

EDUCATION FOR SELF-RELIANCE AND NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

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Introduction

The wide notion that education is a veritable tool for social, economic and political transformation is no longer subject to debate. Education has grown to become the tool that produces positive changes on man's socio-economic, cultural and geo-political conditions. These changes make man critical resource upon which economic future of the nation depends. Man as an economic resource represents the aggregate of skills and attitudes which results from education and training that equip the labour force with the capacity to plan, organize and carryout economic processes when properly allocated. Aghenta (2006) orchestrated this view when he observed that education produces manpower that is the portion of a nation's population which is capable of engaging in productive activities.

Our society is in a state of rapid social, political and economic changes where individuals can be helped to make adjustment through appropriate education and training. Hence, education itself has remained a subject of research since it was first given at the Garden of Eden to the only creature then by God (Osunde and Omoruyi, 2010).

According to Ehiametalor (1991) the economic and social development of the continent of African can be directly linked to the realization of the potency of

education to the development of the continent. Nations of the world have since come to the realization that education should be made available to all people both young and old. This explains why the problem or issue of education and development has remained in the agenda of all the nations of the world, Africa inclusive. Consequent upon this, solutions to problems of national development through education have become a much hotter issue now more than ever before.

In the course of this paper, attempt will be made to examine the issue of Education for self-reliance and National Development. In this regard, focus is on the issue of self-reliance, issues of national development, education, self-reliance and national development.

Periscoping Self-Reliance

Self-reliance connotes self-dependence. Self-reliance implies the ability of an individual to do things on his/her own without depending on another while relying on his/her capability. Self-reliance stipulates the need for individuals to take their destiny in their own hands as a means of ensuring genuine development for themselves in their immediate environment. Self-reliance promotes self-growth which is the realization that one

has the ability to do things on his own without relying on external person.

According to Anyanwu (1992), self-help is fast becoming widely accepted as a new formula for the development of communities. It has been argued that its widespread acceptance in the development planning of most African countries including Nigeria has the tendency of giving greater stimulus and cohesion to development activities in the country (Omoruyi, 2007). This issue helps to promote innovativeness and offer the psychological condition needed for self-improvement in the life of people.

Development activities in most societies emphasize the involvement of the people as a means of ensuring the success of the planned process of change also help them gain adequate information or knowledge and skills that will enable them cope effectively with problems of daily living. Development activities in the process have operated on voluntary cooperative efforts of the people.

Self-reliance in relation to development demands that members of the society should apply their knowledge and skills in exploring the resources at their disposal to promote their own development in the environment in which they live. This implies that people must seek to develop and sustain the society from the pang of the problems of poverty, ignorance, disease, lack and want. This can only be done or achieved by checkmating all known limitations or weaknesses whether social, economic, political, cultural or otherwise that can hinder the developmental efforts of the people. This

underscores the need for the proper education of the people. The spirit of self-reliance can be generated in the people through proper education that will provide them with the needed information, knowledge and understanding of the crucial nature of championing the course of self-improvement of their society. It is obvious that self-reliance facilitates the process of societal development. There is therefore, a tripartite relationship between education, self-reliance and national development. This brings us to issue of national development.

The Issue of National Development

The present global economy is pushing national economies and local industries to compete with the world market. The situation has made many African nations including Nigeria to evolve strategies that will help the continent provide the structure to organize themselves in geo-political terms in order to maximize their political clout and minimize their economic dependence on other nations.

Commonly used indications of poverty reveal that Nigeria is one of the nine poorest countries in the world. The income per head is very low. The average income per person in the country is below one US dollar which makes it one of the poorest in the world. The life expectancy is very low. Even then there is a major inequality between the rich and poor. Majority of the people live in abject poverty while over 40% of the people are unemployed or manage to ek out a bare existence. Majority are involved in the

agricultural sector but practice subsistence farming. The country no doubt is experiencing difficult economic situation. The harsh economic situation has made life almost unbearable.

Nigeria has experienced major political and economic upheavals since attaining independence in 1960. Before then, the country went through more or less, traumatic process of decolonization for several decades. Since independence, the country had gone through process of reconstruction and development towards building a new nation this past forty-nine years. The development process adopted the modernization approach which proposes an economic strategy to develop a modern sector based on industrialization and commercial agriculture by mobilizing the under-employed labour in traditional rural sector. Then development was seen essentially as economic growth based on the expansion of the modern sector and the export of primary products. This process required support by appropriate government measures, accompanied by external investment and foreign aid (Younnman, 2000).

Development agenda has three main features or aims. These are:

- To meet the basic necessities of life
- Promoting law and order and
- Promoting industrialization

In the case of meeting the basic necessities of life. It is the responsibility of the nation to provide for the existence of its population, household goods, clothing shelter, food, needs and recreation. These basic necessities of life must be made

available if the citizens of the country must have a meaningful life. This will also enable the people appreciate their existence. The industrialization of the country will enable the society meet up with the provision of the basic necessities of life.

For any meaningful development to take place there must be law and order because development cannot take place in an atmosphere of rancor or anarchy. These basic features or aims of development separate the developed societies from developing ones. Where these basic necessities are not available underdevelopment abound or results. This is where education is important for promoting self-reliance for national development. Individuals will need education that will provide them with the information and knowledge needed to become self-reliance and foster the course of self-improvement for national development.

Education, Self-Reliance and National Development

It is an established fact that education opens the door for one to attain self-realization, develop national consciousness, promote unity and attain economic, social, cultural, political and scientific progress (Osunde and Omoruyi, 2010). This demonstrates the potency of education in facilitating self-reliance or improvement necessary for national development.

Alluding to the importance of Education in national development.

Chapter 36, of Agenda 21, on education awareness, and training states:

Education, including formal education, public awareness and training should be recognized as a process by which human beings and societies can reach their fullest potential. Education is critical for achieving environmental and ethical consistent with sustainable development and for effective public participation in decision-making. Both formal and non-formal education are indispensable to changing people's attitudes so that they have the capacity to assess and address their sustainable development concerns.

To achieve this vision, Chapter 36 called on governments, international agencies, businesses, and civil society groups to:

- Ensure that basic education and functional literacy for all is achieved.
- Make environmental and development education available to people of all ages:
- Integrate environmental and development concepts, including those of population, into all educational programmes, with analyses of the causes of the major problems; and
- Involve school children in local and regional studies on environmental health, including safe drinking water, sanitation, food, and the environmental and economic impacts of resource use.

Following the Earth Summit, the Commission on Sustainable Development appointed UNESCO to be the Task Manager for Chapter 36 to accelerate reforms of education and coordinate the activities of all stakeholders through a wide-ranging Work Programme, which had the following seven objectives:

- 1) Clarify and communicate the concept and key messages of education for sustainable development
- 2) Review national education policies and reorient formal educational systems.
- 3) Incorporate education into national strategic and action plans for sustainable development
- 4) Educate to promote sustainable consumption and production patterns in all countries
- 5) Promote investments in education
- 6) Identify and share innovative practices
- 7) Raise public awareness

This list reminds us that the challenge of sustainable development is a difficult and complex one, requiring new partnerships among governments, academic and scientific communities, teachers, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), local communities, and the media. All are essential to the birth of a culture of sustainability. Within governments, for example, education for sustainability is of direct concern, not only to ministries of education but also to ministries of health, environment, natural

resources, planning, agriculture, commerce, and others. New policies, programmes, resources, and activities can be reported from almost every country – a sure and encouraging sign that education is beginning to be seen as a significant aspect of national sustainable development policies. These are positive signs for the International Decade of Education for Sustainable Development, which extends from 2005 to 2014.

In 2000, a World Education Forum was held in Dakar, Senegal to develop ways of achieving basic education for all. Six goals are central in the resultant Dakar Framework for Action:

- 1) Expand and improve comprehensive early childhood care and education, especially for the most vulnerable and disadvantaged children.
- 2) Ensure that by 2015 all children, particularly girls, children in difficult circumstances, and those belonging to ethnic minorities, have access to and complete free and compulsory primary education of good quality.
- 3) Ensure that the learning needs of all young people are met through equitable access to appropriate learning and life-skills programmes.
- 4) Achieve a 50-percent improvement in levels of adult literacy by 2015, especially for women, as well as equitable access to basic and continuing education for adults.
- 5) Eliminate gender disparities in primary and secondary education by 2005, and achieve gender equality by 2015, with a focus on ensuring full and equal access to an achievement in basic education of good quality.
- 6) Improve all aspects of the quality of education and ensure excellence of all, so that recognized and measurable learning outcomes are achieved by all especially in literacy, numeracy, and essential life skills.

These goals make the links between basic education and sustainable development very clear. Indeed, the Dakar Framework for Action states: “Education is... the key to sustainable development and peace and stability with and among countries, and thus an indispensable means for effective participation in the societies and economies of the twenty-first century” (Fien, 2003).

Economic growth, progress and indeed national development are reflections of the societal inputs and output of education. On the other hand, and in majority cases, low economic and social development are traceable to the low level of education. In the same vein, low level of skill development can also be a product of poor education.

The poor state of Nigerian society in terms of low economic growth and progress can be attributed to skill constraints which the nation has had to contend with over the years. These constraints, experts say can only be removed by the development process itself. By and large, education is considered the

wheel of development. Osunde and Omoruyi, (2010) point out that skill development is characteristic innate capability of the individual, but the development process is a direct responsibility of education. Therefore education is important to skill learning and development at whatever level or age which will make the individual to become self-reliant and seek for self-improvement. It is education that will enable the individual acquire skills that will facilitate independence or self-reliance and become more actively involved in the development process in the society. The individual needs information on what benefits accrue from any activity and why he needs to be part of the process for him to become interested and participate fully or actively in the planned process of change.

In a country with high level of unemployment and high dependency ratio, social-economic, cultural and political development is of paramount importance. This explains why in Nigeria since the last two decades, numerous efforts have been made to provide or develop programmes that focus on skill development. Such programmes include the National Youth Employment and Skill Development Programme, School on the Wheel programme, income generating programme, vocational skill development programme for women and the various empowerment programmes organized for youth and women aimed at raising their economic status or financial standing through acquisitions of skills that will promote self-reliance and independence.

Within the context of globalized economies, development and education or skill training become even more urgent and complex. The key question is what is the primary aim of development? Is it to be globally competitive? Or is it a means to an end? The general belief that the goal of globalization must be “the development of human capacities of all citizens” has led to hotly debated issues and education has been implicated in these debates. Within these debates on globalization are proposals about the importance and role of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in promoting economic development. The country is one that has a very high level of illiteracy. The illiteracy level of the country is put at over 50% of the populace by UNESCO Report of 1996. This degenerated in the next 10 years. According to UNESCO (2007), illiteracy stood at about 57% due to increasing poverty and irresponsible government. This constitutes a major obstacle to the process of development or transformation of the country.

In the sphere of politics, the country has undergone radical political change in the last decade. This means that there has been high degree of political education has not been given the serious attention that it deserves. This accounts for the low level of involvement of the majority of the citizenry in political activism and education at different levels and times. The political activities particularly at the grass root level. Education is most crucial in seeking to raise the level of political development in the country. The major problem

confronting the attempts made at raising the level of political activism or growth is low level of political education of the citizenry. The struggle for people's democracy can only be attained through proper political education or socialization. The country faces a very serious or difficult political development dilemma because of the high level of illiteracy. There is a very strong link between education and participation in societal activities including political activism. There is much evidence which links people's ability to engage in meaningful societal development with the quality and quantity of their initial education and with the diffused learning environment in which they live. Research has shown in many countries that there is strong correlation between the level of education and civic participation rates. Given the demographic profile of the illiterates in the country, unless radical steps or interventions are made to improve the level of education of the people, participation in civic task or national affairs will remain a mirage. If not done, it will probably reinforce the disparities between the educated and uneducated and the rich and poor which is inimical to growth and national development. The nation cannot grow if majority of her human resources are incapacitated by the monster called 'illiteracy'. Problems such as dependency, poverty, ignorance, unemployment and other retarding problems of development are associated with illiteracy.

Furthermore, education can help individuals acquire skills that will enable them become self-dependent by creating

their own jobs and also generating employment for others. The individuals can also be trained for skill development and as a preparation for the world of work. Aghenta (2006) points out that one of the critical requirements of education, especially functional education is the acquisition of both physical and intellectual skills which enable individuals to be self-reliant and useful members of the society. The education of people presupposes that they utilize their skills for themselves and for the society if progress to be made. A number of experiments embarked upon by organizations and bodies such as International Foundation for Education for Self-Help (IFESH), Lanbash Literacy International (LLI) have shown clearly that education can be used to help individuals to achieve self-reliance, self-relevance, self-confidence, self-pride, self-dependence and high self-concept which are necessary ingredients for promoting national development.

Research, according to Osunde and Omoruyi (2010), has proved that when education is properly planned and given contextual framework or planted in the culture of the people, can help to elevate the circumstance of the poor people. It can also help to raise the level of competence or proficiency of the workforce or manpower which, in turn, can produce a more active economy with her revenue through enhanced or high volume of goods and services and taxes contributed by the individuals to the state. The point being made here is that education can help people appreciate the need to pay and

perform other statutory obligations and duties.

There is no doubt that education has the potency of encouraging meaningful interaction and participation in societal activities, raising understanding, clear doubts and make people more enthusiastic to know about what is happening around them. It provides an avenue for obtaining information sharing, informing and acquiring knowledge. In fact, it can be used to achieve self-reliance, self-dependence, high self-concept, self-confidence which can lead to individual growth and societal upliftment.

There is no denying the fact that the high rate of dependency and lack of saleable skills on the part of beneficiaries of our initial education have been largely responsible for the low level of development and economic growth. The need to provide a more functional and relevant education has since been recognized in the country. This is because experience has shown that individuals must be made to be self-reliant and acquire skills that will enable them improve themselves and contribute more meaningfully to national development.

Conclusion/Recommendations

In conclusion, the writer has argued that education is a veritable tool for self-reliance and national development. Therefore, there is the need to continuously evaluate our educational policies and programmes so that practical skills, motivation and commitment needed for sustainable national development are vigorously pursued.

Educational programmes should be oriented towards helping beneficiaries address the issues of poor health, low income and unemployment with a view to making viable contributions to sustainable national development. Government and non-governmental agencies should as a matter of urgency tackle the problem of poor educational facilities at both formal and non-formal levels to pave way for individuals to acquire desirable skills, knowledge and attitudes for sustainable national development.

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