

SOCIAL STUDIES: A TOOL FOR POVERTY ERADICATION AND SELF-RELIANCE FOR NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract

This paper sees Social Studies as one fundamental tool for realizing the national aim of poverty eradication and enhancing self reliance for national development. It reviews the concept of Social Studies and briefly examined the aims and objectives of Social Studies in the primary and junior secondary schools. The paper went further to discuss how Social Studies can be used as a tool for poverty eradication, self reliance and national development. Finally, summary and conclusions were drawn.

The race of mankind will perish if it seizes to check the level of poverty that exists in the society. Poverty is a naked enemy. It can be assessed objectively and subjectively. It is the oldest and yet unresolved social problem. Historically, the problem of poverty started with the early formation of human society. Societies of the past and present are either stratified between the slaves and slave owners, feudal lords and serfs, or the capitalist and working class.

There are different forms of social divisions which are simply translated into divisions between 'haves' and 'have not's' or 'rich' and 'poor'. The rich are of course the better opportune, privileged, educated, and sheltered, the healthier and secured social groups, while the poor are the complete

opposite-deprive state the form, of increased criminal behavior, deprivation, denial and lack. The vision 2010 report (1998) estimated that over 50% of Nigerians, living below the poverty line would experience absolute poverty. Absolute poverty according to the report is the inability to provide for means of sustenance like food, clothing, shelter clean water, basic education, health care, and transportation.

Clarification of Concept

Poverty

The popular notion about poverty is that, to date there is no single definition of poverty. The concept of poverty is defined according to individual's perception looking at different circumstances. According to Ajakaiye (1998) a review of the massive literature

on poverty shows that a standard concept of poverty remain elusive because of its multi dimensional nature as well as its dynamic properties.

Harlem and herald (1980) defined poverty as absolute issues which involve human needs and are measured in terms of resources required to maintain health and physical efficiency. The World Bank (1990) views poverty as the lack of the capability to attain a minimum standard of living. This directly relates to inaccessibility to food, clothing, shelter, education, health service and clean water, to mention but a few (cited in Oyeyinka, 2001). Poverty is perceived by poor Africans to include alienation from the community, food insecurity, crowded homes and usage of unsafe and inefficient forms of energy, lack of jobs that are adequately paid and/or secure and fragmentation of the family.

Eradication

Oxford advanced learner's dictionary sees eradication as to destroy or get rid of something completely, especially something bad. Olaitan (2001) defined poverty eradication as the removal of factors that contribute to the suffering of mankind. He further explained that poverty eradication is the elimination or minimizing of all factors-that contribute to poverty among people, groups, societies and nations.

Self Reliance

Self reliance depicts a considerable measure of self-worth-actualization, self-recognition and self-fulfillment, self-

reliance is the inherent trait in man to seek to assert the right and ability to set his own goals and strive to realize them through his own efforts using his own resources, Ghana, (1989) in Mathew, (1999) defined self-reliance as the 'derive', the necessity, the freedom, the capacity, the willingness and the resolve of a people to define, articulate and struggle to achieve their own goals of individual, community and national development through their own indigenous effort, indigenous institutions and programmes designed and operated by the people themselves.

In the words of Chairman Mao Tse-Tung (1945), self-reliance is "re-generation through our own efforts" he further said that "the people and them alone are the motive force in making world history and that the masses have boundless creative power".

Further more, as posited by Ake, (2001:140) self-reliance is about responsibility in the context of development, responsibility for producing a development project as well as providing the resources to carry through.

National Development

National development is quite nebulous or amorphous as it entails political, social, economic, cultural, scientific and technological dimensions.

The concept is misleading when one categorizes nations into "developed" "developing" and "underdeveloped". However, Ololobou (1999) saw

development as an advancement from low level to a higher level of political, social, economic, scientific, and technological maturity and organization of a society. In its simple form, national development is the ability of a country in question to improve the social welfare of the people e.g. by providing social amenities like quality education, clean water, transportation, infrastructure, medical care (<http://wild.answers.com/Q/what-is-national-development>).

Concept of Social Studies

Ololobou's (1989) conceptualization of Social Studies deserves noting. To him Social Studies is an organized, integrated study of man and his environment, both physical and social, emphasizing on cognition functional skills and desirable attitudes and actions for the purpose of producing an effective citizenry. An often quoted definition provided by Kissock, cited by Okojie (2007:11) depicts Social Studies as "a programme of study which a society uses to instill in students the knowledge, skills attitudes and actions it considers important concerning the relationships human beings have with each other, their world and themselves. Aina (1982:11) cut the long story short when they defined Social Studies as "a study of man in his totality.

Ololobou (1999) explained that Social Studies in Nigeria seeks to re-establish the pre-colonial African educational values, which include honesty, hard-work, mutual cooperation, consent and conformity to traditional social order.

Social Studies objectives according to Aina (1982) include:

- i. To make students aware of the problems of their country and of the world in general and to appreciate the interdependence between peoples.
- ii. To create an awareness and understanding of the evolving social and physical environment, its natural, man-made, cultural and spiritual resources together with the rational use and conservation of these resources, for development;
- iii. To develop a capacity to learn and to acquire skills essential for the formation of a satisfactory professional life (e.g a pride in the job and sound judgment);
- iv. To become responsible and disciplined individuals capable of and willing to contribute to the development of their societies.
- v. To develop the capacity to recognize the many dimension's of being human in different cultural and social context.
- vi. To develop a sense of solidarity and sharing based on a sense of security in one's own identity.

Social Studies, a Tool for Poverty Eradication and Self Reliance for National Development

In Nigeria today, poverty has become a household name. Majority of the

country's population according to statistics released by the National Bureau of Statistics are poor. The report said, 80.7% Nigerians consider themselves to be poor in 2010, against 75.5% recorded in 2004. Nigeria's condition became worse in the 1980s, when government officials and public servants developed a penchant for ineffectiveness', corruption, mismanagement, disrespect for the rule of law and brazen looting of the country's treasure. The report said Nigeria's minimal standard of feeding, clothing, health care and shelter stood at 60.9% in 2010 against 54.7% recorded in 2004.

Poverty level in Nigeria is rising with almost 100 million people living on less than a dollar per day, despite the economic growth in the country. These trends have increased further in 2011. The Bureau's on-going Annual socio-economic survey, which would be completed later this year, showed that there was a marginal increase of about 2.5% in the poverty rate above the 69% rate (about 115.23om) recorded in 2010, while 112.52m or 67.38% are recorded to be living below poverty line. The situation is likely to worsen with the recent economic crises as a result of the hike in the cost of fuel, which resulted in increased cost of goods and services by over 100% as well as decline in the purchasing power of most Nigerians especially those at the-grassroots.

Despite the fact that there were several programmes put in place by International bodies such as: United

Nations (UN), World Bank International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the like which hold sway, yet such terms as 'poverty alleviation', 'poverty reduction' 'poverty eradication', 'poverty elimination', 'attack on poverty', 'action on poverty and war against poverty' etc still remain elusive.

Social Studies as an integrated course of study aims at inculcating the spirit of nationalism and patriotism in the minds of the citizenry especially among the youths who are leaders of tomorrow to check the issue of inefficiency and inequality among the people of Nigeria. As a multi-disciplinary field of study, Social Studies draw generalizations from various fields of study, in an attempt to solve the ever evolving social problems of man in society. It is a viable tool for solving the problem of poverty for national development.

Poverty as a multi-faced phenomenon caused by lack of food, clothing, shelter and employment can be checked through skills acquisition which is essential for the formation of a satisfactory professional life; that will enable the teaming population to be self-reliant for national development.

One of the cardinal objectives of social studies is the development in the student, positive attitudes and values of honesty, integrity, hard work and patience. These attitudes and values are essential ingredients in making an effective citizen in a society where individuals respect one another.

As mentioned earlier, complete eradication of poverty is rather too ambitious in any society but can be achieved through a long term project targeted at increase in productive potentials and the income of the poor. Although, different programmes were introduced during the past few decades by the governments of Nigeria to reduce or eradicate poverty, which range from Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP). National Directorate for Employment, (NDE) Better Life Programme (BLP) Family Support Programme (FSP) etc. Social Studies as an orientation or training of individuals to become functional and effective members in society is a veritable tool for achieving the objectives of these programmes.

As a discipline, social studies was conceived to not only correct the past experiences but also to create a path to self-reliance and national development. The recognition of the dimensionality of human beings in different cultures and social contexts exposes individuals to the multi-dimensional faces of social problems. Poverty as a social problem can be tackled through concerted efforts of all citizens for national development.

Social studies as a vehicle and a driving force toward solving societal problems furthers educational advancement to promote trade and crafts in the society and aid the development of projects of poverty eradication for meaningful development.

Conclusion

Poverty is a social problem. Its effects are not limited to the poor alone but permeate through the entire society. It connotes lack of minimum requirement for acceptable and desirable living. Based on the foregoing discussion It is clear that Nigeria and/or Nigerians are deep in the 'Mud' of poverty and that several efforts were made through different window-dressing programmes of Government to help the country and its citizens out of the 'Mud' for the realization of self-reliance for national development.

However, Social Studies as a discipline calls for concerted effort of all to galvanize minds as well as to dedicate ourselves to the eradication of poverty for national development.

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