

REPOSITIONING EDUCATION IN NIGERIA TO TACKLE THE CHALLENGES OF POVERTY, SELF-RELIANCE AND NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Prof. Adagba Okpaga
Faculty of Social Science,
Benue State University,
Makurdi.

Education is a crucial tool for moral, social, economic, political and technological development of any society. For this reason, the importance of education to the development and sustenance of the state cannot be overemphasized. This means education is very significant in enhancing poverty eradication, self-reliance and national development. It is in recognition of this all important role of education that government all over the world have at least in principle placed high premium on educational development of their various societies. It is also in recognition of the important role of education that the United Nations General Assembly in 1948 stated that every one has the right to education which shall be compulsory at the primary level.

In Nigeria, successive governments have enunciated several policies and programs aimed at achieving qualitative education in the country. Some of these policies and programs such as Universal Primary Education (UPE), Universal Basic Education (UBE), the 6-

3-3-4 system among others have indeed failed to impact positively on qualitative education in Nigeria.

This paper therefore examines the role of the Nigerian state in promoting the educational sector with a view to recommending ways of improvement in order to strategically reposition education to tackle the challenges of poverty, self-reliance and national development in the country. In doing this, the paper intends to briefly first clarify the concepts of education, national development variant, poverty and self-reliance.

Conceptual Clarifications **Education**

The concept of education has been defined severally and differently by various scholars. Some philosophers view education from the Latin word, 'educare' that is: 'to lead'. Others have seen it as implying the transmission of what is worthwhile to those who have become committed to it. (Peter, 1973). For Okafor (1984), education is a process of acculturation through which the

individuals is helped to attain the development of his potentialities and their maximum activation when necessary, according to right reason and to achieve thereby in perfect self-fulfillments". In like manner. Chauhan (1987) sees education as the shaping of behaviour of modification of behaviour of the individuals for adjustment in the society. Dewey (1963) had earlier described education as the scientific process by means which man studies the world and accumulate knowledge which leads to useful and intellectual living. It therefore serves as a means for meeting the needs of the society. Since it has to be transmitted from one generation to another it encourages the socialization of people into the socio-political system. [Education is therefore a comprehensive endeavor that gives knowledge about all aspects of human life. It is thus, seen as formalized and institutionalized instruction to individuals or people within the society to enable them acquire relevant skills that will enable them not only to be useful to themselves but to contribute to the development of their society.

National Development

To understand what national development is, it is imperative to give some meanings of the term "nation". Barring the several conceptions of a nation, it can be said to be:

A body of people who feel themselves to be naturally linked together by certain affinities which are so strong and real for them that

they can live happily together, are dissatisfied when disrunited and cannot tolerate subjection to peoples who do not share these ties (Muir [1999] cfapparodai, 1977)

Though the foregoing definition cannot appropriately be used as the basis of calling Nigeria a nation, one may observe that because of her colonial experience and for the fact that one of the conceptions of a nation is that it must be regarded as a nation. It must also have a measure of common culture and a civic ideology, a set of common understanding and aspirations, sentiments and ideas that bind the population together in their homeland. For Nigeria however, even if all these common characteristics of a nation are not present, there are some of its elements that can be depicted. For now, Nigeria has to some extent, a historic territory created by the process of colonialism, some common behavioral tendencies and an emerging culture of political and dependent economic dispositions which it is using to forge a kind of national development that it can be called its own.

As for the concept of development, it has several meanings which we do not need to over-emphasize here. But suffice to say that it is a process that centered on the development of people in their varying capacities such as in the political, economic and social realms among others. Since politics, for instance, is operated within the instrument of the state or nation as the case may be, it is imperative that

both the nation and its various component units must share to achieve the benefits of development through taking decisions that would enhance the adequate distribution and allocation of the scarce national resources. It is from here that the process of national development takes off since decisions have to be taken in the overall interest of the nation.

From the above conception of 'nation' and 'development', we can now derive an explanation of the phrase 'national development'. From general knowledge of the phrase, it is a multi-dimensional phenomenon. Economists for instance, ascribe national development to a country's socio-economic growth, a rise in its real output per head and the attendant shifts in technological, economic and demographic characteristics (Rich, 1974). Sociologists and social anthropologists on the other hand, see national development primarily in terms of the process of differentiation that characterizes modern societies, whereas political scientists focus on political stability, national consciousness and political participation as the main indicators of national development (Adams. 1970).

A recast of the clarification of the term by UNESCO (1963) indicates that national development can be referred to as "growth plus change and organizational innovations". Thus, national development can be seen as a process of change at the level of economic, political and socio-cultural spheres, etc., that encompasses material advancement, industrialization,

scientific and technological progress and socio-cultural transformation that results in the general improvement in the welfare of the people of a given nation. If education is an aspect of national development, what then is their relationship?

Commenting on the relationship between education and national development generally, philosophers like Aristotle, Socrates and Dewey all acknowledged that formal education is a prerequisite for peace and national development. Plato in his book, *The Republic*, argued that the "good life" or felicity is obviously the end at which all men aim. The purpose of the education system therefore is to facilitate the attainment of this end. According to Curie (1970:8): "In order to develop, a country must have a very considerable promotion of trained citizens as doctors, teachers engineers, etc".

It has been in the same vein that the importance of education in national development that many policy makers have recognized it. For instance, the National Policy on Education stated that: "The Federal Government of Nigeria has adopted as an instrument par excellence for effecting national development" (FGN, 1981:5).

The above policy went further to state that education will continue to be highly rated in the national development plans, because education is the best instrument of change as any fundamental change in the intellectual **and** social

outlook of any society has to be preceded by an education revaluation. Thus, for Agocha and Okobia (1988), as societies and national development plans change, so should the education system if it is to remain relevant, useful and functional.

Poverty

The concept of poverty has no universal acceptable definition. Maclaver (1865) defines poverty as a matter of levels of sufficiency point as well as of a problem of the misdistribution of income. The World Book Encyclopedia (1982) defines poverty as the lack of enough income or resources to satisfy a person's minimum needs. To Ajakaiye and Adedeye (2001), Anyanwu (1987) and Chris (2001) poverty is defined as inability to have sufficient income for securing basic goods and services. Ukwu (2002) on his part defines poverty as a living condition in which an entity or individual is faced with economic, social, political, cultural and environmental deprivations. These deprivations include lack of food, poor drinking water, high mortality rate, no educational opportunities, poor health services, general lack of economic infrastructure and lack of participation in decision-making process.

The above definitions suggest that, poverty is a condition in which an individuals or group of persons are unable to meet basic material needs such as food, portable water, clothing, shelter, health, education, dignity and has limited chance

of advancing their welfare to the limit of their capabilities.

Self-Reliance

Ake (1985) defines self-reliance as a deliberate process or strategy for ending dependence and promoting development. This entails partial disengagement of the economy from its traditional patterns, restructuring of the patterns of relationship with the international system and re-association with the traditional partners in the industrialized world on a changed bases.

The Nigerian educational system curriculum was changed and reviewed at the attainment of independence with the aim of developing a curriculum that would meet the Nigerian desire for self-reliance and national development. To this end many policies and programs have been introduced to reform education in line with the development needs of the country.

Education, Poverty Eradication, Self-Reliance and National Development: a Dynamic Linkage

There is indeed a dynamic linkage that exist among the concept of education, poverty eradication, self-reliance and national development. This relationship centres around the fact that education propels and determines the nature, pattern and direction of poverty eradication, self-reliance and national development in any society. Abayode (1977) captures this succinctly when he argues that in a community where knowledge

(education) is not allowed to grow, that community remains largely elementary and primitive in self-reliance and national development. Such a community will therefore find it difficult to tackle the challenge of poverty eradication. Self-reliance and national development does not start with goods, rather it starts with people and their education, organization and discipline. Without these elements, all resources remain latent and untapped.

Buskirk (1976) in his analysis on how the relationship between education and national development can attain self-reliance and poverty eradication in Africa, asserts that our true source of power in the world has not been our armies and not certainly our diplomacy, but rather productive and qualitative education.

The role of education in enhancing poverty eradication, self-reliance and national development is the fathoming of the ocean of truth, the conquering of the maintain of facts and the exploration of the forest of knowledge for the development of man's intellect and improvement of his environment. Intelligence properly developed and used can eliminate all human problems including poverty and diseases.

A significant contribution on the role of education in poverty eradication, self-reliance and national development is summed up by Sanders (1955). According to him:

There are countries that,
unnecessary poverty prevails

because people as a whole are unaware of the methods whereby it can be relieved. There are vast tracks of land, abandoned or never cultivated, which could support a thinking community if full use were made of the knowledge and skills. There are innumerable people suffering from diseases which can be cured and from which by following simple scientific rules of hygiene, they need never again suffer... to raise the standard of living in any country two things are needed: scientific knowledge and population sufficiently educated to understand how to apply it. Without the latter the expected benefits of development will not come.

Having established the dialectical linkage, it is imperative to examine the objectives and goals of education in Nigeria to see whether they are capable of enhancing poverty eradication, self-reliance and national development in the country.

Objectives of Nigerian Education and their Relevance to Poverty Eradication, Self-Reliance and National Development

The National Policy on Education (1977) outlines the national educational aims and objectives as follows:

- i. The inculcation of the right types of values and attitudes for the survival of the individual and the Nigerian society.
- ii. The training of the mind in the understanding of the world around.

iii. The acquisition of appropriate skills, abilities and competences both mental and physical as equipment for the individual to live in and contribute to the development of the society.

A number of educational policies and strategies have also been put in place to address the implementation of these objectives and goals. Some of these policies and strategies are:

i. Establishment of unity schools in the 1970s. It has been the policy of the federal ministry of education to establish two federal government colleges in each state, one for girls and the other mixed. Each school is designed to be a mini Nigerian community promoting the best attitudes of a united country.

ii. Development of a citizenship curriculum. Beginning from the 1980's when the second version of the National Policy on education was published, it was wrongly felt that something had to be done to redress the well known negative situation in which Nigerians tended not to identify themselves more as belonging to a nation. They tended to identify themselves by ethnic groups. Citizenship education was therefore introduced to inculcate new values, sense of belonging and loyalty among Nigerians.

iv. Language Education Policy was evolved where children are taught in their mother tongue in primary schools while two other Nigerian languages were made compulsory for students in junior secondary schools.

v. The introduction of social studies curriculum with cultural creative arts designed to take pupils back to their cultural roots, interstate excursions were also promoted with students exchange programs given prominence.

vi. The Introduction of National Youth Service, the enactment of the principle of National character and national spread in the admission formula of federal universities, the promotion of inter collegiate sports etc were all intended to promote and inculcate national consciousness and unity with the enthronement of the right types of values and attitudes for the survival of the Nigerian society.

In spite of all these laudable objectives and goals of education in Nigeria and the enabling policies and strategies to implement them, the Nigerian educational system, has not solved the numerous problems faced by the Nigerian state. Some of these problems are poverty, hunger, corruption and indiscipline, technological backwardness, lack of accountability, decaying moral values, poor leadership, religious and ethnic animosity. All these have not only threatened national unity, but thwarted efforts at self-reliance and national development.

Since the attainment of political independence in 1960, many educators and well meaning Nigerians have expressed concern over the irrelevance of the Nigerian education in meeting the goals of

the nation. In spite of the phenomenal growth in the number of educational institutions in a country like Nigeria, we have not been able to eradicate illiteracy, achieve technological development, produce a stable economic and political system, functional and accountable leadership, and develop the economy to tackle unemployment, poverty and hunger in the country (Akpa 1990). For education to be tagged relevant to self-reliance and national development, it has to be tailored to present the necessary knowledge and be able to also discover how to apply that knowledge and skills more directly to solving political, economic and social problems of the society. This is derived from the fact that, employers of labour have described graduates from Nigerian universities as unemployable. If this trend is not checked the goal of eradication, self-reliance and national development cannot be achieved.

Problems Affecting Nigerian Education Today

A number of problems have affected the success and relevance of educational system in Nigeria in tackling the problem of poverty eradication, self-reliance and national development. Some of these problems are:

- i. Funding- the most significant problem facing education in Nigeria is inadequate funding. This problem of funding stems from the wrong application, use and direction of resources for the development of education in Nigeria. In spite of the huge resources of the country,

budgetary allocation to education is low. Coupled with the issue of mismanagement, development of the educational sector in the country is problematic.

- ii. Poor remuneration and lack of motivation for teachers. The poor funding and poor salary structure, **delay** and non-payment of salaries and general poor conditions of service characterizing the field of education, the context of teachers' training and work can hardly serve as instruments of self-reliance and national development in the country. The implication is that a person who is supposed to be a highly motivated agent and the arrow head of development has become so undervalued, demoralized, marginalized and virtually irrelevant to national development. It is no surprise therefore that, one of the reactions of this phenomenon in many states of the federation has been the re-emergence of a mass exodus of teachers from the nation's classrooms.

The above scenario is captured more vividly by Ukeje (1996) where he observed that:

With this state of affairs we can hardly expect much quality education in the schools and consequently cannot make the desired impact on national development. A phenomenon termed lack of job satisfaction is blamed for the instability in Nigerian education. If teachers are the real builders of **tomorrow, we**

cannot build tomorrow **with** inefficient and disgruntled builders.

It must therefore be understood that until teachers' welfare issues are promoted and tackled realistically, discussed and upgraded, Nigerian education in its present nature and scope cannot fully and systematically inculcate high moral values, high patriotic values and high professional and entrepreneurial skills in the individual to promote national development. Thus, the developments of any nation through education must abinito address these two issues to a high level of satisfaction.

iii. Political factors: Political factors have influenced the Nigerian educational system in many ways. This has so much to do with the decisions by political leaders pertaining establishment, management and provision of infrastructure such as school aids to educational institutions. Education lacks adequate government patronage due to the character of political leadership. Also people in leadership positions look at teachers and lecturers with disdain. In spite of the fact that educational institutions are the store room for knowledge, political leaders are very apprehensive about constructive criticisms from the academia. This has further made the government not to have interest in improving the **educational system especially in terms of staff welfare**

and remuneration. This has negatively affected the desire for poverty eradication, self-reliance and national development.

Repositioning Education for Poverty Eradication, Self-Reliance and National Development in Nigeria

Any development strategy is a conscious direction of state policies and actions towards certain specific objectives. The attainment of these objectives are thought by those in power to bring about desirable changes in the structure of society and economy. The success of any development strategy therefore is contingent upon the extent to which it has achieved its objectives. However, the direction of state policies and actions cannot be neutral, since the state itself is not. Therefore the choice of a particular development strategy or policy and return of the struggle among socio-economic groups for the control of the resources of power and appropriation of wealth in the production process. The direction of policy at any given time in Nigeria today is hence a product of the objective interest of the social class which controls the state. The state is thus a stage on which policies are articulated in the objective interest of those in power irrespective of whether such other policies are inimical to the interests of other social groups (Abdullahi 1985). It is on this basis that we will assess the nature of policies evolved by the Nigerian state in propelling education for poverty eradication, self reliance and national development.

The fundamental philosophy that has guided the direction of educational policies in Nigeria since independence has been the development of high level of manpower or human capacity for increased productivity (Akangbru 1989). However, this has failed as many Nigerian graduates cannot write a formal application letter. This problem is derived from poor funding of educational institutions, inadequate remuneration, declining value system among others. In order to reposition self-reliance and national development in the country, the following are recommended:

i. Government should improve funding of the educational sector. In order to have an effective and efficient educational system, the federal, state and local government should increase budgetary allocation to education so as to have enough infrastructure to aid teaching and learning. Lack of proper learning environment has indeed affected the performance and productivity of staff and students. In most primary schools in the country pupils sit on the floor to receive teaching while most universities do not have enough lecture rooms and office accommodation to facilitate teaching and learning. If the educational sector is to be repositioned to promote self-reliance and sustainable development, proper funding is crucial.

ii. There is need to reform the value system of students and teachers. Values re-orientation is very crucial and significant

given the negative attitudes of students and teachers. The decline in educational development and knowledge acquisition is developed from the lack of commitment by students. Most students are not ready to settle down and read but go about lecturers and teachers soliciting for marks, many students who are in secondary schools and higher institutions engage themselves in cult activities and use this to intimidate and harass teachers and lecturers. When such students finally graduate through their dubious means, they are virtually unemployable.

Similarly, the attitudes of some teachers and lecturers cannot promote the development of education in the country. Many lecturers and teachers are first and foremost not qualified to teach. They find their position as a way of earning a living hence many of them sell marks to students. These values on the part of students and lecturers cannot indeed facilitate the promotion of education for self-reliance and national development. In order to therefore reposition the Nigerian education for poverty eradication, self-reliance and national development, there is the need to encourage positive ethical values by both teachers and students.

iii. The government should encourage science and technical education in the country. The zeal and enthusiasm shown by the government in promoting science and technical education has indeed not been sustained. In Benue State for example the only government technical college has been abandoned by

the government. Government has not paid salaries of staff for two years and thus has negatively affected effective learning in the college. Science education is also not given the requisite attention it deserves. Most science oriented schools are not equipped with requisite equipments and chemicals needed for practicals. It therefore becomes difficult for students to learn and understand what they are supposed to practice. The medical students of Benue State University do not have access to practicals due to the absence of a teaching hospital. The university may graduate medical doctors who have not seen somebody being operated. This will indeed affect their practice as medical doctors. There is therefore, the need to encourage science and technical education through proper funding in order to reposition the educational sector to tackle the challenges of self-reliance and national development.

iv. The government should encourage boarding system. Most schools in recent times are predominantly day schools and this has contributed immensely to the declining standard of education. Students from boarding schools often do better than those in day schools. It is important, therefore that, government should enact a legislation in support of boarding system and at the same time subsidize it to enable the sustenance of the system.

v. Deliberate effort should be made by the government to directly link education with social and economic development. A program of mass

education directly linked to national production must be encourage to bring out the technical skills and innovative talents to bear on national development. This should be closely followed with reward for hard work, motivation and discipline, as fundamental values shaping development. This is because patriotism, discipline and hard work cannot be cultivated as social values for a nation when the leadership is corrupt, selfish and extravagant.

Conclusion

This paper examines the role of the Nigerian state in the promotion of education to tackle the challenges of poverty eradication, self-reliance and national development. It has been established that, the Nigerian educational system has been guided by the philosophy of developing manpower for national development. This has not been achieved due to certain problems as poor funding, poor remuneration, declining value system among others. In order to reposition the Nigerian educational system to tackle the challenges of poverty eradication, self-reliance and national development, the government has to improve funding, enhance the promotion of positive ethical education, and review the educational curriculum to link education to the goals of attaining self-reliance and national development.

References

Abayode, O. (1977) "*The Transmission of Intellect*", Convocation Lecture at University of Ife, 17th December, 1977.

- Abdullahi, M.D. (1999) Vision, Mission and Motion of Science and Technology in Nigeria", in Kabiru, A (eds) *Vision, Mission and Motion of Science and Technology in Nigeria: The Challenges of the 21st Century*, Kaduna: NCCE Publication.
- Agogo, P. (2006) "Dr George Akume's Giant Strides in Education Sub-sector in Benue State (1999-2007)" In P.T. Ortege (ed) *Towards Functional and Qualitative Education in Nigeria*, Makurdi: Destiny Ventures.
- Agocha, O. & Okobia, S.O. (1988) "*NCE-Level Teacher Training for the First Tier of the New School System in Nigeria: An Appraisal*" Unpublished Paper Presented at the 7th Annual Conference of the Curriculum Association of Nigeria, held at the University of Calabar, September 25-29.
- Akangbou, S.A. (1989) "Educational Management and Programs 1951-1984". in Tamuno and A. Aland (ed) *Nigeria Since Independence. The First 25 Years*, Nigeria: Heinemann Educational Books.
- Akawe, T. (1992) "*Thirty years of Nigeria's Rural Development: A Critical Appraisal*", Paper Presented at the School of Social Sciences Week, College of Education, Katsina-Ala.
- Ake, C. (1981) *A Political Economy of Africa*. Lagos: Longman.
- Akpa, G.O. (1990) *Management for Quality Education in Nigeria*, Jos: Ehinder Press.
- Aristotle, cf Appadorai (1977) *The Substance of Politics*, Madras: Oxford University Press.
- Amayo & Ehigie, S.T. (2005) *Education for Tomorrow*, Ibadan: Estate Publishers Limited.
- Anyanwu, J.C. (1997) "Poverty in Nigeria: Concepts, Measurement and Development" in *Proceedings of the 1997 Annual Conference of NES*.
- Buskirk, H.R. (1976) (ed) *Concepts of Business: An Introduction to the Business System*, Texas: Oak Press.
- Chauhan, J. (1987) *Education Strategy for Developing Societies*. London Tavistock.
- Dewey, J. (1963) *Reconstruction in Philosophy*. Boston: Beacon Press.
- Federal Government of Nigeria (1977) National Policy on Education.
- Okafor, F.C. (1984) *Philosophy of Education and the Third World Perspectives*. Enugu: Star Publishing Company.

- Ortese, P.T. (2007) "*Education for Poverty Alleviation in Nigeria*", Paper Presented at a Workshop on Youth Employment held at Benue State University, Makurdi.
- Peters, R.S., ed. (1973) *The Concept of Education*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.
- Rich, J.M. (1974) *Challenge and Response: Education in American Culture*. New York: John Wiley and Sons.
- Rodney, W. (1972) *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*. Enugu: Ikenga Publishers.
- Sanders, H.H. (1955) *Teaching of Science in Tropical Secondary Schools*, London: Oxford Press.
- UNESCO (1963) *Economic and Social Aspects of Education Planning*. Paris: UNESCO HEP.
- Ukeje, B.O. (1996) "Teacher Education for National Development" In P.N Lassa (ed) *Education: An imperative for National Development*, Kaduna: NCCE Publication.
- World Bank (1982) *The Pursuit of Sustained Poverty Reduction*, Washington: IBRD.