

EDUCATION FOR JOB CREATION AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

The crust of this paper, Education for Job Creation and Sustainable Development” revolves around ways the acquisition of formal and informal knowledge and skills can lead to the obliteration of unemployment and underemployment towards the transformation of the society from a low level to an advanced one in such a manner that the prospects of future generations and the environment are not compromised. The paper takes as its point of departure an exposure of the importance and relevance of education for job creation, and sustainable development. particular fundament concepts in the discourse are illuminated. The programme of the United Nations on “Decade of Education for Sustainable Development 2005 – 2014 (DESD)” is adopted to marshal the point that education is indispensable to sustainable development. Further, the problems and challenges of education in Nigeria are brought to the fore, the paper concludes with the recommendation that government should ensure that educational issues are brought to the front burner in the scheme of things; funding; that parents should give qualitative training to their children and ward; and the government should ensure sufficient promotion and sustenance of information communication technology, ICT, usage at all levels in the educational system.

Introduction

The importance of education in the transformation of individuals and sustenance of societal developmental ventures and efforts cannot be over-emphasized. “Education has remained a social process in capacity building and maintenance of society for decades. It is a weapon for acquiring skills, relevant knowledge and habits for surviving in the changing world. (Adepoju, A. and Fabiyi A: 2009).

Inevitably, education is argued to be an inalienable right of citizens universally. To this extent, many “international human rights instruments.... provide for education as a fundamental human right. (Igbuzor, O: 2006). Such an instrument are the Universal Declaration of Human Rights: the International Covenant of Economic, Social and Cultural Eights; and the African Charter on Human and People’s Rights drawn in 1948, 1966 and 1981 respectively.

The relevance of education to job creation and sustainable development was further stressed by the Country Director, Action Aid International, Nigeria, Otiye Igbuzor, when he argued that “education is a key index of development” (2006). He observed that education enhances human productivity, promotes good health and generates empowerment of the individual and society.

The recognition of this fact culminated in series of educational reforms in Nigeria beginning from the British Colonial period. Particularly, in 1954 the educational system was changed from the 8-6-2-3 system (primary -8 years; secondary -6 years, Higher School Certificate -2 years and University -3 years) to 6-5-2-3 system (primary -6 years, secondary -5 years, Higher School certificate – 2 years and University – 3 years). (Gusau: 2008). Then there was the Free Universal Basic Education (UBE) that was introduced in 1976. (Gusau: 2008). According to him, the period of 1975 – 1983 in Nigeria witnessed aggressive attitude of the government towards educational reforms. In 1979, President Olusegun Obasanjo restructured the funding of primary education in the country.

Essentially, the “Revised National Policy on Education” in 1998 had a provision, thus, “Government welcomed contributions of voluntary agencies, communities and private individuals in the management of primary schools alongside those provided by the states and local government as long as they meet the minimum standards laid down by the

Federal Government. “Today, private individuals and bodies are statutorily allowed to run private schools at the primary, secondary and University level. The rationale behind this can be seen in the observation of Michael Omolewa (2007), that “educational reforms emanate from the basic conviction that considerable progress can be made in nation by its people through careful engineering of the educational process.” No wonder Nigeria has 74 Universities; 49 Polytechnics; and 38 colleges of Educations. (Nigerian Tribune, Oct. 2009).

Conceptual Exposition and Theoretical Framework

A proper understanding of this discourse would be sufficiently achieved when particular key concepts central to the subject are illuminated and situated within an acceptable theory and framework. Such concepts include education, job creation, development, and sustainable development.

As it were, the Oxford Advanced Learners Dictionary, (2000), defines education as “a process of training and instruction-which is designed to give knowledge and develop skills”. Also, Webster defines education as “the process of – teaching to develop the knowledge, skill or character of” an individual. (<http://www.meaning> of Education). Central to these definitions are issues of training, acquisition of knowledge, skills and development of character. Importantly, these are necessary pre-requisites of any individual to handle complex tasks and situations and jobs in the society.

By extension, job-creation becomes a necessary requirement in societal developmental chain. In Wikipedia, the Free Encyclopedia, (<http://www.job> creation Program), job creation is seen as the bringing into existence new programs and projects by government (or private individuals) to cater for and provide employment for the unemployed in the society to promote societal development. Societal development here describes the transformation of the society from a particular level to a higher one in terms of human and infrastructural facilities.

In the same light, development is further seen as an “act of improving by expanding or enlarging or refining”; “a process in which something passes by degrees to a different stage, especially a more advanced or mature stage. (<http://www.definitions> of development).

In this regard, societal transformation and development can only be sustained when “a delicate balance between the human need to improve lifestyles and feeling of well being on one hand, - natural resources and ecosystems, on which we and future generations depend” are maintained and preserved. The World Commission on Environment and Development, WCED, (1987), see sustainable development as “a process of change in which the exploitation of resources, the direction of investment, the orientation of technological development, and institutional change are made consistent with the future as well as present needs.” The basic thrusts of sustainable development therefore are the

development of “a stable relation between human activities and the natural world” such that it “does not diminish the prospects for future generations to enjoy a quality life at least as good as our own.” And “people must share with each other and care for the earth. Humanity must take no more from nature than nature can replenish.” (<http://www.definitions> of sustainable development),

Invariably, sustainable development suggests a complex interaction between the human component and other components in the society. Such complex interaction would be better appreciated when situated within Bertalanffy’s System Theory. According to Ademola Adepoju and Anne Fabiyi (2009), “system theory explains the existence of different parts which perform different functions in such a way that each part interacts and is interdependent on the other parts. Traditionally, the theory holds that every system has four attributes, namely, the variables and elements within the system; the properties and qualities of these variables; internal interface and relationships among variables; and the existence of the system in an environment. This implies that all systems and organizations such as the state do not exist in a vacuum. They exist in an environment which they impact on via various outputs and vice-versa. The different state institutional structures with varied statutory responsibilities interact and interrelate in manners and way that would make the dispensation of their responsibilities come to fruition. The adoption of the theory in a biological sense by L. Von Bertalanffy. (1968)

(<http://www.systemtheory>) with an analogy of the relationship and interdependence of all parts in the human system and its environment explains the unavoidable complex relationship among state institutional structures, their idiosyncrasies, and the environment. Herein lies the inevitable relationship among education, job creation, and sustainable development.

Education for Job Creation and Sustainable Development

A staggering 1.5 billion people of the world population, that is, one third of the world working-age population are either unemployed or underemployed. (Economic and Social Council: 2008). As a result of the recognition of education for job creation and sustainable development, “the United Nations General Assembly declared 2005 – 2014 as the UN Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (DESD)” (<http://www.wikipedia> education for sustainable development). This recognition revolves around:

- the need to appreciate changes in learnings;
- attention on the issue of literacy and acquisition of better skills;
- pursuits of standards that “support interdisciplinary thinking”;
- “a systematic thinking – acknowledging complexities and looking for links and synergies when trying to find solutions to problems”
- empowering people to participate in decision making;

- building of partnerships through the promotion of dialogue and negotiation, and people learning to work together;
- “critical thinking and reflection – learning to question our current belief systems and to recognize the assumptions underlying our knowledge, perspective and opinions.” Such “critical thinking skills help people learn to examine economic, environmental, social and cultural structures in the context of sustainable development.”
- It further revolves around “envisioning”, that is, “being able to imagine a better future that is predicated on the belief “that if we know where we want to go, we will get there”. And it is the strong position of the United Nations that Millennium Development Goals would be better attained via Education for Sustainable Development (ESD).

In this context, education helps individuals to acquire and develop specific skills, attitudes, knowledge, character, and idiosyncrasies that make them capable of making informed and sound decisions for their benefits, the benefit of others, the society and the future. In this manner, such issues as corruption, poverty, gender equality, human rights, education for all, health, human security, intercultural dialogue, religious acrimony, ethnic chauvinism, political brigandage, unemployment; underemployment, among many others, would be located in better perspectives.

Problems and Challenges of Education in Nigeria

Legions of problems bedevil the educational system in Nigeria. These problems in the educational sector constitute serious challenges to the state and its institutional paraphernalia in the provision of educational services for job creation and sustainable development.

In its Information Sheet on Girls Education, the United Nations International Cultural and Educational Fund, UNICEF (2007) observed thus:

Why are girls in Nigeria not attending schools? Poverty and economic issues, early marriage and teenage pregnancy, inadequate infrastructure and cultural and religious misinterpretation are the main issues that prevent girls from going to school.

This is a serious problem especially in the North Western and North Eastern parts of Nigeria where only twenty (20) percent of women “are literate and have attended school” (UNICEF 2007).

This poses a monumental challenge to the system because, according to UNICEF information, (2007).

Girls education does not only bring the immediate benefit of empowering girls, but is seen as the best investment in a country’s (sic) development. Educated girls develop essential life skills including self confidence, the ability to participate effectively in society and protect themselves from HIV/AIDS sexual exploitation – (reduces) children and maternal mortality rates,

contributing to national wealth, and controlling diseases and health status – and poverty reduction for generations to come.

While exposing a fundamental challenge confronting educational system in the Nigeria state, the Report brought some other problems to the fore, viz:

- Abject poverty of a larger segment of the nations’ population with seventy (70) percent of the population living below poverty line.
- State mismanagement of economic fortunes.
- Inadequate infrastructural facilities in educational institutions.
- Cultural and ethnic bigotry
- Religious chauvinism

Other issues and matters that affect the educational system in Nigeria are:

- General poor funding of the educational sector (Odebiyi and Olabisi: ND).
- Unnecessary and unjustified reforms and inconsistencies (Onwukwe Alaezi: 2007).
- The challenge of parity between polytechnics and universities (Onwukwe Alaezi: 2007).
- High tuition, at all levels – primary, secondary and tertiary. This was initially peculiar to the privately owned institutions, but today public educational institutions are now money spinning ventures. (Odia and Omofonwan: 2007).

- Insufficient utilization and promotion of information communication technology (ICT) in educational institutions.

With the overwhelming importance accorded ICT in impartation of knowledge and skill, many students, teachers, and lecturers do not have adequate access to ICT facilities. And coupled with poor V.SAT and other internet infrastructural facilities in the country, access to information on the internet is usually erratic and discomfiting.

- Misplacement of priorities and insufficient recognition of the essence of education in budgetary planning and arrangements –For instance, Nigeria government since independence has never allocated one third (1/3) of the United Nations requirements/recommendation of twenty –six (26) percent of annual budget to the educational sector. But the system, ironically, finds it justified to spend a whopping ten billion naira (₦10, billion) on a one day celebration of the nation’s independence.
- Nigerian Government nonchalant attitude to the welfare of teachers and lecturers at all level in the educational system – This laissez-faire attitude of the government usually culminates in avoidable and unnecessary strike actions in the system. Whereas a full – time professor in a Nigerian university takes home about four hundred

thousand naira in a month, a local government councilor, adjudged with a primary six certificate earns over six hundred thousand naira (₦600,000) in a month. More bizarre is the salary of members of the National Assembly where a Senator earns a total package of twenty-two million naira (₦22m) in a month and forty-five million naira (₦45 million) in a quarter as consistency allowance for not passing sufficient and relevant bills to promote and sustain development in Nigeria!

- Financial exploitation of students, by educational institutions in collaboration with educational officers. Examples are issues of admission acceptance fees, post-UME fees and other sundry fees that make educational accessibility difficult. (Odia and Omofomwan: 2007).
- Multiple teaching responsibilities that lead to poor output of teachers and lecturers.
- Inadequate encouragement and promotion of research programmes among academics via grants, aids and sponsorships.
- Bad parental influence in helping their children and wards to pass examinations and secure admissions without merit (Odia and Omofomwan: 2007)
- Students’ ill – preparation for examination and examination malpractice. This is now prevalent

in the primary, secondary and tertiary level. (Odia and Omofomwan: 2007).

- The debilitating effect of cultism in tertiary institution. And its incursion into primary and secondary schools in the system is highly worrisome.
- Unbridled taste for fashion that results in students spending more money and time on dressing modes at the expense of academic studies. (Onwukwe Alaezi: 2007).
- Immoral and indecent dressing manners deliberately adorned especially by female students to scurry the illicit favours of teachers and lecturers. (Onwukwe Alaezi: 2007).

Conclusion and Recommendation

This paper has attempted to look at the importance and relevance of education as an instrument and tool for job creation, and sustainable development in Nigeria. This task was accomplished with the conceptualization of key elements in the discourse and analysis of the relationships and inter-dependence of the variables of education, job-creation, and sustainable development located within the theoretical framework of Bertalanffy's system theory. The benefits of education for job creation for sustainable development were further brought to the fore with the analysis of the United Nations "Decade of Education for Sustainable Development" (DESD) programme. Further, the problems and challenges facing the educational sector in Nigeria were illuminated.

The Way Forward- The decay and degeneration in the Nigerian educational sector, and the gradual abysmal oblivion which the sector finds itself in budgetary allocations and financial arrangements in the polity would only abate with the pursuit of aggressive policies by the state that would place educational issues in the front – burner in the scheme of things.

Besides, this success can be achieved with emphasis, among other issues, on

- Regular and adequate funding of educational services and researches.
- The indispensable and qualitative roles of parents in morally bringing up their children and wards, and infinite support for laudable educational programmes of the government.
- Widespread encouragement and promotion of the utilization and application of information communication technology among pupils, students, teachers and lecturers.

There is no gain – saying the importance of ICT in the education and development of the society, in the words of Uwadia, (2003), in "IT Education in Nigeria Challenges and Opportunities", a Paper presented in the 2nd Global NCS/NITIPA IT Confidence in Washington DC, he argued that:

IT has become a catalyst and an engine of social, economic and political growth and development worldwide – is capable of becoming a major foreign exchange earner for the country, (as it is

in), India, China and Singapore – it produces a well educated, skilled and disciplined crop of professionals; - ensures that Nigeria becomes part of the global education network, and attempts to bridge the digital divide and produces professionals capable of creating wealth through a knowledge based economy.

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