The Research Capacity Strengthening Strategy for Evidence-Based Education Policy and Practice in Northern Nigeria: Year Two Report

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Acknowledgements

Executive summary

The Research Capacity Strengthening Strategy (RCSS) designed by EDOREN (Education Data, Research and Evaluation in Nigeria) provides a framework for the demand and supply of policy-relevant research. It has been trialled through a two year project addressing policies on the recruitment and deployment of primary school teachers in Northern Nigeria. It has had a significant impact and has led to the uptake of evidence-based policy recommendations.

The RCSS is unique in that it brings practitioners (acting as proxies for policymakers) and academics together to generate policy-relevant education research. The premise is that: (i) academics can generate appropriately-focused research providing evidence for informing policy; and (ii) practitioners can focus that research and help make it accessible and therefore usable.

The main study on primary teacher recruitment and deployment clearly indicates its benefits. Primary education in Northern Nigeria is in crisis. The absence of appropriate policies on recruitment has led to the appointment of too many unqualified and/or ineffective teachers. This longstanding problem is widely recognised but little has been done about it. Research using the RCSS has led to evidence-based policy uptake in three of the participating States and the acknowledgement of the need for change in two other States.

This significant progress is attributable to the RCSS which generated robust evidence of the need for change and of research-based solutions. The evidence-based policy recommendations were made acceptable to policymakers through collaborative research conducted by teams of practitioners and academics.

The RCSS has five key components:

- engaging in policy-driven research;
- partnership;
- mentoring;
- repeated policy feedback; and
- hands-on support.

Each of these components is addressed in detail in the main report. These five components enabled practitioners and academics to negotiate a longstanding mutual mistrust of each other and work together instead of against each other.

EDOREN enabled the RCSS. It played a crucial role in providing the opportunity for the collaborative research that led to evidence-based policy change. This has led to considerable interest in future collaborative research.

This evaluation is timely because DFID funding for EDOREN is coming to an end. It is therefore important to consider how the lessons learned from the use of the RCSS can contribute to the improvement of education in Nigeria. The main report acknowledges the significant investment of EDOREN in the RCSS. It also acknowledges that future investment in support for collaborative research may be more limited.

The main report therefore considers how the RCSS might be used in future. The recommendations note the responsibility of funders to support policy-relevant research and the need for State-based institutions to take responsibility for requesting and supplying such research. Those recommendations are:

Recommendations for DFID and other funders

DFID and/or other funders seeking to promote collaborative research should ensure there is an authoritative and independent third party to broker the collaboration. This will require appropriate and sufficient funding for that third party.

DFID and/or other funders should continue funding the main study and its evaluation.

DFID and other funders should ensure future projects are designed to enable and support inter-sectoral collaborative research. The RCSS should be embedded into those projects. Funders should also work with governmental and academic institutions to encourage support for collaborative research within the two sectors.

Recommendations for States and institutions

Institutional stakeholders should provide opportunities for researchers from the State Research Teams to formally present their work to their colleagues. As inter-sectoral collaboration is a key element of the RCSS, such presentations should include representations from both sectors.

Policymakers should include academics on education commissions to encourage the use of research in informing policy development. Academic institutions should include policymakers and practitioners on panels considering research and teaching to encourage a greater focus on policy issues.

Recommendations to support the components of the RCSS

Until it becomes more firmly established, the RCSS should be incorporated into research that is more likely to be accepted by policymakers and inform policy change.

The team composition and task allocations of future collaborative projects must be explained to team members. Both sectors should be represented in leadership roles. Where other tasks are allocated according to sector-specific experience and expertise, they should be clearly explained and justified.

Future collaborative research projects should be designed in consultation with representatives from both sectors. They should provide opportunities for researchers to contribute to discussions within groups and individually.

Future collaborative research projects should establish steering committees that allow representatives from relevant organisations to contribute their experience and expertise to the project.

Future collaborative research projects should include general and study-based frameworks for mentoring.

Future collaborative research must incorporate the process of repeated policy feedback.

Future support for collaborative research should be negotiated with the researchers to ensure it meets their needs and enables capacity development.

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List of abbreviations

CSO	Civil Society Organisation
DFID	Department for International Development
EDOREN	Education Data, Research and Evaluation in Nigeria
LGA	Local Government Area
RCSS	Research Capacity Strengthening Strategy
SMOE	State Ministry of Education
SRT	State Research Team
SSR	State Situation Report
SUBEB	State Universal Basic Education Board

1   Introduction

EDOREN (Education Data, Research and Evaluation in Nigeria) is a DFID-funded programme focusing on primary education in Northern Nigeria. It has just completed a two year project on the use of evidence to inform policies on the recruitment and deployment of primary school teachers. This required academics and practitioners to work together to generate policy-driven research and to advocate for its use at State level. The project was used to pilot EDOREN's Research Capacity Strengthening Strategy (RCSS).

The findings of Years One and Two of the main project and the evaluation of Year One of the RCSS are reported in full elsewhere (Allsop & Watts, 2017, 2018; Watts & Akogun, 2017) and the Executive Summaries of those reports are included here as Appendices A, B and C.

The main premise of the RCSS (EDOREN, 2016) is that inter-sectoral[1] collaboration between academics and practitioners (acting as proxies for policymakers) can enhance educational policies and practices by producing policy-relevant evidence. In particular:

- academics can generate appropriately-focused research providing evidence for informing policy; and
- practitioners can focus that research and help make it accessible and therefore usable.

This was shown to have significantly contributed to the success of the main study. In Year One, evidence-based policy recommendations had been widely acknowledged by policymakers in Kaduna and Kano States. In Year Two, those recommendations informed the implementation of policies in three of the participating States (Jigawa, Kaduna and Kano) and the recognition of the need for change in the other two (Katsina and Zamfara).

The RCSS has five key components with the potential to contribute to policy change:

- engaging in policy-driven research;
- partnership;
- mentoring;
- repeated policy feedback; and
- hands-on support.

Each played its part in the successful outcomes of the main study but they were held together by the fifth component: the hands-on support from EDOREN.

The Year One evaluation of the RCSS highlighted three issues influencing the conduct of the collaborative study: (i) the initial perception of the researchers[2] from both sectors that it was a mostly academic exercise; (ii) the longstanding mutual mistrust between the two sectors that inhibited the development of collaborative practices; and (iii) the significance of EDOREN as a broker in addressing these other points.

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[1] As in the Year One report, the term 'sector' is used here to identify the policy-makers/practitioners and the academics as it is commonly used in this sense in Nigeria.

[2] Both studies (i.e. the main study and the evaluation of the RCSS) used the term 'researchers' to refer to members of the State Research Teams to emphasise the contributions of members from both sectors.

In short, and as discussed below, EDOREN was a vital contributor to the successful use of the RCSS in Years One and Two of the main study.

These evaluations of the RCSS are timely because the EDOREN programme ends in June 2018 and, regrettably, other DFID-funded programmes have so far declined to support the RCSS.

The extensive literature review in the Year One report clearly indicates the uniqueness of the RCSS in educational research in and beyond Nigeria[3]. Given the clear benefits of its incorporation in to education projects, attention should therefore be given to making further use of the RCSS as DFID continues to plan future support for the Nigerian education sector.

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[3] The Year One evaluation report (Watts & Akogun, 2017) included a comprehensive and extensive literature review. The only relevant literature published between these two reports is based on this study (Akogun et al., 2017; Watts et al., 2017) and so this report has no literature review.

2 The main study: recruiting and deploying effective teachers

The main study through which the RCSS was used addressed the recruitment and deployment of primary school teachers in Northern Nigeria.

Two States – Kaduna and Kano – had been selected as the research sites for Year One of the main study and the RCSS (Allsop & Watts, 2017; Watts & Akogun, 2017). The two State Research Teams (SRTs) conducted research to identify the characteristics of effective teachers in the two States. This was used to inform the design of a series of protocols concerning the recruitment and deployment of teachers. The protocols were trialled with a range of stakeholders – from trainee teachers to senior policymakers – and revised in the light of feedback. The revised protocols were then presented to Local Government Area (LGA) Education Secretaries who accepted the protocols and the need for them.

In Year Two, the studies were extended to include Jigawa, Katsina and Zamfara States (Allsop & Watts, 2018). All five States have been involved with DFID education projects and had indicated a desire for education reform. There were three stages to the schedule of the main study in Year Two. The SRTs began advocating for evidence-based policy change through constructive engagement with State-based policymakers using the protocols designed in Year One. They then conducted State-based research on the numbers of effective and qualified teachers to generate further evidence for the need for change and compiled State Situation Reports (SSRs). The third stage was intended to build on this by advocating for policy change: the SSRs would be used to highlight the need for change and the protocols would be used to inform policies.

The recruitment of the SRTs in Year Two followed the process successfully used in Year One. Calls were made for Letters of Interest from potential SRTs. Each proposed team had to demonstrate inter-sectoral collaboration by including four practitioners (recruited from SMOEs [State Ministries of Education] and SUBEBs [State Universal Education Boards]) and four academics. The Team Leader and Deputy Team Leader had to represent the two sectors and had to have sufficiently senior positions (i.e. be at least a Director from the SMOE or SUBEB and a Professor or Dean of Education from the academic institutions). For Year Two, each SRT was also required to include two representatives from Civil Society Organisations (CSOs). The justification for this was that they would contribute to advocacy aspect of the main study.

Prospective SRTs were required to explain how they would engage with and address the key issues of the main study (i.e. advocate for the use of policy-focused research in policy change). As in Year One of the main study, proposals were reviewed by a panel of experts convened by EDOREN using the criteria given to the prospective SRTs.

The selection process led to: (i) the re-engagement of the Year One Kaduna SRT with some personnel changes, including a new Deputy Team Leader representing the practitioners; (ii) the engagement of a new Kano SRT; and (iii) the engagement of three SRTs from the additional States (Jigawa, Katsina and Zamfara) included in the Year Two study.

By the end of Year Two of the main study, policy change was underway in three of the States (Jigawa, Kaduna and Kano) and the need for policy change had been acknowledged in the other two (Katsina and Zamfara). Again, the RCSS made a significant contribution to these successes.

3   The research capacity strengthening strategy

The RCSS (EDOREN, 2015; Watts & Akogun, 2017) was designed to harmonise the experience and skills of policymakers (represented by practitioners in the main studies) and academics in Northern Nigeria to influence and inform education policy through the use of policy-focused research. Its overall approach was intended to strengthen the capacity of policymakers to demand relevant evidence from academics and to use the evidence that is produced. It was therefore explicitly designed to examine the potential capacity to demand and supply evidence for education policymaking and practice.

The policy focus here was the recruitment and deployment of primary school teachers. This had been identified by EDOREN as a policy priority. It means that it was not possible to fully evaluate the demand side of the RCSS, i.e. the capacity of policymakers to demand relevant evidence. However, when recruitment drives took place in three of the States (Jigawa, Kaduna and Kano) the SRTs were asked to help develop appropriate policies and practices. The policymakers were clearly interested in the work of the main study and were aware of the RCSS informing it. This suggests that they are likely to demand research in future. Until it is firmly embedded in State institutions, though, they may need support and encouragement to use it.

The supply side has been clearly demonstrated and is addressed here through the five components of the RCSS. These components, which had been identified as having the potential to contribute to the research capacity strengthening design, are: (i) engaging in policy-driven research; (ii) partnership; (iii) mentoring; (iv) repeated policy feedback; and (v) hands-on support.

As explained in the Year One report, the aims behind these components of this design – illustrated in Figure 1, below – are:

Engagement in policy-driven research. Practitioners taken out of their daily routine will be able to directly engage in extensive policy assessments through the research process. This is envisaged as enabling an improvement in their ability to understand and make use of evidence. The ability of the academics, on the other hand, will improve when engaged in policy-driven research.

Partnership. The interaction between practitioners and academics is aimed at fostering the closer interaction and understanding necessary for strengthening capacity for the demand, supply and use of evidence in policymaking. The design deliberately encourages: (i) intergovernmental collaboration between SMOEs and SUBEBs; (ii) inter-academic collaboration between different academic institutions and departments; and (iii) individual collaboration between practitioners and academics. The partnerships are intended to provide a method of peer-learning that is likely to provide capacity strengthening across both technical and political dimensions. This, in turn, is intended to improve: (i) the policymakers' ability to find reliable assistance in solving future policy challenges; and (ii) the academics' ability to better understand the policy priorities of policymakers thus allowing them to produce more relevant research and attach greater importance to solving policy challenges.

Mentoring. The 'organisational habits' that the process is trying to affect (i.e. improving the production and use of evidence in education decision-making) are passed down between senior and junior members. By asking members to operate in a different manner, senior members may provide a good example and even provide a mentoring role to more junior members of their organisations. This will, in turn, spread the capacity strengthening benefits to a wider audience and provide more internal pressure to shift organisational behaviours. It may also provide a better way to deliver the research, as it is expected to combine senior officers with more authority (vital for policy impact) and junior members with more technical skills (vital for research outcome). Both should therefore be able to learn from each other.

Repeated policy feedback. This is intended to provide external pressure to utilise evidence for policy and effectively demonstrate how best to communicate research findings to a policy audience.

Hands-on support. The provision of hands-on technical skills for data gathering, processing, interpretation and packaging for policy use is expected to be an important input into the study design.

Figure 1: Capacity strengthening strategy design within thematic research
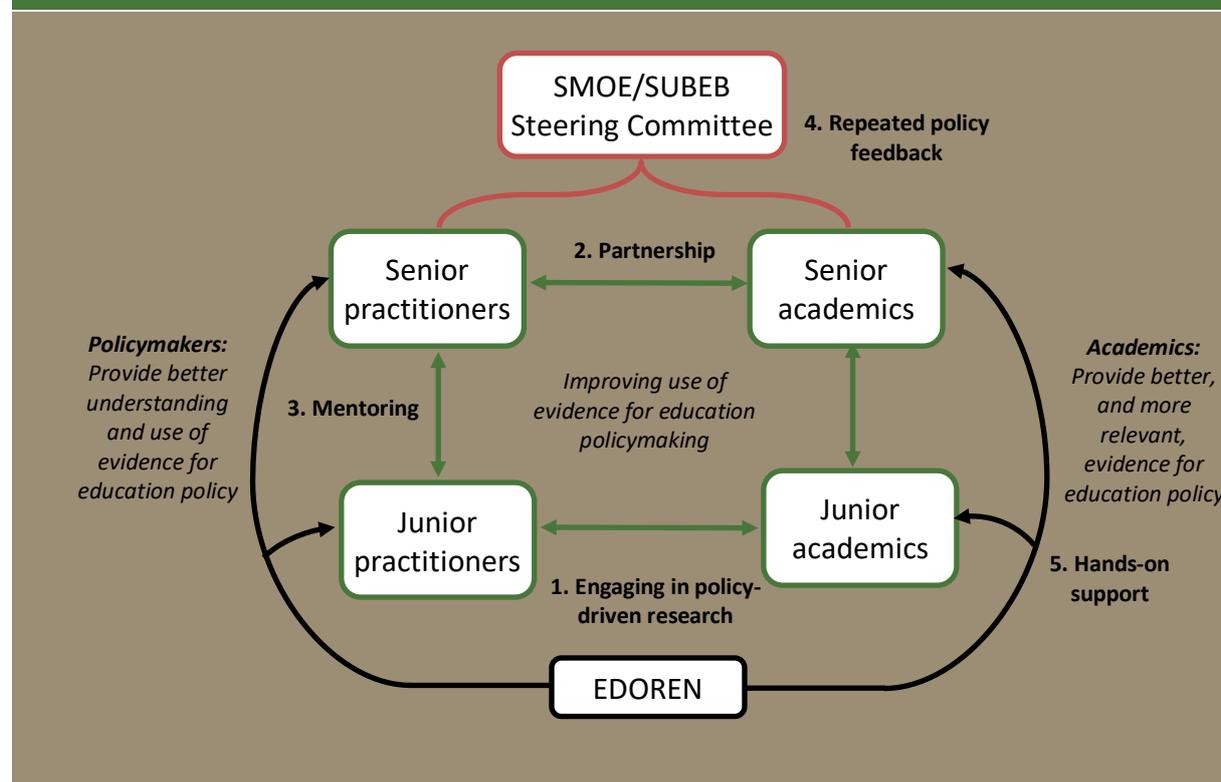
In Year Two of the main study, the SRTs were expanded to include representatives of CSOs. However, these components of the RCSS are addressed here with respect to the practitioners and academics as they represent the sectors most likely to be engaged in future collaborative education research. There was limited evidence of significant contributions from the CSO representatives and it is recommended that future projects wishing to use their expertise co-opt them to steering groups.

As in Year One, EDOREN provided technical and financial assistance to the SRTs. However, a key issue in capacity building is maintaining the balance between the provision of appropriate support and the development of suitably-focused autonomy. The evaluation of the RCSS therefore considered three levels of support which mapped on to the SRTs as follows:

- Kaduna and Kano: in-State development of evidence-based policy recommendations and their use in policy uptake with significant support from EDOREN;
- Jigawa: the use of evidence-based policy recommendations from other States in policy uptake with significant support from EDOREN; and
- Kastina and Zamfara: the use of evidence-based policy recommendations from other States in policy uptake with limited support from EDOREN.

The Jigawa, Kaduna and Kano SRTs were given more intensive EDOREN support throughout Year Two. The Katsina and Zamfara SRTs were given less intensive EDOREN support. At least one other DFID-funded programme had agreed to provide support for the Katsina and Zamfara SRTs and then retracted it without giving any explanation.

The Year Two report of the main study acknowledges the greater move towards policy implementation in Jigawa, Kaduna and Kano States. However, it also acknowledges the willingness of Katsina and Zamfara States to recognise the need for policy change. The two different State-based situations must be recognised here. Jigawa, Kaduna and Kano States were all ready to recruit more primary school teachers and were therefore more ready to consider the recommendations of the policy-focused research that had been presented to them.

This highlights the context-based expediency of evidence-based policy recommendations. The recommendations may be persuasive but their implementation depends upon State-based conditions and limitations. The willingness of policymakers in Katsina and Zamfara States to consider the evidence highlights the importance of the RCSS just as much as the willingness of the policymakers in Jigawa, Kaduna and Kano States to act upon it.

4   RCSS evaluation research methodology

The evaluation of Year Two of the RCSS was qualitative, as it had been in Year One. This methodological approach provides greater opportunities to identify and explore key issues emerging from the evaluation. The evaluation made use of formal semi-structured interviews, informal interviews, observations and documentary analyses.

Semi-structured individual and group interviews with the SRT members were conducted at the beginning and end of the main study. Semi-structured interviews ensure that all participants in the evaluation are asked the same key questions which ensures the reliability and validity of the research. However, it also allows participants to address any other issues they consider important which ensures key issues are not overlooked. These interviews focused on: (i) the researchers' work; (ii) their prior experiences of collaborative work, including sector-specific experience of the demand and supply of policy-focused research; and (iii) their expectations and experiences of: (a) the main study; and (b) the five components of the RCSS. The interviews conducted at the beginning of the main study provided data of their prior experiences and their expectations of the two studies. The interviews conducted at the end of the main study provided data on their experiences of collaborative work and their expectations for similar collaborations.

Individual and group semi-structured interviews were also conducted at the end of the main study with: (i) workplace colleagues of the researchers to explore their understanding of the researchers' work and its potential impact on their institutions; and (ii) EDOREN staff and facilitators to reflect on EDOREN's work and its impact on the RCSS.

In total, interviews were conducted with 50 researchers. At the beginning of the main study, interviews were conducted with 24 researchers. At the end of the main study, interviews were conducted with 26 researchers. This ensured the fair and proportionate representation of researchers from all three sectors and took account of their status as senior and junior researchers. Formal interviews were also conducted at the end of the main study with four EDOREN staff eight workplace colleagues of the researchers (four colleagues of the academics and four colleagues of the practitioners).

Informal interviews were also conducted with the researchers during the EDOREN workshops. These were typically spontaneous and provided opportunities to explore key issues as they were raised.

Observational data was recorded during the EDOREN workshops and focused on the interactions between the researchers. It also provided the opportunity to conduct the informal interviews.

The SRTs were required to submit progress reports – including the draft and final SSRs and activity reports – to the EDOREN facilitators.

The rich and detailed database, comprising data from these multiple sources, was iteratively and closely analysed. The range of data allowed for the comprehensive triangulation that ensured the validity and reliability of these analyses. Those analyses focused on the five components of the RCSS and considered: (i) what happened and why; and (ii) how what happened can inform future use of the RCSS.

The findings of the evaluation are presented below under each of the five components of the RCSS.

5 Engagement in policy-driven research (impact on work)

Aim: Engagement in policy-driven research. Practitioners taken out of their daily routine will be able to directly engage in extensive policy assessments through the research process. This is envisaged as enabling an improvement in their ability to understand and make use of evidence. The ability of the academics, on the other hand, will improve when engaged in policy-driven research.

By the end of Year Two it was clear that research can be used to inform policy: the main study had led to policy development in three of the States and the need for policy change had been recognised in the other two. The protocols used in the main study had been developed through collaborative and critical reflection by the practitioners and academics in the SRTs. However, to understand how the researchers' engagement in policy-driven research contributed to these developments, it is necessary to consider: (i) how and how far were they taken out of their daily routines; and (ii) for what purpose and to what effect they were taken out of them.

Their daily routines typically involved very limited inter-sectoral collaboration. Some academics acknowledged policies in their work, particularly their teaching, but did not otherwise engage with them. There was some limited engagement with practitioners and/or policymakers through the research they conducted but they were research participants rather than research collaborators. Most of the practitioners recognised the potential significance of academic research but did not use or seek it in their work. The CSOs acknowledged the importance of engaging with policies and the need for relevant research but provided little insight into how they combined the two.

All the researchers were taken out of their daily routines to engage in policy-driven research. They participated in EDOREN workshops, met together as State-based teams and conducted State-based research and advocacy. As in Year One, the most important change to their usual routines was that these activities required them to work with colleagues from the other sector.

Participation in the project required them to share their own expertise and to undertake activities similar to those done in the normal course of their duties. However, they were also required to undertake different activities: the academics were involved in policy assessments and advocacy; and the practitioners carried out data collection and analysis. The need to participate in these different activities took them even further beyond their daily routines.

Taking the researchers – both practitioners and academics – out of their daily routines was intended to help them realise the benefits of inter-sectoral collaboration. This purpose was achieved as the structured change to their daily routines enabled the researchers to reflect on their own practices and how they might contribute to the collaborative work needed to influence policy. As one academic noted: 'Before, I thought that when you forward recommendations to policymakers, then they dump it. But now I realize that they are really keen to make use of the recommendations.' Similarly, the practitioners reported a greater willingness to utilise academic research.

The influence of the historic weight of daily routines on inter-sectoral collaboration have been explained in the Year One report and elsewhere (Watts & Akogun, 2017; Watts et al., 2017) but by way of summary: practitioners and policymakers believe that academics are gratuitously critical of them and are only interested in theoretical research; and academics feel that practitioners and policymakers fail to understand and so ignore their research. It is important to note that the concerns of both sectors can be justified.

However, it is more important to note that this mutual mistrust was negotiated by requiring the researchers to engage in inter-sectoral collaborations which included undertaking the work of their

inter-sectoral collaborators: practitioners engaged in data collection and analysis and academics undertook policy assessments. The negotiation of this mutual mistrust enabled the members of the SRTs to work together to contribute to policy change in three of the States and the acknowledgement of the need for change in the other two.

The benefits of this collaborative practice were more readily acknowledged by the researchers in Year Two. There were two reasons for this.

Firstly, the Year One schedule had encouraged the belief that the study was primarily an academic exercise and it took time for the researchers to acknowledge the contributions of the practitioners. However, the Year Two schedule required the presentation of research-based protocols to education stakeholders. This meant the SRTs immediately engaged in work from the two sectors: the research typically seen as being academic work and the policy seen as the work of the practitioners.

Secondly, the teams were familiar with the work done in Year One and had seen that the mutual mistrust could be successfully negotiated to generate policy-focused evidence. They came to the project with a greater enthusiasm for inter-sectoral collaboration. The willingness to learn from their colleagues allowed more opportunities to critically reflect on their own work rather than defend their habitual practices. This then allowed them to make more meaningful contributions to the inter-sectoral collaborations that led to policy changes in three States and the recognition of the need for change in the other two.

The daily routines of the researchers provided few opportunities to reflect on the inter-sectoral mistrust that limits opportunities for collaboration. If anything, they strengthened it: each time the academics believed their work was ignored and/or the practitioners felt unduly criticised the mistrust deepened. Taking them out of their daily routines was therefore essential to the RCSS.

However, it required significant investment from EDOREN. It is not clear how much investment will be made in future collaborations so it is necessary to question how far out of their routines will other collaborators need to be taken.

Here, the researchers were taken a long way out of their daily routines, particularly through the conduct of shared activities that required them to undertake work ordinarily done in the other sectors. This had been necessary in Year One to negotiate the barriers built up by mutual mistrust. It was not enough for the researchers to simply work alongside each other, they had to work with each other and become familiar with the work of their colleagues from the other sector. This was achieved by having them work together on those shared activities. It allowed them to develop a better understanding of and appreciation for the work of their inter-sectoral colleagues and how it could contribute to policy-focused research.

Year Two also required the researchers to undertake activities usually done in the other sector but there was a significant difference: it allowed them to understand and appreciate the work of their colleagues but, unlike in Year One, it was not necessary to do this work to negotiate the mutual mistrust. The researchers approached Year Two with a greater willingness to collaborate with their inter-sectoral colleagues because they had seen how such collaboration had contributed to the first year of the main study.

The importance of the Year Two researchers having seen a positive example of inter-sectoral collaboration cannot be underestimated here. Significantly, the main study has shown that it is possible for researchers from both sectors to change the attitudes that framed their daily routines.

This attitudinal change suggests that future collaborations may not require researchers to be physically taken so far out of their daily routines. It may be sufficient for them to meet with colleagues from the other sector to discuss their policy-focused research rather than undertake shared activities (such as fieldwork or advocacy) together. Such meetings would provide sufficient structure for the acknowledgement of sector-specific contributions to the research – and would still therefore take the researchers out of their daily routines – but would not necessitate so much investment.

6   Partnership

Aim: The interaction between practitioners and academics is aimed at fostering the closer interaction and understanding necessary for strengthening capacity for the demand, supply and use of evidence in policymaking. The design deliberately encourages: (i) intergovernmental collaboration between SMOEs and SUBEBs; (ii) inter-academic collaboration between different academic institutions and departments; and (iii) individual collaboration between practitioners and academics. The partnerships are intended to provide a method of peer-learning that is likely to provide capacity strengthening across both technical and political dimensions. This, in turn, is intended to improve: (i) the policymakers' ability to find reliable assistance in solving future policy challenges; and (ii) the academics' ability to better understand the policy priorities of policymakers thus allowing them to produce more relevant research and attach greater importance to solving policy challenges.

The SRTs included researchers from different government and academic institutions as required by EDOREN. In Year Two the SRTs also included representatives of CSOs.

There was good and close interaction between the researchers in Year Two. As noted above, this was facilitated by an early desire for collaboration which was helped by having seen the benefits of the Year One researchers negotiating their mutual mistrust. The idea of inter-sectoral partnerships is still new and EDOREN needed to support their development in Years One and Two. The main study provided a framework for peer-learning with researchers from both sectors required to attend workshops and team meetings and take part in fieldwork and advocacy.

Researchers from both sectors were enthusiastic about future collaborations. Many of them used the CSOs as examples of how research and policy can be combined. None of the researchers could specify how they would collaborate in future. The partnerships developed in Years One and Two provide a model for future collaborations but they had required extensive support from EDOREN.

The RCSS anticipated intergovernmental and inter-academic collaboration that would enhance the researchers' daily practice and this policy-focused research. Although the researchers from these sectors worked alongside each other, there was no evidence to suggest improved learning from collaborations between the researchers from the SMOEs and SUBEBs or between those from different academic institutions. There was no evidence, either, to suggest that the representatives of different CSOs benefitted from working with each other.

There was no evidence to suggest that the research was enhanced by the inclusion of researchers from a wider range of offices and institutions. The practitioner contributions to the SRTs were typically broad (e.g. advising on presentations, helping to set up meetings) and did not require specific knowledge from either the SMOEs or SUBEBs. Networking was enabled through personal contacts rather than institutional affiliations.

However, there were two advantages to having team members from different government and academic institutions and different CSOs (although neither was explicitly noted by the researchers). Firstly, it made it easier for institutions to release staff to take part in the study. There were no concerns about releasing staff (perhaps because the project was widely known in the States) but this may have changed if institutions had been asked to release twice as many staff. Secondly, it promoted the wider ownership of the research. This is particularly important in the context of sustainability. The more State-based institutions involved in the development of evidence-based policies, the greater the chances of such institutions pursuing collaborative policy-focused research in future.

There was more evidence of the benefits of inter-sectoral collaboration.

As in Year One, the project required peer-learning as researchers shared their technical expertise with their colleagues. This meant the academics taught the practitioners about data collection and analysis and the practitioners taught the academics about policy priorities and advocacy. They jointly undertook related activities. The SRTs were also taught about using software for qualitative data analysis (something that was unfamiliar to the academics) by one of the EDOREN facilitators.

Most of the practitioners and academics indicated their appreciation of the opportunities to learn from their colleagues. Unlike in Year One, there were no reports of this collaborative work causing tensions.

As in the previous year, it was typically easier for the practitioners to acknowledge what they had learned from the academics because it involved acquiring more clearly defined skills sets and the data collection and analysis for the SSRs demanded the most collaborative time. Nevertheless, the academics were ready to acknowledge that they had learned more about policy issues and advocacy from the practitioners. As one senior academic explained: 'because of the proximity of everyone you have to see, you easily have access to them, they explain things even on personal ground… The whole issue is open to everybody and that has really helped in giving us an easy ride to our research, the findings and the way it is disseminated to them.'

The researchers also acknowledged the contributions of the CSOs but this was only described in vague terms and it is not clear what they learned from them. They also acknowledged the input from the EDOREN facilitators.

There was a significant difference between the peer-learning in Years One and Two. In Year One, the EDOREN facilitators had typically encouraged the researchers to share their knowledge and skills while trying to minimise their own input. In Year Two, there was more overt intervention from EDOREN: the CSOs were recruited to facilitate advocacy and the EDOREN facilitator delivered training sessions on data analysis. These interventions were justified (although the practitioners had helped with advocacy in Year One) and appreciated.

However, this undermined the inter-sectoral recognition of what the researchers – particularly the practitioners – contributed to the peer-learning. As discussed below, this can perhaps account for the practitioners having kept quiet about the problems with the SSRs. This is not to suggest that there should be no interventions from outside the SRTs but that care should be taken to consider the implications of such interventions.

In terms of future use, some academics suggested they would pay closer attention to policy issues in their research. The practitioners typically noted that they would make greater use of research but it was not clear whether they would try to commission it.

Again, the partnerships and peer-learning considered here required significant investment from EDOREN and it is necessary to consider their benefits.

Most of the researchers appreciated the opportunities to acquire new knowledge and skills.

However, this task sharing was significant in terms of negotiating the inter-sectoral mistrust that had to be addressed and of raising awareness of the strengths of inter-sectoral collaborations.

Academics need to have a greater awareness of policy matters if they want their work to be considered by policymakers but they do not need to become advocates to have that work

acknowledged. Practitioners and policymakers need to be aware that research can be commissioned to generate evidence-based policy but they do not need to understand how that research is done.

What both sectors need are colleagues who can explain their own areas of expertise. The partnerships developed here provide a framework for collaboration. Those partnerships were strengthened by the peer-learning that took place within them. However, such extensive peer-learning may not be as necessary in future. The most important lesson here is that the academics and practitioners learned they could turn to colleagues from the other sector for appropriate advice, guidance and information.

7   Mentoring

Aim: The 'organisational habits' that the process is trying to affect (i.e. improving the production and use of evidence in education decision-making) are passed down between senior and junior members. By asking members to operate in a different manner, senior members may provide a good example and even provide a mentoring role to more junior members of their organisations. This will, in turn, spread the capacity strengthening benefits to a wider audience and provide more internal pressure to shift organisational behaviours. It may also provide a better way to deliver the research, as it is expected to combine senior officers with more authority (vital for policy impact) and junior members with more technical skills (vital for research outcome). Both should therefore be able to learn from each other.

The main study provided a very suitable environment for mentoring as researchers had protected time and the support of their colleagues and the facilitators. It created favourable conditions in which new attitudes and behaviours could be developed and encouraged to flourish.

There was clear evidence that the researchers had changed their habits and practices in relation to policy-focused research in this environment. They typically expressed the desire to maintain these new habits and practices following the end of the main study. Workplace colleagues indicated that they were aware of the researchers' new attitudes and were generally supportive of them. This suggests that the researchers will be returning to work environments that may also prove suitable for continued mentoring. Favourable workplace conditions will be essential to the future of policy-focused research and it will be easier for researchers to undertake collaborative work if they are not struggling against organisational habits that question it.

Most of the researchers spoke favourably of mentoring, whether as mentors or mentees. Mentoring took place 'horizontally' between the sectors and 'vertically' within them. The horizontal mentoring was important in supporting the researchers understand and make use of what they had learned from their inter-sectoral colleagues. This helped them appreciate the benefits of collaborative research. The vertical mentoring was important in supporting the researchers as they applied their own knowledge and skills to this collaborative research.

The senior and junior academics had previous experience of working together in their institutions and this included some mentoring. They also had similar types of knowledge and skills sets. This shared understanding provided clearer focus for the support needed to develop them within the main study and to align them with the needs of policy-focused research. The senior and junior practitioners, however, had typically not worked together before and tended to have different types of knowledge and skills sets. They therefore had less of a focus for the mentoring.

Mentoring is typically considered a top-down process but there was evidence that junior researchers were supporting their senior colleagues (e.g. by sharing technical skills with them). However, the strongest and most important evidence of mentoring was in the provision of support for changes in attitude to policy-based research and the inter-sectoral collaborations that enable it. All the researchers had a common focus on the study. They were all acquiring new knowledge and skills and learning how to adjust their habits and behaviours to accommodate them. This learning was supported within and across the teams in workshops, team meetings and in the field. In this context, the willingness of the researchers to engage in collaborative work helped it flourish because they were all working towards the same purpose.

The shared goal meant they had to discuss how their work contributed to the study and this provided opportunities to identify what support was needed. It also meant that the mentors and mentees had a common understanding of the context in which support could be requested and given.

This mentoring was made easier and encouraged by the structure of the study. The researchers were required to work together in their teams in workshops, meetings and in the field and to work towards a common goal. These activities provided a dedicated environment and protected time for the study and so for the new collaborative learning it demanded and the mentoring that supported it.

Other opportunities for mentoring were provided by different approaches to the workshops. Given the number and size of the SRTs, several workshops were organised for three senior members from each team only. They were then expected to share their learning with their colleagues but also to provide appropriate support and guidance to ensure that the learning was put in to practice.

Appropriate mentoring supports change by enabling new learning to be put in to practice and by legitimising new ways of thinking and acting. It means that new work-based habits can be developed rather than abandoned in favour of the old ways of doing things. It was clear that the researchers appreciated this important component of the RCSS but, as with the others, it required considerable investment from EDOREN.

The continuation of appropriate mentoring is likely to depend on the workplace environments the researchers return to when the main study ends. There was evidence of organisational awareness of the RCSS but less evidence of it influencing organisational habits. However, this needs to be contextualised with the recognition that organisational habits are typically slow to change.

It has already been suggested above that there is a limited need for researchers to acquire the knowledge and skills of their inter-sectoral colleagues. Although it had been necessary here to challenge and change habitual practices arising from the mutual mistrust between the sectors, the researchers had learned the benefits of collaborative work. As indicated below, that learning seems to have spread far beyond the membership of the SRTs. If there is no need for this inter-sectoral learning, there is no need for the inter-sectoral mentoring.

However, there is a need for researchers to apply their new learning within their sectors and this is likely to require in-sector support. Senior and junior researchers conducting policy-focused research will need to understand its purpose if they are to properly apply their knowledge and skills to it.

Regular meetings, with proper structure and focus, are necessary to foster good mentoring practices. The work environments of the academics are more suited to this as senior and junior academics work in the same institutions. Those of the practitioners are less helpful as those taking part in this study typically did not share the same institutional affiliations or even locations.

However, the strategy is not simply concerned with ensuring that these researchers maintain their focus on policy-focused research. It is concerned with further dissemination of good collaborative practice. These researchers benefitted from the intensive support from EDOREN. Given the depth of feeling that had been reported about the mutual mistrust between sectors, there is a risk that these benefits could be lost on the return to work with colleagues who have not had that intensive support.

The researchers' workplace colleagues acknowledged and understood the focus of the main study. Importantly, the collaborative work the researchers were doing and its potential benefits were also generally recognised. There was no indication that this work was transforming workplace practices but the potential for policy-focused research was recognised rather than simply rejected. When

compared to the inter-sectoral mistrust described by the researchers, and embedded in their workplaces, this wider acknowledgment of the benefits of collaborative research indicates significant progress. Even if organisational habits and practices are slow to change – and they typically are – it also indicates that the researchers' own commitments to collaborative work will be allowed to continue. If they are allowed to continue, then they offer the potential for the researchers to model these new attitudes, habits and practices for their workplace colleagues.

8   Repeated policy feedback

Aim: This is intended to provide external pressure to utilise evidence for policy and effectively demonstrate how best to communicate research findings to a policy audience.

The use of repeated policy feedback had been a key element in the broad acceptance of the protocols designed in Year One. It meant these evidence-based protocols were clearly linked to policy needs. It also meant that what had initially been considered an academic study (and which therefore carried the expectation that the research would be too theoretical and critical of policymakers) was demonstrably seen as being policy-focused and this encouraged support from the policymakers.

Two types of repeated policy feedback had been identified in Year One: (i) internal feedback from the practitioners in the SRTs; and (ii) external feedback from stakeholders. The practitioners had used their communication channels to facilitate meetings with stakeholders and had advised on how to respond to the feedback they gave. This had helped them to establish their positions in the SRTs.

The benefits of incorporating repeated policy feedback in the RCSS were clearly demonstrated in Year Two by the acknowledgement of the protocols in all five States and by their uptake in three of them.

The internal policy feedback continued through Year Two with the practitioners providing input through discussions in team meetings and at the EDOREN workshops. No changes were made to the protocols, but the practitioners were able to advise on presenting them in the first stage and implementing them in the third stage. They were typically more willing to do this without prompts from the EDOREN facilitators than in Year One. The greater recognition of their contributions to what was increasingly acknowledged as a collaborative exercise enabled this. There was no indication that the practitioners from the new teams had to initially assert their authority: the significance of the practitioners' contributions had been established in Year One and was accepted from the outset of Year Two.

There was no evidence to suggest that practitioners from the SMOEs and SUBEBs provided different feedback. The SRT members noted that the CSOs had provided general feedback on advocacy and implementation but it was not clear how this differed from that provided by the practitioners.

External feedback in the first stage was limited to broad acceptance of the protocols and recognition of their need. This had already been established in Year One in Kaduna and Kano. Significantly, stakeholders in the three new States – Jigawa, Katsina and Zamfara – accepted the protocols even though the evidence on which they were based had been generated in Kaduna and Kano. The stakeholders justified this by acknowledging the similarities between the States.

As in Year One, this acceptance can be explained by the repeated policy feedback that had informed the development of the protocols. There had been a problem in Year One with one of the SRTs simply presenting the draft protocols and being prepared to abandon them in response to critical feedback. This was addressed in Year Two. The SRTs explained and justified the protocols and were prepared to listen to any feedback and address it. That is, they constructively engaged with the stakeholders. As one senior academic noted: 'Actually, if you find yourself in the midst of these policy makers, when you are lucky, they listen to you. Then it will carry more weight. Inasmuch as your aim is clear, it will be of interest to them.'

Some of the researchers suggested that the representatives of the CSOs had facilitated the external policy feedback but were unable to explain how. Other researchers commented that they might have

had a negative impact on it as policymakers often see them as politically motivated and so may be less willing to constructively engage with them.

The planning for the SSRs also required constructive engagement as the SRTs worked with the stakeholders to identify the LGAs that would be the fieldwork sites. However, the opportunity to tailor the research to needs of the study – particularly through discussions about the evidence already held by the stakeholders – was lost. There was no external feedback that would have expedited these reports. Nor did the practitioners provide internal feedback on either the planning or the reporting of the SSRs.

No clear reason was given for this. However, the most likely explanation is that these SSRs had been built into the Year Two schedule by EDOREN and so none of the team members thought to question them or to seek external feedback. The problem of the academic-practitioner divide can be perceived beneath this as it is also possible that no-one thought to seek external or internal policy feedback because this was considered research (albeit policy-focused research) and so was a matter for the academics rather than the practitioners and policymakers. There was also some indication that the practitioners felt undermined by the presence of the CSOs who had been recruited to facilitate work they had done in Year One.

Whatever the reason, this stage could have been conducted more effectively if policy feedback had been sought. It therefore serves as an important reminder of the need for constructive engagement with policymakers to obtain external policy feedback and for encouraging practitioners to provide internal policy feedback at all stages.

The SSRs were to be used to justify the need for change. However, events overtook this planned stage in Jigawa, Kaduna and Kano with the SRTs being asked to advise on implementing the protocols.

In this final stage, senior researchers – both practitioners and academics – from these three States were invited to advise policymakers on implementing changes to the policies and practices of primary teacher recruitment. This necessitated further constructive engagement

It also highlighted the importance of the repeated policy feedback. This had enabled the development of policy-focused recommendations that had been broadly accepted by the State-based stakeholders. The process had kept those stakeholders included in their development which meant they were aware of the protocols and of their relevance. It also meant they were ready to take the policy-focused evidence seriously even though such research – particularly when generated by academics – is typically ignored or dismissed.

The experience of both years highlight the importance of creating appropriate frameworks for internal and external policy feedback. It enabled the transition from research findings to appropriate policy recommendations.

The internal feedback took place between and within the SRTs. The inter-team discussions had been facilitated by EDOREN and obviously required the attendance of the teams. They allowed wider consideration of key concerns that were subsequently addressed. Discussions within the teams took place either side of these EDOREN workshops. They allowed consideration of State-specific issues. Importantly, they provided space in which to discuss how the findings should be presented. This was especially important in the three new States as the research generating the protocols had been conducted elsewhere and there was concern that the protocols might be rejected as inappropriate. This concern was negotiated by explanation of the research and emphasis on the repeated policy feedback that had enabled the development of the protocols.

The discussions were facilitated by the developing partnerships between sectors and the mentoring that supported the new learning – including the importance of explaining and justifying the collaborative nature of that learning to stakeholders. Knowing that the practitioners had been involved in the research was a key element of the uptake.

The teams receiving less EDOREN support made slower progress than those receiving more support but their experiences were similar: the repeated policy feedback – even though most of it had occurred in other States – helped the policymakers acknowledge the need for change and give consideration to it.

The inclusion of the practitioners on the SRTs was vital to both the internal and external policy feedback. Some, in both years, struggled to provide appropriate and sufficient guidance because of their perceived status and needed support from the facilitators to provide their experience-based input. However, the successes of the policy-focused research also helped them as it emphasised their roles in the collaborative process.

Future policy-focused research will need to emphasise those roles and this may require support and mentoring. It was clear in both years of the main study that the practitioners felt least empowered when it was perceived as an academic exercise. At those times, they tended to see themselves as trainee academics rather than as practitioners engaged in collaborative research. If, as suggested above, future collaborative studies require researchers to contribute their own sector-specific skills, then the practitioners are more likely to provide the repeated policy feedback required of them.

9   Hands-on support

Aim: The provision of hands-on technical skills for data gathering, processing, interpretation and packaging for policy use is expected to be an important input into the study design.

Support to develop the researchers' technical skills was an important component of the study but for unexpected reasons: it helped develop and legitimise the partnerships that were crucial to the inter-sectoral collaborations that generated the policy-focused research.

EDOREN had recognised the need for policy-focused research and the problems preventing it. Those problems were widely known but no other efforts had been made to address them. As noted below, it was disappointing that other DFID-funded projects failed to provide support. EDOREN's support was essential. It developed and funded the research and recruited and supported the SRTs. The researchers were chosen for their skills and experiences but capacity building and behavioural change require support and input. EDOREN provided workshops that delivered technical support and offered mentoring. This created opportunities for researchers from the two sectors to work together to generate policy-focused research. As one of the senior researchers noted, EDOREN also helped sensitise stakeholders to the need for changed because it 'created awareness among the policymakers that something is going on or is about to happen.'

There is a need to maintain suitable balances between support, capacity building and autonomy. As the main study progressed, the SRTs became more confident in their work and indicated their desire to continue working collaboratively with their inter-sectoral colleagues. The support from EDOREN had enabled this. However, despite the successes of this collaborative work, further support is likely to be necessary. The same levels of intensive support, though, may not be as necessary.

The researchers had very limited experience of inter-sectoral collaboration and so needed support as they learned how to work with their colleagues. They had their sector-specific skills and experience but needed support to align them with the purpose and practice of the study. There was also a need for skills development.

Some of these needs were met by the researchers' colleagues from both sectors. As in Year One, the skills gaps were sometimes surprising (e.g. several senior researchers commented favourably on having learned how to use Excel spreadsheets) but it was reassuring that the SRTs were able to address them.

However, it was necessary for EDOREN to make other provision. This included support for the other components of the RCSS addressed above. Where possible, the facilitators encouraged the SRTs to work together and develop their own capacities. They were generally willing to do this but often needed support and guidance on how to do it. There was less need for direct intervention from the facilitators in Year Two and this can be attributed to the greater readiness of the researchers to collaborate with their colleagues from the other sector.

Other provision from EDOREN was more overt and included the recruitment of representatives from the CSOs to the SRTs, training on the use of software for qualitative data analysis and supplying the template for the SSRs.

It was intended that the representatives from the CSOs would facilitate inter-sectoral collaboration and provide support for advocacy. However, although their presence was generally appreciated, they appear to have played a limited role in the collaborative processes because the greater readiness of the researchers to work together meant there was less need for their help. Moreover, as noted above,

their advocacy role may have undermined the role of the senior practitioners and so lessened their contributions.

The training in the use of the software was important because it filled an obvious technical skills gap. The main study had a qualitative approach but, as qualitative research is rarely used in Nigeria, the academics could only provide limited input. The training was appreciated by researchers from both sectors. It increased the sector-specific skills set of the academics. Although they are less likely to make direct use of it in future, it gave the practitioners greater insight into academic work and so contributed to the development of the partnerships. More significantly, it helped legitimise the use of qualitative research (which is often seen as inferior to quantitative research in and beyond Nigeria) and so gave greater legitimacy to the main study.

The provision of the initial SSR template was more problematic. It was intended to guide the presentation of policy-focused research across the five reports. As one senior practitioner sadly observed, though, it generated 'the sort of academic report that policymakers do not read [but] we did not say anything like this because we were expected to use it.' It was subsequently revised in collaboration with the SRTs, particularly the practitioners. The purpose of the template was reasonable but the initial provision was flawed. However, it highlights the importance of assessing provision to ensure it is appropriate.

It also highlights the importance of providing opportunities for researchers – whether practitioners or academics – to contribute in a meaningful way. This had been more of a problem in Year One as the researchers struggled with the new concept of inter-sectoral collaboration but was much less problematic in Year Two. Given the depth of the mutual mistrust that had previously limited it, it was surprising to see the collaboration develop so rapidly. Although there were some hesitations, it was achieved through the support provided by EDOREN throughout the main study.

As the researchers became more confident in their policy-focused research, they became more able to identify their own needs and more willing to request support for them. This was particularly evident with the Kano SRT which had been asked by state policymakers to contribute to the design of new education policies that were being devised and that extended beyond the study's remit of recruiting and deploying primary school teachers. Acknowledging their own limitations, the senior team members were confident in seeking further guidance from EDOREN.

Less progress was made by the SRTs receiving less support. It was disappointing that other DFID-funded projects failed to give the promised support to these two SRTs and it was equally disappointing that no reason was given for this. These SRTs had received similar types of input from EDOREN but there was no support for enhanced communication with the policymakers. However, their preparation was similar to that of the other SRTs at similar stages of the study. Their more limited progress was explained by them waiting for authorisation from EDOREN to proceed to the next stage.

This is significant as future studies may want to incorporate elements of the RCSS but will not necessarily be able to invest as much in developing capacity. The most important component here was the development of the inter-sectoral partnerships as they enabled the development of the other components. This was more easily achieved in Year Two because the collaborations in Year One had demonstrated that academics and practitioners can work together. This would not have happened without the support from EDOREN. Future researchers may need support to develop and maintain their focus on the provision of policy-relevant research. However, they will not necessarily need as much support as EDOREN has provided because the benefits of collaborative research have been demonstrated and widely disseminated through these studies.

10   Recommendations

Primary education in Northern Nigeria is in crisis. The scale of the problem is indicated by the focus of the main project through which the RCSS has been evaluated: that teaching positions should go to qualified teachers because they are more likely to be more effective. Policy-focused research has the potential to make a significant contribution to the development of appropriate policies and practices that can improve teaching and learning in primary education. However, until now there has been a lack of collaboration between the policymakers and practitioners who understand policy and the academics who are capable of doing the research that can usefully inform change.

The RCSS is intended to strengthen the capacity of policymakers to demand policy-relevant evidence from academics. By the end of the main study, policymakers in Jigawa, Kaduna and Kano States were working with the SRTs and making use of the evidence they had produced. This is encouraging but the research had been initiated and driven by EDOREN. However, it is to be hoped that the successful demonstration of the RCSS will lead to policymakers demanding other policy-relevant research in future.

EDOREN's RCSS has clearly shown that researchers from the two sectors can work together to generate appropriate policy-focused research. The potential benefits of collaborative research have been widely recognised in the five States involved in these studies. The role of EDOREN in successfully supporting that collaborative research has also been widely acknowledged and appreciated.

Yet DFID support for EDOREN is now ending and other DFID-funded projects failed to support the RCSS. Many of the researchers indicated their enthusiasm for continuing this work but they are likely to need further support to legitimise their research, to continue developing appropriate skills and to facilitate changes in organisational attitudes, habits and practices. Otherwise, there is a risk that the benefits such policy-focused collaborative research will be lost.

The following recommendations are intended to guide the continuation of the RCSS. They are divided into three parts that follow the pattern of capacity building: (i) providing necessary support that; (ii) leads to greater autonomy; and (iii) to the adoption here of the RCSS:

- Part I: Recommendations for DFID and other funders
- Part II: Recommendations for States and institutions
- Part III: Recommendations to support the components of the RCSS

Recommendations for DFID and other funders

The Year One evaluation noted three points that influenced the RCSS: (i) the initial perception of the researchers from both sectors that it was a mostly academic exercise; (ii) the longstanding mutual mistrust between the two sectors that inhibited the development of collaborative practices; and (iii) the significance of EDOREN as a broker in addressing these other points. EDOREN could act as broker because it was seen as having authority to manage the main study and because it was seen as independent of both sectors. There were fewer concerns in Year Two about the first point and the extent to which the mutual mistrust was resolved was remarkable. Both matters can be attributed to the demonstrated successes of collaboration in Year One. The role of EDOREN as broker (as well as of provider of financial and technical support) remained significant in Year Two. Representatives of both sectors clearly indicated their desire for further collaborative work. However, until the RCSS becomes sufficiently embedded in both sectors, this enthusiasm will need to be maintained through

appropriate brokerage to minimise the risks of: (i) either sector being seen to dominate the collaboration; and/or (ii) the mutual mistrust resurfacing from either or both sectors.

Recommendation: DFID and/or other funders seeking to promote collaborative research should ensure there is an authoritative and independent third party to broker the collaboration. This will require appropriate and sufficient funding for that third party.

Education stakeholders have been made aware of and supported the RCSS through the main study on the development of recruitment and deployment policies for primary school teachers. The acknowledgement of the RCSS has been facilitated by the successes of that study to date. However, its work is incomplete in that relevant policies have not been introduced in all five States. Demonstrating the success of the main study will further demonstrate the benefits of the RCSS. Appropriate support is therefore needed to: (i) enable the SRTs to continue working with policymakers to develop relevant policies; and (ii) evaluate the implementation of those policies. Other DFID-funded projects failed to provide support for the Katsina and Zamfara SRTs. DFID support for the main study should therefore include clear guidance and appropriate financing.

Recommendation: DFID and/or other funders should continue funding the main study and its evaluation.

The benefits of the RCSS to the development of policy-focused research have been widely acknowledged by education stakeholders in the five States. However, this is a new and radical approach to research that has challenged and successfully negotiated the long-standing inter-sectoral mistrust that had severely limited collaboration. There is no evidence to date of the RCSS changing institutional practices but this is necessary if collaborative inter-sectoral research is to continue. The RCSS should therefore be embedded in future education projects.

Recommendation: DFID and other funders should ensure future projects are designed to enable and support inter-sectoral collaborative research. The RCSS should be embedded into those projects. Funders should also work with governmental and academic institutions to encourage support for collaborative research within the two sectors.

Recommendations for States and institutions

The benefits of inter-sectoral collaboration have been acknowledged by education stakeholders. However, those benefits were based on intensive support from EDOREN. The most significant aspect of that support was the negotiation of the mutual mistrust that enabled inter-sectoral collaboration. That mistrust needs to be challenged – and continually challenged – within the two sectors to avoid the risk of it preventing future collaborations. Until the potential for such collaboration becomes more widely accepted, this can be achieved by highlighting the sector-specific advantages of the RCSS. Researchers from the current study should therefore be encouraged to share their experiences of the study and the collaboration that shaped it. However, as the idea of collaborative research is still new, and as the researchers sometimes misunderstood their contributions to it, they may need support to ensure they properly address it. This, in turn, may require appropriate funding.

Recommendation: Institutional stakeholders should provide opportunities for researchers from the SRTs to formally present their work to their colleagues. As inter-sectoral collaboration is a key element of the RCSS, such presentations should include representations from both sectors.

EDOREN provided formal opportunities for inter-sectoral collaboration through the workshops and the requirements of the main study. This provision made a vital contribution to the development of the partnerships that enabled the policy-focused research. However, other opportunities for such collaboration are few and far between. The two sectors should therefore be encouraged to provide formal opportunities for inter-sectoral collaboration.

Recommendation: Policymakers should include academics on education commissions to encourage the use of research in informing policy development. Academic institutions should include policymakers and practitioners on panels considering research and teaching to encourage a greater focus on policy issues.

Recommendations to support the components of the RCSS

Engagement in policy: The acknowledgement of the benefits of the RCSS was dependent on the progress of the main study which focused on policies concerning the recruitment and deployment of primary school teachers. The policy recommendation (i.e. that only qualified teachers should be recruited) was relatively straightforward with a relatively low cost implication (i.e. the recommended mechanisms for recruiting qualified teachers would not add significantly to budgets). These factors made it easier for policymakers to accept the study's recommendations. Tackling more complex and/or more costly policy issues could have delayed or disrupted the acceptance of recommendations and so could have undermined the acknowledgment of the benefits of the RCSS. The idea of collaborative policy-focused research needs to be more fully embedded in both sectors. Until it is, it should be linked to research on policies that are more likely to be accepted because its association with failed policy changes is only likely to detract from the benefits it offers.

Recommendation: Until it becomes more firmly established, the RCSS should be incorporated into research that is more likely to be accepted by policymakers and inform policy change.

Partnerships (team composition and tasks): The development of partnerships was vital to the success of the RCSS. EDOREN required SRTs to have equal numbers of academics and practitioners and to ensure that the positions of Team Leader and Deputy Team Leader were shared between the two sectors. The team members from both sectors typically shared the research tasks. These structural requirements recognised and legitimised the contributions of the two sectors in the collaborative work they undertook. Requiring team members to share team responsibilities required considerable investment but was necessary to demonstrate the benefits of this collaborative work. With the wider recognition of those benefits, these structural requirements are less important as the acknowledged contributions from both sectors over the two years of the main study have helped establish the principle of collaborative research. Other projects may be unwilling or unable to make so much investment in allowing researchers from both sectors to share in the conduct of all tasks and may need to rely on the researchers' sector-specific experience and expertise. Such an approach should not be problematic if: (i) leadership is balanced between the sectors; (ii) the sector-specific tasks are clearly acknowledged and explained so that the contributions of both sectors continue to be valued; and (iii) regular team meetings acknowledge and review these contributions.

Recommendation: The team composition and task allocations of future collaborative projects must be explained to team members. Both sectors should be represented in leadership roles. Where other tasks are allocated according to sector-specific experience and expertise, they should be clearly explained and justified.

Partnerships (in-sector authority and experience): The main study highlighted the importance of giving individuals the chance to contribute their experience and expertise. In both years, individual researchers had their authority undermined which led to important input being withheld. Given the general perception that this was mostly an academic exercise, this was more likely to happen to the practitioners. This disempowerment was not intentional. It happened because aspects of the research design failed to properly consider their expertise and the conditions that would give them the confidence to share it. Inter-sectoral discussion is important but should not lead to researchers being reluctant to share their expertise.

Recommendation: Future collaborative research projects should be designed in consultation with representatives from both sectors. They should provide opportunities for researchers to contribute to discussions within groups and individually.

Partnerships (steering committees): Consideration needs to be given to the composition of SRTs and its impact on the success of the main study. Year Two saw the SRTs expanded to include representatives of CSOs to advise on advocacy. It was not obvious that they made any significant contribution within the teams and there was some concern that their presence in the SRTs undermined the contributions of the practitioners. Some researchers appreciated their presence but others raised concerns that their political engagement could alienate senior policymakers from the policy-focused research process. Some researchers also suggested that the SRTs should be expanded further by the inclusion of representatives from School Based Management Committees but failed to explain what they would contribute. At the same time, many researchers commented on the logistical problems of working in the SRTs. The success of this policy-focused study depended on the collaboration between the practitioners and academics. The reported enthusiasm for inclusive research and the potential contributions of representatives of other bodies should not be overlooked. However, they should not be allowed to undermine the importance of this fundamental collaboration. Relevant experience and expertise can inform future research, without over-complicating its logistics, by incorporating representatives of relevant bodies (e.g. CSOs) onto steering committees. This would enhance the inclusivity of the research, and so increase its legitimacy, while also providing further opportunities to promote the specific research and the RCSS.

Recommendation: Future collaborative research projects should establish steering committees that allow representatives from relevant organisations to contribute their experience and expertise to the project.

Mentoring: The potential benefits of collaborative policy-focused research were recognised by the colleagues of researchers from both sectors. However, there was no evidence that organisational habits and practices were changing. This should not be surprising given the novelty of the collaboration underpinning the RCSS. The recognition of its benefits should, though, be exploited. Appropriate mentoring within sectors and institutions has the potential to maintain changes in individual habits and practices and demonstrate them more widely within the institutions of those individuals. However, there was only limited evidence of such mentoring taking place in both years of the study. Moreover, institutional structures make it easier for the academics to provide mentoring than the practitioners. Mentoring needs to be strengthened and supported in both sectors.

Recommendation: Future collaborative research projects should include general and study-based frameworks for mentoring.

Repeated policy feedback: This was essential to the development of appropriate policy-focused protocols that could be accepted by policymakers. It allowed the researchers to address stakeholder concerns as they evaluated the relevance of their evidence-based recommendations. It also provided opportunities to emphasise the inter-sectoral collaboration that generated the research. Both aspects of the process helped to negotiate mutual mistrust and so made it easier for the policymakers to consider the recommendations on their own merits.

Recommendation: Future collaborative research must incorporate the process of repeated policy feedback.

Support: EDOREN provided significant support to the SRTs. This included designing the overall framework for the research they conducted, brokering inter-sectoral problems, encouraging and enabling individual researchers to contribute their experiences and delivering workshops addressing specific technical skills. This support was needed to develop the partnerships and progress the main study. Now that it has been established that such partnerships can flourish, some of these tasks can be delegated to researchers from either or both sectors. This is an important step in capacity development. However, support will still be needed to ensure that sector-specific input does not undermine collaborative processes. It may also be needed if the members of SRTs are unable to contribute specific skills to the research. It is important that such support enables capacity development and does not undermine it. This can be achieved through consultation with the SRTs.

Recommendation: Future support for collaborative research should be negotiated with the researchers to ensure it meets their needs and enables capacity development.

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Annex A   Identifying, recruiting and deploying effective teachers in Kano and Kaduna States: executive summary

Terry Allsop and Michael Watts, 2017

EDOREN was encouraged by DFID to explore in-depth issues relating to the recruitment and deployment of teachers in public primary schools in Northern Nigeria with the long-term expectation of establishing a robust cadre of effective primary teachers through appropriate evidence-based policy change.

The main intentions of the study were to: investigate and document research evidence; support the government to improve teacher effectiveness; help support research capacity; and build sustainable partnerships.

Kaduna and Kano States were identified as collaborating partners as both had existing strong relationships with DFID-funded education initiatives and wider DFID engagement in state-level programmes. At a launch event held in Kaduna, the two States were invited to create research teams to bid for funded engagement in this work. The conditions pertaining were to be:

- The focus of the research in the two States was to relate to the identification, recruitment and deployment of primary teachers.
- The research teams from each State should comprise eight individuals, evenly divided by gender and by location in government/academic environments.
- Formal 'letters of interest' should be submitted in a competitive process assessed by external scrutineers.
- All expenses of the research would be met but there would be no consultancy fees, as all involved would be working on the research in normal work time.

Following the selection of two teams, they were prepared for the task through research planning meetings. The research was conceptualised in two phases:

Phase 1 – Identification of effective primary teachers

Methodology: Finding a sample population for study; semi-structured interviews with nominated teachers and their headteachers; classroom observation.

Phase 2 – Recruitment and deployment of effective teachers

Methodology: This needed a two-stage process, the first being the drafting of protocols covering all aspects of identifying, recruiting and employing the teachers. The challenging part of the work was taking these drafts for validation processes by a range of stakeholders, chiefly managers at various levels of the system.

Throughout the programme, a series of planning meetings were held and managed by EDOREN and involving all the researchers. These five-day meetings were held as follows:

- 6-10 June 2016: Phase 1 planning and budgeting
- 3 – 7 October 2016: Phase 2 planning
- 23 – 27 January 2017: Development of State Reports/validation with LGEA ESs

The revised protocols were then exposed to further scrutiny in two research meetings – one in each State – to which all LGEA Education Secretaries were invited:

- 27 January 2017: Kaduna State
- 30 January 2017: Kano State

The findings of the two phases of the research are reported in sections 3 (Phase 1) and 4 (Phase 2) of this report. The concise conclusions of the research are presented in section 6 but are reproduced here to complete the Executive Summary:

- Working in two States of Northern Nigeria, it has proved possible and constructive to create research teams which unusually brought together those who are charged with carrying out research (four academics) and those who are charged with managing a primary education system (four MoE and/or SUBEB staff). Each team had a balance of genders. Careful preparation of the teams gave them confidence to carry out fieldwork at a variety of levels – school, LGEA, SUBEB and MoE.

- Phase One of the research allowed the identification in each State of a group of 40 effective primary teachers through a process of nomination (to identify a population for study) whose practices were documented through interviews and classroom observations. The data generated was used to develop: (i) a series of case studies; and (ii) clearly defined job descriptions for both P1-P3 and P4-P6 teachers. Additionally, there was important learning about how these teachers operated successfully in frequently less than conducive working environments.

- Phase Two of the research depended on the development of strong draft protocols for each part of the recruitment and deployment processes for primary teachers. So that for recruitment, descriptions were generated covering the following areas: needs analysis; advertising and applying; testing and interviewing; appointing. At least in part as a result of the team composition, it proved possible to undertake a validation process with the drafts through interactions with different groups of stakeholders, chiefly those with direct responsibility for teacher recruitment, thus: MoE and SUBEB Directors; LGEA Education Secretaries; Head teachers. We conclude that, for each State, a robust set of protocols is now ready for wider field testing in pilot/trial settings.

- We note and acknowledge the continuing undercurrent of scepticism regarding the ways in which these instruments may be undermined by political decisions (often legitimate) and patronage (never legitimate). Our response is simply that policy-related research of this kind can only provide the tools by which transparent processes can occur if there is a supportive political will. We have to presume that the development of quality primary schooling for all children is a high order political priority in both States.

- We take this opportunity to report early successes relating to the use of the findings of this research in Kaduna State. It is not an accident that a member of the Kaduna research team is the Director of Recruitment. For the next recruitment cycle, commencing in May 2017, she has already been able to put in place new approaches to: school staffing needs analysis; on-line job advertising; use of job descriptions in the recruitment process; and, overhaul of interview procedures. Work in progress is consideration of significant allowances for rural postings.

- Over the next one year, there are two priorities:

  o In Kaduna and Kano States, initiating well-structured pilots/trials of the various approaches in carefully managed and observed settings. This will strengthen the relationships between the research teams and the management cadre.

  o Taking the approach to other States, with different levels of EDOREN-related inputs.

Annex B The use of evidence in developing primary education policies in North-Western Nigeria: executive summary

Terry Allsop and Michael Watts, 2018

Primary education in Northern Nigeria is in a crisis. There are significant and longstanding concerns about the quantity and quality of primary school teachers. The crisis is made worse by the absence of clear and coherent policies on the recruitment and deployment of teachers.

EDOREN (Education Data, Research and Evaluation in Nigeria) has been working with State Research Teams (SRTs) in Jigawa, Kaduna, Kano, Katsina and Zamfara to make the case for the development of evidence-based recruitment and deployment policies.

The SRTs presented policymakers with: (i) detailed analyses of the teacher gaps in their States as a justification for the introduction of such policies; and (ii) the evidence-based recommendations from an earlier study which focused on four key aspects of recruitment and deployment as one solution to the problem.

Sustained engagement with senior policymakers led to the introduction of evidence-based policies and/or practices in three of the five States.

The main report documents the process of evidence uptake in all five States and makes the following recommendations:

Focus: Presentations and other forms of engagement with policymakers must maintain focus on main issues – here, the recruitment and deployment of new teachers. Links to existing data (e.g. the ASC, EMIS) must also maintain that focus.

Evidence: Evidence must be pertinent, clearly presented and persuasive. It is not the responsibility of policymakers to interpret evidence: SRTs are responsible for this and must ensure the reasons for presenting evidence are clear. Where evidence is generated in some States, sufficient State-based contextual detail must be included to facilitate its acceptance by other States.

Engagement: SRTs must ensure clear argument and evidence are presented. They must also ensure that engagement with policymakers is led by senior practitioners. State Champions should be identified and targeted for continuous engagement.

Support: State authorities – including SMOEs, SUBEB and universities – should develop, maintain and promote opportunities for future work generating the evidence needed to inform education policies and practices.

Annex C The research capacity strengthening strategy for evidence-based policy and practice in Kaduna and Kano States, Nigeria: executive summary

Michael Watts and Oladele Akogun, 2017

Appropriate and effective education policy can be usefully informed by appropriate and effective education research. However, policymakers typically fail to make use of research produced by academics and academics typically fail to make their research accessible to policymakers. In Northern Nigeria, and elsewhere, this significantly weakens opportunities to improve the education sector in general and the primary education sector in particular. The comprehensive literature review in the annex to the main report highlights the extent of this problem.

Education Data, Research and Evaluation in Nigeria (EDOREN) designed a research capacity strengthening strategy that requires practitioners (acting as proxies for policymakers) to collaborate with and work alongside academics in designing and delivering rigorous policy-focused research. The strategy, which is described in detail in the main report, has five key components: (i) engaging in policy-driven research; (ii) partnership; (iii) mentoring; (iv) repeated policy feedback; and (v) hands-on support. The strategy was integrated into the EDOREN project *Identifying, Recruiting and Deploying Effective Teachers in Kano and Kaduna States* which started in 2016.

Research teams comprising senior and junior practitioners and academics were formed in Kaduna and Kano States and were tasked with generating policy-focused research that was then used to inform a series of appropriate policy recommendations. At the time of reporting, the Education Secretaries from the two States had broadly accepted these recommendations and there was evidence of some recommendations being implemented at the Local Government Area level.

All members of the research teams were interviewed at the beginning, mid-point and end of the project about their experiences of the project in the context of the strategy's five components. These five components – except for the mentoring – were successfully realised and contributed to the broad acceptance of the policy recommendations to date. The research capacity strengthening activities and the realisation of the components for research capacity strengthening are detailed in the main report.

The main report also explains how and why three issues influenced the research capacity strengthening strategy.

The researchers (both academics and practitioners) initially saw the main study as a mostly academic exercise. This disrupted the fundamental principle of academics and practitioners collaborating as co-researchers with equal status and equally important contributions to make. This issue was partially resolved as the main study progressed and as the practitioners demonstrated the value of their knowledge and skills.

The study highlighted considerable deeply embedded mistrust between the academics and practitioners. It was disguised by the rhetoric of collaboration but its origins are traced to the belief that neither side respects the potential contributions to education policy and practice of the other. The extent of this mistrust inevitably varies between individuals but it presents significant barriers to successful collaboration. It was partially negotiated as researchers from both sides acknowledged and accepted the value of what their colleagues contributed to the main study.

A third party was needed to help the researchers negotiate this mistrust. EDOREN provided necessary technical support to the State-based research teams. This enabled the provision of the brokerage that allowed most of the researchers (both the practitioners and the academics) to negotiate the mistrust and to acknowledge and appreciate what their colleagues contributed to the main study.

The potential exists for collaboration that will improve the quality of primary education in Northern Nigeria. That potential is currently limited by the mistrust identified in this study. However, this study also identified strategies for negotiating it and so increasing the potential for improving the quality of primary education through collaborative research.