offering financial assistance for AEPs after the withdrawal of donor agencies. These challenges primarily arise from widespread poverty, the repercussions of insurgency in the northeastern region, and the overall economic conditions in the country. Graduates actively volunteer as AEP facilitators, supporting AEP beneficiaries in their quest for knowledge expansion. Media campaigns educate parents and children on the significance of non-formal education, resulting in a net positive impact. Furthermore, community-based child protection committees (CPCs) work closely with non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to facilitate the enrolment of OOSC in non-formal education programmes.

Education innovators have acquired significant expertise and developed their capabilities in reaching communities spanning various areas, including communities, wards, and local governments. They have organized awareness campaigns for AEPs, enlisted AEP facilitators, set up learning centres, and more. These non-governmental entities adopt a community-oriented strategy for AEPs, equipping AEP facilitators with non-formal teaching methods through capacity building. This approach has resulted in higher enrolment in AEPs within the community.

The primary obstacle to the sustainability and scaling of AEPs, affecting all pertinent stakeholders, including the community and various levels of government, is financial constraints. The challenge of sustaining and scaling AEPs has diminished the motivation for OOSC to access basic education. This situation has led to an increase in criminal activities, drug abuse, and theft, and potentially contributed to the pool of individuals involved in causing insecurity within the state.

5.2 Key Lessons Learned

- Government stakeholders have not fully grasped the significance of Accelerated Education Programmes (AEPs) in tackling the Out-of-School Children (OOSC) challenge, but there is an increasing degree of acceptance.
- There are no dedicated policies designed exclusively for AEPs, and AEPs have not been institutionalized.
- The Government allocates most of its education budget to formal education and does not cater to the financial requirements of AEPs. Funding for these initiatives is mostly sourced from donor agencies and development NGOs.
- The Federal Government has been involved in various AEP innovations, with some at the pilot and implementation phases. The creation of the AEP curriculum is one such innovations.
- The State Government provides support for AEPs primarily through non-financial means. This support includes creating a conducive environment for AEP innovations and implementations, organizing awareness campaigns about AEPs, offering government schools for use as learning centres, and assisting in transitioning AEP beneficiaries into formal education.
- The sustainability and scalability of AEPs face significant constraints, particularly regarding financial resources, affecting all stakeholders, including both government and communities.

5.3 Recommendations

- It is essential to maintain ongoing efforts to inform government stakeholders about the actual essence and possibilities of Accelerated Education Programmes (AEPs) in tackling the issue of Out-of-School Children (OOSC). This continuous awareness-raising is crucial in obtaining the support and active involvement of stakeholders, encouraging them to embrace AEPs as integral projects and initiatives of their own.
- Policies and work plan specifically tailored to AEPs should be developed and institutionalized, as this is instrumental in driving sustainability and scalability of AEPs.
- Enacting AEP legislation at the subnational level will give AEPs a prominent position on government agendas and encourage community-based AEP implementation. This, in turn, will lead to the allocation of the necessary resources to sustain and expand AEPs.

- Enhanced collaboration is needed among stakeholders and across all government levels to foster AEP innovation, investment, and implementation in addressing the OOSC challenge.
- AEPs should be regularized nationwide, as there is a prevailing belief that the OOSC problem is predominantly limited to northern Nigeria, when, in fact, the OOSC challenge is widespread throughout the entire country.

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Annexes:

Annex 1: Concept note

Annex 2: Research tools

Annex 3 : list of all people interviewed at national to district levels

Annex 4 : summary of the key findings from the regional stakeholder meetings