

# SOCIAL STUDIES EDUCATION AND NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

*Mrs. Imoh-Obong Inyang Inyang*

## **Abstract**

This paper examines the role played by Social Studies education in promoting national development. It focuses on the concept, nature and scope of Social Studies, as well as highlighting some of the objectives of Social Studies vis-a-vis national development. The paper goes on to identify some of the factors that can hinder national development, which include: political instability, absence of reliable census data, migration, national debt burden, leadership of a charismatic type, population growth vis-as-vis low food supply. Lastly, the paper tries to examine how Social Studies education fosters national development and some recommendations are made.

## **Introduction**

CESAC, (1979) states that social studies deals with man in the society as a whole whereas according to Eboh and Udoukpong (1984) social studies as a subject is concerned with man's total way of life..

On the whole, social studies is a subject that deals with man in his environments. According to Okafor (1981:12), "No man is an island, people need each other for survival and because they need each other, no one is replaceable". People live in groups in houses and make use of the land, water, air etc. On the basis of this, we say that man lives in a social environment. Secondly, man lives in a territory and uses what he can get from that territory. This implies that man lives and interacts with his physical environment.

Man also uses science and technology as a means of solving the problems of his environments. We can therefore see that social studies is a subject which is concerned with the" way man lives and interacts with his social and physical environments. Social studies is the means by which people know and do what they ought to do as members of the society.

Social studies in the Nigerian educational system have been that of a tool for fostering national unity, citizenship and self-reliance; all geared towards national development. It also makes education more relevant to the society through teaching students to develop positive attitudes and acquire relevant skills and knowledge that can promote national development.

Much emphasis on social studies education came after the Nigerian Civil War of 1967-1970. It should be noted that the introduction of social studies into schools and colleges in Nigeria and in different states of the federation came at various times and employed different strategies, hence its incorporation into the syllabus of the Junior Secondary School to reflect the idea of the new National Policy on Education.

National development is concerned with what the government and the people want to achieve for the nation and the people within a stated time frame, say, ten or twenty years. National development objectives may include the provision of electricity to all local government headquarters nationwide, the construction of an overhead bridge across a river to provide communication link for communities, industrializing backward states, establishing universities or polytechnics in all or some of the states of the federation within a stated period of years or thereabout; improving the standard of living of the people through better social services and better means of communication and transport facilities etc.

National development objectives are often contained in a programme called national development plans. The plans may be named according to length of time or according to serial order of the plans. Thus, it is normal to call a plan first, second or third development plan. The same plan may be referred to as a five-year or a ten-year development plan.

The plans normally state-precisely what shall be done to improve the material prosperity of the economy and the economic growth the nation wants or envisages to achieve. In this way, the plan might decide how to bring about mechanized agriculture; the establishment of manufacturing industries and how to

provide modern sports and recreation facilities for the citizens. The building of stadiums; cultural centres are parts of the development plans meant to serve recreational and leisure needs of the citizenry.

After drawing up the national development plans, the government usually examines ways and means of raising money for implementing the policy of the plans. Sometimes government has to borrow or tax the people heavily in order to raise enough money for these projects. In event of scarcity of funds to execute the plans, some of the projects may have to be dropped.

No nation can attain an effective level of development if it does not tap the intellectual talents of its professionals. It is only when a nation is able to achieve self-sufficiency and self-reliance in the major aspects of its economic, political, social and cultural life that it is regarded as a developed nation. Also, a nation in quest for development and upliftment of the standard of living of its citizens has to embark on community self-help development programmes. According to Oji (2000:4)-; community development can be seen in the light of making the people self-reliant; capable of full participation in the overall development of the nation; and ensuring that the communities are fully integrated into the life of the nation through specific community development programme.

### **Concept, Nature and Scope of Social Studies**

In the modern setting things are not static; everything is dynamic and is undergoing series of revolutions or changes. One of the areas of changes is education, which has much relevance when we talk about the nature of social studies. Social studies according to Beleyejusa (1981) is a new child of the past two or three decades in the annals of African experience. People see social studies as a natural development that comes as a result of cultural flow and transfer of ideas. The subject has been an accepted innovation in America and Britain since and before the beginning of this century. Its introduction into Africa follows a logical consequences of cultural and political relationship that has existed between these three continents.

The most important character of social studies is that it is a corrective study in the sense that it examines the present educational system with a view to correcting the ills of the colonial system that sought to prevent national unity and development. The nature of social studies is that it is a study that emphasizes the importance of man. Man is put in the central position and his activities are studied in relation to his various environments, which could be physical, social, psychological, etc.

The scope of social studies refers to what it covers or what it entails. The scope of social studies will remain ever-changing areas given the factors of space, time and human development. Social studies tries to gather relevant knowledge, values and skills centred around the subject that form part of these broad spheres of man. It is a subject that centres around man, examining how man manipulates and is manipulated by the various environments in which he finds himself. Thus the subject includes knowledge, skills, concepts, attitudes mid values drawn from history, geography, economics, political science, physical sciences, psychology, sociology, anthropology, among many others.

Social studies is an inter-disciplinary study aimed at studying man comprehensively. Unlike other disciplines, social studies does not aim at building up theories, rather it inter-relates or integrates the already formulated theories to gain an understanding and a wider perspective in the study of man and how he goes about solving his numerous problems.

### **Objectives of Social Studies Vis-a-Vis National Development**

The study of man in relation to his environments and to science and technology, as a medium for national development has certain things seen to be important in social studies. The first is that people living in groups, in families, villages, towns, or states must learn to live together as one people. They must learn to understand themselves and the environments within which they live. They must be able to tolerate one another, settle differences among themselves and work together for the developmental progress of their communities, state and nation.

Secondly, without this co-operation and understanding, Nigeria, as a case study, may cease to be a united, happy, self-reliant and a developed nation. In order to survive and be prosperous and self-sufficient, every member of a society has a responsibility, not only to obey the law and help the leaders but also to do his duty well.

The following therefore are some of the objectives of social studies programme that leads to national development:

- 1) Social studies education inculcates into students the need to be good citizens and future national builders/leaders by helping them to develop good skills, habits and positive attitudes towards one another and towards the nation that will lead to national development.
- 2) Social studies enable Nigerians to know and use the resources of their physical environments effectively. This ingenuity leads to better provision of social amenities and infrastructure in the communities thereby enhancing development.
- 3) Social studies education helps people to develop a good sense of judgment and a sense of moral and social responsibility. This results in immediate reduction of social vices and tension in the society by removing idle hands from the streets.
- 4) Social studies makes people understand their own culture and the cultures of other Nigerians so as to appreciate their differences and the need to live together in one great nation.
- 5) It helps people to acquire different kinds of skills and competence like reading, listening, observation and analysis.
- 6) It helps develop in students positive attitudes of togetherness, comradeship and cooperation towards a healthy nation.
- 7) Social Studies education also inculcates appropriate values of honesty, integrity, hard-work, fairness and justice at work and fair play as one's contribution to the development of the nation.
- 8) The teaching and learning of social studies create an awareness and understanding of our evolving social and physical environment as a whole in its natural, man-made, cultural and spiritual resources together with the rational use and conservation of these resources for self-reliance and development of the nation.

The overall aim of social studies education is to produce good citizens. And to be good citizens, students must learn and acquire certain qualities such as cooperation, loyalty, discipline, dedication, faithfulness, honesty, moral and social responsibility, spontaneity, conviviality, empathy, sympathy and positive regard to human beings as well as to the rules and regulations of the society.

#### **Some Factors that Hinder National Development**

A nation has a developed economy when industries, factories, manufacturing companies and business enterprises take over from subsistence farming in the village and small-scale manufacturing. A developed economy is self-reliant with an economy based on highly sophisticated technology.

The rapid growth and development of a nation's economy is to a large extent affected by certain factors. Some economists believe that if these factors are put in check, it would then be possible for a nation to forge ahead towards development. The following, among others, are some of the factors that can hinder national development:

(a) **Political Instability**

Political stability is necessary if economic progress is to be made. Foreign investment and even domestic investment would be scared if there are constant political upheavals or great instability such as that generated by June 12, 1993 presidential election results in Nigeria. There have been political instability caused by frequent military take over of most African Governments. Most of the affected countries have natural resources for development but lack the favourable political climate to tap the resources thereby hindering national development.

(b) **Absence of Reliable Census Data**

The absence of reliable census figures has therefore become the greatest problem hindering the economic development of many developing countries including Nigeria.

In Nigeria, population figures are usually used as the basis for representation in legislative assemblies and sharing of amenities and revenues. Consequently, leaders and officials ensure that figures for their respective communities, regions or states are grossly inflated to their own advantage.

No nation can plan adequately and successfully without vital information regarding the population. Misinformation obtained during head count leads to under-estimation in the national budget thus hindering development nationally.

(c) **Migration**

To recent years, the movement of migrants into Nigeria from neighbouring countries was a source of concern to the Nigerian Government. This was so because large population poses a serious restraint to the developmental effort of a nation. Migration sometimes has destabilizing effects on the receiving country, especially, if it were sudden and in great numbers, as all who enter the country would be competing for available jobs, food, shelter and clothing,

(d) **National Debt Burden**

This is a debt a country owes its citizens or to other countries or organizations: such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank. The debt, which a nation owes to its citizens, is known as internal domestic debt, while the debt owed to foreign governments or organizations is known as external or foreign debt.

The ability to manage or service the national debt of a country can be a powerful weapon for effective control of the economy. When a country is having heavy debt burden, that country is facing economic hardship in all areas. The possibility of inflation resulting from the form of borrowing constitutes another element of burden for a nation. Heavy debt burden may lead to retirement of civil servants or heavy taxation by government. If an existing debt of a nation is too high as to exhaust the government's borrowing power, it would make further borrowing difficult or impossible. The result will be loss of benefits, which can be derived by new expenditure in excess of current taxes.

(e) **Leadership of a Charismatic Type**

This is a sine-qua-non to the stimulation of social change that can lead to self-reliance and development. National development can come about if a leader can bring about changes or provide direction for the felt needs of the members of his society in periods of serious stresses and strains.

The United States of America was able to rise to glory through such charismatic leaders like Richard Nixon, George Washington, Woodrow Wilson and deserve it. Leadership with a sense of direction and a clear vision is what is needed to move a country to good height of development.

### **Social Studies Education As A Tool for Fostering National Development**

The primary aim of social studies education is to help individuals, groups and organizations to become aware of the social, political, economic and cultural realities of man's social and physical environments and to prepare man by sharing and grooming the individuals to fit into the society.

Allen (1971) sees social studies as a subject that teaches self-awareness, self-discipline, self-reliance leading to the development of a sound mind in an individual. The teaching and learning of social studies help to inculcate the right type of values and attitudes for the survival of the individual and the Nigerian society.

Social studies education also helps an individual to acquire appropriate skill, competencies and abilities both mental and physical as equipment for the individual to live in and contribute to the development of his society, which can therefore lead to national development.

In this period of new political order, the teaching and learning of social studies help students to develop their social and civil consciousness, instill discipline and orderliness in them as well as make them become effective citizens. The Federal Government of Nigeria is highly concerned about the alarming rate of crime and vices such as bribery, dishonesty, corruption and lack of patriotism among its citizens. This may explain why it has set up such bodies as War Against Indiscipline (WAI), Mass Mobilization for Social Justice, Economic Recovery and Self-Reliance (MAMSE'R), Environmental Sanitation and Code of Conduct Bureau. It is expected that a social studies programme that is well planned and effectively taught will complement the government's efforts in solving these problems.

Social studies education leads to national development in the sense that through the teaching and learning of social studies, students are taught about the different mineral resources found in their physical environment and how to utilize, conserve and control the tapping of these resources so that the nation does not resort to importation.

Social studies education helps the students to know more about science and technology in the society. The knowledge about science and technology can generate full and gainful employment for majority of the citizens in a given community. And this can also lead to the protection of a community's domestic

industry from aggressive external competition. Indigenous scientists and technologists are being mobilized for research and development activities and so that new ideas are invented; facilities for food storage, processing and marketing are also invented and new products manufactured, hence the attainment of self-sufficiency and independence in some manufacturing products.

Social studies education enables a citizen to know more about his civil duties and obligations. In the teaching and learning of social studies, an individual is well informed to understand and see the need of some civic duties and obligation in the society. For instance the need for payment of taxes as at when due. Mezieobi (1992) states that payment of taxes is necessary for the following reasons:

- (a) It fosters economic development through the establishment of industries and establishment of other revenue yielding projects.
- (b) It facilitates the provision of social amenities such as electricity, roads, water, hospitals, recreational facilities etc.
- (c) Tax payment indicates citizens' loyalty and support to the government of the day. Above all, tax payment is a way of improving the revenue generation capacity as a strategy for economic development, which leads to national development.

### **Recommendations**

- (1) There is a great need for change in the social attitude and government policy towards agriculture.
- (2) Government should pay more attention to the peasant farmers by giving them loans, fertilizers, and making provisions for improved farming implements that will lead to mechanized farming. With these, farming food production will not show substantial decline with a corresponding increase in population in excess of the rate of planned food increased.
- (3) The government should make provision for mass education with emphasis on the economically profitable aspects such as family planning, birth control and better management of resources that will lead to national development.
- (4) Government should create job opportunities for young school leavers in the community so that they may not become nuisance in the community.
- (5) Adequate social studies teachers who would transmit the desirable objectives of social studies into the learners must be trained and the necessary instructional materials procured.
- (6) The government should give loans to small-scale industrialists and manufacturers to enable them function well and uplift their progress thereby promoting national development.
- (7) The government should encourage and mobilize the indigenous scientists and technologists for more research and development activities by organizing conferences, workshops and seminars for them both in and out of the country leading to national development.
- (8) The government should make provision for the building of stadia, cultural centres and parks which are meant to serve the recreational and leisure needs of people in the community thereby leading to national development.

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