Private schools are revolutionising developing world education. If only UNESCO would admit they exist [1]

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A so-called ?fact sheet? on education in Nigeria [3] published by UNESCO in October 2012 suggests that Nigeria has some of the worst education indicators in the developing world. For example, since 1999, the number of out-of-school children has increased from 7.4 to 10.5 million, which means that Nigeria now has the largest number of out?of?school children in the world. Unfortunately, these statistics fail to take into account the thousands of unregistered low cost private schools that exist across Nigeria and the millions of children who attend these schools. Consider, for example, the following findings from acensus of private schools in Lagos State [4] carried out by DFID in 2010-2011:

The table shows that the vast majority (88%) of schools in Lagos State are private and they cater for 57% of all enrolments. Most of these schools are owned by individual proprietors and serve low income families. The report therefore concludes that ?the education landscape in Lagos is dominated by the private sector, with the majority of pupils attending private schools of all types?. Critically, 74% (8,952) of these private schools are unregistered and therefore not included in the official statistics. If the average number of children in these private schools is 114 then this would suggest that over 1,000,000 children in Lagos State alone are not out of school but attending unregistered fee paying private schools.

Further research carried out by DfID in Kwara State [5] also estimated that there could be a possible 417,600 private enrolments, compared with the official school census from 2010/2011 which only recorded 157,327 children in private schools. This would add another 260,000 children who are not out of school but attending unregistered fee paying private schools. There are thirty six states in Nigeria and my guess is that if similar research was carried out in each state then the total number of out of school children would be dramatically reduced to a fraction of UNESCO?s original figure of 10.5 million - which is clearly bogus and in no way, shape or form reflects the reality on the ground.

So what could possibly explain such an extraordinary level of incompetence on behalf of UNESCO? First, UNESCO benefits from exaggerating the extent of the so called global education crisis because they are the international agency tasked with solving the problem. Without an education crisis and UNESCO would quickly become redundant. Second, by widely exaggerating the number of out of school children, this also allows UNESCO to point the finger at Western donors for failing to meet their funding commitments. This also helps to deflect attention away from the enormous problems facing government education sectors

across the developing world including rampant corruption, teacher absenteeism and an almost unbelievably low level of learning - problems which UNESCO have failed to address over the previous half century.

Finally, UNESCO?s legendary anti-capitalist bias used to manifest itself in direct hostility to all forms of private sector involvement in education. Today, their opposition is much more civilised ? they simply turn a blind eye to the remarkable growth of private schools for the poor across the developing world and instead continue to preach to the world in blissful ignorance and in a complete state of self-denial.

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