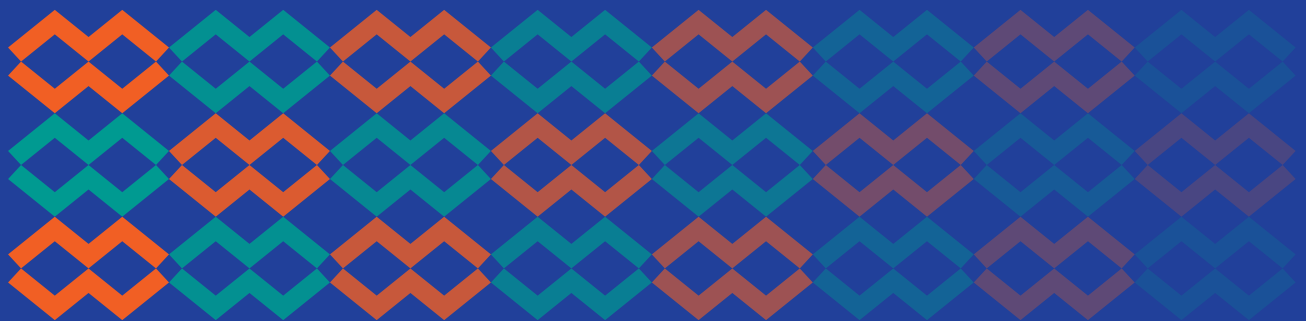


POLICY BRIEF

Scaling EdTech with Equity

Evidence and recommendations for
technology-assisted education programming
in conflict- and crisis-affected contexts
in Nigeria.



PREPARED BY

Gideon Seun Olanrewaju

Founder & Chief Executive Director
Aid for Rural Education Access Initiative (AREAi)

Evidence from
Practice Series
2026

Contents

PAGE 02

Executive Summary

PAGE 03

The scale imperative

PAGE 04

The scale–equity framework

PAGE 05

Field evidence from Northeast Nigeria

PAGE 06

Implications for government-led scale

PAGE 07

Recommendations

PAGE 08

Conclusion

Executive Summary

Nigeria's basic education system must scale interventions to reach the millions of children who remain out of school, a disproportionate share of them in the displacement-affected states of the Northeast.

Field evidence from EdTech scale-up in Borno, Adamawa, Benue and the Federal Capital Territory shows a consistent pattern. Scale extends the reach of public systems into underserved populations, but it can just as easily narrow the equity lens to whichever dimensions of disadvantage are easiest to measure, fund and defend politically.

This brief sets out that tension as a practical framework, grounds it in programme evidence from displacement-affected Northeast Nigeria, and closes with defined, actionable recommendations for UBEC, the Federal Ministry of Education and NCFRMI.

THE CENTRAL ARGUMENT

Government ownership of EdTech scale-up is necessary but not sufficient for equitable outcomes.

WHAT DETERMINES WHOSE NEEDS REMAIN VISIBLE AT SCALE

Political championship

Institutional capacity

Design of data systems

The incentives attached to them



5

programmes examined
across the Northeast

4

propositions on how
equity travels at scale

9

recommendations
across three agencies

0

new legislation required
to act on them

SECTION 01

The scale imperative in displacement-affected basic education

Nigeria's Northeast continues to carry the education consequences of a protracted displacement crisis. Children in and around Borno, Adamawa and Yobe move between host community schools, IDP camp learning spaces and periods with no schooling at all, often several times within a single academic year.

Any intervention designed to reach them has to be built for scale from the outset, since a single pilot classroom cannot reach a population this mobile and this large. But the scale mechanisms available to government and its partners — cascade training, national curriculum integration and reporting tied to EMIS — were largely designed for stable, sedentary school populations rather than for learners whose defining characteristic is disruption.

Cascade training

Assumes a stable roster of teachers in fixed schools across a full training cycle.

Curriculum integration

Assumes continuous progression through a graded national sequence.

Reporting tied to EMIS

Assumes a learner is enrolled at one school, once, for one academic year

That mismatch is the starting point for the framework below

SECTION 02

The scale imperative in displacementaffected basic education

Four propositions, drawn from comparative research on equitable scale and tested against Nigerian field experience, frame the rest of this brief.

1 Scale can increase equity through reach

Public systems that extend coverage to previously unreached areas, and interventions explicitly targeted at learners falling behind, are the clearest route to equity gains at national scale.

2 Scale can also narrow the equity lens

What gets addressed as a programme scales is shaped by what is easiest to measure, what government priorities already exist and what is politically feasible to fund and defend — not necessarily by where the greatest need lies.

3 Dimensions of inequality travel differently at scale

Gender is comparatively visible in enrolment and attendance data. Disability, displacement status, religion and intersecting disadvantage are systematically harder to identify and prioritise as a programme grows, and are the first dimensions to drop out of scale-up decisions.

4 Government ownership is necessary but not sufficient

Political champions, institutional capacity, the design of data systems and the incentives attached to them jointly determine whose needs remain visible as a programme moves from pilot to national policy.

SECTION 03

Field evidence from Northeast Nigeria

3.1

Proposition 4

FCDO and the TaRL pilot in Borno

Under FCDO's North-East Nigeria Transition to Development programme, UNICEF partnered with Teaching at the Right Level (TaRL) Africa to pilot a remedial, competency-based learning approach in Maiduguri. The results were strong enough that Borno State government took ownership of the scale up, extending TaRL into Adamawa, Yobe, Kaduna, Kano and Jigawa, and drawing further donor interest including Germany's KfW. Credible pilot evidence secured a political champion willing to scale the model, but the scale-up itself still depended on further institutional and donor commitment. The evidence alone did not make it sustainable.

\$479k

pilot cost

9,200

children reached

\$52

per child

6

states after handover

3.2

Proposition 3

Save the Children and the Safe Space model

Save the Children's Early Childhood Development project reaches over 1,000 children aged three to five across Borno, Adamawa and Yobe, alongside its FCDO-funded Foundation for the Future programme in Borno. At community level, its Safe Space learning centres for displaced adolescent girls — in Sulumri, Borno, for example — show the third proposition at work. Gender is the dimension most visible to donors and most consistently reported, yet girls in these communities remain out of formal school because of the distance to the nearest functioning school and small recurring examination fees, even where an NGO-run learning space already exists nearby.

The barrier is not an absence of gender-targeted programming. It is a layering of access costs that a gender-disaggregated enrolment count alone would not surface.

3.3

Proposition 2

Mercy Corps and the youth livelihoods gap

Mercy Corps Nigeria reports reaching roughly 90,000 young people with education and income generating opportunities, many of them out of formal schooling, through programmes such as the EU funded MAIDA early recovery initiative for returnees, IDPs and host community youth in Borno.

Because this cohort is engaged mainly through livelihoods and vocational training metrics — numbers trained and numbers placed rather than education sector metrics — they are counted robustly within the humanitarian and livelihoods reporting system but are largely absent from UBEC-facing enrolment and EMIS data.

COUNTED HERE

Humanitarian and livelihoods reporting

ABSENT HERE

UBEC enrolment and EMIS data

3.4

Proposition 1

AREAI FastTrack+ and the limits of programme evidence

AREAI's FastTrack+ programme, active since 2014 and grounded in a randomised controlled trial affiliated with J-PAL and MIT, has drawn institutional funding from FCDO, the Malala Fund, UNICEF and UNESCO on the strength of that evidence base. It demonstrates the first proposition — an RCT validated intervention extending reach into underserved communities. But the same limitation recurs.

Rigorous programme-level evidence does not, on its own, feed into UBEC's or the state EMIS systems that would let government planners see where FastTrack+ reach overlaps with, or fills gaps in, their own coverage.

ACHIEVED

Evidence at programme level

NOT ACHIEVED

Visibility at system level

Evidence at programme level and visibility at system level are different achievements — and only the second is what government ownership actually requires.

3.5

Proposition 3 & 4

IRC's Opportunities to Learn and the cost of a donor exit

\$25m

USAID consortium

60,000+

learners enrolled

1,400+

learning centres

2025

funding discontinued

The USAID-funded Opportunities to Learn programme, a consortium led by IRC with Plan International, the American University of Nigeria, Restoration of Hope Initiative and Inclusive Development Partners, enrolled learners across Borno, Adamawa and Yobe. Unlike most reach focused programming, OTL deliberately built disability into its design: technical guidance on inclusive infrastructure and inclusive budgeting, and partner training on the Washington Group Questions, the internationally recognised survey tool for identifying disability in programme and household data. Yet by early 2025, ahead of its original 2026 end date, its funding was discontinued.

THE LESSON

Well-designed equity infrastructure that sits outside a government-owned system has a lifespan set by one donor's funding cycle, not by the quality of the design.

The Washington Group Questions protocol OTL piloted is a tool UBEC and state SUBEBs could adopt directly into EMIS data collection at effectively no design cost, regardless of what happens to the programme that piloted it.

TAKEN TOGETHER

FCDO's pilot found a political champion. Save the Children's work shows how a visible gender gap can still hide less visible access barriers. Mercy Corps reaches tens of thousands who never appear in education data because they are counted as a livelihoods outcome. ARAI's evidence base has not yet translated into system level visibility. And IRC's disability tool was built well, then lost its funding before government could adopt it. None of these gaps comes from a shortage of programming or evidence. Each comes from whether government data and institutional systems are built to see, and keep seeing, what is already happening at scale.

SECTION 04

Implications for government-led scale

For UBEC, FME and NCFRMI, the practical implication is that ownership of a scaling programme is not itself a guarantee of equity. Three conditions determine whether ownership translates into equitable outcomes.

01

Data systems

Whether they are designed to capture more than the most visible dimensions of disadvantage.

02

Institutional capacity

Whether it exists at state and LGA level to act on that data once collected.

03

Incentives

Whether funding formulas, reporting requirements and endorsement criteria reward attention to the harder-to-see dimensions.

SECTION 05

Recommendations

Organised by agency and intended to be actionable within existing mandates, without requiring new legislation.

UNIVERSAL BASIC EDUCATION COMMISSION (UBEC)

1 Expand EMIS and School Census data fields

Add disability status, using the Washington Group Questions already piloted by IRC's Opportunities to Learn consortium, alongside IDP or host community status and prior out-of-school duration, as standard fields next to existing gender and age data — so equity reporting is not reconstructed after the fact.

2 Condition a share of SUBEB disbursement on disaggregated reporting

In displacement-affected states, tie a defined portion of matching grant release to submission of equity disaggregated enrolment and outcome data, not enrolment numbers alone.

3 Require a multi-dimensional equity assessment before state-wide endorsement

Any EdTech pilot seeking UBEC backing for scale-up should submit an assessment covering at least three dimensions of disadvantage — gender, disability and displacement status — before approval for rollout beyond the pilot LGA.

FEDERAL MINISTRY OF EDUCATION (FME)

1 Issue national guidelines on multi-dimensional equity reporting

Any EdTech programme seeking curriculum integration or NERDC endorsement should be required to report on disability, displacement status and religion alongside gender.

2 Designate equity focal points in State Ministries of Education

Give them an explicit mandate and budget line, prioritised first in displacement-affected states, to track which dimensions of inequality are and are not being addressed as programmes scale.

3 Commission an annual visibility review

Publish a short Ministry-level synthesis, alongside existing EMIS reporting, of which learner populations are represented in national EdTech scale-up data and which are structurally absent.

NATIONAL COMMISSION FOR REFUGEES, MIGRANTS AND IDPS (NCFRMI)

1 Formalise partnership pathways with cascade model providers

Build IDP camp and host community learners into national digital literacy and assessment programming as a default design requirement, not an afterthought added after the pilot.

2 Require an intersectional equity audit as a condition of endorsement

For any government-facing EdTech scale-up operating in displacement-affected LGAs, cover disability, religion, displacement status and gender together, not as separate single-axis checks.

3 Establish a shared data protocol with UBEC's EMIS

Align NCFRMI's displacement tracking with education data so displacement status can be joined to enrolment and outcome records at the point scale decisions are made, rather than matched after the fact.

FOR GOVERNMENT

Decide which fields, disbursement conditions and endorsement criteria to write into systems now, while they are still being designed.

FOR IMPLEMENTERS

Design for system-level visibility from the start, not programme-level evidence alone — and align reporting to the fields government actually collects.

SECTION 06 • THE TIMING IS NOT INCIDENTAL

Two systems are being designed right now. Both can carry equity or quietly drop it.

DNEMIS

The Digital National Education Management Information System — flagship platform of the Nigeria Education Data Infrastructure reform — replaces the paper-based Annual School Census with a real-time national database of every school, teacher and learner. Whether it becomes the data backbone this brief calls for, one that finally lets government see disability, displacement and out-of-school history alongside gender and age, will be decided in the field definitions being finalised as it rolls out to states.

The National EdTech Strategy

Being developed by the Federal Ministry of Education with the Federal Ministry of Communications, Innovation and Digital Economy. A unified, interoperable EdTech ecosystem can either carry equity forward at scale or quietly drop it, depending on what fields, standards and endorsement criteria are written into it now, while it is still being designed rather than after it has shipped.

This is why the recommendations in this brief are written as data fields, disbursement conditions and endorsement criteria, not new programmes. Nigeria does not need another pilot to prove EdTech can reach displaced and out-of-school learners. FCDO, Save the Children, Mercy Corps, IRC and AREAi have already reached hundreds of thousands of them. What Nigeria needs is for DNEMIS and the National EdTech Strategy to be built so reach is not the end of the story.

UBEC, FME and NCFRMI do not have to choose between scaling EdTech and scaling equity — but they have a narrow window, while both systems are still being designed, to make sure the second does not quietly fall out of the first.