

VOCATIONAL AND TECHNICAL EDUCATION: A PANACEA FOR ACHIEVING MILLENNIUM DEVELOPMENT GOALS (MDGs) IN NIGERIA BY THE YEAR 2015

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Abstract

In recent years, successive government in Nigeria have repeated initiated and adopted policies and programmes intended to provide necessary infrastructure to stimulate economic activities, enhance income and improve living standard of its teaming population. The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) is one of such initiatives which, United Nation States, Nigeria inclusive have agreed to try to achieve by the year 2015. However, the 2015 deadline is not far from now and the overall success in meeting the MDGs in Nigeria is not assured due to problems and challenges. Hence this paper examines Vocational and Technical Education as a catalyst for achieving the MDGs. Recommendations were highlighted for the realization of the first MDG or MDG 1 (eradication of extreme poverty and hunger) upon which all the rest of the MDGs directly relies on.

The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) as noted by the United Nations (2005) are the summarization of the decisions reached by the United Nations (UN) to alleviate the problems of mankind. These decisions or goals were reached after research into the problems of developing and developed nations, most especially the third world countries including our dear country Nigeria. These problems were summarized and resolved into eight goals, eighteen targets and over 40 indicators. These gals were made put of the UN Millennium road map (Secretary General's Millennium road map). These projects were assigned to the UNDP (United Nations Development Project). During the United Nations Millennium Summit in September, 2000, these measureable goals and targets for combating these problems were called Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). A target of the year 2015 was set for the assessment and achievement of these goals/targets. These goals were placed in the heart of global agenda. These are:-

1. Eradicate Extreme Poverty and Hunger
2. Achieve Universal Primary Education
3. Promote Gender Equality and Empower Women
4. Reduce Child Mortality
5. Improve Maternal Health
6. Combating HIV/AIDS, Malaria and other Diseases
7. Ensure Environmental Sustainability
8. Develop a Global Partnership for Development

However, Nigeria “the giant of Africa” is unmistakably the “epitome of thwarted prosperity”. The eradication of extreme poverty and hunger remains largely unachieved goals despite several programmes of successive governments aimed at achieving this goal. This is due to neglect of technical vocational education. Although recent studies have shown improvement and potential to achieve some of these goals, which include universal primary education, environmental sustainable and global partnership for development. Most of other goals however remains unlikely to be met by the year 2015. Though the relevance of technical vocational education is recognized and emphasized in our education system, this has not led to improvement in standard of living of the people (Abiri, 2008). Education among the citizens has served as an eye opener that the lessons learnt seems to be beacons to guide future educational plans in Nigeria.

Vocational and Technical in Nigeria

Vocational education is designed to prepare skilled workers for industry, agriculture, commerce, etc. Vocational education is a specialized education designed to prepare the learner for enhance into a particular vocation or to upgrade employed workers (Ugbomah, 2005). Suggestively the content of such education is usually drawn from the world through the analysis of the skills, understanding, value and the attitudes of successful workers in that particular field and environment.

According to Okorie (2001) Vocational education is a form of education whose primary purpose is to prepare persons for employments in recognized occupations. In fact, vocational education is seen as a precursor of skills, knowledge and attitudes necessary for effective employment in specified occupation. Similarly, technical education is designed to prepare technicians for industry, agriculture, home economics and such education is provided for at the senior secondary level or at the lower tertiary levels. The National Policy on Education (FRN, 2004) defined technical education as “that part of education which eventually leads to the acquisition of practical and applied skills as well as basic scientific knowledge.”

Vocational and technical education is any form of education whose primary purpose is to prepare persons for employment in an organized occupation. According to Okoro (2006), it equips the learner with skill, knowledge and attitude that enable learners to earn a living in a specific occupational area. It is different from general education since consumption is made that an individual has made a choice of career or vocation in furtherance of his interest and aptitude and requires specific training to enable him actualize this desires. Technical and vocational education streams beginners into job clusters and specific skills areas for which they are already trained. It has the advantage of providing opportunities for the youth to obtain employment after school because they already equipped with permanent skills, unlike graduates of general education.

Even though Nigerian government is a signatory to the Millennium Development Goals as reported by Igbuzor (2007), Nigeria is far from achieving the MDGs. He noted that it is the lack of political will that is the greatest stumbling block to the achievement of the MDGs in Nigeria. According to 2005 review of Nigeria Millennium Development Goals, it is stated that though Nigeria has adequate potentials to attain some of the MDGs targets, the progress is slow. It was added that there has to be an enabling policy environment and strong political will if for reasonable progress is to be rewarded. Based on this background that one can confidently say that Nigeria is very far from achieving the MDGs by the year 2015.

According to National Policy on Education (2004), the goals of technical and vocational education are to:

- (i) provide trained manpower in the applied sciences, technology and business particularly at craft, advanced craft and technical levels;
- (ii) provide the technical knowledge and vocational skills necessary for agriculture, commercial and economic development;
- (iii) give training and impart the necessary skills to individual who shall be self-reliant economically.

It is clear that if these goals are vigorously pursued and achieved, majority of Nigerian people will be in employment and as such wealth will be created which will consequently reduce the level of poverty and hunger and improve standard of living. This is in line with the achievement of MDGs.

Achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) through Vocational and Technical Education

One of the goals of MDGs is to reduce extreme poverty and hunger and improve standard of living of the people. However, it is disheartening that the rate of poverty in Nigeria strike the adoption of the MDGs seems to be on the increase and unemployment is not reducing. It is obvious that poverty in Nigeria is in the midst of plenty. To buttress this point, Igbuzor (2007); Haruna & Aliyu (2008) noted that it is ironic that Nigeria is the sixth largest exporter of crude oil and at the

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same time host the third largest number of poor people after China and India. Unless this trend is averted, the achievement of the MDGs by 2015 will remain a mirage.

Based on this vocational and technical education is expected to play an important role in averting this ugly trend towards achieving the MDGs. This is because there is a link between vocational technical education and reduction in unemployment through acquiring work skills. Vocational technical education will provide for individual interest in terms of gainful employment. It provides the requisite skills necessary to gain entrance into employment. Vocational technical education delivery systems are therefore well placed to train the skills and entrepreneurial work that Nigeria need to create wealth and emerge out of poverty.

Provision of employment is one of the goals of vocational and technical education. Individuals are trained to acquire entrepreneurial skills. Attainment of this will contribute to the enhancement of employment – oriented skills training for Nigerian youths and women to access employment and income generating opportunities. Therefore, it means that vocational technical education promotes establishment of small and medium scale enterprises necessary for wealth creation and poverty reduction (Nyere, 1993). If this is achieved, it will be in line with the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs 1 and 3) in that it will contribute to poverty education through the improvement of skills, expertise and the competitiveness of beneficiaries. Furthermore, it will foster progress towards gender equality and women's independence through the provision of skills training opportunities to the women.

MDGs 3 is concerned with gender equality and women empowerment. For the goal to be realized the imbalances between men and women have to be corrected. Vocational and Technical education is one of the greatest forces that can be used to bring about redress. Nyere (1993) cited in Haruna and Aliyu (2008), emphasized the importance of women participation in development through appropriate vocational technical education. He stressed empowerment, it also connotes that development cannot easily take place without women. In the same vein, Azikiwe (1990), advocated for vocational and technical education for women to take their rightful place in our national economic empowerment strategy. He agitated for functional education which enable women to acquire skills and knowledge that will solve their basic needs. Therefore gender equality and women empowerment which is one of the MDGs could be achieved through vocational and technical education.

Suggestively, there is the need to train people in vocational areas in order to achieve some of the MDGs. These areas are vocational Agriculture, Business education, Home economics education, Trade and industrial education and Technical education. Teachers should be trained adequately in order to achieve universal primary education; Engineers, doctors and nurses should also be trained adequately to construct roads, handle hospital and provide health service respectively. The training of doctors and nurses will improve maternal health; reduce child mortality, HIV/AIDS, malaria and other disease. MDGs 2 – 6 will be achieved if rightly implemented.

About 70% of the MDGs target lives in rural areas, particularly in Africa and Asia (World Bank, 2004). This 70% according to the report are those living on less than 1US dollar a day with agriculture as their major sources of livelihood. Thus, a necessary component in meeting the MDGs by 2015 in many parts of the world is a more productive and profitable technical and vocational agriculture. One may then ask: can we achieve a more productive and profitable technical and vocational agriculture to eradicate extreme poverty and hunger (MDGs 1) without developing the needed manpower through employing a more practical and skill based methods of teaching technical and vocational science to the younger generation who are key to the achievement of the MDG? While the relationship with technical and vocational education is particularly strong for the first MDG, or MDG/all MDGs have direct or indirect linkage with technical and vocational education. Technical and vocational education contributes to MDG1 through agriculture – led economic growth which enables increase employment and rising wages (World Bank, 2004).

Similarly, vocational agriculture directly helps combat HIV/AIDS, Malaria and other diseases (MDG 6) through higher – quality diets and directly by providing additional income that can be devoted to health-care services (FAO, 2003, World Bank, 2004). Vocational agricultural practices can be both direct causes of and important solution to environmental degradation (MDG 7). More productive agricultural technologies allow the withdrawal of agriculture from marginal sensitive environments. Developing a global partnership for development (MDG 8) will help maintain the steady increase in technical and vocational trade significant increase in development assistance offered to the technical and vocational sector, increases that help sustain the benefits from this sector in the longer term (World Bank, 2004).

Conclusion

Developing nations in the world including Nigeria requires an urgent restructuring in her technical and vocational education. The achievement of technical and vocational education will lead to the realization of MDGs by 2015. This means that the MDGs are achievable in Nigeria if all the ills militating against technical and vocational education are cured. There is need therefore, for all stakeholders to direct efforts towards empowering people especially at the grass root with this aspect of education so that the dreams of MDGs will come true.

Recommendations

For the Millennium Development Goals (MGDs) to be achieved in Nigeria by the year 2015, the following recommendations are made:-

1. A compulsory vocational and technical education both formal and informal should be launched by local, state and federal government.
2. Regular workshops, seminars, conferences, short refresher courses should be organized for all vocational and technical teachers.
3. Government should provide industrial estates in all the states of federation to encourage the establishment of manufacturing industries that shall employ the graduates with manufacturing skills.
4. Governments at level should increase budgetary allocations to technical and vocational education sub-sector.
5. Women should be given incentives such as scholarship and bursary to enroll in technical and vocational education.

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