

TRANSFORMING EDUCATION POLICY IN NIGERIA: LESSONS LEARNED FROM PLANE'S REFORM EFFORTS

LESSONS FROM PRACTICE | Scaling What Works.



When implementation is taken seriously from the start, policy stops being a document and starts being a direction.

Partnership for Learning for All in Nigeria (PLANE) is a UK-funded education programme supporting education reform at the Federal and State levels (Kano, Kaduna and Jigawa) in northwest Nigeria. Through sustained engagement with government institutions, PLANE has worked to strengthen how education policies are developed, tested and put into practice. This work has shown that inclusive, evidence-informed policy development works best when it is connected to real problems, credible budgets, functioning institutions and clear accountability. When these conditions are met, reform moves from paper into practice.

This brief draws on PLANE's implementation experience to share what practice has taught us about making policy reform work. Each lesson explains what works, when it applies and how others can apply it. Companion document: [Reforming from Within: A How-To Guide on Policy Development for Education Reforms in Nigeria's State Systems](#).

LESSONS FROM PRACTICE

01



Monitoring works best when it improves performance, not just checks compliance

Monitoring systems built only for audit and compliance cannot drive accountability, learning or improvement.

PLANE's experience shows that monitoring loses credibility when it is used mainly to name and shame poor performers, or when it is limited to one-off compliance reports. Things change when monitoring is tied to improvement and learning, connected to existing data, and used as a regular tool by the people responsible. When done properly, field officers can see that their work matters and contributes to wider state goals. Senior managers also get timely information and make better decisions.

02



Keeping reform realistic protects ambition. It does not weaken it

Large reform packages that exceed all institutional capacity or funding do not fail dramatically; they fail quietly, through drift and delay.

PLANE's experience shows that where states have focused on a small number of high-impact, affordable actions, rather than trying to change everything at once, reform has produced visible early results. These early wins help maintain political support and build the confidence needed to tackle more complex reforms. Checking feasibility and moving in stages are what allow ambitious reform goals to survive in practice. A reform that starts and delivers something visible is more valuable than a plan that is comprehensive but never carried out.

03



Good evidence does not just inform policy. It makes reform defensible

developing or updating policy without solid evidence risks fixing the symptoms rather than the root causes.

Where **PLANE** has supported baseline assessments before drafting policies, reform was grounded in specific, measurable problems rather than general assumptions about what needs to change. This gives reform a clear focus, builds agreement among stakeholders, and makes the case for change much easier to justify. Policymakers can point to evidence. Stakeholders can debate real findings rather than opinions. This way, reform becomes harder to dismiss and easier to defend.

04



Validation is a quality check, not a rubber stamp

When validation is treated as a formality, problems that should be caught early get pushed into implementation, where they are much more costly to fix.

Where **PLANE** has supported structured validation of policy documents, implementation plans and monitoring frameworks, two things have consistently happened. First, the technical quality of the policy has improved. Second, the institutions responsible for implementation, including key stakeholder groups, have taken ownership of the result rather than simply receiving it. Both technical quality and genuine ownership are needed for reform to last. Validation turns a drafted document into something that stakeholders take responsibility for. This sense of ownership is critical for ensuring that implementation follows approval.

05



Sustainability must be planned from day one

Reform that depends on external funding or outside support is often lost before it delivers real results.

PLANE's experience shows that sustainability cannot be added on at the end of a reform process. Where it has been built in from the start, by fitting reform into existing government routines, putting capable officials in charge with their own budgets, and building skills at every step, reforms have lasted longer. Institutions continue the work because they own it and have the tools to keep it going. Sustainability is not an afterthought; it must be built into every decision from the start.

06



Endorsement is the starting point for implementation, not the finish line

Policy approval is often seen as the end of the reform process. In practice, it marks the beginning.

PLANE's experience shows that what happens before and at the point of policy approval shapes what comes after. Where senior leaders have been actively involved from the start, not just brought in at the end, policies move into action more quickly. Where plans for sharing the policy and taking the first steps are ready before formal approval, the transition from decision to action is smoother and people at all levels feel more committed to making it work. The conditions for implementation must be in place before a policy is approved. Building them afterwards is significantly harder.

07



Every policy needs an implementation plan, not a promise to write one later

Policies without clear guidance on how to act leave implementation open to different interpretations and delay.

When policy documents are accompanied with clear implementation frameworks, specifying roles, targets, timelines and monitoring responsibilities, the move from policy approval to action become faster. The question of how to implement is answered before the policy is approved, rather than left to a separate process that may never happen. A policy without an implementation plan is a destination without a route. When implementation planning is done at the drafting stage, policy approval becomes the start of delivery, not the end of planning.

08



If reform is not in the budget, it will not happen

Policy commitments not linked to government spending plans and priorities will remain wishes, however well they are written.

Across all of **PLANE's** work, the clearest sign of whether reform actually happens is whether it is backed by money. Where governments have been supported to connect policy commitments to sector plans, annual budgets, work plans and progress reporting, reform has moved forward. Where that link has been missing, even well-written policies have stalled. Every policy commitment should be traceable to a budget line. If it cannot be traced, it will not be funded.

These eight lessons do not add up to a formula. What they reflect is a consistent pattern: evidence before drafting, an implementation plan before approval, ownership before sign-off, budget before announcement, and sustainability built in from the start. **PLANE's** experience at the Federal level and in Kano, Kaduna and Jigawa shows that when these conditions are in place, reform has a strong foundation.



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