

Improving Basic Education Access and Equity

Oando Scholars Programme



The Tale of Bilkisu A.



Bilkisu is a brilliant 13-year-old girl from Northern Nigeria, who dreamt of becoming a medical doctor amid the poverty in her family. Her father, a single parent struggling to sustain his large family through his meagre income from subsistence farming, had given her the option of attending primary school until she turned 13, after which she would be given away in marriage to make room for the training of her younger siblings. Sadly, this is the case with many young girls whose parents due to their economic status cannot afford the cost of secondary education.

Due to her outstanding academic performance in LGEA Primary School, Rido – an Oando Foundation adopted school; Bilkisu was awarded a scholarship support her secondary education. But for the timely intervention, Bilkisu would have missed out on the opportunity to fulfil her dream of becoming a medical doctor. “I am grateful for Oando Foundation’s scholarship”, Bilkisu remarks with excitement, “If not for it, I don’t know where I would be. My father had informed me that school-

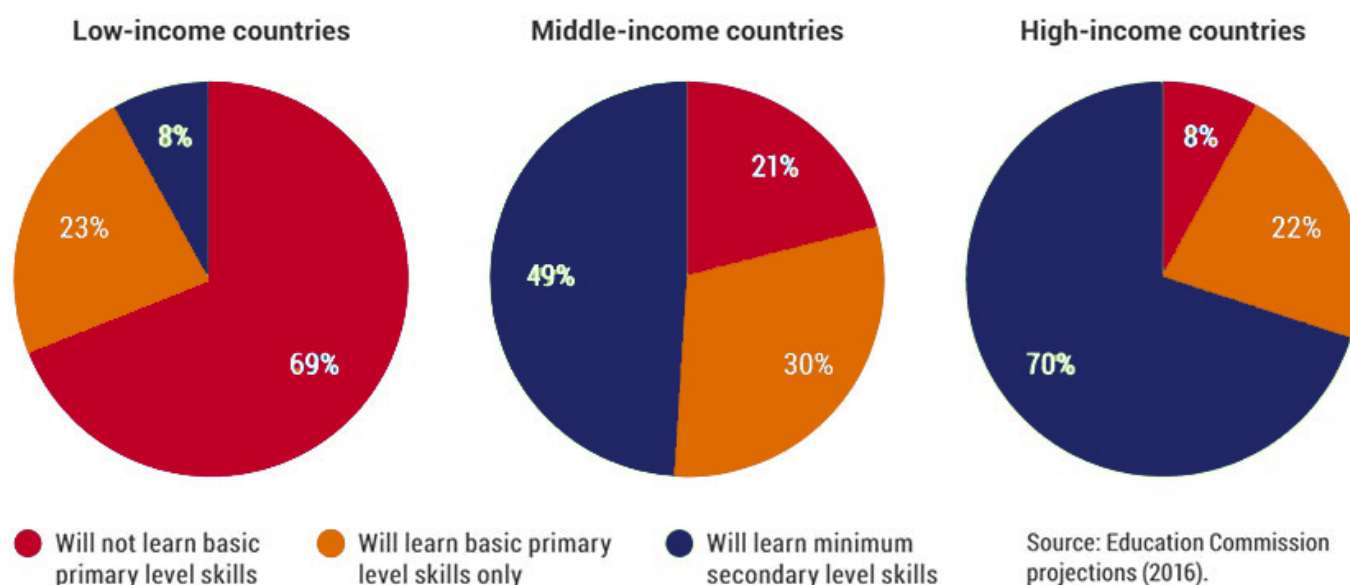
ing was over, and I should prepare to be married. I still remember it like yesterday, I cried my eyes out that day, but through Oando Foundation my hope has been renewed!”

Today, Bilkisu has proudly completed her senior secondary school and is looking forward to the commencement of her university education, holding firmly to her life dream. She has become a beacon of hope and a source of inspiration for other children in her community who desire formal education.

Stories like Bilkisu’s is the inspiration behind the Oando Scholar Programme. At Oando Foundation, we believe that every child, irrespective of gender, race or socio-economic status, has a right to quality education.

The Facts

The impact of poverty on education globally has remained one of the biggest challenges facing the achievement of SDG4 goals on access, equity, and inclusion. Despite progress over the last decade, 67 million children worldwide, of whom approximately 53% are girls, do not have access to basic education currently. The Education Commission projects that if current trends continue, by 2030 just 4 out of 10 children of school age (1.4 billion children) in low- and middle-income countries will be on track to gain basic secondary-level skills.



A global learning crisis: The expected learning outcomes of the children and youth of school age in 2030

In 2018, The World Poverty Clock Report showed Nigeria has overtaken India as the country with the most extreme poor people in the world. 86.9 million Nigerians now living in extreme poverty, representing over 42% of its estimated 206 million population. It is therefore not surprising that despite compulsory free basic education in Nigeria, an estimated 10.5 million children are presently not enrolled in school – according to the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF), the highest in the world. Many of these children are out of school due to socioeconomic reasons.

Since its establishment as an independent charity in 2011, Oando Foundation has been awarding scholarships to outstanding pupils in its adopted public primary schools under the flagship Adopt-A-School Initiative (AASI). As a key driver for increased enrolment and retention of students across adopted schools, Oando Scholars Programme is changing the lives of communities by giving vulnerable children the opportunity to attain higher education.

The programme annually sponsors 3 best performing primary six pupils from select adopted schools through their secondary education based on set criteria that prioritizes the girl child, whilst building a culture of excellence among children in these schools. 1,153 students have benefitted from the scholarship till date, with increased opportunities for lifelong learning and sustainable livelihoods.

This case study highlights the approach adopted and results achieved by the Foundation through the scholarship scheme. It is a useful case or strategy for addressing economic challenges limiting access to basic education in Nigeria and similar developing economies.

Our Intervention Approach

Recognizing economic barriers as a stumbling block to accessing higher education in Nigeria, the Foundation designed the scholarship program to help underprivileged but brilliant children in under-resourced public primary schools to continue and complete their secondary, and in some cases, tertiary education. The scholarship aims to ease the financial burden on parents and guardians so that their children's education would not be interrupted due to financial challenges.

Secondly, it helps to cushion the need for children to be economic contributors to their households, thereby allowing them to attend school and give parents a reason to support the education of their children. This is very critical in a country where 75% of the population live below the poverty line. As the public primary schools adopted by Oando Foundation are mostly in marginalized communities, the beneficiaries of the scholarships or scholars are mostly from underprivileged families and households. At the initial stage of the scholarship program, 10 best-performing Primary 6 pupils were selected annually in each adopted school for the award.



Left: A scholar receives his annual scholarship from a staff of Oando Foundation during the formal presentation of the awards in Sokoto State. Right: A group of female scholars also from Sokoto State.

Subsequently, the number was reduced to three per school per annum to accommodate the economies of scale associated with our growth and adoption of many more schools.

The benefitting pupils or scholars are selected based on an aggregate of their Primary 5 and 6 results (continuous assessment and exam) and state-level secondary school placement examinations to measure consistency in performance. Selection of scholars is coordinated by the Foundation in partnership with the State Universal Basic Education Board (SUBEB), head teachers of the adopted schools, and representatives of the Local Government Education Authorities (LGEAs) and School-Based Management Committees (SBMCs) to ensure transparency and accountability.

The scholarship is thus a parting gift to outstanding pupils in Oando's adopted schools – a gift to complete their secondary education, a gift for a better future. The scholarships are usually presented at the beginning of each academic year at a small ceremony witnessed by SUBEB officials, head

teachers of benefitting schools, parents of awardees, and the scholars themselves to create awareness about the scheme as well as motivate other students to seek the path of academic excellence.

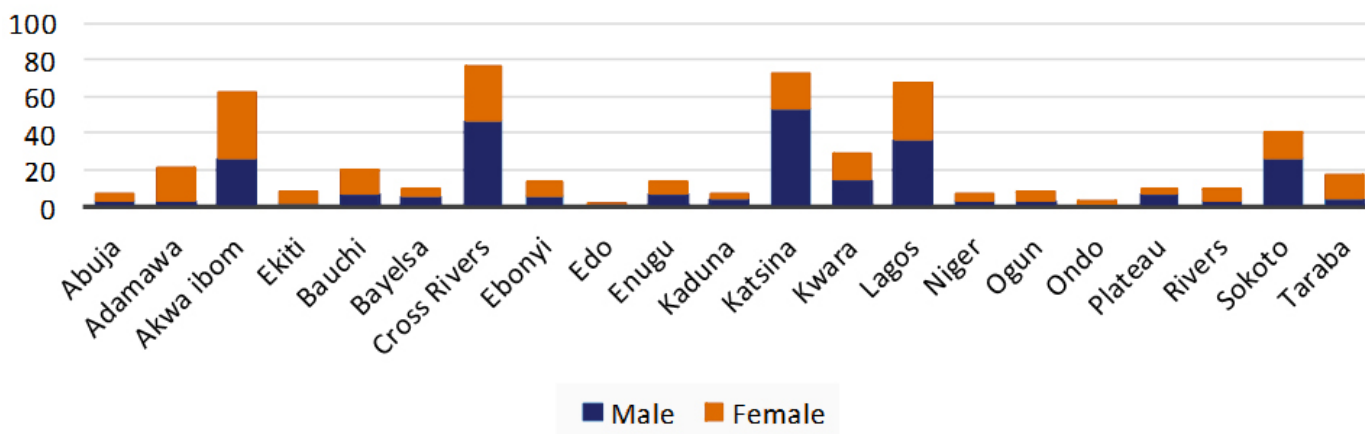
The award is an annual grant of 40,000 naira for scholars in secondary school, and 100,000 naira for others in tertiary institutions. It covers tuition where applicable and other expenses such as transportation, study materials and uniforms. Awardees are required to maintain an annual average performance of 70% in all subjects to remain on the scheme for the duration of their schooling. This condition serves as motivation for the students to remain hardworking and outstanding in their studies.

The Foundation's implementing partners (Nigerian NGOs/CBO) with expertise in grassroots education management and community engagement, was responsible for managing the scholarship programme in focal states, to ensure effective monitoring of the scholars' academic and social performance and engage with the various stakeholders to ensure smooth running of the scheme.

Results and Impact

Just like other interventions by Oando Foundation, the scholarships have brought significant changes to the lives of many children. With 1,153 scholarships awarded till date across 88 adopted schools, the Foundation has committed over 200 million naira to the scheme in the past 10 years. The scholarship has enabled these children enjoy uninterrupted schooling, especially in a country where schooling is a fragmented and not continuous experience for many children.

Scholar Gender Spread



Oando Scholars' gender spread per State.

While the scholarships initially helped beneficiaries to transition to secondary school and continue their education at this level, there are a few who have had their support extended to include tertiary education.

This is at the discretion of the Foundation and subject to outstanding performance by the beneficiaries. Overall, the attached conditions to retaining the scholarship (70% average performance in all subjects) have motivated the scholars to maintain good academic status while their scholarships last. This has therefore helped to improve the quality of learning.

It is worth noting that 56% of scholars have recorded remarkable strides, performing above set average consistently; some have represented their states, local governments,

and schools in various academic competitions and excelled. One of such is Mustapha Aminu, a pioneer scholar who emerged the best performing student in Katsina State for the national university entrance examination (Joint Admission and Matriculation Board examination).

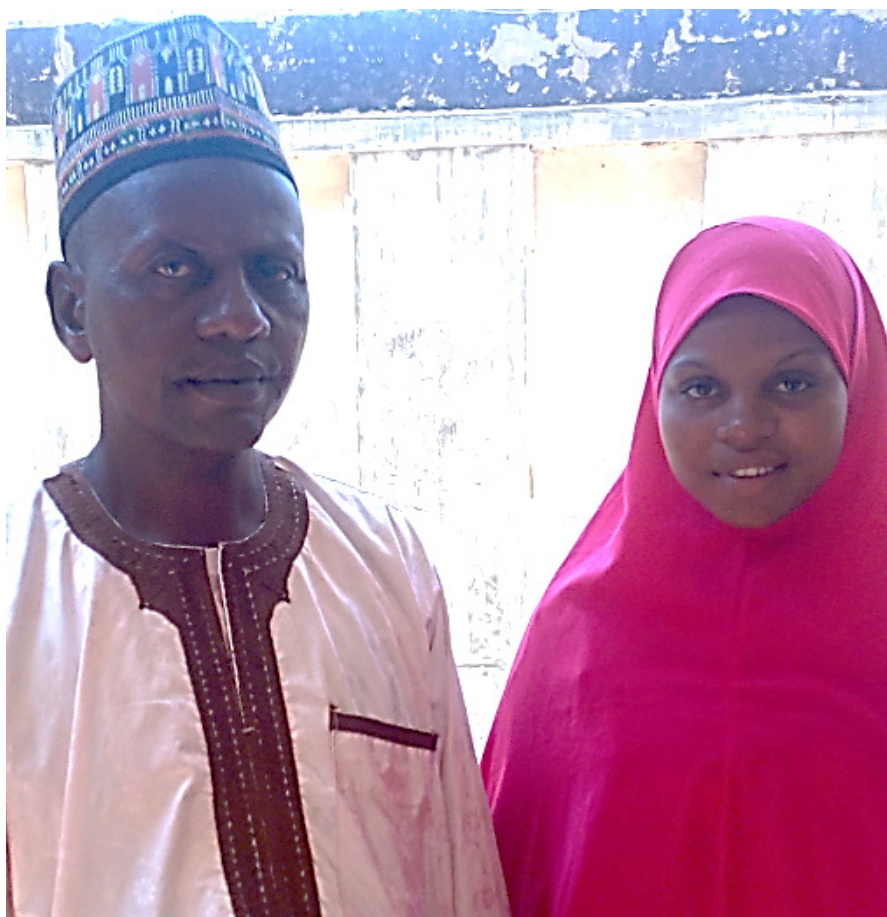
15 pioneer beneficiaries of the scholarship scheme are now in various tertiary institutions, with the Foundation extending their scholarship and increasing the annual grant to 100,000 naira(see success story next page).

"Even if I am a millionaire, and someone adds to my money, that would reduce the amount I need. But I'm not even a millionaire so the Oando scholarship makes a big difference for me and my family."

Aminu Sidi Mohammed, 55
Father of Hajara Aminu
Mohammed

"I have benefitted from the Oando scholarship for six years. My parents use the money received to buy my textbooks, school bags and uniforms. My father also used it part of it to get me a home teacher for extra lessons. That has helped improve my performance in major subjects"

Hajara Aminu Mohammed, 18
SSS3 student of Government Girls
Day Secondary School,
Tudun Wada, Sokoto State



"The scholarship initiative is good. Three of my students are receiving the scholarship. In this area, some parents cannot even sew uniform for their children. The scholarship has helped some parents a lot."

Mr Abdullahi Mohammed
Head Teacher, Shehu Mallami
Model Primary School, Kware LGA,
Sokoto State



Success Story

With Oando Foundation Scholarship, I Will Achieve My Goal

My name is Mustapha Aminu. I am 18 years old. I am a first year student of Civil Engineering at Bayero University Kano (BUK).

I am an Oando Foundation Scholarship beneficiary.

I was in Primary 6 at Daura Model Primary School in Katsina State when I was selected among 10 pupils to benefit from Oando Foundation scholarship program.

I remember that Oando gave us a certificate that they will give us scholarship up to the university if we continue to do well in our studies. My parents were very happy.

I will say I come from an average background. My father is a civil servant working at Daura Local Government Education Authority. My mother is also a civil servant – a teacher at Saitawa Primary School, Daura. I am the first born of my parents' children. I have four brothers and two sisters. My mother has five children while my step-mum has a child.

I enjoyed Oando Foundation scholarship throughout my secondary school years at Government Secondary School, Dutsinma, and now into the university. Oando scholarship has

motivated me to study hard. University study is different from secondary school. One must study hard here, and you need more study materials in the university.

But with the scholarship, I have been able to sort out a lot of things. I received N100,000 grant this year. I paid my registration fees, bought some textbooks, and paid for my hostel accommodation.

My father may be able to take care of some aspects of my education but not everything. Even if one is from a wealthy family, a scholarship is a unique opportunity.

Among the 10 of us that initially received the scholarship in Katsina, I am the first to have proceeded to the university. So I appreciate the scholarship so much. I scored 4.2 GPA in my first semester examination. I will even do better next semester.

Oando has impacted my studies. My ambition is to become a great civil engineer who will impact his generation. With Oando scholarship, I will achieve my goal Insha Allah.

Challenges

Huge capital investment required for sustainability:

Although scholarships provide a good incentive for the marginalized population to remain in school, it requires huge financial commitment. To ensure operational efficiency and ensure we effectively continued our AASI expansion strategy, we reviewed the proposed number of beneficiaries downwards from 10 scholars selected annually per school, to 3 scholars.

Monitoring and tracking difficulties:

We work with community-based organizations to monitor scholars' performance and manage programme implementation across focal states. The sheer volume of beneficiaries thinly spread across target states pose a challenge for efficient monitoring school attendance, academic performance, and overall wellbeing of the scholars. There are also instances of parents relocating, loss of telephone numbers or change of schools, creating communication difficulties.

To address this in part, we enlisted the support of the SUBEBs in securing placements for scholars in top-rated public secondary schools around their residential communities. Where this is not feasible, we have covered boarding school expenses to ensure the scholars are adequately supported and for ease of monitoring.

Financial misappropriation:

Diversion of resources by parents or guardians at the expense of the scholars' educational needs. In other cases, implementing partners or other stakeholders seek financial reward from the parents or scholars during payment.

Serving largely unbanked families – most of the beneficiary families did not have bank accounts to aid seamless and transparent fund remittance. To address this, we facilitated the opening of bank accounts for all scholar and direct fund transfers were made.

Transparency in scholar Selection – we had an incident of a head teacher falsifying result in favour of her ward. To avert such, we created a transparent system of selection. Scholars were selected by a joint committee comprising head teachers and representatives of LGEA, SUBEB and SBMC, ensuring transparency and accuracy of results.

Lessons Learnt

Our experience indicates –

Over 50% of the scholars who completed their secondary education would not have accomplished it without the scholarship, given their economic background. Scholarships are a valuable component for supporting poor and marginalized children to attain education and access future economic opportunities.

Increased Enrolment in OF adopted schools - the programme served as an incentive for parents to enroll their children in the adopted schools. They hope that their wards will someday become a beneficiary.

Cluster-based implementation approaches are efficient and cost effective: As a result of early lessons during implementation of the Adopt-A-School programme, the Foundation prioritized a cluster-based approach in its school adoption strategy for ease of monitoring, with direct benefits for all programme components, including scholarship.

Direct correlation between financial support and increase in school retention:

Most students under the scholarship had additional incentive to work hard, perform well academically and remain in school. They had fewer domestic distractions such as the need to contribute economically to their families. They serve as models for children within the community and a beacon of hope for other children to aspire.

Conclusion

There is evidence that increased schooling will not only allow adolescents to gain better jobs and break the inter-generational cycle of poverty, but it also has protective effects against violence and early marriage particularly among the poorest, rural households and those with other vulnerabilities like special needs.

We believe that increased investment and commitment to scholarships targeting grassroots at the secondary level will be an important step in addressing the economic barriers towards educational achievements.

About Oando Foundation

Oando Foundation is an independent charity established to support the Nigerian Government in achieving its Universal Basic Education goal; with a vision to create sustainable and equitable educational systems in communities that empower every child through its signature project the Adopt-A-School Initiative (AASI).

AASI deploys a holistic approach of integrated school improvement, addressing critical supply and demand factors that affect learning, teaching, management, parental/community participation and responsiveness to children's needs, providing proof of concept for programme replication and scale up. It comprises Infrastructural Improvement, Teacher Capacity Development, Digital Literacy, Early Childcare Development, Grants and scholarships, and institutional strengthening of education managers, targeting 88 public primary school communities across Nigeria

For more information on how Oando Foundation is impacting basic education in Nigeria, please visit www.oandofoundation.org