

REFOCUSING CITIZENSHIP EDUCATION FOR RELEVANCE AND SUSTAINABLE NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

The global focus today is on sustainable development in various countries of the world. This paper examines critically the idea of refocusing citizenship education for relevance and sustainable national development in Nigeria. It looks at the concept of citizenship education, the concept of sustainable national development, the challenges of citizenship education as well as the strategies of repositioning citizenship education for relevance and sustainable national development in a true democratic environment in Nigeria.

Introduction

The main theme of this conference is on refocusing education for relevance and sustainable national development. The concept of education is, however, that which people are familiar with, especially those in academic environment. There is, therefore, no need for detailed examination of the concept of education since it is very much familiar with a good number of the conference participants. However, the main goals of education are basically the development of individual members of the society and the society at large.

Interestingly, development takes place in a country when the citizens are well educated to acquire the relevant knowledge and skills that will enable them to solve the numerous problems that confront their country and promote national development which will enhance improved living conditions of people in the country. Ozigi and Canham (1979) emphatically stated that worthwhile development can take place in a society where citizens are well educated and fully provided with the necessary tools to use in solving many problems that face the people, enhance meaningful change and development. The implication of this is that the acquisition of relevant knowledge and skills; and their subsequent application are essential in solving national problems and promoting sustainable national development in a country.

The simple road map to achieve refocused education for relevance is to evolve a deliberate educational policy and reforms for sustainable national development. Qzigi and Canham (1979) noted that many developed countries which have long tradition of formal and non-formal education succeeded to a great extent in overcoming a number of their national problems such as ignorance, poverty, disease, social and political problems through a deliberate education policy and programme of national development.

The Concept of Citizenship Education

The concept of citizenship education can be viewed as really an adult and non-formal educational process which tends to promote a type of education that focuses on improved social organization in the society. It is pertinent to note that citizenship education promotes better social structures and disciplined people. Citizenship education helps to make members of the society very much aware of their rights and responsibilities in the area where they reside in the society. While commenting on a similar subject, Ijere (1992) stated that political literacy is aimed at making an individual member of the society conscious of his rights and roles in the place where he lives. The idea is, indeed, to integrate every individual member of the society into full democratic institutions that will enable him make meaningful contributions to transform the society.

Essentially, citizenship education is, indeed, very important in promoting good leadership and good followership in any democratic environment in the society. As Ijere (1992:36) rightly observed:

It involves kindred and family meetings, which every member of the family must belong to and participate in as may be required by the group. Rules and regulations, and codes of conduct are clearly spelt out for people to follow and respect. Political issues are discussed and analyzed. Decisions are taken through democratically agreed procedures. Such a group is an effective functional body for social and community changes.

The implication of this is that citizenship education must aim at social transformation of the people of the society. The concept of citizenship education focuses basically on increasing and strengthening participation of members in various communities in the public life of their respective communities, local government areas, states and countries. In this context, citizenship education tends to focus greatly on increasing and improving democratic participation of members of the various communities in the public affairs of their various communities, local government areas, states and country, Nigeria.

Adult and non-formal education has an important role to play in this regard in order to promote sustainable national development. Adult and non-formal education is very critical to enhance people's active participation in the public life of their respective local communities and society at large. Groombridge (1981) rightly stated that education is very important for participants to contribute meaningfully in managing the affairs of their local communities and societies in general. The implication of this is that education is very critical for relevant and sustainable national development which can always be promoted through active participation of people in managing the affairs of their local communities.

Sustainable National Development

Indeed, there can be overt attitudinal change of the people of a country and their ways of life. Qzigi and Canham (1979) observed that people can develop new attitudes to work or become more sensitive to national issues, more patriotic, more nationalistic, more responsible and disciplined. This implies that it is when such changes take place in a country that one can confidently talk of national development.

Understandably, education is generally known to be a good tool to promote sustainable national development in the society. Interestingly, an expected change that has national outlook which affects the lives of the people of a country can be regarded as national development. However, development simply means the process of improving the quality of people's lives in the society (Todaro, 1982). It is, therefore, pertinent to state that people's attitudinal change in the ways of doing something can obviously enhance the image of their country and the propensity for effective service delivery in the society.

Sustainable development is defined as development that lasts and which does not endanger the environment and the resources therein for both present and future generations (Segynola, 2003). In this context, sustainable national development can be described as a development initiative which focuses on meeting the needs of present generation in a country without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. The idea is basically to ensure better quality of life for every person now and for future generations (Aruma, 2004).

There are certainly conditions which must be met before sustainable development can be achieved. Segynola (2003) identified the followings as conditions which must be met before sustainable development can be achieved.

- (i) The resources that will be used must be available when they are needed.
- (ii) The resources are mostly land based and consequently their exploitation and the resultant development will affect the environment.

(iii) Sustainable development will affect the wellbeing of people.

The Challenges of Citizenship Education

The challenges of citizenship education are the followings:

1. **Conscientization of People in the Society:** Firstly, the challenge of citizenship education is on the urgent need for conscientisation of people in the society. The challenge of citizenship education is to ensure that real conscientisation of people as Freire (1985) rightly put it should take place in silent culture. He further indicated that silent culture refers to the home, the local school, the church, and the community listening centres which should serve as the common venue for the people of local community to meet and deliberate on issues affecting their local community affairs.
2. **The Challenge of Producing Better People:** Citizenship education has the challenge of ensuring that Nigeria has better people in the society. This can be achieved through well articulated education programmes at all levels of education in Nigeria.
3. **Social Necessity as a Challenge:** Citizenship education is very imperative because of a social necessity in Nigeria. Interestingly, what defines citizenship education is not the learner's age but the civic option which provides the access to vital information that will ensure a social order and disciplined society which will ultimately guarantee a stable, peaceful, progressive and united country.
4. **The Demands for Active Participation of People in Public Life:** This presents another serious challenge to citizenship education in Nigeria. Sadly enough, to survive in today's Nigerian political environment, every Nigerian has to contend with a number of challenges such as national or cultural identity, religious identity, and political affiliation among the people of the country. This is not healthy enough for sustainable national development.

Strategies of Refocusing Citizenship Education for Relevance and Sustainable National Development

It is the position of this paper that the following strategies can be evolved in order to refocus citizenship education for relevance and sustainable national development in Nigeria:

1. Citizenship Education through Communication Strategy.
2. Citizenship Education through Conscientisation of the Masses.
3. Citizenship Education through Mass Media

1. Citizenship Education through Communication Strategy

Citizenship education through communication strategy is, indeed, a good means of refocusing citizenship education for relevance and sustainable development. The need for effective communication to disseminate information on citizenship education cannot be overemphasized. Citizenship education, therefore, requires effective communication in order to be very successful in reaching the target audience in the society. According to such experts like Pratt and Boyden (1985:156):

Every social development project involves communication, communication between members of a community or group; development workers and the people among whom they work; funding agencies and field workers, and so on. Communication involves the sharing of ideas-of information, of emotions, of hopes and fears; and is part of every human activity.

The implication of this is that communication is, indeed, very critical for the success of citizenship education as a social force that helps to shape the society with a view to promote sustainable national development in Nigeria.

The purpose of communication in citizenship education is to promote change which focuses on the interaction between the change agents and the people whom they are working with in their respective communities in the society. The people of a community can be enlightened about the idea of citizenship education and its potential through adequate public enlightenment campaigns.

2. Citizenship Education through Conscientisation of the Masses

The spirit of national consciousness should be promoted very effectively among all Nigerians through citizenship education. This will certainly help them function very well in the society. Aruma (1998) noted that it is not an easy thing to develop a new consciousness. This is however, task demanding.

Indeed, any change in the society requires good understanding of what is really involved. Freire (1985) stated that a person does not change his or her reality without first understanding it. Therefore, working towards this understanding should form an integral part of citizenship education initiatives to stimulate relevant and sustainable national development in Nigeria.

3. Citizenship Education through the Mass Media

The role of mass media can be seen as another strategy that facilitates refocusing citizenship education for relevance and sustainable national development in Nigeria. Understandably, people need information in order to form new attitudes, values and aspirations among other things, Gathu (1998) stated that there is an urgent need to build an informed citizenry so as to enable each individual member of the society to be very much concerned about the welfare of his/her neighbours and environment.

Understandably, there is a common saying that knowledge is power. Nnamene (2007) stated that information is part of man's knowledge which empowers those who have it. Therefore, citizenship education should through the mass media focus on the rights to inform and to be informed in order to enable people to respond positively to a number of issues affecting them in the society.

Conclusion

Citizenship education is an adult and non-formal educational process which tends to promote a type of education that focuses on improved social organization in the society. This promotes a social order in the society.

Citizenship education, indeed, promotes better social structures, order and disciplined people in the social values and general re-orientation of people's attitudes to personal, community and national issues which will ultimately enhance sustainable national development in Nigeria. Since citizenship education creates awareness in the society, it helps people to acquire relevant information and knowledge of their community, local environment, local government area, state and country suitable enough to promote relevant and sustainable national development in the country. However, any meaningful change in the society requires good understanding of the tasks involved. Interestingly, people do not change their reality without first understanding it. Thus, making conscious efforts towards this understanding should form an integral part of citizenship education to enhance sustainable national development in Nigeria.

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