Nigeria is the latest research country and final addition to the RISE portfolio of high-quality studies into education reforms and interventions that seek to improve learning. As the most populous country in Africa, Nigeria will allow researchers to draw lessons from a country where the size of population, scale of the challenge, and local dynamics require different approaches from the standard “business as usual” interventions. This research, together with that of the other RISE research countries, will be key to understanding what works at scale to improve learning outcomes.

The research project, which runs through 2022, will focus on examining the role of parents’ aspirations for their children’s education, and parents’ and communities’ engagement with schools. The aim is to see whether and how demand for improved learning drives educational systems change in Nigeria. The research agenda will also analyse key historical developments that have shaped educational outcomes in the country.

In-depth, multi-year projects by RISE in seven countries—Ethiopia, India, Indonesia, Pakistan, Tanzania, Vietnam, and, now, Nigeria—aim to shed light on how systems of education can address the global learning crisis. Nations around the world have been remarkably successful in making progress toward universal primary schooling, but in many places, learning levels are low, or declining. As a result, even when children finish many years of schooling, they still lack basic, critical skills in reading, math, and other areas. The RISE agenda emphasises the need to make changes that can provide children with the education they need to be successful adults in their local, national, and global communities.

“The RISE Nigeria country research team will be examining frontier questions on education systems research related to the demand for education, parents' preferences in education, and community engagement in education systems,” said Lant Pritchett, RISE Research Director. “We hope that the Nigeria team's scholarship will deepen our understanding of education systems in Nigeria and around the world. This work has the potential to make substantive contributions to the design of policies and reforms to ensure that all children leave school with a conceptual and procedural mastery of basic skills.”

Nigeria faces enormous challenges in its aim to increase learning among its fast-growing population of young people. More than 10 million children of primary school age are currently not in school (UNESCO, 2012). Nigeria’s teachers are absent roughly a quarter of school days. Fewer than 8 percent of public-school teachers are able to meet the...
minimum qualifications through primary school-level maths and English tests (Wane, 2014). Learning outcomes are low, and vary widely, dividing along gender, ethnic, religious, and geographic lines.

The Nigeria Country Research Team is an international group of academic researchers with extensive experience working in Africa, with an emphasis on economic, educational, and political issues. Leonard Wantchekon, professor of politics and an associated faculty member of the economics department at Princeton University, leads the team. Wantchekon, a native of Benin, is also the founder of the Institute for Empirical Research in Political Economy and the African School of Economics in Benin.

A distinct aspect of the research project is its focus on the demand side of education (pressure from parents, students, and the community) rather than on the supply side (textbooks, teachers, financing, and buildings).

"When we think about education systems, we have to simultaneously consider history, politics and institutions," Wantchekon said. "In the context of Nigeria, a country with big regional and group differences, education outcomes can only be explained by looking closely at historical legacies, political constraints, and community engagement."

The research, which will utilise both qualitative and quantitative methods, will examine educational issues in five key areas:

- **Mission schools** – Researchers will examine the influence of colonial era mission schools, with an eye toward understanding lessons that may be drawn for contemporary Nigerian public schools.

- **Free Primary School programme** – Researchers will seek to understand why a 1950s-era programme that rapidly expanded primary school education has been considered such a success, and why a subsequent programme that further expanded primary school education has failed to achieve its aims.

- **National Student Youth Corps programme** – Researchers will analyse the effects of a programme which brings university and polytechnic graduates into local primary and secondary schools.

- **School-Based Management Committees** – Researchers will examine the outcomes of a national law that mandated the creation of such committees, whose membership, composed of community representatives and parents, incorporates quotas for women. The research will focus on mechanisms that enhance, or impede, the effectiveness of such committees.

- **Political economy of education reforms** – Researchers will investigate whether constructive dialogues in a public forum and mutual commitment between stakeholders can improve governance and learning outcomes.

The principal research institution for the Nigeria Country Research Team is the African School of Economics in Benin. The Centre for the Study of the Economies of Africa (CSEA) will be the primary affiliated institution involved in the research. Other affiliated institutions include Barnard College, Dalhousie University, Oklahoma State University, Princeton University, and the University of Oxford.

Please contact information@riseprogramme.org for additional information, or visit www.riseprogramme.org.

RISE is supported by: 

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