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## Basic Education Curriculum for Sustainable Economic Development: The Nigeria Experience

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By

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### Abstract

*The World Education Forum in 2000 at Dakar endorsed Education for All (EFA) by the year 2015, affirming the significance of education at all levels. This is to meet the basic learning needs of children, youths, and adult in area of literacy, oral expression, numeracy among others. The declaration has prompted various countries in the world like African states to take certain measures towards re-aligning and re-structuring curriculum in their education system to meet the international standard. The author therefore, used the new 9-year basic education curriculum developed by the Nigerian Educational Research and Development Council (NERDC) to illustrate how the new curriculum can empower a child to create job, generate wealth, eradicate poverty, be economically viable and above all become self-reliance in an effort to actualize Nigerian vision 2020. The problems of insecurity, poor funding, corruption and lack of infrastructural facilities were highlighted as impediments to this new innovation. It was finally recommended that apart from inadequate funding and security challenges, other African countries should emulate the Nigerian new basic education curriculum for a sustainable economic development in African states beyond 2015.*

The non-access to basic education in some parts of the world is a source of worry to the stakeholders in the sector. Burnett (2008 p.2) notes that 774 million adults worldwide lack basic skills as measured by the conventional methods. Similarly, many countries' educational systems have been slow to adopt to economic crisis and other factors that erode quality. What is being taught in schools is not always relevant any

more. According to Cyberschool (2013) when educational programmes exist out of context, without a bearing on the surrounding job market, or on the local culture, sooner or later they lose their clients. In essence, Educational system in African states needs to be reviewed to keep abreast with the global trend.

It is in realization of this, that the world Education Forum converged in April, 2000 at Dakar Senegal to re-reposition education sector worldwide. The major issues that dominated the conference include: Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE), Universal Primary Education (UPE), Learning needs of young people, adult literacy, gender parity/equity and quality education.

These goals were targeted towards expanding educational opportunities for children, youths, and adults by 2015. Matsuura (2008p.i) further stated that the outcome of Dakar convention enabled participants to “endorse a comprehensive vision of education anchored in human rights affirming the importance of learning at all ages and measures to reach the poorest, most vulnerable and most disadvantaged groups in the society”.

Following the Dakar resolutions, various countries in the world reviewed their educational policies and curriculum to enable them meet the 2015 target by Education For All (EFA) on the conviction that basic education is imperative for economic development of any nation. Some of the countries (UNESCO, 2008 report in EFA Pp.221-231) include:

**Cambodia:** in her educational plan of 2000-2010 incorporated Dakar EFA goals and initiated new basic curriculum.

Eritrea: emphasized new curriculum including HIV-Aid education on her educational policy, and road map.

**India:** in 2002 amended her constitution to make education a fundamental right for ages between 6-14, and developed new curriculums on child centered education.

Dominican Republic: in her plan Decenal and general law of education 1993-2002 reformed her curriculum and emphasized ICT education.

**China:** The strategic plan on education aligned with EFA goals and developed new national curriculum. Government efforts to eliminate illiteracy motivated by the desire to have faster economic development.

**Morocco:** in 2000-2009 promulgated National Policy on Education that focuses on training of character and promotion of basic education Revision of existing curriculum was made based on local circumstances in both formal and non-formal education.

**Mozambique:** embarked on new curriculum for primary education including mother-tongue. Abolished school fees based on 1995 Education Policy.

**Pakistan:** emphasized the need for a new curriculum in her national Education plan for EFA goals 2000-2010.

**Philippines:** revised her school curriculum to accommodate culture in diversity.

South-Africa: revised National Curriculum introduced in 1977 to include basic education for all.

**Nigeria:** in 2004 reviewed National Policy on Education to emphasize basic education. Thus, NPE (2004 p. 8) states that “Basic Education shall be 9-years duration comprising of 6 years primary education and 3 years junior secondary education. It shall be free and compulsory”.

As a follow-up to this, Nigerian Educational Research Council and Development (NERDC) was mandated to develop new basic education curriculum for basic 1-3, 4-6 and JS 1-3 respectively. In the presentation that follows an attempt will be made to demonstrate how the new basic education curriculum by NERDC can aid and sustain economic development of African states.

### **The Nigeria 9 Year Basic Education Curriculum**

Basic education is defined as the whole range of educational activities taking place in various stages (formal and non-formal education) to meet up the basic needs of the learners. Clynych and Mchain (2011) state that it is the competencies, knowledge, attitudes, values and motivations that are deemed necessary in order for the people to become fully literate and to have developed the educational foundations for a lifelong learning journey.

Consequently, to actualize the dreams of basic education, the Nigeria government felt the need to develop a curriculum that reflects the aims and objective of basic education – hence new basic education curriculum. The Nigeria new basic education curriculum is unique in that it is developed to encourage a child create job, generate wealth, acquire skills, be culturally oriented, have Information and Communication Technology (ICT)/Computer training etc that can make him self-reliance, eradicate poverty and employ others. It also exhibits principles of sustainability 1-3 which livable communities initiative (2000) listed as maintaining the quality life of a community, enhancing local economic vitality and the promotion of social and intergenerational equity.

They further explained that principles of sustainability take into cognizance that:

*Quality of life or livability – differs from community to community. It has many components, income, education, health care, housing, employment, legal rights on one hand; exposure to crime, pollution, diseases, disaster and risk on the other ... A viable local economy is essential to sustainability which includes job opportunity and provision of infrastructure, facilities, services and a suitable business and climate... to everyone, regardless of ethnicity, cultural background, religion or other characteristics. (Liveable Initiative, 2000).*

Curriculum according to Obioma (2007) reflects “the depth, appropriateness and interrelatedness of curricular content. It also represents the total experience to which all learners should be exposed to, such as the contents, performance, objective and activities for both the teacher and students”. Yenusa (2000) states that curriculum is the guided learning experiences and variety of learning activities pupils undergo under the control of a teacher. On development process, Onwuka (1981) cited in Ajileye (2013) defined curriculum as the creation of new materials and methods of presentation to ensure effective learning and ways of evaluating the process to determine whether the learning has taken place or not. She listed vital elements of curriculum as processing, planning, development, implementation and evaluation.

Based on the above criteria and definitions of Curriculum, the Nigerian Educational Research and Development Council (NERDC) in collaboration with the Universal Basic Education Commission (UBEC) in 2006 were mandated to develop a new 9 year basic education curriculum for 20 subjects (2007) and later in 2012 reduced to 10 subjects. NERDC (2012 p. II) edition lists the new UBE subjects as English Language, Mathematics, Basic Science and Technology, Religion & National Values, Cultural and Creative Arts, Business Studies, Nigerian Languages, Pre-Vocational Studies, French and Arabic.

The essence of this new arrangement is to reduce overload within and across subjects without compromising depth, appropriateness & interrelatedness of the curricular content.

Obioma (2012 p. iv) further explains that “the 9 year basic education curriculum was particularly developed for the attainment of Education For All (EFA) goals, the critical target of National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategies (NEEDS) and Millennium development Goals (MDGs)”.

The implementation of the 9-year duration is gradual and spread thus: lower basic (primary 1-3), middle basic (primary 4-6) and upper basic junior secondary school 1-3). Rufai (2012: iv) stated that the implementation of the curriculum started

nationwide in primaries 1-3 and JS 1-3 in September, 2008 with the first batch graduating in June 2010. The basic curriculum is to be taught concurrently with the old for easy transfer to the new one. This is to allow proper planning, teacher capacity, development, textbooks review, provision of learning resources, monitoring, evaluation and feed back (Obioma, 2007).

### **Implementation Strategies**

According to NPE (2004) cited in Adejanu (2013) and Ezea & Anochirionye (2013) no educational system can arise above the quality of its teachers. The Nigeria Educational Research and Development (NERDC) as one of the implementation strategies has involved National Commission for Colleges of Education (NCCE) (the regulating body of teacher education in Nigeria) and National Teachers Institute (NTI) Kaduna in the re-alignment of the basic education curriculum. These agencies train and produce teachers in Colleges of Education for primary schools. In essence the NCCE minimum standard has been re-structured to address teachers needs to basic education and the EFA goals. Explaining the role of NCCE in global trends, Junaid (2013 p.v) opines that “if NCE is to remain relevant to the sub-sector, it is intended to serve ... it must prepare teachers with knowledge and skills required to teach effectively at different levels and areas of basic education programme”.

NCCE has therefore, developed implementation framework and quality assurance toolkit to guide Colleges of Education in the country regarding the new basic education curriculum for primary schools.

Another implementation strategy by NERDC is the production of teachers guide nationwide on the new curriculum.

Furthermore, workshop and sensitization programmes have be organized for teachers between 2006-2013 in respect of the new Basic Education Curriculum.

Finally, the first edition of the New Basic Curriculum has been revised to reflect the EFA goals.

### **Emerging Issues in New Basic Curriculum**

The curriculum addressed emerging globally issues as stated in UBEC act of 2004. They include: value orientation, ICT/Computer Literacy, poverty eradication, HIV/Aids education and recently security education, under the umbrella of Religion and National values. The emerging issues fits in appropriately into the philosophy of Nigeria education (2004) and EFA goals which Ayiede (2008) affirmed that:

*At the end of the programme every learner who has gone through the 9-year basic education should have acquired appropriate level of literacy, numeracy, manipulative ability, communication and life skills as well as the ethical, moral and civil values needed for laying a social foundation for age long learning as basic for scientific and reflective thinking.*

It is therefore, expected that the new trend in the curriculum will equip learners with basic skills and knowledge as highlighted below:

**Value Orientation:** Values are what individuals, groups or society care about and adhere to vehemently in life for sustenance. The Nigerian core values include; honesty, regard and concern for the interest of others, justice, discipline, right attitude to work, courage and national consciousness (NERDC, 2012, V).

Value orientation on the other hand is an attempt made by individual, government, group of people to sensitize members of the public on the need to imbibe the culture of behaviour, doing the right thing; such as truthfulness, accountability, respect for elders, rule of law, moral integrity and love for one another.

Nigeria as an integral part of African states has these values embedded in their cultures particularly respect for elders, interest in farming, arts and crafts, honesty, receptiveness and industrious. These values are aimed at inculcating discipline in youths as they are the future leaders. They are impacted into the learners through religion and national values as well as homes, traditional rulers, peer-groups etc. Good behaviour and discipline are rudiments for economic development.

### **Entrepreneurship and Life Skills**

Acquisition of appropriate skills by learners was captured in the new basic education curriculum. Through traditional education, Nigerian child is trained in various fields of skill acquisitions like waving, sculpturing, dying of cloth, iron smiting and fabrication of farm implements. The federal government of Nigeria as a follow up, to this has established a good number of skill acquisition centers for the youths, women, girls among others. It is expected that at the end of the programme they will be empowered to establish their own centers in an effort to become self-reliance and employ others thereby, reducing youths' unemployment.

### **Peace and Dialogue**

In recent times, peace has elude some African states due to terrorism political instability, natural disasters, poverty and unemployment. Inculcating in a child the virtues of keeping peace through dialogue is one of the surest ways of sustaining economy for where this peace, progress and development abound. According to Ihedioha (2013) peace and security are the essential ingredients for economic development.

### **ICT Technology**

Between 1970 and 1990, the world witnessed technological advancement in areas of computer and information technology, such as GSM phone, websites and internet. Information technology is one of the fastest means of boosting economic

fortune of any nation through radio adverts, TV, newspapers among others. Introducing learners to the knowledge of ICT also entails training them in computer operation on the use of modern technology. Apart from GSM, accessing information from internet and websites requires computer literacy. Basic science and technology as provided by the new basic education curriculum will expose a child to ICT technology.

### **Agro-Based Industry**

One of the cultural values cherished by Nigerian citizens is farming. Parents therefore, expose their boys to farming operation between the ages of 4-8 years. In essence food crops like yam, maize, melon, cassava etc are produced in a large quantity. Similarly cash crops like coca, palm produces, kolanut, groundnut are produced in Nigeria. When guided in modern way of agricultural operation, a child can be encouraged to pick up farming as a business. To ensure quality education, both the teachers and learners need to be feed properly and remain healthy. Ezea (2006) on the important food security, “A nation can only realize her vision if the citizens are well feed... the produces from farm industries not only provide food for the teaming population but also enhance the economics status of entire nation”.

The pre-vocational studies in the UBE subject captures agriculture in the new basic education curriculum.

### **HIV-Aids**

A nation that enjoys good health is wealthy. HIV/Aids education is vital among the young ones to teach them the danger and havoc it causes on people. The symptoms and how to prevent HIV/Aids are exposed to the learners. Issues like the effect of indiscriminate sex, and promiscuity are also presented to the learner for security purposes. One of the preventive measures is that couples should remain faithful to each other and avoid unwanted sex.

### **Commercial Activities**

It is the culture of Nigeria to expose their children to commercial activities through apprenticeship like blacksmithing, carpentry, tailoring, mechanics, jewelry etc. Through this means, they learn the art of trading in various fields like food stuff, building materials, cultural artifacts, soap making etc with which they grow up to the school level. Okeke (1979) cited in Ezea (2008) noted that Nwana (1933) provided the best model for apprenticeship and commercial activities in Nigeria in his book titled *Omenuko Aku* (the first Igbo novel). He states:

*Igbo people engage in various types of commercial activities such as transportation, electronic business, textile materials etc. They invest without minding the risk it involves and this has made them to have a strong base in economic development of Nigeria.*

The commercial activities by Nigerians have aided economic development as infrastructural facilities like banks, markets, schools, hospitals and industries have been provided business men and women thereby, preparing Nigeria for the actualization of her vision 2020.

### **Security Education**

Economic growth can be deterred where insecurity abound. Exposing children to security measures at early stage will guide them to be aware of the global challenges and threats it imposes on citizens. Security education, therefore, enables a learner/child to identify security agencies like police, army, NAFDAC, FRSC and their duties. The punishments that awaits anybody who commits criminal offences, like examination malpractice, forgery and tourism are impacted to the learner.

### **How Emerging Issues in New Basic Education Curriculum Can Aid and Sustain Economic Development of African States**

Development is defined as the gradual growth of object from initial stage to an advanced one. Applying this to economic development, it therefore, according to Hornby (2006) denotes the gradual growth of trade, industry and wealth of a country to an advanced and sustained stage depends on the viability of her economy. Positive attitudes to life, work and economy of a nation determine the growth of trade, wealth etc of such a country. The inculcation of right values and good behaviour in a child like honesty, transparency and accountability as demonstrated in Religion and National Values will accelerate economic development. For any business transaction to take place, people must be trusted and depended upon without fears. These virtues are also necessary for any meaningful economic policy planning and implementation.

The culture of respect for elders as demonstrated in value orientation can boost economic development. Obedient to the rule of law, economic policies bring about business growth and peace among African states if applied.

In Nigeria, a lot of skill acquisition centers have been established by both the federal and state governments. This is mainly to empower youths to create job, generate wealth and sustain themselves as well as the economy of the nation. For instance, the Imo state government of Nigeria in May, 2013 launched “youths must work programme” in an attempt to reduce unemployment rate in the country.

In an agro-based industry, massive food production ensures food security and also provides employment for jobless youths. Nigeria is blessed with agricultural resources in both food and cash crops including animal husbandry. Youths can be encouraged through Agricultural loans to set up farms to produce food for the masses and also provide raw materials for the industry.



The knowledge of ICT/Computer as one of the emerging issues in the new curriculum is vital in any economy. The exposure of GSM phones, computer, internet and website operation to a child is very vital. First, he can source his information like learning materials and secondly earn a living through them such as using GSM to make business. NERDC (2012) notes that youth can take advantage of numerous advantages opportunities provided by science and technology to establish their own business.

Considering the current security challenges in some African States, the teaching of security education in our schools becomes imperative. Economic activities cannot thrive in an atmosphere of uncertainty, killings, terrorism, kidnapping, robbery & rapping. Exposing children to security challenges will equip them with the knowledge of identifying dangers and how to combat them in their lives.

The pandemic caused by scourge of HIV-Aids in Africa and worldwide is enormous. Through HIV-Aids education children will be taught the dangers of the disease and how to prevent them. For economic activities to be carried out, people have to be healthy and free of any dreaded disease like HIV-Aids.

### **Constraints of Basic Education Curriculum**

Although the Federal Government of Nigeria is making efforts to meet EFA targets by providing basic education to her citizens, there are challenges confronting the initiatives.

1. **Lack of infrastructural facilities:** Basic infrastructural facilities like classrooms and good environment are lacking in our schools.
2. **Inadequate funding:** Although the Universal Basic Education Commission has disbursed over 42.8 billion naira to the programme, the impact is yet to be felt in areas of training, provision of instructional materials etc.
3. **Corruption:** Is one of the greatest challenges facing education and other areas in Africa. Irregular payment of salaries and denial of public fringe benefits of civil servants also compound corruption in some African states.
4. **Epileptic power supply** seriously affects Information Technology (ICT)
5. **Scourge of HIV-Aids:** The scourge of HIV/Aids is a national disaster. It is ravaging both children, adults and youths of Nigeria and African states in general hence it impedes basic education in a big way.
6. **Interruption in implementation strategy:** Between 2004 and 2010 JSS classes were phased out in Nigeria Unity Schools, thereby creating vacuum in the full implementation of the new basic education curriculum by the Nigeria government.

7. **Poor regard to our cultural values:** generally due to influence of western world, cultural values like respect for elders is deteriorating.
8. **Unemployment:** The rate of unemployment in Nigeria and other African states is alarming due to over dependents/on white-collar job. This discourages some individuals from going to school.
9. **Poverty:** Although some African states like Nigeria made basic education free, some parents cannot afford to provide books, uniforms and food to their wards due to poverty.
10. **Insecurity:** Some African states including Nigeria is facing serious security challenges. Infrastructural facilities including lives are destroyed through act of terrorism. Kidnapping, rapping, robbery also abound thereby, creating uncertainty in the sub-Sahara African states.

### **Conclusion**

Education still remains the best instrument for social change, skill acquisition, eradication of poverty and empowerment of the youths. A nation's peaces mission and economic development are driven by the quality and functional education given to the citizens towards enhancing productivity, self-reliance and global competitiveness. The new basic education curriculum developed by Nigerian Educational Research Development (NERDC) is a sure foundation to attain EFA goals by 2015. If fully implemented, the curriculum will empower youths to create jobs, acquire necessary skills for those who could not proceed to tertiary institutions immediately thereby reducing unemployment rate, terrorism and criminal offences in African states and worldwide.

### **Recommendations**

Based on the discussion in this paper, the following recommendations are made:

1. There is need to properly fund education as well as the implementation of basic education curriculum in Nigeria and African States. Sufficient budgetary allocation in education sectors is therefore, highly recommended.
2. All African states and Nigeria in particular are encouraged to intensify teacher capacity building in the areas of training and re-training as they are the key element in curriculum implementation.
3. The sensitization programme embarked by NERDC on basic curriculum should be emulated by other countries worldwide. This is to enable teachers acquaint themselves with the new concepts like job creation, wealth generation and translate them into reality.

4. Infrastructural facilities like classrooms, cultural rooms, laboratories, educational technology center, etc be provided to make the idea of basic education curriculum functional in African states for economic development.
5. Donor agencies like World Bank, UNICEF and non-governmental agencies should assist in funding basic education curriculum and the implementation in African States.
6. Soft loan should be given to any child who distinguishes himself in the area of creativity to set up a small scale business. More acquisition centers should be established in rural areas to reach out to the most disadvantage people. Massive food production is hereby recommended for healthy citizens and economic development.
7. The campaign against HIV-Aids in African states should be intensified.
8. Government and all the stakeholders in education should take the responsibility of catering for the education of the poor, and physically challenged children in areas of feeding, schools fees and purchase of text-books.
9. An anti-corruption crusade should be introduced in offices, market, government and non-governmental agencies such as Schools, Colleges and Universities to curb the menace in the society.
10. The issue of epileptic power supply in some African States should be properly addressed. It deters information technology and access to computer.
11. Security challenges facing African states should be squarely dealt with by providing employment opportunity to our youths who are always used to perpetuate crimes in the society.
12. Quality assurance unity should be established in African schools to regulate the implementation of the new basic curriculum.
13. Teacher remuneration such as allowances, salaries, should be re-viewed in Africans states to meet the world standard as obtained in China, England and USA where a primary school teacher receives between N300,000 – N500,000 thousand naira per month.

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