

EDUCATION, THE NIGERIAN POPULATION AND GLOBALIZATION

Joan Egbe Onoja (Mrs.)

Abstract

This paper examines the present conditions of education and population in Nigeria, it comments on the quality of education and assesses the suitability of the present level of education and the effect of globalization. The outcome of the examination is that the current level of education and the quality of the Nigerian population cannot launch Nigeria advantageously into the global economy. It is contended that what is making Nigerian population less of a resource for globalization are the rapid growth of youthful population that outgrows the facilities for education and training, the poor funding of education, research and training, the resultant poor quality of education offered in the institutions, the reluctance of a large proportion of the youth to be educated, as well as the poor health conditions of the increasing youthful population. This situation has resulted in a present vicious circle of poor education, poor primary health care, poverty, rural-urban drift and unemployment, leading to rural decay and urban squalor and a human development index of 0.393 on a scale of 0 to 1. These are the challenges for Nigeria in the 21st century in relation to globalization. The paper concludes that until these problems and the equally negative driving bug known as the "Nigerian Factor" are solved, Nigeria cannot be in the driving seat of globalization. Rather she would be a backbencher, being driven to where she knows not.

Introduction

One can state with little contradiction that a well-educated and gainfully employed large population would be an asset to any country. The country will be able to gain from the present call for globalization and be able to stand its grounds in relation to other countries. On the contrary, uneducated, underemployed large population would be a disastrous debit for a country in the face of globalization.

Education is the means by which such society reproduces itself in terms of passing through the new and fresh generation the shared societal culture, mode and quality of management of different sectors of the economy, technological and scientific skills and knowledge, production of new sets of people with various skilled teachers, nurses, doctors, engineers, accountants, lawyers, architect, quantity surveyors, musicians, dramatists, journalists, economists, sociologists, bankers, etc. The future of any society therefore depends on the quality of current educational system. For a nation to benefit from globalization, the quality of its population must be above average no matter how large that population is.

Globalization is multifaceted, with many important dimensions such as economic and social, political and environmental, cultural and religious. According to the IMF (1997), globalization refers to the growing economic interdependence of countries world wide through the increasing volume and variety of cross - border transaction in goods and services and of international capital flows, and also through the more rapid and wide spread diffusion of technology.

There are, of course, many alternatives or competing definitions of globalization Collier (1997), for example, defines globalization as meaning "Falling trade barriers, integrating financial market and trans national corporations". In the view of Daouas (2001): Globalization is characterized in particular, by an intensification of cross - border trade and increased financial and foreign direct Investment flows, promoted by rapid liberalization and advances in information technologies.

In trying to understand the trend that await Nigeria in the 21st Century vis-a-vis education, population and globalization, one would have to examine the trend in the current population, the quality (education-wise) of that population. The outcome of this examination should enable one to project the trend for Nigeria in this 21st Century, with special reference to the issue of globalization.

This paper would examine the present population, its growth and structure; highlight the education level in the country and the quality of the Nigerian population emanating from this and what the conditions identified pose for the country in the face of globalization.

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Nigeria Population, Growth and Structure

Many estimates exist concerning the population of Nigeria today, depending on what is the

Joan Egbe Onoja (Mrs.)

benchmark data used and the rate of growth adopted. It is fashionable to estimate the population to be about 130 million people, however, the projections made earlier might be more accurate than the current guesstimates. For example, IMPACT (1990) projected a population of 160 million for Nigeria in the year 2000 with a rate of growth put at 2.9% - a rate that the World Bank (1995) confirmed. Thus, there is no doubt that the population of Nigeria is relatively large, compared with other African countries, and that it is growing rapidly. Indeed, it does not seem that the country is doing very much to reduce the rapid growth rate. Rather, the death rate is decreasing at the face of a constantly high rate of birth. For religious and other cultural reasons, family planning methods are less adopted by married than unmarried women. The population is also young. For example, the proportion of the total population of Nigeria that is under 15 years of age is put at 45% by IMPACT (1990) and about 29% of teenage females are believed to have experienced at least one pregnancy (Population Reference Bureau - PRB, 1992), most of them before marriage. Indeed, the rate of birth among 15 - 19 year-old females in Nigeria is put at 152 per thousand (15.2%) with an infant mortality of 121 per thousand (12.1%) by PRB (1992). This yields an annual natural net increase of 3.1%. When it is assumed that about 51% of the youth in the country are females (agreed higher survival of the female child), the immensity of the problem at hand can be realized. This scenario of early pregnancy and youthful rapidly growing population prompts formal education to any appreciable level for this group of teenage women, and the children they bear are also marked for poor education. To this, one must add the widening gap between a declining death rate and a constantly high birth rate as mentioned earlier. No wonder IMPACT (1990) came to the conclusion that Africa (including Nigeria) is growing much faster than any other region of the world and that the rapid growth is recognized as a major impediment to economic and social development. We add that the rapid growth of the Nigerian population is also the greatest impediment, or challenge to quality education in the country too.

Quality of Education and the Nigerian Population

The assertion made above is especially true for a rapidly growing youthful population in Nigeria where, as Olurode (2000) puts it: Persistent strikes by teachers [have] almost crippled the educational sector with the result that youths [sic] spent less time in school. They are being forced, to the streets as hawkers and are no longer motivated or attracted to higher education. Indeed, many-of them are now actively involved in the spate of ethnic, communal, and religious violence in the country. The females among them risk teenage pregnancy, abortion and prostitution.

Of course, there are today about forty-four universities (Panel of SSAN, 2000) and as many, if not more polytechnics and over 70 colleges of education and a host of institutes in Nigeria. Ironically, in spite of the lack of interest on the part of thousands of youth for tertiary education, each of these tertiary institutions admits students beyond their capacities. Yet, those so admitted are believed to be less than one quarter of candidates qualified for tertiary education in the country. Nonetheless, under the current tertiary population situation, the facilities are stretched beyond their capacities at the same time: ...funding has declined ... and facilities in many of the institutions are in a state of disrepair. There has been brain drain with many scholars emigrating to the developed countries and others in Africa, whose economies are still buoyant (Panel of SSAN on Education, 2000).

Obi (2000) gave some reasons for this apparent irony in relation to social science research to include policy makers' suspicion and the militarization of the Nigerian social life. Thus, the goals and objectives of the tertiary institutions are not being attained in Nigeria. The right academic environment is almost completely absent, particularly in the universities (Awe, 2001), as the incessant strike actions of the teachers and non-academic staff continue unabated! The situation at the secondary school level is worse, while that at the primary school level is appalling. The only light coming forth from the education sector seems to be from some private schools that are usually too expensive for a larger proportion of Nigerian parents. The reaction of the youth in tertiary institutions to this frustrating educational condition is the emergence of campus cults with their negative, virulent, violent and essentially evil dispositions (Awe, 2001). Yet, these cults were undesirable transformations of earlier "confraternities that were established at the inception of the universities for noble ideals" (Awe, 2001). At the lower level of education, cultism, truancy and other negative attributes have emerged to replace the past diligence.

What we are trying to state is that for the youth that surrendered themselves to be educated at the tertiary level, the poor funding, the brain drain, the incessant strike actions, the dilapidated and inadequate facilities and the activities of the campus cults have combined to deny them of quality education that can make them useful labour and market resources for development. They are, therefore, as half-baked as their cousins who dropped out at the primary, or secondary school level. They are, to say the least, unemployable,' but are worse than the earlier dropouts because they tend to claim to be

Nigerian Population and Education Suitable for Globalization

Population is one of the resources of any nation since it provides labour and serves as a market. When a population provides adequate manpower and a large market with a high purchasing power it becomes a very important resource to such a nation, and will be an asset in the process of globalization. It is clear that skilled manpower or quality population is employable and is capable of generating wealth. Hence, it is a resource. What is skilled or quality, however, depends on the level of development and technological advancement of a country. For example, up to the fourth decade of the 20th century, when Nigeria was essentially a subsistence agrarian community, the knowledge of native farming was all the skill required from the population. Sons learnt this from their fathers on the job, while girls learnt trades and other domestic skills from their mothers. Thus, virtually all able-bodied persons were sufficiently equipped to be productive in that economy. Under such conditions, therefore, the larger the population, the better it was for the economy. As Olurode (2000) clearly puts it: Nigerian youths [sic] were an integral part of the society in the past, with established role expectations. Job opportunities that were open to them were then limited and broadly similar. They followed their parents to the farms, foundry [sic] or some other places where they were actively involved in various other [sic] activities.

However, the society is not static, and the Nigerian society along with the entire world has undergone great changes. As we say now, the world has become a global village, thanks to Internet and other information technological breakthroughs. Indeed, industrialization, urbanization and globalization have affected the behaviour pattern of all citizens, particularly the youth, in the world, those of Nigeria inclusive. What remains unarguably true for all societies is that the population of any society is a resource in the sense that it provides appropriate labour force and market. For labour to be appropriate, it must be of the quality that can handle the task at hand. To provide an adequate market, the population must be wisely discriminating and possess a buoyant purchasing power. Where a population fails to provide suitable manpower and market, as stated earlier, it ceases to be a resource and becomes a depleting agent of other resources - a liability.

From our argument so far, the first question that comes to one's mind would be: Is the Nigerian population as it is today an appropriate resource to benefit from globalization? The answer to this simple question is not simple. It is not a straightforward yes, or no. One may hide under the noncommittal answer that it is a potential resource, or dodge the main issue and state that it is marginally a resource. What we are trying to state is that there are some aspects of the Nigerian population that makes it a resource for globalization. Surely, Nigeria has moved from the picture painted by Onokerhoraye, (1985) that 50% of the unemployed in Nigeria were aged 18 to 25 years old and that 68.4% of the labour force were illiterate. For example, Nigeria has produced quality manpower in certain areas, and many Nigerian citizens have excelled in different fields abroad. However, it would seem that for every two well-trained Nigerians that are gainfully employed today, there are, at least, two well-trained ones that are underemployed and six that are half-baked or untrained that roam the streets (assumed estimates). The World Bank (1995) puts adult literacy in Nigeria at 51%, with secondary school enrollment as 21% of the population. Macaver (2001), quoting the UNDP, puts adult literacy at 40% in 1999. This is not showing a highly educated society, even if those being educated are willing and the facilities are excellent. It may be stated that what is making our population to be less of a source are the rapid growth of youthful population that outgrows the facilities for education and training, the poor funding of education, research and training, the resultant poor quality of education offered in the institutions, the reluctance of a large proportion of the youth to be educated, as well as the poor health conditions of the increasing youthful population. These, then, are the challenges for Nigeria in the 21st century if it is to be a driver in the globalization train. Otherwise, Nigeria would remain a backbencher that does not know where she is being driven. An

Joan Egbe Onoja (Mrs.)

answer must be found for the present vicious circle of poor education, poor primary health care, poverty, rural-urban drift and unemployment that result in rural decay and urban squalor. The result of this vicious circle is a human development index of 0.393 on a scale of 0 to 1 in 1994 that has been decreasing since then (Njoku, 2001). This does not augur well for a positive participation in globalization.

The Making of a Population and Education Suitable for Globalization

The last section has shown why the teeming millions of people in Nigeria do not constitute a useful resource base for effective participation in globalization, as they should be. Since the reasons are known, the solutions should be obvious. For example, the rate of growth should be controlled to a level that can be accommodated. There is a need to improve the quality of the people through qualitative education, proper skill training, moral renewal and adequate healthcare delivery. For one thing, in describing the problems, what to do must have become clear in each case. Also, there are many reports of committees, panels and individuals on each of the aspects mentioned that have proffered workable solutions. All that is required is to dust up these reports and adapt and implement their recommendations. Suffice here to state that to slow down the rate of growth requires some form of birth control - be it the natural abstinence, backed by enlightenment campaign. To improve the quality of the Nigerian person through education and training, adequate funding and a system that rewards and recognizes quality and merit should be put in place. Qualitative education should also produce proper skilled manpower such as medical doctors, engineers, and knowledgeable scientists that will event, develop, adapt and maintain technologies that can propel Nigeria advantageously into the global village. Such technologies will enhance productivity in all sectors of the economy and enable Nigeria to be less of a consumer than a producer in the global economy. It is then that Nigeria will not just be a dumping ground in the global market. Of course, one has to admit that apart from the obvious causes enumerated so far, there is the bug known as the "Nigerian Factor". This bug must be killed if anything positive is to be achieved in the country. This bug has made nonsense of probity, accountability, justice, honesty, fair play, merit and morality in the country. It has brought about the worship of corruption, injustice, falsehood, mediocrity, sycophancy, sharp deals, bribery, immorality and other such pervasive vices enumerated by the Independent Corrupt Practices Commission (ICPC 2000), in both private and public affairs in the country. Until this bug is killed and laid to rest, we may be managing the Nigerian population aspiring to be drivers of globalization in vain. It does not seem that the task of killing the bug is going to be easy, judging from the degree of resistance to the current crusade against corruption by many sectors of the Nigerian nation. Many people have declared the crusade as a one-man's show that is bound to fail.

However, for Nigerians to benefit meaningfully from globalization, she must overcome her present situation of low level technological development. She must pay serious attention to adaptation and adoption of technologies that can enhance the competitiveness of her economy. To enhance export development and diversification, not only should emphasis be on the development of transportation, education, telecommunication sectors as well as investment, science and technology, and also that the vigorous acquisition of technologies should become national policies.

Recommendations

In order to maximize the benefits of globalization a number of challenges have to be addressed. Some of these challenges include:

- Designing and implementing sound economic policies to promote rapid economic growth; and
- Development of human capital, technology, institutions and physical infrastructure.

Conclusion

This discourse may be concluded by re-stating that the population of this country is a potential asset for development and gainful employment that can usher the country appropriately into the global village. However, certain characteristics of the population and conditions in the country currently make the large population a burden to development, productivity and globalization. These conditions include (but are not limited to) the rapid growth of the population, its youthfulness, the lack of proper education and training, and the interplay of the Nigerian factor with these conditions. These characteristics and conditions have produced massive unemployment, underemployment

(including putting round pegs in square holes) and under-training. The conditions must be managed appropriately before the Nigerian population can supply the required labour and market as inputs into an all-round development of the Nigerian economy that can stand firm in the current globalization campaign. It is then that the country can be a globalization driver. Failing to do this means that the half-baked, half-trained, hardly healthy and shockingly corrupt large population of Nigeria will continue to remain a cog in the wheels of the country's progress and its efforts at globalization; and the current indices of economic growth and human development will continue to worsen.

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