In the last five years, Nigeria has tackled two major problems in basic education: the chronic shortage of qualified teachers, especially in rural areas, and the dire quality of education children receive in primary school. With gains provided by debt relief the Government launched initiatives that have put 74,000 new qualified teachers in primary schools and boosted the skills of more than 400,000 serving teachers.

Class overcrowding in urban primary schools is gradually reducing towards the national norm of 35 pupils per teacher. This will improve the quality of teaching, which has declined over the years. Importantly, progress towards MDGs 2 and 3 education targets and educating Nigerians to play their part in achieving Nigeria Vision 20:2020 is on course.

**Shortage of teachers, poor quality education**

In 2005, there were not enough teachers to staff all primary schools, particularly in rural areas and slums. And, more than half the teachers were unqualified. Adding to the problem, most serving teachers had not updated their skills in years. In 2006, the Federal Teachers’ Scheme and Nationwide Capacity building were introduced. These programmes work in tandem to put more teachers into schools and improve the quality of teaching.

**Federal Teachers’ Scheme boosts supply of teachers**

The Federal Teachers’ Scheme tackles the chronic shortage of qualified teachers in primary schools.

Every two years this initiative places 45,000 unemployed Nigeria Certificate in Education graduates into schools across the country as teaching interns. The Federal Government provides each intern with a monthly stipend while States supplement the basic stipend either by providing accommodation or by an incentive payment.

Interns attend a short induction course before deployment. On successful completion of the two-year internship, States offer them fulltime teaching posts.

To date this initiative has boosted the teaching force with 74,000 new teachers. The student-to-teacher ratio, especially in rural schools, is improving. Marking this progress, some States no longer participate in the scheme because they now have enough teachers to fully staff primary schools.

The scheme also tackles the need to equip children with the basic knowledge and skills in the sciences that are necessary for national development. To this end, 10,000 of the interns with backgrounds in science, maths, English and technical subjects are deployed to teach junior secondary students.

**In-service professional development raises teacher performance**

The nationwide capacity building scheme for serving public primary school teachers is an in-service professional development programme. It exposes teachers to new approaches to coping with large classes and gives them an opportunity to exchange experiences with other teachers.

Every year during the long vacation, this initiative provides 145,000 teachers, 400,000 in all to date, with professional development to aid student learning. The focus is on teaching English, maths, social studies and science – the fundamental skills students need.
In addition, teachers can make use of education resource centres equipped with reference materials. By using these centres they can continue to improve the skills they learn during the short in-service training.

The programme is continuously improving. Teachers who take part provide feedback to improve subsequent sessions.

**Links with other key strategies**

Boosting the supply of qualified teachers and improving the quality of education are critical to fulfilling the aims of the National Policy on Education and the Universal Basic Education Act 2004. These entitle all children aged 6-14 years to free education.

**Overcoming challenges**

Both schemes successfully overcame significant challenges.

In the Federal Teachers' Scheme, State Universal Basic Education Boards were not paying interns their allowances on time. This was solved by instigating an e-payment system. States and local government authorities also found it difficult to monitor the performance of interns. To overcome this particular hurdle, state, federal and local authorities joined forces and pooled their monitoring efforts.

Retention of interns also proved difficult. Despite the fact that internships offered employment and the prospect of a permanent job, many recruits absconded. Now, interns are being closely monitored every quarter and budgets are being examined to see what can be done in the way of providing additional incentives.

The professional development programme also witnessed challenges, largely because State agencies nominated people who weren’t teachers. This was overcome by involving the teachers’ union and other stakeholders in selecting participants, and getting accurate information about those selected to make sure that they were indeed teachers.

Facilities for training were frequently inadequate, another problem which is being addressed in the budget. Participants also often turned up late and missed parts of the course. Better communication and meetings of key stakeholders before courses start aim to counter this.

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**More teachers for primary schools**

74,000 more qualified teachers in primary schools:

- 40,000 National Certificate of Education graduate interns placed in primary schools in 2006, 34,000 in 2009
- 5,000 focusing on junior secondary sciences in 2007, and a further 5,000 in 2009
- 38,868 graduates completed their two-year teaching internships successfully in 2008
- 25,686 now have permanent teaching posts in the Federal Capital Territory and the States

**Quality teaching**

Professional development for 400,000 teachers to date

- 143,140 serving primary teachers received professional development training in 2006, 158,600 in 2008, and 115,415 in 2009

"The student-to-teacher ratio, especially in rural schools, is improving.'