

## **An Assessment of the Rescue Mission Policy in Mitigating Educational Challenges in Taraba State (2015-2018).**

**By**

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### **Abstract**

The advancement of any nation relies extensively on the effective implementation of appropriate education policies. However, this important variable is grossly neglected in many African countries, including Nigeria. The case of Taraba State is very glaring. The education segment of the state is characterized by incessant industrial actions by teachers/lecturers, low funding, inadequate staffing (both in quantity and quality), lack of advanced teaching aids, inadequacy to deteriorating state of infrastructures, lack of internet facilities to aid research, ill-equipped libraries and the lack of conducive learning environment. The primary objective of this study therefore, is to appraise the success or otherwise of the Rescue Agenda of Governor Darius Dickson Ishaku's administration from 2015-2018 on education. For a better understanding of the subject matter, this study is anchored on the system theory of Public Policy propounded by David Easton (1965). Findings from the study reveal that, while the Rescue Mission has tried in mitigating some challenges at the primary and post primary levels, higher institutions in the state have remained impoverished in all ramifications. The study therefore recommend some measures for mitigating the glaring challenges confronting, particularly, tertiary educational institutions in the state.

**Keywords:** Education Development, Education policy, Public policy, Rescue mission, Sustainable development.

### **Introduction**

The relevance of public policies in any nation-state is enormous and cannot be over-stated. This is on account of their instrumentality to the government's impacts on the lives of citizens. They constitute the major variables in assessing achievements of successive governments in any society (Obiyan, 2006). Public policy is simply deliberate effort by government to address societal problems, and problem at hand in a modern society. Public policies are indeed ubiquitous.

In contemporary world, the advancement of any nation depends extensively on the aptness and faculty of the government to initiate and implement appropriate educational policies. In the Nigerian context, for instance, the National Educational Policy, which is the nation's education policy document explicitly lays down the guiding principles for effective implementation, administration and management of education policies from basic education up to tertiary education at the central (federal), regional or state and the lowest/local tiers of government (National Policy on Education, 2013). The education policies specified the government's prospects, benchmarks, aspirations and objectives viz a viz the prerequisites necessary for ensuring optimal service delivery.

After independence in 1960, the national education policy aimed at examining the manpower needs of the country for two decades with the sole aim of restructuring the education configuration so as to ensure the provision of quality education (Martins, 2005). Unfortunately, the aim could not be adequately achieved due to mistrust among the regions owing to ethnic and religious differences. For this reason, the 1966 to 1979 education laws empowered each state to formulate its education policies (Martins, 2005). Even between 1966 and 1979

education laws had empowered each state of the federation to formulate educational policies suitable to their peculiarities for the attainment of quality education in every state of the federation so as to meet up with global best practice and compete favorably with each other within the country and even abroad. This accounted majorly for the level of educational imbalance among the states.

In Taraba State, the present condition in the education sector at all levels is regrettable. It is characterized by incessant industrial actions by teachers and lecturers, low funding, inadequate staffing (both in quantity and quality), lack of standard and advanced teaching aids, inadequacy to deteriorating state of infrastructures, lack of internet facilities to aid research, ill-equipped libraries and, above all, lack of conducive learning environment. This has made the state to be categorized as one among the conglomerates of educationally backward states.

The foregoing challenges in the public schools in Taraba state has led to the establishment of more private primary and post-primary institutions (schools) of acquiring western knowledge whose proprietors charge exorbitant tuition fee thereby making standard and quality education a commodity only affordable by the rich. This has made quality education to become a luxury for the poor and peasant Tarabans who also desire the best quality education for their children and wards. These problems are not only limited to the primary and post-primary institutions but extends to tertiary institutions which has resulted in many Tarabans migrating to other states for higher education. This is more so because of incessant strikes in the higher institutions, particularly, Taraba State University where a course of four years could take up to five to six years because of incessant industrial actions (strike) by lecturers at short intervals.

With the emergence of Arch. Darius Dickson Ishaku as governor of Taraba State in 2015, he launched the “Rescue Mission” which was actually the slogan of his political campaign. For instance, in November, 2015 (Vanguard news of 18<sup>th</sup> November 2015) he declared that the state’s budget for the coming year (2016) will be predicated upon the objectives of his Rescue Mission mantra, which considers education as a key sector. This statement, no doubt, revived the hopes of stakeholders in the education sector of the state as it portends the governor’s commitment to battenning the quality and value of western education in the state. However, even with the launching of the Rescue Mission policy of the governor and his pledge to adequately enhance and better the education sector, the aforementioned challenges hitherto bedeviling the state’s education sector have persisted unabated, thereby having no significant positive impact on the development of education sector in the state. This study therefore seeks to unveil the challenges faced by the Rescue Mission in salvaging the education segment of the state. To be precise, the study intends to identify the reasons for the seeming abysmal failure of the Rescue Agenda of the present regime, especially in reviving the education sector.

## **Conceptual Clarification**

### **Education Policy**

Education policies are the rules and regulations, principles and decisions which concern the operation of an education system. According to Okoroma (2000:190), educational policies are initiatives mostly by governments that determine the direction of an educational system.

In the view of Awokoya (1981), educational policy is directed towards increasing the quality of life of a people. He believes that the objective of any policy is to satisfy individual needs, community pressures and the degree of complexity and sophistication to which socialized personnel must be educated and trained to meet these demands. The following

considerations, according to Awokoya (1981), are necessary to guide the formulation of adequate educational policy;

- 1) It should be formulated and adopted through a political process which acknowledges the reality and legitimacy of conflicting interests and desires among its participants.
- 2) It should portray some elements of guidance for properly directed and coordinated action towards the attainment of the desired goals.
- 3) It should contain information on the broad objectives that should be reached.
- 4) It should be a binding guide on the actions of those implementing it.
- 5) It should be enforceable and enforced by the society which formulates it.

Kerr (1976) believes that, for a policy to qualify as an educational policy, it must be distinct from other policies. In his view, educational policies are distinguishable from other policies by the fact that policies on education are part and parcel of educational institutions. However, it is important to note that not all policies formulated in educational institutions can qualify as educational policies. Generally, policies must be rational and purposeful to enable them to stand the test of time.

### **Educational Development**

The concept "Education Development" suggests advancement in the education system of a state/country, ranging from infrastructural to human resources. It therefore, simply implies a paradigmatic shift from "what is" to "what ought to". Educational development can then be said to be an improvement on what is procurable in the education system to what is regarded as global best standard. Some indicators of educational development include; the availability of electronic devices such as power-points, availability of internet facilities, conducive learning environment, constant review of school curriculums, training of teachers, etc.

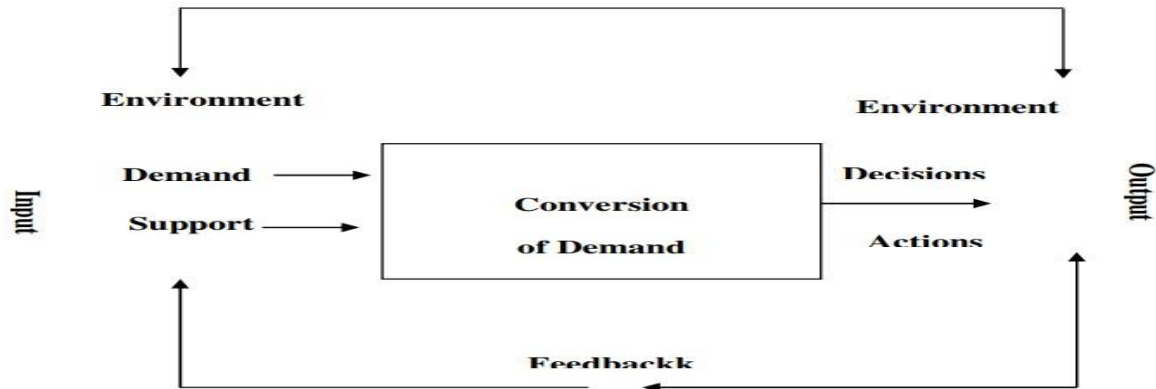
Improved and up to standard education policy is very crucial for other forms of development to take place, viz; political, economic and cross-cutting. The "demand" for government's attention on education by the citizens forms part of the input of the citizens who voted the government in power. While the formulation and implementation processes adopted to bring to reality the wishes, demands, yearnings and aspirations of the people with concern to educational development constitutes what Easton referred to as the "Conversion/Black Box". The Rescue Agenda policy document by the Darius regime reflects, planned programmes, policies and projects by the government for the development of all sectors of the economy, including education.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Public policy may be viewed as the response of a political system to demands arising from its environment. The political system, as defined by Easton (1965) is composed of those identifiable and interrelated institutions and activities in a society that make authoritative decisions (or allocations of values) that are binding on society. Inputs into the political system from the environment consist of demands and supports. The environment consists of all those conditions and events external to the boundaries of the political system. Demands are the claims made by individuals and groups on the political system for action to satisfy their interests. Support is rendered when groups and individuals abide by election results, pay taxes, obey law, and otherwise accept the decisions and actions of the authoritative political system made in response to demands.

These authoritative allocations of values constitute public policy. The concept of feedback indicates that public policies (or outputs) may subsequently alter the environment and the demands generated therein, as well as the character of the political system itself. Policy

outputs may produce new demands, which lead to further policy outputs, and so on in a continuing, and never ending flow of public policy.



Diagrammatic representation of David Easton's System Analysis

Source: Gauba op, an introduction to political theory.

The systems theory is a useful aid in organizing inquiry into policy formation. However, the usefulness of the system model is limited due to several factors. First, this model is criticized for employing the value-laden techniques of welfare economics, which are based on the maximization of a clearly defined “social welfare function”. The missing ingredients in the systems approach are the “power, personnel and institutions” of policy making. In examining these, there is need to note that decision-makers are strongly constrained by economic factors in the environment of the political system.

Secondly, the model also ignores an important element of the policy process, namely, that the policy makers (including institutions) have also a considerable potential in influencing the environment within which they operate. The traditional input-output model would see the decision-making system as “facilitative” and value-free rather than “causative” that is as a completely neutral structure. In other words, structure variations in the systems are found to have no direct casual effect on public policy.

Finally, the extent to which the environment, both internal and external is said to have an influence on the policy-making process is determined by the values and ideologies held by the decision-makers in the system. It suggests that policy-making involves not only the policy content but also the policy-makers perceptions and values. The values held by the policy-makers are fundamentally assumed to be crucial in understanding the policy alternatives that are made (Basu, 2004:443).

The system theory, even with its deficiencies has been considered as the best theory of public policy to explain this phenomenon. This is because Taraba State is a system that is made up of other sub-systems/sectors (economic, social and political). These subsystems in turn comprises of other sub-units. For example, the social system is made up of the education sector, health sector, cultural sector, environmental and water resource sector etc.

The social sector therefore, constitutes a subsystem whose sub-unit (education sector) must be well handled in terms of being fed with adequate inputs, so as to contribute immensely and appropriately to the optimality of the whole system (Taraba State). But when the social (education) sector is not receiving the required support and input from its people and especially the government, the reverse will inevitably be the case. Suffice to say that, the system is like a biological entity made up of interrelated and interconnected subunits, which portrays a scenario of “an injury to one is an injury to all”. Maltreatment/abuse on the social (education) sector

portends an adverse effect on other sectors of the state. That is to say that, not giving attention to improving education is detrimental to the economic sector and all other sectors of the state. Improved and up to standard education policy therefore is very crucial for political and economic development to take place.

The “demand” for government’s attention on education by the citizens forms part of the input of the people who have voted the government of the day and paid their tax (support). While the executive and legislative processes adopted to bring to reality the wishes, demands, yearnings and aspirations of the people with concern to education development is deliberated upon in what Easton referred to as the “Conversion/Black Box”. The output is however, the Rescue Agenda policy document which contains the planned policies, projects and programmes initiated by the government of the state. More to this, is the feedback loop/mechanism which is a medium through which the pleasure and/or displeasure of the people resulting from the output of the government is channeled. Feedbacks could therefore be in the form of protests, industrial actions, political apathy, increased political participation etc. The response from the people (environment) on the projects and programmes from this policy could form the basis for improving on the policy, programme or projects or initiating an entirely new policy.

It should be noted that the quality of projects and programmes (output) largely depends on the quality of input on the part of the government. This simply means that the success and/or failure of whatever policy depends on what goes on in the black box, because it is in the black box that popular opinions are considered, policies are formulated, funds are apportioned, personnel are selected (awarding of contracts) and ongoing projects are monitored.

### **The Rescue Agenda on Education**

The Rescue Agenda is one of its kinds and a sort of what Ikelegbe (1996: 18-19) regards as a “mega policy” because it cuts across various sectors of the society ranging from, the economic, political to the social sectors which has education as its sub-unit. The primary objective of the Rescue Mission is to transform Taraba State in all its ramifications, viz: economically, socially, culturally, and politically, in order to accomplish the vision of being one of the top two leading vibrant economies in the North East Sub-region by 2025.

The Rescue Agenda on Education (2015:14-17) reads thus;

Education has been said to be the key to human capital development and essential to sustain an emerging democracy and a vibrant economy. It has been established that Taraba State is disadvantaged in terms of education in North East Sub-region. Thus, the Rescue Mission seeks to deploy cutting edge strategies to first reverse this position, while at once, time ramp up the standard of education, as a matter of urgency, in terms of institutions, infrastructure, and human capacity at all levels;

- i. Primary Level: We acknowledge that the primary school is the foundation of any basic education scheme. Consequently, school infrastructure will be built/constructed or rehabilitated; also a deliberate plan will be put in place to develop a world class curriculum for primary schools in Taraba State. This Uniform Standard Curriculum will be jointly developed by both the public and private primary schools.
- ii. Secondary Education: To ensure that secondary school pupils get good supervision and adequate and conducive learning environment, strategic commitment will be made to substantially improve the standard/quality of boarding secondary schools in the state where they exist, and establish additional ones on a needs basis. Where feasible, school feeding programme will be considered for implementation in our

day secondary schools, to enhance the living standard of our young ones and guarantee their cognitive development. This administration will ensure the payment of all exam fees for secondary school students as soon as the financial crisis is resolved.

- iii. Tertiary Education: We will increase access to higher education for all qualified citizens through a sustainable scholarship programme. The Taraba State University, Jalingo, will be developed to expand its capacity to a world class university in collaboration with the Nigerian University Commission (NUC) and notable foreign universities. Eminent citizens will also be encouraged to support the university through endowment programmes.  
We shall encourage and support private universities that are in the state such as Kwararafa University in Wukari, and other upcoming private universities.
- iv) Scholarship: We shall put in place a scholarship scheme for both local and overseas training of young and qualified citizens in specialized areas of medicine, engineering, environmental sciences, aviation, agriculture, information and communication technology, and other critical areas, to meet the increasing manpower needs of transforming Taraba State into a nationally and globally competitive economy guided by the Rescue Agenda.
- v) Vocational Education: In addition to the mainstream educational programmes, special emphasis will be laid on vocational education to ensure that our graduates at this level do not swell the rank of job seekers, but become entrepreneurs and employers of labor in their own right.
- vi) Teacher Education: In recognition of the immense contributions of our teachers and the need for on-the-job training and retraining, we shall provide training for qualified teachers in various categories and at all levels by enhancing the capacity of the College of Education, Zing, to serve as the bastion of teacher capacity building. Taraba State Government will also improve the working conditions of teachers by the establishment of Teachers' Housing Scheme through Housing Cooperatives, as well as providing funding and incentives for creative work and research for lecturers. We shall invest sufficiently in capacity building to encourage the development of indigenous lecturers for all the tertiary institutions within the state, by establishment of scholarship scheme for qualified lectures at all institutional levels, within available financial resources, as well as leveraging on development partners and private sector stakeholders.

### **Impact of the Rescue Mission on Educational Sector in Taraba State**

Despite the Rescue Agenda of the Darius administration in the state, the education sector is still confronted with avalanche of challenges which has left the sector in a state of moribundness which needs swift intervention in order to prevent further degeneration of the sector. Prominent among the challenges of the education sector are;

- a) **Poor Funding;** The first and possibly one of the greatest challenges facing education in Taraba State is inadequate funding by the state government. While the United Nations recommended a 26% allocation to education so as to adequately fund the education sector for optimal function, Taraba State government allocated only N2.5 billion to the sector out of the total sum of N110 billion for the 2017 budget, which represents 2.3% of the year's budget (taravoices.com, 19<sup>th</sup> January, 2017). Synonymously, the arrangement for the financing of the State University by virtue of the law (Law no. 4) establishing the institution states clearly that the institution should be funded from the following sources; 5% of the state's allocation from the federal government, 5% of the local governments' allocation from the state government and

two percent of all contracts awarded in the state. Resultingly however, the institution has rather become a shadow of itself. This implies that the Rescue Mission has virtually no impact on the funding of the State University, in addition to grossly abusing the sources of funding outlined in the law establishing the institution.

- b) **Lack of Infrastructure;** Schools and other vocational institutions have become dilapidated and at the verge of collapse due to abject negligence and lack of maintenance by the government despite the Rescue Mission by the present regime. Most secondary schools in the state lack basic equipments for conducive learning, most especially for science practical classes, and those that claim to have are managing old ones. Hence, the students only learn the theoretical aspects in subjects that require practicals for optimal understanding. It is quite appalling that the state has no single public library to its name, while the libraries in the various schools are lacking the required books, journals and magazines.
- c) **Lack of Adequate Teaching Aids;** Teaching aids are objects, tools, devices or accessories used by teachers/lecturers to facilitate, enhance and enliven classroom instruction. There is a wide variety of teaching aids ranging from audio, videos, books, DVDs, projectors to computers, etc. Unfortunately, these crucial learning materials are not made available for teachers, and where provided, are grossly inadequate, thereby making teaching and learning herculean tasks for students and teachers alike. It is very disheartening that the only state owned university up to date does not use projectors during lectures and seminars, does not have sufficient computers to cater for its students' needs in this global Information and Technology (I.T) era. This has translated into producing graduates with no prerequisite computer knowledge. Our primary and post-primary (secondary) schools are not left out, as no standard libraries are provided for any of the schools even within Jalingo metropolis. These are critical issues one would have expected the Rescue Mission to have focused on if actually it intends to have its impacts felt on the education sector.
- d) **Inadequate Staffing;** Because of the unattractiveness of the teaching profession, most professionals have scampered from the profession for better alternatives that are more promising. This is consequent to the meager salaries earned by teachers, which is also not paid as at when due. This is among the most critical and leading causes of incessant industrial actions by teachers, especially at the primary level. In the alternative, people who do not leave the teaching profession for other jobs rely on other means or businesses, which they give more attention to, for the sake of financial security. This diverts the teachers' attention to such alternatives thereby no longer being devoted to their jobs. The development has adversely affected students' performance both in external and internal examinations.
- e) **Corruption;** Corruption is one of the major factors that have stunted the development of this state, not just in the area of education, but in all ramifications. The Get Rich Quick Syndrome (GRQS), which is the mindset of many, has aided the exploit of corrupt practices, especially in the phenomenon of ghost workers, which has remained the major source for siphoning or misappropriation of funds.
- f) **Lack of Conducive Hostels in Secondary Schools;** Boarding schools are intended to be conducive, so as to trigger high academic performance amongst students. Unfortunately, the condition of boarding schools in the polity has so much deteriorated to the extent that students no longer sleep at night in rainy seasons due to roof leakages. Very worrisomely, also, is the lack of electricity supply in virtually all secondary schools in Taraba State. This unfortunate phenomenon has made the purpose of for establishing boarding schools meaningless, since students cannot read, especially at night, under conducive atmosphere. The Rescue Mission is expected to have taken up

this issue as one of its priorities in the education sector. Unfortunately, the reverse is the case.

- g) ***Lack of Training and Development of Teachers/Lecturers;*** Teachers in Taraba state have been neglected. Gone are those days when the government sponsored an on-the-job training and development trips, seminars and workshops. The lack of exposure to new knowledge has further contributed to the present state of education in Taraba State. According to Wilson (1887), if we ourselves know nothing but of ourselves and not of others, then we know nothing. Much of what the Rescue Mission is expected to have done is not only to provide for training and retraining but also to have ensured employment of adequate and qualified teachers in various categories and at all levels of the education sector. Unfortunately, this is not the case at all levels, even in the only State University.

### **Positive Impacts of the Rescue Mission on Education**

One major area the Rescue Mission has come in to salvage the situation is in the area of improving staff strength both in elementary schools (primary) and high schools (secondary schools) by employing 3000 teachers for both levels (businesspost.ng, 20<sup>th</sup> February, 2017). This has, of course, boosted the performance of the Education sector and repositioned it for better performance. It is, indeed, the triggering factor behind the tremendous success recorded by the state in its 2017 WAEC where it was rated among the top 10 (8<sup>th</sup> position nationwide and 1<sup>st</sup> position in the Northeast and, in fact, in the whole of Northern Nigeria) performing states in the examination and recorded 67.3% pass in 2016; the highest in the state's 27 years history (Leadership Newspaper, 22<sup>nd</sup> August, 2017), as against its 27<sup>th</sup> position and 15.3% pass in 2014, which was before the inception of the Rescue Agenda of the Darius Dickson Ishaku's administration in the state. But more still needs to be done, since the education sector still needs much for optimal performance.

Governor Darius Ishaku's Rescue Mission has also achieved much in appreciably reducing the phenomenon of ghost workers in the civil service, especially in the education sector. In an exclusionary interview with Andrew Ojih (Leadership newspaper of 26<sup>th</sup> January, 2019), Governor Ishaku stated that "... what I did was to sit up and do a cleaning exercise to remove the ghost workers and check the standard of teachers, and not like sacking 20,000 teachers as they did in some states... we hardly found any school that had 10 regular teachers but their salary bill was for 50-60 teachers...". This shows that the Rescue Mission has done laudably well in area of reducing staffing by fishing out ghost workers and employing 3000 newly trained teachers to fill the vacuum. But no matter the seeming success in this aspect of the Rescue Mission, much still needs to be attended to, since corruption still prevails in almost every aspect of the state civil service.

In an effort to further boost students performance in external exams, Governor Darius Ishaku donated an office to the West African Examination Council (WAEC) and a utility vehicle. This is because for the past 25 years, the state had no WAEC branch and as such had depended on WAEC branch in Yola, Adamawa State for all official transactions. This has often led to late commencement of examinations since examination materials often gets to the state late due to logistics challenges (<http://www.tarabastate.gov.ng/gov-ishaku-commissions-new-waec-office-in-jalingo>).

Other laudable efforts of the Rescue Mission on educational development in the state is the organizing of a workshop and training for teachers, distribution of 300 laptops to indigenous students of the Taraba State University, payment of exchange fees for students and WAEC fees for 225 students, intervention project (provision of facilities) in 28 primary schools across 13 selected local governments.



## Conclusion

It can be deduced from the foregoing discussion that the Rescue Agenda on education has significantly contributed in mitigating some of the challenges confronting the education sector, which has helped in improving the standard and quality of education in the State, especially in primary and secondary schools. Unfortunately, the Rescue has grossly failed to address the challenges confronting, especially the State University, in the area of funding. Notwithstanding the positive achievements especially at the primary and secondary levels, the Rescue Mission still needs much to be done in the area of development of infrastructures in our schools, so as to attain the so much desired sustainable education development in order to and meet up with global best practice. The tertiary institutions, especially Taraba State University and College of Agriculture need urgent intervention in order to salvage their deplorable conditions. On the whole, however, the Rescue Mission has created impact, especially at the primary and secondary levels.

## Recommendations:

- a) There should be sufficient and adequate provisions of financial resources by the government for the procurement of qualitative training facilities, for revamping and refurbishing schools and also for the acquisition of good infrastructure to guarantee conducive environment for a stress-free transfer of knowledge; teaching and learning process.
- b) Properly monitoring of use of funds in order to avoid mismanagement, misappropriation, siphon and embezzlement.
- c) Teachers'/lecturers' salaries need to be improved, to serve as a motivation or incentive for them to be more effective and dedicated.
- d) Adequate measures should be taken and mechanisms should also be put in place to ensure stability in the lecturing and teaching profession. Professional teachers should be adequately employed with cognizance to quality and quantity.
- e) Teachers/lecturers need to be engaged in periodic trainings to ensure that what they are well equipped so as to give out what is of good quality and in line with global best practice.

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