

DEMOCRACY, GOOD GOVERNANCE and DEVELOPMENT in AFRICA



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Education for Sustainable Development in Africa: An Appraisal with Focus on Nigerian Experience

Patrick U. Nwosu

Introduction

Generally, when one talks about African development, it ends up being a talk about Africa's underdevelopment. This clearly points to the undeniable fact that Africa is in dire need of development particularly from within the continent itself. In this regard, there cannot be any sustainable development in Africa without self-initiated, holistic education. The education that is key to the continent's development is that which leads the individual to a holistic self-discovery and in turn empowers the individual to add value to the society. It is the education that prepares one to appreciate and cherish African values and potentials. Unfortunately, the reality on the ground in many African countries is the fact that unsuitable educational and economic approaches are the principal causes of the continent wasting chances of development. Most African countries, particularly Nigeria pattern their educational institutions in line with colonial masters' style instead of developing indigenous system. This attitude works against African rich pre-colonial educational system. The pre-colonial African educational system allows one to develop himself/herself and in turn contribute to the development of the society. Functionalism in the light of the common good of the greatest number was the guiding principle of education in traditional African society.

In the light of the above, the objective of this chapter is to make a critical appraisal of education in the context of sustainable development in Africa. Applying historical and analytical methods, the chapter proceeds in the following sub-themes: Africa and

Development, Indigenous Education in Africa, Nature of Education that Guarantees African Development, and in conclusion, the chapter submits that the type of education that contributes to the development of a people must take account of the specific context and essential values of the people. Therefore, an educated African capable of enhancing development in Africa cannot be a visitor to his/her own people.

Africa is a continent riddled with legions of developmental problems of multi-faceted nature. Many of the problems have their origins in what is popularly described as “the scramble for Africa”. The scramble for Africa commonly means “the carving up of the African continent into some thirty colonies and protectorates, that was a byproduct of the aggressive competition amongst the European imperialists in the 19th century” (Shorter 2006: 23). Amongst many other descriptions of Africa, one could describe the continent as a compact of land mass with an area of about 29,952,000 square kilometres. This is approximately 22.4% of the whole land on earth. The vegetation of Africa ranges from tropical rain forest and mangroves swamps to mountain tundra, and the soil from tropical red earths to podols (Nwosu 2011: 5). But very sadly, the scramble gave European nations alone ten million square miles of the new territory. The French occupied Algiers in 1830. Ten years on, an unnecessary border dispute was used as a pretext for annexing Tunisia. At the Berlin conference, Germany, with British and American backing, gave approval to the creation of the Congo Free State. With great feelings, Achebe (2012) writes of this scramble for Africa:

The rain that beat Africa began four or five hundred years ago, from the “discovery” of Africa by Europe, through the transatlantic slave trade, to the Berlin conference of 1885. That controversial gathering of the world’s leading European powers precipitated what we now call the scramble for Africa, which created new boundaries that did violence to Africa’s ancient societies and resulted in tension prone modern states. It took

place without Africa consultation or representation, to say the least (p. 1).

Consequently, France, Britain, Germany and Belgium consolidated their position in the areas allocated to them: the Sahara, the lake regions of East and Central Africa, and the Niger Basin of West Africa.

The scramble for Africa has militated against socio-economic, spiritual political and educational development of the continent. Shorter (2006: 24) expresses the situation thus:

These areas of Africa were already a prey to violence and inter ethnic conflict precipitated by the slave trade; ...the colonial incursion roused strong resistance on the part of African rulers and aggravated their domestic wars. In 1982 an already violent situation was being rendered more violent. Every step of colonial annexation provoked resistance and the consequences of resistance were devastating.

Achebe's recent work, corroborating Shorter's sentiments, reveals a distinctive portrait of post-colonial Africa. He notes in the work that "Africa's post-colonial disposition is the result of a people who have lost the habit of ruling themselves" (Achebe 2012: 2). Added to the foregoing, is also the difficulty of managing the various systems foisted upon African nations upon the dawn of independence by the colonial masters, educational institutions that are key to sustainable development inclusive.

The reality on ground in Africa is that unsuitable educational and economic approaches are the major causes of the continent's illusive attempts to sustainable development. There cannot be any sustainable development in Africa without appropriate home-grown education. The pre-colonial African educational system comes to mind here. It is a system that allows one to develop himself/herself and in turn contribute to the development of society. Functionalism in the context of the common good of the greatest number was the

guiding principle of education or training in the ancient African society.

Education and Sustainable Development

Etymologically, the word education comes from the Latin root “*educō-ere*” meaning “to lead out”, to bring out (Wormald 1962: 331). Education leads one to a comprehensive self-discovery and actualization. It is about the actualization of the innate potentialities in the individual. The individual, through educational process, gradually manifests his/her potentialities and capabilities. In their study of Philosophical Foundations of Education, Ozmon and Craver (1976: xi) observe that: “Education is involved with both the world of ideas and the world of practical activity; good ideas can lead to good practices and good practices lead to good ideas”. In other words, the educational process of self-discovery is not only to benefit the individual, but also benefits the larger society. This is because education contributes to the growth of society. The essential fact of education is recounted by Onwuka (2002) when he cited Japan as an instance of a nation that developed rapidly through education. He notes that education “is the instrument to be used in transforming any society. Through education, developments of various kinds occur; development in terms of health, environments, transport, and so many other good qualities of life occur” (2002: 16). He went further to say that “in Japan, during the Meiji the Restoration in 1868, education was employed as an instrument par excellence for national policy and was used to cultivate the cardinal virtues of the Shinto philosophy of filial piety, benevolence, justice, propriety, intelligence, and fidelity” (2002: 17). Till date, the handing on of these cardinal virtues to the young ones is the function of the school.

In the light of the above, education is interrelated with the development and direction a society takes; education policy makers and educators, including the students must become aware of this if they don't yet know. Furthermore, education involves the passing on of the cultural heritage of a people from one generation to the

next. This is the case to assure that essential social and cultural continuity exists. Education also provides skills, abilities, and understanding to develop new ways of doing things in light of changing conditions. But the question is: did the Western-oriented education brought to Africa aim at sustainable development?

Responding to this fundamental concern, Rodney (2009: 293) strongly insists that the Western-oriented education introduced to Africa "was not an educational system designed to give young people confidence and pride as members of African societies." It was a system of education geared towards African underdevelopment. Fafunwa (2004: 70), on his own part, notes that the missionaries and colonizers undertook the business of education not because they regarded education as good for Africans but because they found that they could not do their work properly without giving the people the tool of reading and writing. Shorter (2006: 198) admits the limitations of Western and missionary education projects in Africa and gave a fair summary of their objective thus: we do not want to create scholars but educated people, formed for Christianity, for a serious life and for reflection.

Sadly, in pursuing their educational objectives the missionaries sowed seeds of discrimination and even violence in the African soil. Between 1892 to 1914, mutual intolerance of one kind or another was characteristic of all Christian denominations in Africa and this has lingered till date. In terms of educational curricular in most African universities, especially in Nigeria, the drivers ignore the crucial aspect of pre-colonial African education that was relevant to Africans and pattern activities after the colonial system. Olupona (1992) attests to this when he writes:

The University of Nigeria, Nsukka, presents a somewhat different programme. As a university that was modelled after the American university system before the civil war, it had some of the best expatriate scholars [...] in Nigeria who had all along encouraged the scientific study of religions (p. 189).

At the same time, the concept of sustainable development, linked to the culture of 'consumption', has entered into crisis. Indeed, the availability of the many real benefits provided in recent times by science and technology, including world-wide-web (www), bring freedom from every form of slavery. Yet, David O'Brien and Thomas Shannon (2010) note that this super development, which consists in an excessive availability of every kind of information and material goods are for the benefits of certain social groups. The super development mistaken for sustainable development: "easily makes people slaves of possession with no other horizon than multiplication of the things already owned with others still better" (p.442).

In trying to achieve sustainable development, that dimension which is specific to human nature must not be lost. Human beings are to be seen always as bodily and spiritual (Gen. 2: 7). Hence, the Brandt Commission report defines sustainable development as "meeting the needs of the present generation without compromising the needs of future generation" (p.135). Put another way, sustainable development should be an everlasting process. It is needed to stress on the quality of life of the people through increase in the real income per-capita, improvement in the education, health and general quality of life and above all, improvement in the quality of natural environment.

The foregoing stresses two fundamental things. The first is that sustainable development cannot be excluded from economic advancement, and closely tied to this, is the fact that development that is sustainable go along with functional educational system. Many other definitions of the concept of sustainable development could be adduced, but suffice it to state that sustainable development entails four important factors: economic, social, environmental and educational framework. Ekanem (2010) confirms this when he argues, "sustainable development aims at bettering people's health and education opportunities, giving everyone the chance to participate in public life, helping to ensure a clean environment and promoting intergeneration equity" (p.37).

Africa and the Development Discourse

Reflecting on Africa from an integral human context, one sees a continent that is rich in biodiversity, rich in aquatic and wildlife. In addition to this treasure the continent is also endowed with oil, gas and many other mineral resources, combined with in-depth search for God expressed in African Religion.

However, modern foundational structures and the coming of new religions in Africa set in motion the present day development challenges on the land. At the foundational base of contemporary African economic, political, educational and social blocks is a strong systemic structure of poverty that has economic interest protection as an objective (Nwosu 2010: 66). The typical poor African country is dependent for foreign earnings on the export of one or two agricultural products such as tea, coffee, or beef. In Nigeria, it is crude oil. In this regard, Dor (1984) notes that the development situation in Africa is that in which "the economy... was reorganised to serve the interest of the imperial powers" (p.53). Not only were the outside boundaries of the continent decided by the West at the Berlin Conference, but the continuous internal exploitation of the economy has been arranged by the West ever since (Mayson 2010: 104). At the heart of the developmental crisis in Africa is the continued ownership and control of the resources by the imperial powers and unaccountable African governments and elite. The consequence of this, as being witnessed today is the loss of human society and the community expressed through social bias, racism and cultural boastfulness associated with capitalist mind-set. Mayson's study shows that disharmony now characterises the developmental lives and relationships in Africa. She writes:

The economic worldview of the West, trying so desperately to take over Africa, is based on making profits. A repeated failure demonstrates that this approach does not work. Africa knows that the only profitable path is an economy based on shared, compassionate, cooperative, collective democracy. The alternative is extinction (Mayson 2010: 109).

On his own part, Nnoruka (1998) describes the African developmental efforts as a near scramble for existence. He argues that:

Much of the continent has turned into a battle ground of contending dooms: over population, poverty, starvation, illiteracy, corruption, social breakdown, over crowded cities, war and of war refugees. African has thus become... a vast continent in a free for all, a sort of new-post colonial breakdown (p.242).

Certain factors like political instability and corrupt practices legitimise African woes.

Above all, inappropriate economic policies and misplaced educational approaches are the principal causes of the continent's wasting chances of development. Most African countries, instead of developing and diversifying agriculture, try in vain to industrialise at a time when it is clear that much of the rest of the world is already well on its way into the industrial age (Nnoruka 1998: 242). Worst still, African countries, in their haste to catch up with Western industrialisation, actively but unconsciously discourage agriculture, which constitutes basic strength for most countries. This is not good for African sustainable development. Mayson (2010) imagines what ought to have happened in Africa. She writes:

Africa had plenty of land and resources and people to develop from prehistory to a modern educated and productive state in a century, as the United States and Australian had done. The original root of Africa's wealth was its agricultural potential, which could be developed to provide support for the vast move to the urban centers, where an industrialized population could turn Africa's mineral and manufacturing potential into the full experience of a people enjoying economic and cultural liberation (p.103).

But where is the African developmental and educational framework to achieve this?

Development concerns basically the individual, and sustainable development is the extent to which one realises his/her potentials and attains social integration. Development starts with the individual person anchored on education. Opoku (1985) puts it succinctly: "Development as the realisation of the potentialities of a human society or nation involves the attainment of certain desirable ends, and the surest means of attaining those ends is through education" (pp.69-70). Sustainable development in Africa must take into consideration the person as a whole. African continent would be developed when all parts of societal aspirations are held in balance. What consciousness does Africa hold towards suitable education that can result to sustainable development? The form of consciousness expressed in the *Africanness* of education is the concern of the next sub-headings.

Pre-colonial Education in Africa

No appraisal of education and sustainable development in Africa is complete without adequate attention to the indigenous educational system prevalent in the continent before the advent of colonialism. Indigenous education in Africa is as old as African continent. Nnoruka (1998) offers some valuable insight into indigenous education in Africa. He writes: Africa before its contact with Western civilizations had a rich educational system. The young man who followed this educational system developed himself and eventually contributed to the development of society (pp.243-244). Pragmatism or functionalism that aims at the common good of the greatest number was the guiding principle of education in ancient African society. In other words, education was conceived as a means to an end and not an end in itself. Social responsibility, job orientation, political participation, spiritual and ethical values were important components of African education. Children learnt by imitation. Fafunwa (2004) emphasised that, they (children) together

with the adults “engaged in participatory education through ceremonies, rituals, imitation, recitation and demonstration” (p.2).

· In African setting, farming, fishing, weaving, cooking, carving, and knitting and so on form practical courses learnt by doing. There were recreational courses which included wrestling, dancing, drumming, racing and other displays. Munyaradzi Mawere in the work *‘The Struggle of African Indigenous Knowledge System in an Age of Globalisation: A Case for Children Traditional Games in South-eastern Zimbabwe’*, offers plausible insight to the forgoing. Following the same line of thought, Nnoruka (1998) submits that “the periods were normally moonlight and the venue the public square. There was also a system of intellectual training. The courses were local history, legends, the environment, poetry, reasoning, riddles, proverbs, storytelling, and so on” (p.244). These were courses in the class of Mathematics, Zoology, Biology, Geography, Physics, Music, Dance, etc. In this regard, Fafunwa (2004) explains:

Education in old Africa was an integrated experience. It combined physical training with character building and mutual activity with intellectual training. At the end of each stage, demarcated either by age level or years of exposure, the child was given a practical test relevant to his experience and level of development and in terms of the job to be done. This was a continuous assessment which eventually culminated in a passing out ceremony, or initiation into adulthood (p.2).

Education during this period had a focus and objective. It was functional because the curriculum was relevant to the needs of the society. Hardly did men and women roam the villages and towns because of unemployment. The number of unemployed young men and women was very minimal. Fafunwa (2004) further summarises the cardinal contents and totality of indigenous education in Africa as the:

Aggregate of all the processes by which a young adult develops the abilities, attitudes and other forms of behaviour

which are of positive value to the society in which he lives; it is a process for transmitting culture in terms of continuity and growth for disseminating knowledge either to ensure social control or to guarantee rational direction of the society (p. 3).

Education in ancient Africa enabled people to develop a sense of belonging in order to participate actively in family and community affairs. It also empowered people to understand, appreciate and promote the cultural heritage of the entire community.

Nature of Education that Guarantees African Sustainable Development

At this point of the discourse, the fundamental question that comes to mind is: what system of education could contribute to African development? Put another way, what kind of education could enable Africans to develop Africa today? It is education that gives one sufficient opportunity to develop a mental capacity and exposure beyond the immediate environment while at the same time allows him/her to appreciate age-long African values. The educated person becomes in truth African while at the same time open up to other cultures. The recipient of this education appreciates African values and imperative categories such as solidarity or *umunacra* in Igbo, hospitality and respect for elders. To achieve this Nnoruka (1998) pointedly argues that "the study of African values is important... because we find ourselves in a historical setting where vice is extolled at the expense of value..." (p.245). For instance, in traditional African setting leadership was for service. But today most of African leaders are self-centred and lacking in good governance.

The study of African values here implies a critical approach to the world view of African forebears, a revival of their values a renaissance approach to the study of values; knowledge of what values are. A highlight of the possible course content on the Igbo practices of solidarity as a value may be helpful here. The Igbo of

Southeastern Nigeria promote the quality of life of the individual and the community through solidarity. It is through solidarity that the actualisation of the possibilities of the individual person receives the opportunity to express his/her individuality, develops hi/her personality and fully becomes the kind of person he/she want to be. In this way, the community life progresses as well. Taylor (1999) affirms this fact when he writes that human persons can “only develop their characteristically human capacities in society. The claim is that living in society *with others* is a necessary condition of the development of rationality, in some sense of [...] becoming a fully responsible being” (p.190; emphasis original). Although Taylor (1999) used the word “society” which does not have the same meaning with African sense of community, his submission adds more force to the fact that solidarity and unity are inseparable aspect of Igbo social life and by extension African social life. It enriches the quality of African life and hence promotes happiness among members of the community.

The willingness and disposition to live together for purposes of sustainable development is a basic aspect of African social life. Ezekwonna (2005) gives a hermeneutic nexus between sustainable development and Africa within the contexts of education. He writes:

The individual remains part of the whole in his own complexity expressing the ultimate reality. He is placed in a given context which is the community where his reality is actualised. Whatever individuals do is done in the context of the community as a whole (p. 38).

Given the nexus between the individual and the community in Africa, the active participation of all improves the quality of life of the African. In this way, Africans are dictated by their society to be “viable, resilient, industrious, tenacious, achieving people, and experienced in ways of group life, including groups other than those of a kinship nature” (Carlston 1968: 210). In Africa, the individual cannot alienate himself/herself from community life.

From the context of the meaning of development education, Equiano (1967) gives a rich appreciation of African social education. He writes: "agriculture is our chief employment, and everyone, even the children and women, are engaged in it. Thus we are all habituated to labour from our earliest years. Everyone contributes something to the common stock, and as we are unacquainted with idleness we have no beggars" (Equiano 1967: 8). Equiano (1967) explains that solidarity is achieved in Africa as a result of hard work and cooperation on the part of every member of the community. In order that solidarity could promote the quality of life every member of the community must be active. The course content on solidarity should conclude by strongly emphasising the important point that solidarity is an inseparable aspect of African social life. It is the ingredient which gives flavour to African life.

Again, the content of the educational system under discourse should be general and at the same time particular. The general includes the various expression of African culture: myths, folklore, songs, proverbs, plays, symbols, artefacts and so on. The knowledge of them encourages critical thinking among people and elicits strong responses that may form basis for shared discussion. The particular enables the individual to undertake specific studies that appeal to him/her as a person. The history Africans study should not just end with general information. It should pay attention to particular history of one's locality and kindred. This is very relevant based on the observation of Nnoruka (1998) that "there are some who pass out from universities as graduates without being able to explain the meaning of their family names; beyond their nuclear family, they know almost nothing about their kindred" (p. 247). Against this perspective of specific history, Stewart (1862) argues for the value of the study of history. He writes: "history is replete with instruction, and suggestive of duty. It takes the experience of others and offers it to ourselves, admonishing us to shun their virtues. No person can read a faithful history without advantage..." (p.1). For Stewart (1862) the merit of historical study is more than moral instruction.

The Guardian of Friday, May 22, 2015 confirms the point being made in favour of pre-colonial African education. The Newspaper reports about a Nigerian woman with no formal education but lectured at Harvard, and other top Universities. The woman's name is Nike Okundaye. Nike never went to school to study art. Vocational training in art was passed down to her by her great grandmother. "Watching her great grandmother in the art of *Adire* (a fabrics indigenous to the Yorubas in Nigeria) textile processing and helping her out, Nike walked up the line to become an expert in *Adire* making, dyeing, weaving, painting and embroidery" (*The Guardian*, Friday, May 22, 2015: 5). Nike is today a world acclaimed artist and textile designer. She brings vivid imagination as well as a wealth of history and African tradition into the production of *Adire*. Her works are celebrated in major capitals of the world, with her designs exhibited in countries like the USA, Belgium, Germany, Japan and Italy, to mention just a few. As an accomplished artist, Nike has taught in several universities in the US, imparting the knowledge of her traditional *Adire* designs in many students from across the world. Interestingly, all the education she had all the time was the traditional education that her parents pass onto their children, not the formal education one gets in a classroom. This is the practical and indigenous education that can guarantee sustainable development in Africa.

So far, it has been emphasised that the education that can guarantee African development is one that prepares the recipient to steadily assimilate cherished African value. Such as system of education cannot be lacking in focus. A product of such a system will be one properly formed as an authentic African person. However, the basic challenge here bothers on personal identity. The nature and nurture that play vital roles in the formation of personal identity are not the same in every environment. Be that as it may, for any person to be authentic there must be reflection of the past circumstances of birth, early childhood influences and other realities that shaped one's view of the world.

The issue of personal identity is quite difficult for the African considering the impasse that many African societies find

themselves. It is on the one hand the failure to recognise the identity and importance of every individual in society. There is often the problem of the gap between the rich and the poor, the education and non-education. The educations often and arrogantly think that it is their exclusive right to determine the destiny of others. On the other hand, there are times in African society when you find "irrational adhesion to some traditional ways of life. The principle is: 'it has been so, so it is and so will it continue to be' (Nnoruka 1998: 248). The rationale behind such ways of life, at times, is never critically evaluated and put in perspective. Through the indigenous education system, with focus on African development, as being advocated, some of these challenges would be improved through critical analyses.

The African social impasse requires a radical system of education, radical enough to give to African society the type of character that pragmatism gave to American society in the face of the unduly intellectual idealism that marked the 19th century (Ozmon and Craver 1981: 96). To achieve this, the course contents of African education should be a gradual pedagogical process which, if well carried out, makes the learner at each stage of learning more mature. The maturity will manifest in critical analysis and applications to the benefits of the greatest number. The end product is positive progress and recognition of the diversity among individuals and their circumstances of up-bringing.

The thesis of the chapter is that for education to contribute to African development, it must first appreciate indigenous values and contribution to the development of the African. The African developed through this process becomes a well- educated citizen of African continent. The well-informed African represents a high level of knowledge. His/her principal guide is the development of the continent. He/she is wise especially in respect of the choices being made, knowing that what is irrelevant today could be relevant tomorrow (Nnoruka 199: 249). Schutz (1962) explains that the opinions of well-educated are reasonably founded and verifiable in particular fields. The well-educated is perfectly qualified to make proper assessment of issues and situations. An African well-

information citizen is, therefore able to form a judgment concerning contradictory experts and make more or less well-founded decisions for one's own actions (p.351). Put another way, the educated African does not accept unreflectively any assertion. He or she appreciates the values inherent in African culture, accepts the inputs of others to the development of the continent. At the same time, the individual rejects as abnormal and false the assertion of outsiders telling the African stories

Conclusion

From the various submissions above, it is clear that only education matched with the spiritual and social realities of African society can bring about African development. Such education grows from the environment. The study claims that it is indigenous education system that is best suited in this context. The indigenous education stresses the importance of seeing one in relation to all the experiences he/she encounters in the environment, not just classroom experiences. Through the indigenous process of education, people are looked at in terms of cognitive, physical and emotional development. Other factors that serve to influence and shape lives are also considered as general and particular histories.

Also, the chapter submits that it is time African concepts and categories are used as media of instruction. At the start, there may be deficiencies, but Africans must be bold to make a start.

The chapter concludes that effects of sustainable development cannot be the same in all parts of Africa. For education of a people, it must take account of the specific values of the people. Therefore, for education to be a tool of sustainable development in Africa with focus on Nigeria, sufficient chance must be given to the individual to assimilate the fundamental African values. To this end, a well-educated African will be at home with his/her environment and with his/her own people. He/she through critical study of the values of the people rejects excesses and advocates the mean. It is, in the totality of these, that indigenous education can enhance sustainable development in all African countries.

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