

# Classroom champions

Good leadership is core to transforming the education system in Niger State within the Federal Republic of Nigeria

By  
Dr Roni Ajao

**N**igeria's Niger State is home to around four million people, including nearly one million primary and secondary school-age students. The largest state in the country by landmass, it has 3,347 schools – 89% of which are located in rural areas. Unfortunately, these schools are part of an education system that has plunged into crisis. But state governor Dr Abubakar Sani Bello is committed to transforming the system.

Over the past decade, a lack of investment in education has resulted in crumbling buildings, overstretched and demotivated teachers, and rising student drop-out rates. The average teacher-to-student ratio in Niger State is 1:53, but in some schools it is as high as 1:175. Low remuneration has led to many teachers running businesses on the side, which explains why the rate of absenteeism among teachers is high. Classrooms lack even the most basic facilities, such as chairs, desks, pencils, books, blackboards and chalk. Some schools also lack sanitation facilities, science labs and security. Unsurprisingly, education achievement levels remain disappointing, with Nigeria holding a low position in most international measures of socio-economic status.

## Time for change

In 2015, the state government embarked on a major change programme called Transforming Education in Niger State (TENS). The overarching aim of the programme, which is scheduled to run

until 2019, is to improve the standards delivered by teachers, as well as the associated infrastructure and facilities available in primary and secondary schools. International management consultancy MRL Public Sector Consultants is advising the government on implementing this programme.

The programme has been divided into three phases. The first phase was a fact-finding mission to gain a deeper understanding of the challenges within Niger State's education sector. We undertook a census of the whole state, exploring the standard of infrastructure in schools, as well as gathering baseline education statistics (BES), such as the total number of schools (primary and secondary), pupils, teachers, subjects being taught, and the academic and professional background of teachers and support staff. We also ran a change workshop with the University of Cambridge to train and develop the change leaders who would be expected to manage the change process. In total, 95 people working in education from across the state attended the workshop, including teachers, vice principals and representatives from the Education Directorate. We wanted to learn their views on what they thought the problems were, how these problems could be addressed, and what they as individuals could do to champion and support the change.

## Focus on development

This year, the programme moves into its second phase, which focuses on training teachers, vice principals, head teachers, administrators, education quality control officers, education secretaries





**Clockwise from left**  
The TENS programme aims to tackle Niger State's education crisis

## GOALS OF THE TENS PROGRAMME

- 1** To identify the current problems and challenges within the educational sector at both primary and secondary level in Niger State.
- 2** To develop and implement interventions and programme initiatives to address the problems and challenges within the sector.
- 3** To transform all Niger State primary and secondary schools in a sustainable way by improving the educational standards, refining learning outcomes and enhancing the standard of the learning environment.
- 4** To provide an education and pupil experience that will empower pupils by enhancing teachers' skills and improving learning access.
- 5** To develop mechanisms to review and put forward recommendations on the implementation of the curriculum to reflect the needs of pupils and the labour market.
- 6** To update and review teaching methods to ensure best practice and applicability with the National Curriculum for enhanced performance in national exams.
- 7** To identify and implement operational and process transformations within the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology.



### MORE INFORMATION

To find out more, or to support the TENS programme, visit [www.tens-niger.com](http://www.tens-niger.com)

You can also follow us on Twitter @tensprogramme, on Facebook via TENS Programme, and on Instagram @tensprogramme

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and communicate with education officials and agencies across the state. We also want them to enhance their report writing and listening skills, and to have access to online resources that keep them up to date. Ultimately, we believe that by improving the individuals within the system, we will improve the system itself.

Besides training, the second phase will involve infrastructure investment. We are exploring opportunities with international donor agencies such as DFID, USAID and UNESCO, as well as private foundations and venture philanthropists. If we can create conducive learning environments, students are more likely to come to school and teachers are more likely to stay in school. We are also working with agencies on how we can increase the number of girls attending school and prevent them from dropping out early – either to get married or for other cultural and religious reasons.

### Definition of success

The third phase of the project will be a review of the first two phases. We will evaluate the impact of what we did and draw up some lessons learned. Then we will ask ourselves: have we achieved the changes we wanted, and can the changes be sustained? These lessons learned could then be used as best practice around the world.

We will measure success by the number of teachers, vice principals, head teachers, education secretaries and others in the sector who have been trained by the programme; how many more children are attending school; how many more girls are attending schools; progress in educational attainment; and school infrastructure improvements. We hope that we will see some great outcomes in all these areas. ■

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and other individuals within the sector. One of the most important findings from our research was that training has been severely neglected. The BES survey revealed that two-thirds of 30,000 teachers in Niger State schools had not been on a training programme in the last five years.

So we are working with the Institute of Leadership & Management and ILM to develop training materials that will support senior teachers, vice principals, teachers and other support staff to help lead and support the change process while becoming more efficient as teachers. We want them to learn how they can maximise the limited resources they have, improve processes, work together more effectively as a management team