INEQUALITY IN EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT AS A CONSEQUENCE OF HIGH POVERTY RATE IN NIGERIA: THE SOCIAL SECURITY SOLUTION

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Abstract

This paper examined inequality in educational attainment as a consequence of high poverty rate in Nigeria: the social security solution. In Nigeria, the rate of illiteracy is still high. Besides, Nigerian candidates have been experiencing mass failure in external examinations such as the West African Senior School Certificate Examinations (WASSCE). Worse still, the rate of out-of-school children in Nigeria is abysmally high as UNESCO report put it at 10.5million. This situation is worrisome. Pondering over what might be the cause of this trend, poverty is said to stand tall among the causes. What is more unfortunate is that it is creating a condition of inequality which could also ignite socio-political tension in the country. The federal government foresaw this and launched the Universal Basic Education (UBE) in 1999 and charged it with the responsibility of reducing drop out but this noble objective has not been achieved rather illiteracy and dropout is on the increase. Both the government and the entire Nigerian populace are confused on what to do to wriggle out of this condition. This paper is of the view that social security (welfare system) approach can go a long way to reducing the inequality in educational attainment if such provision is made in Nigeria.This paper has therefore explored the concept of social security, its history and its successful implementation in developed countries like Germany, Britain and even Greece. It concludes that since social security is all about reducing poverty by means of distributing resources, it would be efficacious if implemented in Nigeria. This is because the beneficiaries would use the resources to fund their education as well as the educational needs of their wards. It is therefore

recommended that the government should promulgate an enabling law to enhance implementation of social security; there should be an objective database of the poor among other things.

Poverty is a state of being poor. It is a situation that no person likes to experience. Infact it is a condition that is life-threatening hence many regard poverty as a disease. Poverty is associated with developing countries. Nigeria as a developing country has been experiencing poverty over the years. Citizens of Nigeria can hardly eat balanced diet thrice daily. Under this situation, it was not surprising that Nigerian economy came under recession in the year 2016. National Bureau of Economic Research as (cited in John – Bray, 2016: 2-3) defined recession as "a significant decline in economic activity which spreads across the economy lasting more than six months, normally visible in real Gross Domestic Product (GDP), including employment, industrial production, wholesale and retail sales".

In line with the above, World Bank has said that the poverty and unemployment rate in Nigeria has continued to increase despite the country's recent exit from recession in 2017. The rates of unemployment and underemployment increased in 2017 and poverty is estimated to have increased slightly, GDP growth in 2018 is expected to hover just over two percent, largely oil sector driven. In March 2018, the International Monetary Fund, IMF said the country needed urgent and coherent policies because Nigerians were getting poorer (Emmanuel 2018: 40).

In a similar development, Brookings Institution as cited in Muhammad (2018) states that

data from the world poverty clock show that Nigeria now has over 87 million people living in poverty. Yes the average Nigerian is a poor man, but Nigeria is a country of riches and poverty all in one: splendid wealth in few hands and abject poverty at most people's doorsteps. The number of people living in poverty has increased due to rising of disparities in the distribution of resources in the country PP18

Nigeria's poverty condition is a factor of the absence of enabling environment that would liberate people from the shackles of poverty, uplift their living standard and provide ways to assist them. The poverty situation manifests itself in various spheres of human endeavour among the Nigerian populace. For instance, the UNESCO (Cited in Nigeria, The World's Poorest Country 2018:3) stated that "Nigeria's out-of-school children are over 10.5 million. Nigeria has been associated with the worst case of tuberculosis in the world as well as the worst place to give on earth because of the high rate of infant and maternal mortality.Nigeria's National Bureau of Statistics reports over the months support the prevalence of increasing rate of poverty, unemployment, mass job loss etc (Nigeria, The World's Poorest Country 2018: 3).

The economy of Nigeria is harsh and the poverty level is so high that criminality and other forms of deviant behaviours have become a common feature. Such deviance behaviours include armed robbery, kidnapping/hostage taking,

prost
itution, sale of human beings etc. for instance, a robbery suspect Mr. JimoRaji who was arrested by the Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS) Ikeja, Lagos, said poverty was responsible for his criminality. Writing on his confessions, Isiguzo and Boniface (2011) reported that:

The suspect has told the police that suffering and hardship pushed him into crime. Adding that he had tried all kinds of odd jobs to survive but none seemed to be working, so he joined a three-man gang of robbers to improve his life pp38.

Another poverty induced crime was the case of FunkeOlubunmi who sold her three-year old daughter and was arrested and paraded at Eleweran, Ogun State Police Command Headquarters. In her words she said "I am a prostitute. I engaged in prostitution after my first husband sent me packing. So I decided to give out my daughter to a woman who gave me ₦280,000. I used the money to offset my debts". Also paraded was a self-styled Prophet, RotimiDarasimi and his accomplice, Sunday Ibunkunle, who allegedly killed Sara Olowokere, and harvested her body parts for money rituals (Nwokolo, 2017:6).

The above scenario no doubt has implications for educational attainment in the sense that the poor may be limited while the rich aspires and eventually attains the height he aspires. This paper therefore sets out to explain the concept of educational attainment, poverty, poverty rate, social security, low educational attainment and social security option.

The Concept of Academic Attainment

Attainment is more or less achievement. According to Hornby (2000: 61) attainment is something that one has learned or achieved. It also means success in achieving something". Meanwhile, school or academic achievement has been defined by Okeke (2002: 69) as "an individual's performance in class tests as well as the level of education ultimately attained".

Low Academic Attainment

Low academic attainment can be viewed in two perspectives. One is poor performance, in academics and the other is the rate of school leaving (out-of-school) children. There has been the experience of mass failure of Nigerian candidates in external examinations such as the West African Senior School Certificate Examination, WASSCE conducted by the West African Examination Council, WAEC. According to Soweto and Ogundele (2014: 8) "this year's WASSCE recorded a woeful failure with just 31.28 percent of the 529,425 candidates obtaining credits in five subjects including Mathematics and English". The failure has been described variously as "massive". It is also worthy of note that the results of the November/December, 2013 examination

popularly known as GCE (General Certificate of Education) was very poor. Nwadike reports that;

From a comparative assessment of the result, it has been declared that only about 15% of the total 300,000 candidates that sat for the exam, posted credit level passes and above in at least 5 subjects including English and Maths pp42.

The mass failure has continued unabated until the year 2018 when the attention of the National Assembly, precisely the House of Senate was drawn. The recent examinations results released by the WAEC in 2017 shows that only 34,664 out of 131,485 had five credits including English and Mathematics. The poor results over the years have been described as disgraceful (Lawal, 2018: 47).

On the second perspective of low academic attainment, it is said that enrolment in academic programmes has dropped steeply. In support of the above, Nwadike (2014: 42) stated that "the 300,000 candidates that registered for the exam (GCE, 2013) is a mere 18% or thereabout of the 1.6million candidates that wrote the exam in 2012". This shows a drop of over 80% in the following year.

The Concept of Poverty

Poverty is a state of being poor. According to Hornby (2000: 910) poor means "having very little money or not having enough money for basic needs". The basic needs of man include food, clothing and shelter.

Meanwhile, in the real sense of it, the basic needs are not limited to the three above but also include health (medicare), education, security, sanitation, electricity, mobility (vehicle) etc. These needs are so important that if any of them is lacking, it is either life threatening or keeps one sad for most parts of his life. Giving credence to the above, Haralambos, Holborn, Chapman and Moore (2013: 231) posit that the term poverty and social exclusion imply "undesirable states". People suffering from poverty or social exclusion need to be helped so that their situation can be changed. In other words, poverty and social exclusion are usually seen as social problems.

It is however, important to note that poverty is defined in absolute or relative perspective. Moreso, poverty is viewed at both individual level and national levels. According to Macionis (1994: 187) absolute poverty is "a lack of resources that is life-threatening. Most commonly, absolute poverty means lacking the minimum level of nutrition necessary for health and long – term survival".

Poverty Rate

In order to understand the term poverty rate, it is important to define poverty line or level. Hornby (2000: 910) defines poverty line or level as "the official level of income that is necessary to be able to buy the basic needs such as food and clothes and to pay for somewhere to live. With the above definition of poverty level, it then means the extent to which members or population of a given society fall below or above the poverty line is the poverty rate. It is also important to state that poverty can be viewed

at the level of individual as well as geo-political entities. Based on this, we have people regarded as wealthy or very rich such as billionaires and millionaires as well as poor people such as poverty – stricken and abject poverty. Similarly, geo-political entities are rated according to their levels of richness or otherwise. Explaining the rate of poverty in Nigeria, it is said that Nigeria is one of the few countries where the number of people living in poverty increased from 69 million in 2004 to 112 million 2010 – a rise of 69%. The period witnessed increasing number of millionaires by 44%. And considering the six geo-political zones of Nigeria, the level of poverty stood at 60.7% for the North – Central, 71.4% for the North – West, and the North – East had 69.1%. In the South-East the figure stood at 59.5%, the South – South 49.8% and the South – West 55.5%. Also the Human Development Index, HDI is a composite index which include health, education, income, livelihood, security and other indicators. If Nigeria is critically weighed in the HDI, one would see that Nigeria weighs very low. As at July 2017, Nigeria's HDI stood at 0.514 putting the country among the lowest global ranking of those in the low developing category. Indeed, out of 188 countries assessed, Nigeria was placed 152nd hence she was the only oil-producing country languishing in such ridiculous rung of the socio-economic stratum (Baje 2018: 17).

Social Security

Social security is the provisions made by the government to alleviate the sufferings of the down trodden. In some countries, it is called social protection while in European countries, it is known as welfare state. Briggs cited in Haralambos et al (2013) posits that;

Welfare state exists where governments decide that private enterprise is failing to meet what the government sees as he social needs of its citizens. The welfare state might intervene to meet such needs by providing services; or by redistributing resources to those in need through a benefits system pp231.

The excerpt above shows that government is saddled with the responsibility of overseeing how the populace is fairing and intervene where necessary. In the same vein, Abercrombie et al (2000) assert that:

The basic premise of a welfare state is that government has the responsibility for the well-being of its citizens and that this cannot be entrusted to the individual, private corporation or local community. Welfare states typically protect people against poverty by means of unemployment benefits, family allowances, income supplements for the poorly paid and old age pensions; they provide comprehensive medical care, free education and public housing. These services arefinanced by state insurance schemes and taxation pp382.

The United Nations Research Institute for social development defines social protection as the prevention, management and overcoming of situation that adversely affects people's well-being. Moreso, it consists of policies and programmes designed to reduce poverty and vulnerability by promoting efficient labour markets, diminishing people's

exposure to risks, and enhancing their capacity to manage economic and social risks, such as unemployment, exclusion, sickness, disability and old age (Oditta, 2016: 20).

It is imperative to note that while the earliest welfare state programme has been introduced to Germany in the 1880s as the national social insurance system and was imitated in Britain in 1911, African countries are yet to embrace it in the true sense of it.In fact, it was not until 2011 that African countries made a deliberate plan towards social security by including it in the agenda of their Arusha, Tanzania meeting. No doubt this was to be in consonance with the International Social Security Association, (ISSA) as it stated that the forum would offer an opportunity to debate ways and measures towards dynamic social security in the African regions diverse contexts and would be an important milestone towards future World Social Security Forum. Considering the relatively low levels of social security coverage in many African countries, covering such groups that lack access to social security including informal workers, older people with chronic and acute illness will be prioritized (Olayinka, 2011: 55).

It is however, unfortunate that even if workers welfare package is enshrined in chapter 2 of the 1999 constitution of Nigeria, its implementation was delayed for several years. The Managing Director of the Nigeria Social Insurance Trust Fund (NSIFE), MunirAbubakar faulted the Workmen's Compensation Act (WCA) of 1942 and articulated an Employees Compensation Act (ECA) which he presented to the National Conference Committee on labour in 2014. The ECA deemphasized profitability and placed high premium on social service. The merits of the scheme reported by Olayinka (2014: 27) include the following:

- Provision for an open and fair system of guaranteed and adequate compensation for all employees or their dependants for any death, injury, diseases or disability arising out of or in the course of employment.
- Provision of rehabilitation to employees with work-related disabilities as provided in the Act;
- Establish and maintain a solvent fund managed in the interest of employees and employers;
- Provides an appeal procedure that is simple, fair and accessible, with minimal delays;
- Combines efforts and resources of relevant stakeholders for the prevention of workplace disabilities, including the enforcement of occupational safety and health standards.

The above recitals show that social security or Social Insurance Trust Fund has not been given priority attention in Nigeria. The social protection system in Nigeria seem to have been legislated but at the executive level, it is only receiving lip service. This invariably had led to spontaneous rise in the poverty level with its attendant low academic attainment or inequality in educational attainment among Nigerian children and youths.

The Social Security Solution

Social security is an act made by the state or government to protect people against poverty. It is all about redistributing resources in the form of providing family allowances, income supplements for those earning very low wages or salaries, old – age pensions, unemployment benefits, public housing, free education, this explanation has free education as one of the provisions of social security, medical care etc. This being the case, it therefore stands logical that those who did not enroll for academic programmes due to poverty would not have refused to enroll if social security was hitherto provided.

The mass failure recorded in WASSCE is a factor of absence of social security. The rich or wealthy send their children to quality schools and in most cases their children are sent abroad where there is adequate infrastructure as well as qualified personnel to teach their children. On the other hand, the poor has no choice than to send their children to low quality or sub-standard schools because they cannot afford the school fees. The situation is further aggravated by the freedom to establish private schools which indicates commercialization of education. This no doubt increases the rate of inequality in educational attainment. No wonder the mass failure in WASSCE is blamed on bad policies of the government. One of the bad policies is poor budgeting. In support of this, the President of the Word Bank Group, Dr. Jim Young Kim as reported by Anaeto, Komolafe and Ujah (2018:25) stated that "Nigeria unfortunately ranks 152nd out of 157 countries in Human Development Index (HDI). Nigeria like many other African nations was in red zone because the country's health and education budgets were too low". To buttress the issues of poverty as a factor of inequality in educational attainment, the World Bank President also stated that "at present a quarter of the world's young people are unlikely to achieve their full potential because of chronic malnutrition and illness that result in stunting, which permanently affects a child's cognitive development, school, performances, and future income".

Social security or social protection is indispensable in reducing conspicuous inequality in educational attainment. This view is given credence during a Social Protection Cross Learning Summit (SPECS) 2016 in Abuja where the Vice President of Nigeria, Prof. Yemi Osibanjo said that Nigeria is fully in support of the idea behind social protection and had begun processing an enabling law that would give effect to its implementation across the board. He further stated that the social protection initiative is fundamental to erasing the gap between the rich and the poor in addition to enhancing human capital development and sustainable livelihood among all Nigerians. He also informed that Nigeria subscribes to the uniqueness of the welfare system and has formulated a National Social Safety Net Programme (NASSP) to serve as Nigeria's template to tackle poverty and inequality (Oditta 2016: 20).

Social security could serve as a panacea to poverty if resources would be redistributed. Pondering over the inequality in Nigeria published by the Oxfam on May

2017, the combined wealth of Nigerian five richest men - $29.9billion could end extreme poverty in the country. The report brought to the limelight, the large and growing gap between the rich and the poor. This exposes how the benefits of economic growth have been seized by a wealthy elite (who are quite few) at the detriment of ordinary Nigerians that are in majority (Baje, 2018: 17).

In spite of the above, it is also worth considering that since some developed countries such as Germany, Britain and even Greece have implemented welfare system (social security) and achieved success in protecting their citizens against poverty, Nigeria should also do the same thing. If social security is implemented in Nigeria, the beneficiaries could use it to either advance their education or that of their wards thereby reducing inequality in educational attainment.

Conclusion

Inequality in educational attainment has been a source of concern for all and sundry. This is because it has created tensions in the Nigerian socio-political milieu. In her bid to address this trend, the Federal Government of Nigeria launched the Universal Basic Education (UBE) in September, 1999 with the objective of reducing drastically the incidence of drop-out from the formal school system among other things. Unfortunately, the UBE could not achieve the objectives for establishing it rather Nigeria now has over 10 million out-of-school children. Therefore, since poverty is the major cause of school drop-out, provision of social security would drastically reduce the inequality in educational attainment in Nigeria. This is sequel to the fact that if resources are redistributed in the name of social security, the beneficiaries would use it to cater for their educational needs. Besides, the welfare system was successful in developed countries where it was implemented, hence it is hopeful that it would also be a success in Nigeria.

Recommendations

Based on the expositions and the conclusion drawn, the following recommendations were put forward:

1. The government should make an enabling law to enhance implementation of social security in Nigeria.
2. The millionaires and billionaires of Nigeria decent should be philanthropic conscious to enhance provision of social security.
3. There should be an objective data base of the poor.
4. The Department For International Development (DFID) should capture all the states of Nigeria in their Child Development Grant Programme (CDGP).
5. The government should reduce poverty by being proactive in resolving occupational clashes i.e. crop farmers and herdsmen as well as religious conflicts.
6. The International Social Security Association (ISSA) should aid Nigeria by calling on other international agencies and organizations to assist Nigeria.

7. Investors should come and invest in Nigeria because there is high rate of unemployment which is causing poverty and discouraging people from high educational attainment.

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