

EDUCATION: A VEHICLE FOR SUSTAINABLE POVERTY ERADICATION AND NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract

The paper focuses on the importance of education in making our nation, Nigeria greater, more organized, more reliable and hence becoming more advanced through poverty eradication initiatives. It also shows that poverty has its roots in lack of education or the inadequacy of education. Education, the key that opens different gates to wealth must therefore, be accorded due attention. When there is educational revolution in any nation, poverty will be reduced or eradicated and sustainable national development will emerge as a result of improved quality of personal lives and social relationship. The paper therefore, examines the problems in the Nigeria society, its Consequences and suggests some remedial measures in form of recommendations.

Introduction

Education is a process of teaching, training and learning to improve knowledge and develop skills. The main purpose of education is to prepare the individual for a responsible life so that he or she can be a productive member of the society. Good education awakens the talents in every individual and stimulates his or her development to the maximum level (Agbi, 2003).

O' Conner (1970) cited in Mbia (2004) opined that education has three components:

- a) a set of techniques for imparting knowledge, skills and attitudes;
- b) a set of theories which purport to explain or justify the use of these techniques; and
- c) a set of values or ideas embodied and expressed in the purposes for which knowledge, skill and attitudes are imparted and so directing the amounts and types of training that is given.

According to John Locke (1632-1704) cited in Osokoya (1993), the function of education is to help the child learn how to use his reason more and more in making decisions. He considers the contents of education as a means of developing in the pupil, virtue, wisdom, breeding and learning in that order. Education is the aggregate of all the process by which a person develops ability, attitude and other forms of behaviour of positive and meaningful value in the society in which he lives. It is a system based on certain philosophical or theoretical assumptions and seeks to justify its, usefulness in terms of its practices and results (Sani, 2001).

This invariably involves knowing how to utilize it and apply it to one's needs and to meet the expectation of the society and play the roles that societal life places on individual, especially in the immediate environment. It is the undertaking of its ramifications that it was adopted in the national policy on education in 1981, as the instruments per excellence for effecting national development. Hence it was assigned to inculcate the following attitude and values as according to Eberечи and Bukar(2000):

- (a) Respect for the worth and dignity of the individual;
- (b) Faith in man's ability to make National decisions;
- (c) Respect for the dignity of labour; and
- (d) Promotion of the emotional psychological and physical health of all children.

Consequently education process must not only be:

- > effective, that is, successful in producing literate people with improved numeracy; and
- > or functional, that is, fulfilling with regards to purpose or practical use.

It must also be:

- a) Relevant, that is, bearing upon and applying lo the needs of the individual and society.
- b) Practical oriented to raise the psyche of people and the society in the country or nation.

According to Sani (2001), the purpose of education is to transmit from one generation to the next, the accumulated wisdom and knowledge of the society and to prepare the young people for their future membership of the society and their active participation in its maintenance. Stability cannot exist in isolation, it has to be established and maintained through functional and result oriented type of education. For a country to develop under democratic dispensation, there must be meaningful stability, which is a situation where by everyone, has means of surviving on good health care, education, and good drinking water and access to good roads.

Some socio-economic indicators as slated in the Nigerian vision 2010 Report of UNDP (1997), revealed clearly that poverty level in Nigeria contradicts the country's immense wealth. The report shows that:

- a) Population of illiterates at the dawn of the 21st century is about 50%;
- b) About 51% of Nigerians are living below the poverty line despite the country vast resources;

- c) Only 40% of the population has access to safe water supply;
- d) About 90% of rural population is living in mud and thatched houses;
- e) Urban population living in single room with an average of about 8 occupants per room is 85%.
- f) Population of those (that have access to primary health care facility is 62%; and
- g) About 80% of Nigerians consumes less than one-third of the minimum required protein and vitamin intake.

Aliyu (2001), opined that, increased in poverty level among Nigerians has been attributed to many factors. These factor include the following:

- a) poor management of the Nation's resources coupled with large-scale fraud and corruption, most of which have been siphoned out of the country in hard currency; and
- b) poor execution of Government programmes and projects especially the ones aimed at the provision of social welfare services such as education and health.

Response to Poverty Situation and Alleviation

According to Alfa and Adeniji (2003), the activities of the past government to alleviate poverty included provision of basic amenities such as social and economic infrastructural programmes to generate employment, enhance income earnings and increase productivity. Numerous policies and programmes were designed at one time or another, to meet the special need of the poor.

The Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAP) of 1986, stressed greater realization of the need for policies and programmes to alleviate poverty and provide safety nets to the poor. Nigerians are living witnesses to the negative effect that programme had on them especially the poor. It indeed aggravated the existence of poverty among many groups in the society. As a result of the socio-economic problems, government put in place programmes that were designed to have positive impact on the poor among which are:

In Agriculture: - (i) Agricultural Development Programme (ADP) (ii) River Basin Development programmes Authority (RBDA) (iii) National Agricultural Land Development Authority (NALDA) (iv) The strategic grain reserve Programme (SGRP).

In Health: • (i) Primary Health Care (PUG) Scheme (ii)

(Guinea-Worm Eradication GWE) (iii) HIV/Aids programme. ***In Education:*** - (i) Nomadic Education Programme (ii) Universal Basic Education Programme (UBE). (iii) Adult Education Programme.

In Transport Sector: - The Urban mass transit programme, which was launched in 1988, specifically, to arrest the widening gap between, the demand and supply of transport services, offer credible basis for modernizing the national Urban mass transit system, promote technology in the transport sector and generate employment.

In Financial Sector: - (i) The Rural Banking Scheme (ii) Nigeria Agricultural and Cooperative Bank (NACB) (iii) the People Bank of Nigeria (PBN) (iv) The National Economic Reconstruction Fund (NERFUND), (v) The Community Bank (CB).

In Other Sectors: - (i) National Directorate of Employment (NDC) (ii) The Directorate of food, Roads and Rural Infrastructure (DFRRI) (iii) The Better Life Programme (BLP) which metamorphosed into the Family Support Programme (FSP) (iv) Family Economic Advancement Programme (FEAP) (v) National Poverty Eradication Programme (NAPEP) of the Present Government, etc.

According to UNDP (1997) and Abba-Gana (2001), most of these efforts failed in one way or the other because virtually all of them, lacked target, policy discontinuities, lack of accountability and transparency and lack of well managed Implementation and proper monitoring are other contributing factors. Above all, less emphasis was placed on education, which is the magic key for poverty eradication.

National Poverty Eradication Programme (NAPEP)

The National Poverty Eradication Programme (NAPEP) of the present government was established in 2001. Its aim is to eradicate absolute poverty in Nigeria through the streamlining and rationalization of existing poverty alleviation institutions. Its activities are classified into the following Schemes.

- 1) Youth Empowerment Schemes (YES), which deals with Capacity acquisition, mandatory attachment productivity improvement, Credit delivery, etc.
- 2) Rural Infrastructural Development Scheme (RIDS), which deals with the provision of portable and irrigation water, transport (rural and urban), rural energy and power supply.
- 3) Social Welfare Service Scheme (SOWBSS), which deals with education, primary health care services, etc. Notable among these are the Universal Basic Education (UBE) programme and the National Programme on Immunization (NPI).

National Resources Development and Conservation Scheme (NRDCS), which deals with harnessing of the agricultural water, solid mineral resources and so on.

Education and Poverty Eradication

The role of Education in National development and hence poverty eradication cannot be over emphasized. All the Identified problems and causes of poverty have their roots in lack of education or the inadequacy of education. From the statistics, the population of the Nigerian illiterates is about 50% (UNDP, 1997). This is precarious as it amounts to an overall low economic productivity for the nation. A country that does not pay serious attention to the education of its citizens cannot come out of poverty.

Education is a solid foundation on which the totality of literacy is built. Literacy is linked with development and countries with very high rate of development are known with high rate of literacy (Ugbe, 2002). Nobody can be said to be literate without being educated. Education can prepare one for good jobs. It also helps individual to be self-employed and be good managers of their business outfits. Experience in the past had shown that the credit facility provided for citizens without adequate education led some to acquire more wives creating more population problems instead of using the facilities for what they were meant for.

Education broadens the mind and makes it creative; the possibility of the educated becoming poor is reduced to half as when compared to the uneducated (Sudharshan, 1998). It has been discovered that the probability of being poor increases with household size especially, if, only few have jobs. Through education the problem of over-population can be solved (World Bank, 1996).

Table 1: Poverty Level in Nigeria Between 1980 - 1996

Year	Estimated Total Population	Estimated Poverty Population	Percentage Poverty
1980	65m	17.1m	28.1
1985	75m	34.7m	46.3
1992	91.5m	39.2m	42.8
1996	102.3m	67.1m	65.6

Source: Federal Office of Statistics, National Census Survey (Abuja).

Table 1 above, shows that the level of poverty between 1980 and 1996 rose from 28.1 percent in 1980 with almost 18 million people in poverty to 46.3 percent in 1985 with almost 35 million in poverty. This dropped to 42.7 percent in 1992 but rose to 65.6 percent in 1996 with more than 67 million people in poverty.

Poverty and Educational Level of Household Heads

Table 2: Poverty Headcount in Percent by Education Level of Household Heads

Poverty	Headcount			
Educational Level of Household Head	1980	1985	1992	1996
No Education	30.2	51.3	46.4	72.6

Primary	21.3	40.6	43.3	54.4
Secondary	7.6	27.2	30.3	52.0
Post Secondary	24.3	24.2	25.8	49.2

Source: FOS "Poverty Profile for Nigeria" (1980 - 1996).

The Table 2 above, shows that, the lower the level of education the higher the poverty level. The table clearly showed that households headed by persons with no education had the highest poverty incidence of 30.2% 51.3%, 46.4% and 72.6% in 1980, 1985, 1992 and 1996 respectively whereas those with educational level beyond the secondary level had the lowest chance of being poor with exception of 1980 where poverty level in households headed by person with post secondary education was even higher than those with primary education. The Table clearly shows, that, the role of education in poverty eradication programmes and National Development cannot be over emphasized.

Health is wealth they say and education is the key that opens different gate to wealth. No nation can rise above the quality of its education system. Therefore, for any meaningful change in the intellectual, social and structural outlook of any Nation, educational revolution must first take place.

Recommendations

1. In eradicating poverty education must be given the topmost priority. Education has been under funded in Nigeria; many schools are in poor condition and need extensive repair. As laudable as the Universal Basic Education (UBE) programme is. it won't achieve its objective if under funded. It has become absolutely imperative that the government alone cannot fund education in Nigeria, therefore all stakeholders, Government (Federal, State and Local), Non-governmental Organizations (NGO's), Community Based Organizations (CBO's), and Donor Agencies, Individuals, etc. should rise up to the task.
2. Parents and guidance should be sensitized greatly to send their children and wards to School. They should equally be charged to complement School education with positive traditional values and moral training in the home and to ensure that both boys and girls attend School.
3. Education requires a greater commitment than any other developmental activities. People generally should be encouraged to develop interest in Education so that the younger ones coming behind can equally develop the much needed interest in Education so that poverty can be rooted out of this Country.

Conclusion

It is the desire of various government and agencies to make the world a poverty free place through some deliberate policies that will provide for all the basic things that will make life worth living. Education therefore provides all that is needed to bring us out of the world of poverty. Hence government genuinely interested in eradicating poverty among its people should embrace education. Hence education must be accorded due attention.

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