

# Mobilizing and Enrolling Out-of-School Children in Nigeria



Case Study of Our Out-of-School Children (OOSC) Initiative







**Newly enrolled out-of-school children at Randawa Primary School, Mani, Katsina State – one of Oando Foundation’s adopted public schools in Nigeria.**

The global education goal, Sustainable Development Goal 4, covers an ambitious range of targets, including the pledge to ‘ensure that all girls and boys complete free, equitable and quality primary and secondary education leading to relevant and effective learning outcomes’ and to ‘eliminate 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’ by 2030 (United Nations, 2015).

Oando Foundation’s intervention for Out-of-School Children (OOSC) aims to increase opportunities for children in this category to access quality formal education through the Foundation’s Adopt-A-School Initiative (AASI). Since 2011, the Foundation has worked with multilayered stakeholders across communities in Nigeria to improve access to quality basic education and accelerate efforts towards the achievement of the universal primary education, leaving no child behind.

The achievement of every child’s right to education drives the Foundation’s mandate to radically improve the quality of teaching and learning in our schools and communities by ensuring access to world class basic education systems; leveraging resources, best practices, and cross-cutting solutions that have delivered similar results we aim to achieve.

**TO ACCELERATE  
THE ACHIEVEMENT  
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FOUNDATION  
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TARGET THE MOST  
MARGINALIZED  
CHILDREN MUST**

Despite the wide recognition of education as an empowering right and one of the most powerful tools by which economically and socially marginalized children and adults can lift themselves out of poverty and participate fully in society, millions of children and adults remain deprived of educational opportunities; many as a result of social, cultural and economic factors.

This case study highlights the approach adopted by the Foundation as well as the results achieved, challenges encountered, and lessons learnt in reducing the number of out-of-school children in target communities, and improving the overall basic education system in Nigeria.



# Context

The UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UNESCO-UIS, 2015a) defined out-of-school children as “children of primary or lower secondary school age who are not enrolled in primary or secondary education,” including “a small number of children in pre-primary education and non-formal education (NFE)” (p.21). Out-of-school children are also categorized into those who have never been to school, despite having the appropriate age to enrol, or those who dropped out for various reasons.

According to the 2016 Global Initiative on Out-of-School Children report entitled “Leaving no one behind,” about 263 million children and youth are out of school, according to UIS data. This number includes 61 million children of primary school age (about 6 to 11 years), 60 million young adolescents of lower secondary school age (about 12 to 14 years), and 142 million youth of upper secondary school age (about 15 to 17 years) for the school year ending in 2014. If current trends continue, millions of children are likely to never set foot inside a classroom.

The case in Nigeria is even more daunting. It is reportedly the country with the highest number of out of school children globally -10 million out of school children - (UNICEF), despite considerable government investments in access initiatives. Children are excluded because of poverty, gender, disability, geography, language, albinism, nomadism, population explosion and weak governance system. Issues of gender, child protection and increasingly conflict throw up further barriers to the education of the poorest children.





In the past four years, we have targeted OOSC – children between the ages of 7 -14 years who have never attended school or who had attended school at some point but has not been in school for over a school term (3 Months). The Foundation is working with multiple stakeholders cutting across various sectors in 88 communities across 23 states in Nigeria; ensuring the rights to education for thousands of children are maximized beyond the barriers of poverty, ignorance, social practices, lack of classrooms, incompetent teachers and non-involvement of communities in education.

## OOSC Intervention

Oando Foundation OOSC strategy deploys an integrated approach that thrives on the involvement of multiple stakeholders (SUBEB, LGEA, SBMC, and Teachers etc), deployment of effective community engagement practices and provision of ancillary support where necessary. This approach ensures the entire process – OOSC mobilization, enrollment, retention and monitoring is community-driven, sustainable and cost-effective. It goes beyond mobilization to improvement in learning performance in literacy and numeracy, provision of a conducive learning environment that serve as safe spaces for out-of-school to engage, teaching methodologies that are child-focused, and provision of learning materials for enrolled OOSC to ease the economic burden on parents/guardians.



# OUR ACCESS APPROACH

School		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provision of teaching and learning materials</li> <li>• Renovation / Construction of classrooms</li> <li>• Capacity building of teachers and head teachers</li> </ul>
Child		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provision of back to school materials</li> <li>• Walk in center</li> <li>• Provision of scholarship</li> </ul>
Institution		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Capacity strengthening to provide effective oversight functions; monitoring and data management</li> </ul>
Community		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Community sensitization</li> <li>• Capacity strengthening through the SBMC</li> <li>• Promoting participation in decision making from bottom up</li> </ul>

Our approach recognizes the pivotal role communities play in the successful execution of programmes, increasing sustainability and maximizing resources. We therefore leverage community structures through the School-Based Management Committees (SBMCs) and train them in effective school governance and OOSC mobilization, among others. The SBMCs championed enrollment drives, deploying various approaches to educate community members on the benefits of education and persuade parents to enrol their wards in school. The approach deployed in each community was contextualized to fit the community's peculiarities – engagement of Religious and Traditional Leaders, Mothers' Association, House to House Call, and Market Place Awareness, among others.

For newly enrolled OOSC lacking basic literacy and numeracy skills, we provided a bridge – the Walk-in Center – to support smooth assimilation and improve retention. The Walk-in Centers (WICs) serve as non-formal accelerated learning spaces within the school system, supporting OOSC to experience education before transiting into formal classes. The centre provides short intensified participatory activities aimed at stimulating OOSC, then gradually introducing basic literacy and numeracy in the mother tongue, using play and drama as a medium to facilitate learning. Beneficiaries spend an average of 10 weeks in the WIC to bridge their learning gaps before they are mainstreamed into formal classes.



We also build the capacity of the WIC teachers based on identified learning gaps (letters, sounds, reading concepts, etc). The training supports the creation of practical experiences in teaching OOSC essential reading, writing, basic mathematics and science skills; using more effective, current and child-centred practices. We provide relevant resources and instructional materials to match learning objectives and make learning interesting for the children. In addition, training guides that replicate best practices and aligns with the Nigerian curriculum on literacy and numeracy are produced, to ensure standardization of lessons across board and promote learning improvements in all WICs.

The WICs serve as a functional cushion for OOSC without basic literacy and numeracy skills. Using intensified informal activities, OOSC are engaged to learn basic letters and number identification, providing a smooth transition for over 80% of OOSC into formal classes. To wage the socio-economic cost of schooling for the most disadvantaged, OOSC were provided with back to school malterials such as uniforms, text materials, etc, easing the financial burden on parents who are unable to afford the cost.

Through our integrated approach, we are experiencing changes in the communities where we work. In the last three years, working in close collaboration with our stakeholders, we have mobilized and enrolled 60,966 children; communities are taking responsibility for their children's education, teachers and headteachers are delivering education in an improved child-friendly environment using modern pedagogy that promotes learning, hence increasing attendance and retention.

## Community Led Change



**Catching them young: nursery school-age children already enrolled into one of Oando Foundation's adopted schools in Katsina State .**



A range of factors contributed to the remarkable success experienced in mobilizing and enrolling OOSC. These include: empowering and working through community gatekeepers, leveraging existing government structures (Home-Grown School Feeding programme, government counterpart support in target school communities), strategic collaboration with development partners such as the USAID-Education Crisis Response (ECR) programme to mainstream OOSC, providing back to school materials to reduce the burden on parents.

We have experienced a higher level of SBMC participation in driving targeted OOSC mobilization activities, working with relevant community coalition groups to sensitize parents and guardians on the need to send their children to school and deploying innovative solutions to cost reduction. In Itori-Ewekoro School, Ogun State, for instance, the SBMC successfully secured a reduction on pupils' registration fees from the LGEA, having observed that most OOSC enrolled were unable to pay the registration fee. It shows the difference orientated communities can make in ensuring that all school-aged children in Nigeria receive the education they need to function effectively in society. Besides, many of the enrolled children remained in school to complete their studies as the SBMCs monitored their progress and supported their parents or guardians to ensure their continued stay in school.

A total of 48 WICs were established to support enrolled OOSC. To date, 16,345 children have been enrolled into various WICs with an 80% transition rate into formal classes, on their path towards actualizing their right to quality basic education.



We provided school uniform for 47 children who were out-of-school until the SBMC sensitized their parents to send them to Randawa Primary School. We also provided a playground for pre-schoolers which motivated them to come to school along with their older siblings.

**- Mamuda Musa**

SBMC Chairman at Randawa Pry School, Mani LGEA





# Success Story

## Out of School, Now Back to School



Ten-year old Shukura Haruna lives with her parents in Randawa in Mani LGA, about 40 kilometers from the capital Katsina in Katsina State in the north of Nigeria. Shukura is the third child of her parents. She has two brothers. At 10, Shukura has had only one year of basic education – and that was about four years ago. “My father told me to stop going to school,” Shukura recalled. That was shortly after she moved from Primary 1 to 2 at Randawa Primary School, Mani.

It is not uncommon for parents or guardians especially in rural, northern towns like Mani to halt their children’s education because of poverty or economic challenges. Many children have also been forced to abandon school because of socio-cultural norms and practices that discourage attendance in formal education, especially for girls. Conflicts are also a factor.

Out of school, Shukura was made to assist her mother in her business of knitting sweaters for sale at the local market, especially during the cold Harmattan seasons. Following Oando Foundation’s intervention in the school and capacity strengthening of the School Based Management Committee (SBMC), they prioritized community sensitization and mobilization of out-of-school children which led Shukura’s return to school – to Randawa Primary School that she left four years ago.

“I like school. I want to learn. I want to know how to read and write,” she said in plain Hausa language. “I enjoy playing hand-thread game with my friends in school. I like my school, it is fenced so it is safe for us to play.” “We currently have about 280 out-of-school children who were enrolled at the start of the new academic year, thanks to the SBMC,” says Mr Ibrahim Alika, the head teacher at Randawa. Through the efforts of the SBMC, Oando Foundation has facilitated the enrollment of over 60,955 out-of-school children across 23 states in Nigeria.



# Challenges

**Low Teacher Capacity and Frequent Transfers:** The capacity of teachers in government primary schools in Nigeria is relatively poor. Huge financial investment is required to train and retrain teachers to maximize teacher performance. Despite the training conducted for the WIC teachers, their performance remains sub-optimal. The Foundation is exploring ways of ensuring continued capacity enhancement opportunities for teachers in our adopted schools. In other cases, trained teachers are transferred to other schools by the government education agencies, impacting programme delivery.

**Inadequate supply of age-appropriate learning materials:** Many of the states are not supplying basic books to their schools. Without the appropriate books, learning outcomes would likely be compromised in schools, leading to repetition and drop out. The Foundation provided textbooks and other teaching and learning materials to support knowledge transfer in supported schools.

**Socio-cultural barriers:** Across target communities, different cultures hold diverse limiting beliefs that hinder enrollment and sustained parental support for children to enroll and complete their education. Part of our strategy was active engagement of community gatekeepers to identify existing hindrances, and through sensitization and awareness ensure parents see the need to prioritize education of their wards.

## Lessons Learnt

**Involvement of multiple stakeholders,** particularly community gatekeepers, is critical to driving OOSC mobilization and enrolment in schools, thus promoting a sense of responsibility and ownership of the process. Communities were at the core of our approach, delivering a successful strategy to mobilizing and monitoring enrolled OOSC.

**Effective engagement with government stakeholders is essential** for improved supervision, sustainability, and effective management of the intervention. The government was responsible for assigning teachers to the WICs and continuous monitoring of lesson delivery.

**School Feeding Programme; a catalyst for OOSC enrolment:** The Home-Grown School Feeding and Health Programme (HGSFHP) promoted by the Nigerian Government across selected states, resulted in a surge in pupils' enrolment. Most profound was the Rigassa School in Kaduna state, where over 35,000 OOSC were enrolled in one academic term. Although the initiative was very laudable, sustaining it has remained a challenge. Sustainable school feeding programme can make a difference in curbing the menace of OOSC in Nigeria.

**Poverty is the principal factor impeding children's access to basic education** and pushing others already enrolled out of school before completion. We support the enrolment of vulnerable and marginalized children by providing ancillary items not covered under the Government's 'free basic education' mandate, such as school uniforms, bags, and textbooks. Therefore, any effort to eradicate out-of-school syndrome should recognize this factor and seek innovative and sustainable ways of addressing it.



# Conclusion

We are a decade away from the year that the world has committed to achieving Sustainable Development Goal 4, so that every child can learn to read, write, and achieve his or her full potential. Sadly, with the current population of OOSC in Nigeria, further exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic and poor political will to address this as an emergency, it might take longer than a decade to get there. The education of our children holds the future of our nation. Hence, we enjoin all stakeholders – government, development partners, private sector – to engage strategically and proffer solutions that ensure every child irrespective of gender, race or socio-economic status have access to quality basic education in Nigeria.







# 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](http://www.oandofoundation.org)