

EDUCATION OF NIGERIAN FISHERMEN: IMPLICATION FOR EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

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Abstract

Migrant fishermen children are found in the riverine areas of Rivers, Cross River, Akwa Ibom, Delta, Ondo and others in Lake Chad, Argungu, Kainji and Benue waterways. For a longtime these children have been kept out of education of process in the country. Following the introduction of nomadic .. education in 1987, there was a call for the introduction of education for the migrant fishermen. Approval was given in March 1990. Today, many schools for the migrant fishermen children are in existence. This paper analyzes the state of education of the migrant fishermen in the country. There are some primary schools in the area but most of them have temporary structures that get flooded during the rainy season. The importance of pre-primary education has been highlighted and the need to have permanent early childhood educational institutions stressed. The functions and achievements of the National Commission for Nomadic education are presented and suggestions *made for the introduction and improvement of early childhood education for these children.*

Introduction

Education is widely acknowledged as the most important instrument of change in any society. Jegede (2007), explains that any fundamental change in the intellectual and social outlook of any society has to be preceded by an educational revolution. Any nation that wants to be illiterate and developed is aiming at what has never been and would never be. This value of education has made many parents, communities and nations to invest a large percentage of their resources on the education of their children and citizens. Education is now seen in Nigeria as a right following the United Nations Millennium Development Goals (MDG).

Fagbamiye (1996) explained that in many developing countries, including Nigeria education has been adopted as the panacea for many ills. Illiteracy is considered a disease, a very bad one at that, Nigeria has as her national objectives as stated in the second National Development plan the building of:

- i) A free and democratic society
- ii) A just and egalitarian society
- iii) A united, strong and self-reliant nation
- iv) A great and dynamic economy
- v) A land of bright and full of opportunities for all citizens.

These aims include the building of a just and egalitarian society as well as land of bright and full opportunities for all citizens. This implies that in education, equal opportunities have to be provided for all Nigeria citizens.

The fisherman that lives in the creeks of the Niger Delta areas of Nigeria and other coastal areas that move from one place to another for fishing require education for their children. For quite a long time this group of people were denied educational opportunities. In this paper, education of the migrant fisherman is analyzed with a view to finding out how it is currently carried out and the way forward. This will help to provide more fundamental education to all Nigeria children.

History of Education of the Migrant Fisherman

As explained by Tawari (2002) moves to ensure the provision of education for the migrant fishermen started in the mid 1990s. The old Rivers and Bayelsa States, have been in the fore front of the campaign for the inclusion of the migrant fisher people in nomadic creation programme in Nigeria. It carried out studies in conjunction with other states having the same migratory problems and presented papers desirably of providing separate educational opportunities to the children of the migrant fisher folks.

Since the federal government was bent on education for all irrespective of work role location and lifestyle, the National Council on Education (NCE) in March 1990, approved a national programme for the education of migrant fishermen. This was to be provide in the affected states which are Rivers, Bayelsa, Akwa Ibom, Edo, Delta, Ondo and Ogun States. The National Commission for nomadic education (NCNE) was given the responsibility to cater for the migrant fishermen education in addition to that of the pastoralists.

Research statistics for the year 2000 in Tawari (2002) showed that there were 301 migrant fishermen, children schools in the country with a teacher and pupil population of 852 and 40, 826 respectively.

Introduction of Nomadic Education in Nigeria

Since education of the migrant fishermen children provided by the National Commission for Nomadic Education, it is important to give a brief history of this form of education. Garba (1997). Report that the realization of the importance of nomadic education dates back to the colonial era. Schools were established then in some nomadic communities as early as 1953 as in the case of the Karakartu. Nomads primary school in Daura Local Government Area in Katsina State. This programme did not last long because the peculiarities of the nomads, who were the learner were not taken into consideration. In 1979, some of the nomads seized the opportunity provided by the Universal Primary Education (UBE) programme to send some of their children to school. This still did not help matters as the schools were conventional schools.

A group of more than 200 nomadic leaders nationwide were summoned to a workshop to Yota, Adamawa State, the communique from the workshop gave birth to a blue print on nomadic education titled "Fair Deal for Nomads". This was followed by a massive enlightenment campaign on the need for nomadic education. Nomadic schools were formally launched in July 1987. As reported by Muhammad et al (1995) in 1988 the Federal Government inaugurate a thirty-two member National Advisory Committee on Nomadic Education and Retired Col. M.B. Khaliel was appointed the chairman of the committee. On the 12th of December 1989, the federal government enacted decree 41 which established the National Commission for Nomadic Education.

Functions of the National Commission for Nomadic Education

Iwuoha (1992) reports that the National Commission for Nomadic Education is entrusted with the following functions:

- a) To formulate policies and issue guideline in all matters relating to Nomadic Education.
- b) Provide funds for:
- c) Research on personnel development for the improvement of Nomadic Education in Nigeria,
 - i. Development programmes on nomadic education.
 - ii. Equipment and instructional materials, construction of classroom and other facilities relating to nomadic education.
- a) Establish, manage and maintain primary schools for nomadic children.
- b) Liaise with relevant agencies to ensure effective implementation of nomadic education.

Achievements of the National Commission on Nomadic Education

As reported by Tawari (2002) the National Commission for Nomadic Education has since its inception:

- a) Established 4 University centres to cater for teachers, curriculum and materials development and research and evaluation for nomadic in the country.
- b) Created 6 zonal office with the following headquarters: North Central (Minna), North East (Bauchi), North West (Kano) South East (Enugu), South West (Benin).
- c) Appointed state coordinators and director in all these state of the federation.
- d) Appointed supervisors in all the local government authorities of each state.

Dade and Ganadoss (1993) defines migrant fishermen as those residing or living in the riverine areas of Rivers, Cross River, Akwa Ibom, Delta, Ondo State and other found in the waterways of lake Chad, Argungu, Kainji and Benue Rivers. This explains why there are people from Ghana, Togo, Cameroon, and from other parts of Nigeria in the fishery ports located in the most incisive areas of the riverine coastal areas of the country.

Their fishing activities are tamed on in marine or inland waterways or both. Adults and children migrate form one fishing village to another during various fishing camps in village in shores and creeks, what seems to be permanent in the camp are the chiefs of the villages/camp and the huts found there. Men and boys engage in actual fishery while women and girls participate actively in fish processing, preservation and marking. There are some fishery communities where women also engage in fishing.

Dada and Gnadoss (1993) explain that the migrant fishermen carry our their fishing activity on water. They paddle their canoe and put their nets in the sea or river to catch fish.

If truly education enables people to acquire knowledge, skills and values that will enhance their lives and those around them, then it is important that strategies be mapped out for the

improvement of the education of this disadvantaged group in Nigeria - the migrant fisher folks, who provide us with valuable protein.

Migrant Fishermen and Formal Education

Migrant fishermen do not see the need for formal education but are satisfied with the fishing since they do not see the need of sending their children to school, they are forgotten by the society. Ezewu and Tahir (1997) assert that they are deprived of many things such as reading and writing skills as well as welfare provisions.

In a study by Tawari (2002) 6 local government areas of Rivers and Bayelsa states were used, Kokuma-Opokima; southern Ijaw, Sagbama; Okrika, Ogu Bolo and Abua Odual. The study used 235 respondents and it was found that a part from the feeling of being inferior, the migrant fishermen communities would want their children to be educated to fill in the gaps that they could not occupy before now.

Tawari (2002) found that some fishing camps are made of people from different nations, for instance, Igbabele fishing camp in Brass Local Government Area of oil Rich Bayelsa State is made of people from Ghana, Togo and Cameroon as well as people from other tribes-in Nigeria. One hundred and twenty (120) pupils from the school were asked if fishing affected their schooling. Only 45% or 54 of them responded positively. The reason being that the amount of fish, they would have caught is limited by the period they are in class learning. This accounts for low attendance as in the month of October. Furthermore, it was observed that those who managed to attend classes are conscious that they are supposed to be out fishing immediately after school.

The other 55 percent responded that fishing does not affect their schooling. Tawari (2002), explains that these are the class of pupil whose parents are buoyant enough to employ paid labour to do the fishing. Migrant fisher children engage in domestic chores like sedentary pupils before going to school. After school hours they go with their parents to fish.

About 60% of the Community Based Organizations (CBO) AND Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) felt that fixed schools are unsuitable for the migrant children's education. Thus, they attribute it to lack of teachers, poor and unsuitable temporary school structures, inadequate materials and it will also prevent fish from being readily and abundantly available in the market.

The curriculum of the migrant fishermen education is made of subjects that help them have functional literacy, fulfill their civic responsibilities, play their social, political and economic roles. It includes scientific and technological element to enable them improve their fishing methods, processing, drying, canning and storage of fish, setting up fish ponds, thereby increasing their income. Some pupils have completed their primary education, moved to secondary and some have gone to universities. All the 120 pupils used for Tawari's study wish they could engage in sporting activities. Importantly the terrain that they find themselves in does not permit a standard field to be constructed.

Implications for Early Childhood Education

Early childhood education is synonymous with pre-primary education and is defined by National Policy on Education (2004), as education in an educational institution given to children aged 3 to 5 years and prior to entering the primary school. Early childhood education plays an important role in the society as well as in education of children. In the view of Oninokun, Oyoye, Alav and Onwuchekwa (1999). With increase in industrialization and employment facilities in Nigeria, especially in the few years following large sum of money which changed they testes and natural value systems developing interest in sending their children to pre-school institutions as a status symbol.

Furthermore, the increase in the rate with which married women picked up jobs. Parents began to see the need to send their children to pre-school institution where they can be taken care of before the mothers returned from work and when they would also learn in preparation for entering primary school later on.

The National Policy on Education (FRN: 2004), states the following as the objectives of pre-primary education.

- a) Effecting a smooth transition from the home to the school.
- b) Preparing the child for the primary level of education.
- c) Providing adequate care and supervision for the children while their parents are at work (no the farm in the markets, offices, etc).
- d) Inculcating social norms
- e) Inculcating in the child the spirit of enquiry and creativity through the exploration of nature and the local environment, playing with toys, artistic and musical activities etc.

The above shows that the citizens and government are aware of the vital need for pre-school

education in Nigeria.

Ekanem (2007), has shown that the location of these schools with make-shift structures, churches and personal houses are a hindrance to their effectiveness. It is to be noted that early childhood education is a necessity in the migrant fishermen camps. This would help their children to have a head start in formal education before they move into the primary schools. It would go a long way to improve the attitude of the pupils to school and formal education"?

Since the government does not establish pre-primary school but only supervises them, the onus is on the communities and on non-governmental organizations to do so. The curriculum should be on their environment.

Recommendations

Based on the issues raised in this paper the following recommendations are made:

- i) Community based organizations and non-governmental organization should be sensitized to establish Nursery Schools for the migrant fishermen children,
- ii) The teachers of these children should be give more incentives to attract qualified and dedicated ones,
- iii) More instructional materials should be provided as the ones provided by NCNE, World Bank and ETF are in short supply.
- iv) More permanent schools should be set up in areas that the terrain permits,
- v) Parents should continue to be sensitized to allow their children attend schools

Conclusion

Migrant fishermen children are among the educationally disadvantaged groups in Nigeria. For a long time they have been denied access to formal education due to the peculiar nature of their environments and no individual should be denied access to it by reason of location, sex, religion, social class or any other consideration. If is in so doing that this segment of the population can be brought into the mainstream of the Nigerian society and can contribute effectively to the development of the country.

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