

Education as a Panacea for National Capacity Building Strategy, for Sustainable Development and Poverty Alleviation in Nigeria

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Abstract

This Paper examines education as a panacea for national capacity building for sustainable development and poverty alleviation in Nigeria. To the perspective and analytical observer of the Nigeria scenario, there are many problems in the education system which threaten its survival, development, relevance and utility. The paper discusses the role of education and its subsectors (pre-primary basic, secondary, tertiary and non-formal education) in enhancing sustainable development and poverty alleviation with a view to exploring the readiness of the country in their march towards, actualizing the set goals for economic development. This paper, in consequence, suggests key factors and the way forward for enhancing Nigerians national capacity building through education for sustainable development and poverty alleviation. To remain relevant in the global space, Nigeria must begin to make education a high priority in strategic planning, policy formulation and implementation for sustainable development and poverty alleviation.

Keywords: education, capacity building, development, poverty alleviation, Nigeria

INTRODUCTION

Education is as old as human existence on earth. Upon all the primary human life survival tools and skills, education stands out as the most singular powerful instrument of life, sharpening and retooling all the others, along the years. Education today still remains a global matter in all the nations, because of the intellectual power it produces which governs all aspect of life and sustainable development. Since 1960 when Nigeria gained political independence, the country has had governments with low capacity for people-driven and inclusive development programming options. In many of these governments, decisions on the type, location and timing of a development intervention was a function of the whims and caprices of policy makers who hardly understood the interface between development and conflict, especially in the heterogeneous society of Nigeria. Numerous development projects were poorly conceived and as a consequence, impacted negatively on the people. Needless to say that, development challenges bordering on issues of human rights, academic, political and economic inclusion were part of the causal factors of the Nigerian civil war.

The history of inadequate planning capacity in Nigeria has had destabilizing effects on development at the micro (individual), meso (community), and macro (country) levels. In particular, the politics of the exploitation of oil, the control and appropriation of the huge revenues accruable to this sector, and the political economy of systemic corruptions have remained the mainstay of the centrifugal forces that sustain conflict in the context of development. Development and conflict counts as part of

an integrated picture of the social realities that shape Nigerian educational and political economy. Nigeria's choices of development must be moderated in such a way that they are sustainable and ultimately contribute to building peace and reducing the risk of violent conflict (IPCR 2003).

Capacity building strategy deals with the policies, and factors that determine the level of productivity of a country (World Economic Forum, 2013). A country's level of productivity determines the level of prosperity it can attain as well as the rates of return obtained by investment in the country. A globally competitive economy therefore, is one that is able to achieve and sustain high rates of productivity over time through enterprises that are able to compete favorably with any enterprise anytime and anywhere around the globe. Primary and higher education are not only indicators of strategies, but are also key drivers of sustainable development and poverty alleviation for national capacity building. In other words, a country wishing to develop well-functioning institutions, efficient good market, and innovation, for example, must begin with developing a sound educational system that provides the right kind of education and training. Thus, a country's ability to absorb new technologies, to produce goods and services that can reach standards of quality and performance acceptable in international markets, to engage with the rest of the world in ways that are value creating, is intimately linked to the quality of its schools, to the priority given to training in mathematics and science, and to the existence and accessibility of specialized research and training centres. (WEF, 2006).

Thus, there is a strong relationship between the quality of a country's education system and its overall national capacity building. Highly educated workers represent a source of innovations needed to enhance labor productivity if a country's education system is unable to turn out quality graduates into its workforce, the country's productivity will be negatively affected. Therefore, this paper has been simply and precisely structured, using the thematic approach in order to identify the many type of issues the plague our education system. More importantly, suggestions have been proffered on possible and realistic remedies, strategies, and solution. The significance of this study is to form a major contribution to the knowledge bank. It may also be relevant to all stake-holder, educational planners, school administrators, academic and non academic staff, student, private sectors as well as government at all levels. In our search for credible options, and to win friends and support for the education system, we must remind leaders and followers alike that a country become wealthy only when its people are wealthy, and that development occurs only when its citizens are properly educated and empowered to participate fully in the democratic, productive national capacity building for sustainable development and poverty alleviation.

Education, therefore, plays a critical role. It equips citizens with requisite knowledge, skills and competencies. What students require to be productive and to succeed in the global economy are a blend of core academic subjects such as mathematics, physics and economics; skills such as critical thinking, problem solving and creativity; as well as literacy's such as information literacy. Digital literacy and media literacy. Thus, education institutions are challenged to adjust their programme structures, curricular, teaching methods and learning environments to adapt to these new demands. The sector must transform itself to improve its capacity to play this significant role throughout the students' learning journey, beginning with sound early childhood education through basic education to senior secondary and higher education, (Okpala 2014).

Early childhood Care Development and Education (ECCDE)

ECCDE is one of the strongest tools that Nigeria can use to build a strategy for sustainable development and poverty alleviation for future workforce. If children (0-6 age-groups) have access to good nutrition, health care and early stimulations, they will have good foundation necessary for physical and cognitive development in the subsequent years. This will in turn, improve the lives of Nigeria's next generation. Indeed, ECCDE is the most effective strategy to break the inter-generational transmission of poverty and to improve productivity and social cohesion in the long run (World Bank, 2011). If children are not given this opportunity during this critical period, when brain development is most active, it may become more difficult

and more expensive to make them become good learners later in their lives (Okpala, 2014).

Inadequate preparation for schooling and low learning achievement in primary school level could be traced to lack of preparedness for learning. Children who have not learned to read, write or do basic calculations have little chance of benefitting from higher primary school grades, their commitment to education is likely to diminish and they are more likely to drop out of school (Glick & Sahn, 2010; Liddel & Rae, 2011, cited in EFA GMR 2012). Thus, the low productivity of primary education in developing countries might be raised dramatically by substantial investments in the physical and mental development of preschool children. Research suggests that spending on pre-primary education brings the greatest return on investment (Goodnight, 2006, World Bank, 2011). Such investments yield economic returns of 7 to 18 percent, which is much higher than the returns generated by investing in financial capital (World Bank, 2011). For example, in one of the American preschool programmes, the public gained \$12.90 for every dollar spent on the program due to dollars not spent on incarceration, lower spending on education, taxes paid to public coffers because of higher earnings, and savings in public assistance costs (Calman, 2005).

In a globally competitive world, Nigeria should no longer allow children to enter school unprepared to learn and succeed. To this end, Government should make concerted effort to raise the current enrolment rate of 20%, and schools providing such education should focus on relevant content and method of delivery for children at that stage. According to Keat (2012), pre-schools should use play in a fun and purposeful way to stimulate the learning of languages and social-emotional skills as well as invoke a sense of curiosity and love for learning in children.

Basic Education

Basic education is an important phase in a child's education, when a child lays the foundation for future educational opportunities and lifelong skills. The knowledge and skills learned during basic education enables people to participate (socially, economically and politically) in their communities. Basic Education is also seen as a basic human right that frees human beings from a state of ignorance and helps to reduce the negative effects of poverty, relating in particular to health and nutrition (Webster, 2000). Universalizing quality basic education, have catapulted countries to rapid growth. One of such countries is the Republic of Korea, which rapidly expanded its education system from a gross enrolment of 70% in the 1980s to almost 100% by the late 1990s and linked skills development with broader strategies aimed at stimulating the economy (EFA GMR, 2012). In Nigeria, access to basic education has increased considerably at the national

level although it has not reached the desired 100 percent mark and number of out of school children remains high. According to a data released by UNESCO, an estimated 61 million children of primary school age are being denied their right to education globally and, Nigeria alone is home to an estimated 10.5 million (HME, 2013). WEF (2013) also reported that quality of primary education in Nigeria is as low as 2.9 and ranked 119th while enrolment into primary education ranked 144th. Thus, the Nigerian basic education programme must continue to work towards improving quantity and quality of basic education in order to increase access and provide the right education for Nigerian Children. Primary school education must be focused on education to help children build confidence and desire to continue learning. Children must also be helped to acquire the knowledge, skills, values and habits they need to thrive in a future driven by globalization and technological advancements.

Senior Secondary and Higher Education

Senior Secondary school is a crucial period in a child's learning journey during which a learner's character, career aspirations and readiness to take on responsibilities are shaped. Hence, quality secondary education is vital for creating a bright future for individuals and nations alike. As Nigeria strives to reach the goal of basic education for every child, demands for access into senior secondary school are increasing dramatically. Thus, Nigeria must continue to work hard to increase enrolment rate into senior secondary schools. This is particularly important because globalization and international competition increases demand for a more sophisticated labor force. Therefore, basic education is not enough to drive sustainable development. Workers who have received little formal education can carry out only simple manual tasks and find it much more difficult to adapt to more advanced production processes and techniques and therefore contribute less in coming up with or executing innovations (WEF, 2012). Quality higher education is therefore crucial for countries that want to go beyond simple production processes and products.

The above implies that students should be encouraged and supported to pursue education to tertiary level. Tertiary education refers to all postsecondary education including universities, polytechnics, colleges of education, technical training institutes, nursing schools, research centres, distance learning centres, etc. All these forms of tertiary education supports the production of higher order capacity necessary for sustainable development and poverty alleviation.

Non-Formal Education

Nigeria has an alarming number of adult illiterates. According to a UNESCO Report, the number of illiterate adults in Nigeria is 35 million (HME, 2013). Thus, Nigeria

is classified among the nine countries with the highest population of illiterates in the world. The group otherwise known as the E9 countries includes Nigeria, Bangladesh, Brazil, China, Egypt, India, Indonesia, Mexico and Pakistan. These nations account for about 70% of the world's population (UNESCO, 2012). Learning outcomes from non-formal learning activities have significant value which countries can leverage to reap the benefits of economic growth. It is also a means of actualizing the 'lifelong learning for all' agenda and reshaping learning to better match the needs of the 21st century knowledge economies and open societies. It is therefore important to extend education to people outside the formal schools system.

It is acknowledged that government is making significant efforts to address the illiteracy challenge. One of such efforts is the revitalization of youth and adult literacy programme to which the government had committed a total of USD 6.4 million as a fund-in-trust with UNESCO. The programme is directed towards revitalizing the delivery of adult literacy with the aim of attaining the EFA goal 4 (Reducing adult illiteracy by 50%). Government is, however, encouraged to strengthen its internal strategies to reduce illiteracy through its local agencies, with a view to making every Nigerian a productive individual. (Okpala, 2014).

Challenges of Education For Sustainable Development And Poverty Alleviation

- Existing policy framework cannot adequately support education in a global economy due to the following, among others:
 - the core principles and reasons behind policies are not sufficiently transparent.
 - inadequate fidelity in policy' implementation. i.e., some relevant parts of the education system do not support policies
 - policies are not given enough time to show results due to policy summersaults
 - Education is not adequately funded due to scarce resources and inadequate public
 - private partnership in funding education. As a result,
 - teachers' conditions of service is not good and motivating enough to make them undertake the heavier task of preparing students for an entirely new world;
 - education infrastructure such as access roads, classrooms, laboratories, etc. are in poor condition. Thus, the current learning environment cannot meet the demands of 21st century learning; etc.
 - Teachers are inadequately trained. Educator preparation programmes in Nigeria are not yet preparing their graduates to possess, teach and assess 21st century knowledge and skills. As a result, they

cannot become change agents for embedding 21st century knowledge and skills in core subjects.

- There is little emphasis on science and technology as well as technical and vocational education and training. These areas are not developed enough to aid success in global competition
- There is continuous brain drain to rich and low performing institutions outside the country.

National Capacity Building Strategy In Education (The Way forward)

Driving Nigeria's sustainable development and poverty alleviation demands educational excellence. In order for the Nigerian education system to reach the level of excellence required to reinvigorate the Nigerian economy and improve its capacity building, the following are imperative:

Globally Competitive Policies

There is need to make educational policies in Nigeria more responsive to challenges of the 21st century. Goodnight (2006) suggests policy options that can keep the education system on its toes and 'deliver answers' to the globalization challenge. Indeed, the issues of national capacity building should be made a priority in strategic planning and policy formulation in Nigeria. In doing this, Nigeria must make more effort in benchmarking highly globally competitive countries in order to formulate educational policies based on strategies that are proven to produce best results.

In this globalised economy, Nigerian educational policies should focus on issues such as:

- creating access to education i.e. making education and training widely available a point in an individual's life time.
- adopting new technologies to aid teaching and learning and increase access to education
- improving learning environments to meet the needs of educating for the global economy
- increasing focus on science, engineering and mathematics as well as Technical and vocational education and training (TVET) in order to create highly skilled technical workforce
- recruiting, rewarding, training, and honouring a new generation of talented teachers.
- ensuring that teacher preparation schools/faculties are strengthened to prepare teachers that can lead the change required for success in the 21st century, among others
- providing more advanced research and development infrastructure
- building research networks among higher education institutions in Nigeria and collaborating with international institutions
- building competitive learning systems encouraging Nigerian students to participate in international tests

-building closer cooperation between universities and industries

-building administrators, teachers and evaluators who can execute policies and innovations in education.

World-Class Teachers

The nature of teaching has changed significantly, creating an exciting and challenging time for teachers and teacher educators. Duncan (2009) believes that teaching has never been more difficult, it has never been more important, and the desperate need for more student success has never been so urgent than it is in the 21st century. Good teaching is at the heart of successful learning and development of competitive minds. Good teachers are those who can use technology to drive learning as well as weave 21st century skills into core subjects through new pedagogy. In fact, the teachers should be of the transformational type associates with new professionalism or new leadership. These are teachers empowered to transform their practice from within at their classroom level, school level, and inter-school and cluster levels. (Okpala, 2014).

Such teachers create and innovate by constantly reflecting on their practice through an established culture of learning and evolving sound teaching and learning principles from their daily work. This culture of learning enables them to view their practice from fresh perspectives each day, ask new questions and seek innovative responses to their own questions. For such teachers, each classroom encounter is an opportunity to demonstrate the learners a culture of learning emanating from an enquiring mind. The learners would see as models to emulate in their projects, group activity; community initiatives experimental groups. All of these enquiry skills prepare the learner to continue to learn and see the teacher as the new professional who serves as a resource for their continual enquiry. Within the schools that such teachers operate, a firm culture of community is rooted in the practice of school enabling them to learn from one another (Fraser, 2007).

Improved Curriculum and Instruction

In transmitting the required skills for success in the 21st century, teachers must adopt teaching methods and materials that will motivate and inspire today's learners. The 21st century learner wants to be engaged with exciting, relevant content and opportunities for learning through experience and by doing. Learners' abilities come in many forms such as visual-spatial, logical-mathematical, kinesthetic and musical, among others. In this century, learners need to be supported to enjoy success no matter where their talents lie. To this end, education institutions are challenged to adjust their programme structures, curricula, teaching and learning methods to adapt to the new demands. Educators are also responsible for monitoring changes in technologies, determining if they apply to their learners and seeking ways to use

technologies to compliment and support instructional methodologies. This is particularly important as students, outside the classroom, are often engaged with such things as playing interactive games as well as communicating and collaborating with people on Facebook. Thus, technology-rich classrooms will help reduce the gap between what students do for fun and what they are required to do in class. This will consequently increase student engagement and academic achievement (Okpala, 2014).

High Quality System Leadership And Accountability

Nigerian educational system needs to begin to pay serious attention to the issue of leaders and accountability at all levels of the educational system (schools, educational parastatals, ministries, etc). For example, teachers, who possess instructional leadership skills, should be made head teachers/principals in schools. These leaders should focus their time on instructional leadership and foster excellence in their schools. School leaders should be accountable to students; questioning if school is staying relevant to their lives while policy leaders will be accountable to employers and citizens; questioning if the system is effectively preparing young people to help meet national aspirations (CISCO Systems, 2008).

In fact, leaders in the education system should be leaders who can ask and seek answers to the following critical questions used by The National School for Boards Association in America to gauge the competitiveness of their education system:-

- What are our goals for enhancing the competitiveness of our students? What assumptions, data, and comparisons are we using to set these goals and how do we achieve them?
- Is the breadth and depth of our curriculum sufficient to teach our students what they need to know? Are our textbooks up to date?
- How are we integrating 21st century skills into core subject matter curricula?
- Do our math and science teachers possess specialized training or expertise in the subject areas that they teach?
- How many Advanced Placement courses do we offer? What are the scores of the students who take AP exams?
- What are we doing about students at risk of dropping out? Are we able to identify them?
- Do we have connections with the university community that can help to enrich our curriculum?
- What opportunities, both in class and extracurricular, do we offer to engage students in STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) fields? Should we be offering more?
- Are we working with our business community to ensure that what students are learning is relevant and applicable to the work force?

Increased Investment in Education

People are the primary resources of every nation. Improving the quality of citizens and making them

productive individuals plays a critical role in improving the capacity building strategy of Nigeria. Thus, it is important to make education a priority in national budget. Moreover, research has shown that investment in education is more profitable than investment in financial capital.

CONCLUSION

As mentioned earlier, this paper examined education as a panacea for national capacity building for sustainable development and poverty alleviation in Nigeria. There is certainly critical need for reorientation, sensitizations, national rebirth and rebranding in the educational system in Nigeria for sustainable development.

The preparedness of the Nigerian educational system to provide necessary support for sustainable development still leaves much to be desired. The system is yet to be of such quality that would turn out people who have the right mix of knowledge, skills, literacies and attitudes into the Nigerian workforce and, therefore, can not effectively help the country improve her national capacity building. This is as a result of supportive policy framework, inadequate funding and lack of qualified teachers among others. It is therefore, important that the suggestions made for enhancing education for sustainable development and poverty alleviation should be given serious consideration, bearing in mind that education not only enhances the productive life of individuals but also the entire economic leverage of a nation.

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