

RESEARCH ISSUE Brief

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Special Needs Education: Not a Priority in the 2019 Appropriation Bill

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Executive Summary

Persons With Disabilities (PWD) are among Nigeria’s most marginalized groups, resulting from socio-cultural norms and bias regarding disability as well as a lack of proactive government effort towards improving Special Needs Education. The Federal government, notably the Ministry of Education, has consistently overlooked the importance of reducing the existing education disparity faced by Persons With Disability, in contravention of its National Policy on Special Needs Education as well as the SDG goal 4.5. Against this backdrop, this information brief draws the attention of the legislature to the non-inclusion of projects specifically for Special Needs Education in the 2019 Appropriation Bill. The objective is to seek the reversal of this trend by emphasizing the need for proper funding and the provision of a legal framework for Special Needs Education in Nigeria.

1. Introduction

The 2019 budget speech of President Muhammadu Buhari recognized the importance of education in fostering development and tackling poverty in Nigeria. To this end, the Federal Government’s education policy as reflected by its proposed budget, emphasized on “Every Child Counts” which is premised on a national educational system that will boost digital literacy, impart functional skills to children, ensure re-training of teachers and equipping children from a very young age with modern skills by emphasizing education in science, technology, engineering, arts, and mathematics (STEM). The emphasis on “Every Child Counts” presupposes Federal Government’s intent on reducing all existing education inequalities in the country.

However, what is conspicuously missing in the proposed budget is evidence of Federal Government’s commitment to reducing education inequality for Persons With Disabilities (PWD). With Nigeria’s adoption of the Sustainable Development Goals, Goal 4.5 focuses on *eliminating gender disparities in education and ensure equal access to all levels of education and vocational training for the vulnerable, including persons with disabilities, indigenous peoples, and children in vulnerable situations*. Therefore, the Federal government’s budgetary commitments aimed at ensuring “Every Child Counts” should reflect “progressive budgetary improvements” towards attaining inclusive education outcomes. The 2015 National Policy on Special Needs Education in Nigeria is premised on ensuring access to appropriate

education for Persons with Special Needs. The main thrust of inclusive education in the policy is making appropriate education available to children and youth with Special Needs.

2. Situation Analysis on Special Needs¹ Education in Nigeria

Special Needs education in Nigeria has been plagued by various factors, chief among these factors is the problem of inadequate funding. Although the National Policy on Education clearly states that services to Persons with Special Needs should be free, there is no guarantee in the policy that funding will be made available. Special Needs Education in Nigeria has been devoid of adequate funding, as capital projects in the education ministry hardly priorities Special Needs Education. In cases where there is funding, such funds are normally used by practitioners who may not be qualified or diverted due to the perception that educating Persons With Disabilities is a humanitarian endeavor.

There is no all-inclusive data on Persons With Disabilities, with the consequence of hindering effective planning and implementation of policies over time. However, according to Precious Sango of the Centre for Learning Disabilities in Nigeria, the World Report on Disability estimates that approximately 3.5 million Nigerians have very significant difficulties in social and physical functioning². These disabilities include physical and intellectual developmental conditions. Despite the large

number of people with disabilities in Nigeria, little support, if any is given to individuals living with disabilities. These individuals are often excluded from social, economic and political affairs in the society. The status report from the Ministry of Education highlights the restricting environment in which Special Needs Education operates in Nigeria. Although from international best practices, school bound, home bound and hospital bound settings are the norm, only school bound settings are currently provided for, albeit in limited areas in the country. Also, there is no formal license or certification for practitioners in special needs education, thereby allowing for inadequate supervision and setting of standards and methods of practice.

There is no available information or procedures on location of schools, centers, hospitals, homes and public offices aimed at tracking early detection of Persons with Special Needs. Availability of such information gets the public informed about where to go to for service delivery. Lastly, the report noted the absence of any functional federal legislation on Special Needs Education. Existing state laws have become moribund, with current regulations being in the form of grants-in-aid. Thus, there is an urgent need to transform existing policies and strategies into effective legal frameworks that would ensure effective planning and implementation of these policies.

¹Due to lack of data on Persons With Disability (PWD) and Special Needs Education in Nigeria, the situation analysis was drawn from the 2015 report of the Federal Ministry of Education.

² <https://books2africa.org/visible-but-invisible-people-living-with-disability-in-nigeria/>

3. Key Findings from 2019 Appropriation Bill

A scrutiny of the 2019 Appropriation Bill showed that while there are projects in the 2019 Appropriation Bill that aim to reduce gender and conflict area disparities, there are no provisions for disparities relating to special needs and disability. This is in contradiction to the 2015 National Policy on Special Needs Education, which stipulates the Federal Government as having a financial responsibility in funding special needs education in Nigeria.

Scrutiny of the expenditure profile of the Ministry of Education in the 2019 Appropriation Bill revealed that,

- I. About 2% of total capital allocation is dedicated to pursuing the objective of equipping children with modern skills through STEM.
- II. About 3% of total capital allocation is committed to improving digital literacy.
- III. About 8% of the capital allocation is committed to re – training of teachers and imparting functional skills, including technical and vocational skills.
- IV. There are no capital projects (explicit or implied) that target special needs education. Curiously, the same exclusion of

special needs education exists in both the 2017 and 2018 Appropriation Acts. Cross country evidence in Table 1, reveals that both developed and developing countries commit considerable funding to Special needs Education.

Table 1: Funding Details for Special Needs Education in Selected Countries

Country	Details of Funding
United States of America	The United States has specific legislation called Individuals With Disability Education Act (IDEA Act) which ensures that the Federal Government bears 40% of the cost of all forms of Special Need Education. Funding for the IDEA Act in 2017, 2018 and 2019(proposed) was \$13.001 Billion, \$ 13.038 Billion, and \$13.051 Billion, respectively ³ . The figures for 2017, 2018 and 2019 represent a share of 11%, 20% and 21% of the total budgetary allocations to education.
United Kingdom	Funding for Special Needs Education in the United Kingdom is governed by the Special Educational Needs and Disability Bill of 2001. As at 2018, budgetary allocation for Special Needs Education was £6 Billion, representing a share of 7% of total budgetary allocation to education.
Ireland	Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs

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<https://www2.ed.gov/about/overview/budget/budget19/19action.xlsx>

	(EPSN) Act 2004 regulates Special Needs Education. As at 2017, budgetary allocation to Special Need Education stood at £1.683 Billion, representing a share of 18% of total budgetary allocation to education.
Nigeria	No Budgetary allocation to Special Needs Education in the years 2017, 2018 and 2019. Also, no existing legal framework guiding the operationalization of Special Needs Education in Nigeria.

The views expressed in this Research Issue Brief are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily represent the views of the Institute and its Management.

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4. Conclusion

The lack of budgetary allocation to Special Needs Education reflects the Federal Government’s non-commitment to its 2015 National Policy on Special Needs Education. Although the policy drive with regards to education hinges on ending inequalities and enhancing inclusion by making sure that “Every Child Counts”, the absence of budgetary allocation does not support this stance. A plausible reason for this disconnect between policy and implementation is the lack of legal underpinning for Special Needs Education. While there is a Special Needs Education Bill, 2015, there is need to ensure that the provisions of the bill guarantee adequate funding for Special Needs Education, and mandates specific responsibilities and cost sharing for the federal, state and local governments in the implementation of the provisions of the Special Education Needs bill after its enactment into law. The bill, after further scrutiny should be given accelerated passage.