

**CULTURE, SCIENCE
AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT
IN AFRICA**

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FOREWORD

The animating idea behind this collection is *Sustainable Development in Africa* across the full range of disciplines and professions in culture and science. Our central objective is the study of the achievement of growth, in all its aspects, in Africa within acceptable levels of global resource depletion, and the avoidance of environmental and mental pollution.

We hold this volume to be the first in a continuing series to grow out of our joint conferences in order to sustain the vision of home-grown scholarship. Our aim is to provide a forum for scholarly presentations and debate that will itself be sustained in the coming years. The point is for our two Universities to shine new light on shared problems in our sub-region and Africa, to synthesise current research, and to highlight best practices towards balanced continental development for our benefit and that of mankind.

We take this opportunity to express our deep appreciation to all who made this fine publication a reality. Finally, we look forward to growing this collaboration into a permanent feature of our universities.

Vice Chancellor
University of Cape Coast

TABLE OF CONTENT

AUTHOR

TITLE

PAGE

SECTION ONE AGRICULTURAL SCIENCE

A. Muhammad-Lawal, O.A. Omotesho & T.T. Adediran	An Assessment of Relative Poverty Situation in Nigeria: The Case of the Rural Households in Osun State, Western Nigeria	1
S. A. Ogunlade, Aderinoye-Abdulwahab & A. E. Ipadeola	Animal Waste Management among Livestock Farmers in Ojoo Farm Settlement, Lagos, Nigeria: Implication for Extension Programme Development	15
Joseph Adjei Kwarteng & Nathan Adu-Gyimah	Higher Agricultural Education and the Challenges of Sustainable Agricultural Development in Africa	22
I. Ogunlade, S.A. Adebayo, O. Coulibaly & S.A. Ajiboye	Determination of Sustainable Agricultural Practices Among Farmers in Ogbomoso Farm Settlement in Oyo State, Nigeria	30
H. C. Owolabi & I. Ogunlade	Evaluation of Kwara State Government Initiatives and Extension Challenges in Agricultural Development	38
Richard W. N. Yeboah	They Know it Let us Ask Them: Farmers' Understanding of Climate Variability in Bongo District, Upper East Region, Ghana	47

Edward Ntifo-Siaw &
Adam Babatu

Forecasting Mining-Induced
Vulnerability Among Farming
Communities- A Conceptual
Framework

68

Martin Bosompem &
Isaac Nunoo

Effect of Gold Mining on Cocoa
Production: A Case Study in the
Asutifi District of the Brong Ahafo
Region, Ghana

90

M.A. Belewu & J.O Olajide

Lesser Known Seed: A Renewable
Pathway for Sustainable Animal
Production in Africa

103

O.A. Omotesho &
A. Muhammad-Lawal

Optimal Food Combination for
Rural Households' Food Security
in Kwara State, Nigeria

113

J. O. Atteh

Participatory Approach to
Sustainable Agricultural
Development In Africa

127

Lawrence Acheampong, L.
Ernest Okorley &
Eric Gbedemah

Prospects of Inland Fish Farming
for Sustainable Fish Resource
Management and Development in
the Central Region Of Ghana

136

K. L. Ayorinde

Sustainable Food Production in
Africa: Emerging Issues

145

SECTION TWO ARTS

Oyeronke Olademo

Gender and the Environment in
Yoruba Religion: A Focus on
Water Bodies

155

Abdullahi Abubakar

Historicism and Political Dialectics
in Osofisan's Nkrumah Ni...Africa-
Ni and Rotimi's Ovonramwen Nogbaisi

166

Mahfouz A. Adedimeji	Towards A Pragma-Integrative Approach to the Teaching of 'Use of English' in Nigeria: A Case for Human Development	178	Lasiele Alabi Yahaya & A. A. G. Jimoh	Factors in the Rate of Acceptance of HIV/AIDS Voluntary Counselling and Testing (VCT) in Kwara State	301
Greg Mbajorgu	Literature and the Quest for Provision of Potable Water in Rural Communities - A Study of Wota Na Wota Experiment	194	R.A. Shehu, S.A. Onasanya & U. Nnabueze	Nutritional Lifestyle of the People of Kaduna State, Nigeria: The Need for Educational Intervention	311
Rafiu Ibrahim Adebayo	A Study of Some Factors Contending with Sustainable Development in Nigeria: A Muslim Perspective	206	L. A. Yahaya, A.O. Oniye & M. L. A. Mulikat	Counselling and Poverty Alleviation	320
Kwame Osei Kwarteng & Mary Akosua Seiwa Owusu	Populorum Progressio Versus Environmental Degradation: A Re-Examination of the Agrarian Revolution in the Ghanaian Forest Belt	229	D.O. Durosaro &	Poverty Eradication and Social Inclusion: The Panaceas to Sustainable Development in Africa	331
Tayo Simeon Arinde	Theatre as a Mechanism for the Prevention and Management of Hazard and Disaster for Sustainable Development in Africa	238	I. A. Durosaro Isaac Olakanmi Abimbola	Scientific Literacy and the African Worldview: Implications for Sustainable Development of Science Education in Africa	344
Zakariyau I. Oseni	Two Animal Tricksters in the Arabic Fables of Two African Writers: Shawqi And Ogunbiyi	254	SECTION FOUR ICT		
			J.K.E. Edumadze & F. Annor-Frempong	Gender Differences in Computer Access and Literacy -Among Agricultural Students at University of Cape Coast in Ghana	363
			F. Annor-Frempong & J.K.E. Edumadze	The Use of the Internet among Agricultural Students at University of Cape Coast in Ghana	377
			L.O. Aina	Challenges of Managing Indigenous Knowledge in an African Setting	388
			O.V. Mejabi & A.O. Babatunde	The Web as a Medium for Communicating Research Works From African Universities: Case Study of a Nigerian University	397
SECTION THREE EDUCATION					
Olubisi Olasehinde-Williams	Academic Integrity and Sustainable Educational Development: Implications for Sustainable Development in Africa	275			
R.A. Shehu, S.A. Onasanya & U. Nnabueze	Gender as a Determinant of Individual Lifestyle for Sustainable Development in Africa	291			

COUNSELLING AND POVERTY ALLEVIATION

L. A. Yahaya

A.O. Oniye

M. L. A. Mulikat

Department of Counsellor Education
University of Ilorin, Nigeria

Abstract

Counselling is an enlightened process whereby professional counsellors assist in facilitating growth and development among clients through an exercise of self understanding. Poverty is an age long problem which has characterized the developing nations. The effects of poverty on individuals and the society at large cannot be over stressed. For instance: Poverty leads to ignorance, malnutrition, poor health, begging, and prostitution, child labour, child-trafficking and other social exclusion problems. Poverty is also capable of setting stage for deviance. Counselling as an essential part of education, aims at assisting individuals to actualize their potentials in order to reduce and eradicate poverty, illiteracy, diseases, ignorance, prostitution and other forms of negativity hindering national development. In view of need to equip individuals with the necessary knowledge and skills needed to contribute meaningfully to national development, this paper highlights the usefulness of counselling in alleviating poverty and offers some suggestions on how counselling can be employed to reduce poverty in Nigeria.

Introduction

Counselling is an enlightened process whereby professional counsellors assist in facilitating growth and development among clients through an exercise of self understanding. Poverty is defined as "a condition or act of being deficient" (New Thesaurus Dictionary). It can also be referred to as a want, an extreme need, often financial (Idowu, 2003). Ifeoma (2008) stated that poverty is synonymous to abjection, aridity, bankruptcy, barrenness, emptiness, hardship, impoverishment, indigence, impecuniousness, meagreness, penniless, pinch, reduction, starvation, underdevelopment, & scarcity among others.

A nation is poor if a fair proportion of her population lives under poverty condition whereby they lack basic needs such as nutritious food, clothing, clean water, clean environment, health care and easy means of transportation and communication (Katende, 2008). Nigeria Human Development Report (NHDR)

(2001) estimates put the percentage of the poor at between 66 and 70 (Ocholi, 2003). Nigeria Human Development Index (HDI) value at the dawn of the third Millennium and the twenty-first century ranked among the lowest in the world. All the twenty-three countries with lower HDI values have been classified as least developed countries. Nigeria is a major producer and exporter of crude oil and she occupies a top position among the Organisation of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) but the country is one of the most backward in terms of development among all other OPEC countries.

Katende (2008) identified corruption, lack of capacity to harness available natural resources, over population, inadequate education and employment opportunities, mismanagement of available resources, insufficient natural and human resources and environmental degradation.

The effects of poverty on individuals and the society cannot be overstressed. For instance, poverty leads to malnutrition, poor health, ignorance, illiteracy and can well set stage for deviance among the populace. Also it leads to migration of people from rural to urban areas thereby overstressing the available services. The influx of rural dwellers into urban areas without any productive capabilities is a potential source of increase in the level of poverty and social vices. The consequences of this include high rate of prostitution, robbery, drug peddling and use, general insecurity and disregard for human life.

Poverty is an aged long problem, which has led to the introduction of various alleviation strategies. At independence, in 1960 and for the best part of the 1960s, poverty eradication efforts in Nigeria centred on education, which was seen as the key to economic, technological and intellectual development of the nation, as stipulated in National Policy on Education. Nigeria's First President, Late Nnamdi Azikiwe was quoted to have said "show the light, and the people will find the way". Thus, education programmes were implemented alongside agricultural extension services which encouraged increased food production.

However, the oil boom in the 1970s skewed this outlook as rising global oil prices boosted export from N4 billion in 1975 to N26 billion in 1980. By the time oil prices fell, so did the nation's export receipts. Prior to 1960 the federal office of statistics estimated that 15% of Nigerian population was poor but by 1980 the percentage has risen to 28% and by 1985 to 46%. In 1996, poverty incidence in the country was 66% and by 1999 the United Nations human poverty index placed Nigeria among the 25 poorest countries in the world.

Various measures were put in place by successive governments to alleviate poverty, these include Operation Feed the Nation (OFN) by the administration of General Olusegun Obasanjo (1971), Green Revolution by President Sheu Shagari (1979-1983); War Against Indiscipline by General Muhammed Buhari (1983-1985), General Ibrahim Babangida (1985-1993) however introduced a number of poverty alleviation programmes which include People's Bank and Community Banks, (meant to provide loans to prospective Entrepreneurs), Directorate of Food, Roads and Rural Infrastructure (DFFRI), Nigerian Agricultural Land Development Authority (NALDA) and the National Directorate of Employment (NDE). During the reign of Late General Sanni Abacha (1993-1998), the Family Economic Advancement Programme (FEAP) was established to fight the poverty scourge. It must also be recalled that spouses of the Heads of state also joined in the fight against poverty with novel programmes such as Better life for Rural Women and Family Support Programme (FSP) by Mrs. Mariam Babangida and Mrs. Mariam Sani Abacha respectively.

With the advent of the third republic (May, 1999), National Poverty Eradication Programme (NAPEP) was introduced to be a central coordination platform for all anti-poverty efforts from the local government level to the national level. On assumption of office on May 29 2007, President Umar Musa Yar'Adua also unfolded his innovative 7-point Agenda. The aim of the Agenda was to fast-track socio-economic development of Nigeria. He also endorsed vision 2020 which is the projection that by the year 2020, Nigeria should be one of the world's top 20 economies. The visioning process is useful and much needed, but Goldman Sachs (A leading global investment banking, securities and investment management firm) emphasized that research findings has pointed to a wide range of conditions that are critical to ensure solid growth performance. He noted for instance, that getting the right institutions as well as the right policies are important ingredients for meaningful socio-economic development. He also cited higher education as one of the critical factor for successful economic growth and poverty reduction. It is imperative to note at this juncture that for higher education to produce the needed high level manpower for economic and technological advancement of any nation counselling for self understanding, skill acquisition and potential actualization is required.

Erwin, Guerrero and Gretchen (1999) stressed the need to design educational programmes, which are tools for liberating human beings from poverty, in line with the societal needs. It is obvious that counselling as helping service is needed now more than before as means of:

- a. Assisting individuals to access information for enhancing their effectiveness in their field of endeavour.
- b. Training individuals to work cooperatively and productively with a wide range of people to set and pursue education and career goals; and to evaluate their achievement in life.
- c. Encouraging people to learn from their experiences and accomplishment and new skills capable of facilitating their survival in structured and supportive settings.
- d. Facilitating their self understanding, the value of education; apply their skills and knowledge in the classroom, school various work places and community at large as responsible citizens.

Okafor (2008) also noted that higher education has the capacity to assist its possessors to make transitions throughout lives from family to school, from school to school, from school to work and from school to lifelong learning. Adequate education and guidance will also prevent individuals from entering into premature marriage, which reduces the opportunity for upward socio-economic mobility. According to Oniye (2008), premature marriage is a potential source of socio-personal maladjustment and occupational backwardness. It has been observed that individuals who aimed at having higher education would require accurate guidance and counselling to sensitize them on the negative impact of premarital sexual relationship, which may lead to teenage pregnancy. Adegoke (2003) explained that adolescents in institutions of learning require proper guidance in order to avoid mistakes and involvement in deviant behaviours such as drug abuse, prostitution, examination malpractice and robbery.

There is also a great interaction between counselling and health; and health is very crucial in poverty alleviation. For instance, accurate health counselling increases the willingness to improve sanitation practices which consequently prevents many diseases. The wider the scope of counselling one acquires, the brighter the opportunities avoiding diseases. Health counselling also encourages an individual to keep his/her body physically fit through having good diet, exercises adequate sleep/rest and personal hygiene (Mustapha, 2005). Counselling also affords individuals the opportunities to develop their capacities to the fullest, if they are able to acquire the knowledge to understand and appreciate their environment and the world and the wisdom to change it, then the prospect is bright.

Counselling plays vital roles in national economy by helping to identify and develop the skills needed for national development. Learners who acquired knowledge, skills, attitudes and values through counselling have been found to be better equipped to contribute meaningfully to the economy (Idowu, 2003). Counselling helps people to develop and use skills which will free them from the shackles of poverty. It is necessary for:

- i. Promoting health, because knowledge about diseases, nutrition and hygiene is the best as a preventive strategy rather than curative.
- ii. Applying new technologies and the advancement of new knowledge, because it provides the training essential for scientists and other professionals in the area of self understanding and capacity utilization.
- iii. Protecting the environment and ensuring sustainable development, since it gives knowledge about the web of life and how to preserve it.
- iv. Advancing gender equality, this is because it is capable of creating awareness on the benefits of educating girls and women.
- v. Extending democracy and good governance, because accurate education enables citizens and the rulers to know their rights and responsibilities in the true spirit of give and take.
- vi. Production of human power for exploration, exploitation and marketing of the nation's human and material resources (Mustapha, 2005).

A lot of challenges have been militating against poverty alleviation in Nigeria in particular and Africa in general. For instance, Blair Commission Report for African (2005) observed that "an understanding of the cultures of Africa shows that development means putting a greater emphasis on increasing human dignity within a community". It identified professional skills and leadership as key to achieving development and highlighted the challenges confronting African countries in this regard. According to the report, qualified professionals are essential to all forms of development; for delivery of health, education and other services. Scientifically and technically proficient staff are crucial and essential with skills for:

- a. Collecting, analysing and managing data.
- b. Debating and developing good policies based on the evidence of what works and what does not.
- c. Implementing policies and monitoring how they are put into effect.
- d. Identifying opportunities arising from innovation and scientific discoveries.

- e. Developing effective policies in areas such as science, trade and resource management.

The report noted that while these skills are particularly needed for high performance and innovation, Africa has been lacking skilled men and women in all these spheres and fundamental to this shortage is the loss of much of Africa's pool of skills to the developed world. "Around 70% of Ghanaian medical officers trained in the 1990s have left and it has been estimated that there are more African Scientists and engineers working in the USA than in the whole of Africa. This shortage starts with higher education, which ought to be the breeding ground for the skilled individuals whom the continent needs".

The report also has the following to say about the tertiary educational institutions:

Many of Africa's higher education institutions are still in a state of crisis. They lack physical infrastructure, such as internet access, libraries, textbooks, equipment, laboratories and classroom space. Demand for higher education is increasing; in 2000 Nigeria had the capacity to accept only 12% of qualified candidates. Hit by these pressures and a lack of funding, the research capacity of Africa's institutes has declined. The capacity that does exist is not being used efficiently, as there is limited collaboration, and human and financial resources are spread thinly.

The report lamented that the science gap between Africa and the rest of the world is wide and under business-as-usual the gap will continue to grow. The theme of this conference and the collaborative effort of its organizers appears to be a timely response the African way to some of the observations raised in the Blair report. The role of counselling in fast tracking poverty alleviation is made more imperative given the understanding that Africa lacks the requisite manpower in so many facets of the economy, while the few available are noted to be underutilized, poorly remunerated or over-utilized or variously dehumanized leading to the "Brain Drain Syndrome".

Okebukola (2009) highlighted the various reasons why Nigerian higher education has not been able to achieve its aims and objectives. He maintained that the state of University education in Nigeria can be described as one of massive explosion in student enrolment; increasing number of prospective new

entrants in the face of inadequate and obsolete infrastructure and equipment; poor library facilities, inadequate academic staff in number and quality; lack of relevance of academic programmes, low level of funding, cultism, examination malpractice and generally therefore low quality graduates as shown by many studies supported by the World Bank and the Needs Assessment Survey of the National Universities Commission (NUC) of Nigeria. This to a great extent is not surprising especially when it is realized that most of the education programmes in this part of the world are provided without due regard for counselling and its guidance component both at the planning and implementation stages. Invariably we now have a situation where those willing to learn and those not so keen find their ways into our public schools creating an army of perpetually overcrowded school/classrooms. Consequently, the human and infrastructural facilities that should have been concentrated on willing populace are often shared among the ever growing army of school population.

The world economy is however changing as knowledge supplants physical capital as the source of wealth. This is driven by technology especially information technology and biotechnology. As knowledge becomes more important, so does qualitative and quantitative education improve. The quality of this and its availability to the wider economy is becoming increasingly critical to national competitiveness. These challenges and problems call for a re-think on the part of education policy makers with regards to role of counselling in educational planning, implementation and delivery to ensure that counselling is given the opportunity to play its mandatory role in the society as a veritable tool for poverty alleviation. For example, a glance at the nature of Girl-Child Education would show that in spite of the increase in enrolment at all levels of the educational system, access, participation and retention of girls in schools have been a subject of great concern.

In terms of the indicator of access for the Millennium Development Goals (MDG), it is noteworthy that at least 3.9 million primary school-age children are out of school, of which 71% are girls. The gender disparity in basic education no doubt contributed to the increasing rate of poverty since the females form recognizable proportion of the national populace. A number of factors militate against gender parity in female enrolment, retention and achievement. Prominent among these are socio-cultural practices, misinterpretation of religious tenets, poverty and unfriendly school environment. Other factors include issues of curriculum and curriculum delivery. There have been efforts to put in place a policy environment to tackle these impediments and enhance girls' education. For instance, in Nigeria, the Federal Government has produced a

National Policy on Women which has provisions for women and girl-child education. In the quest to implement the Policy, task forces on the Education for the Girl-Child has been set up at all levels: Federal, State and Local Governments. The Federal Government established Unity Schools for girls. There are 19 co-educational Federal Science Technical Colleges in the country. The Federal Ministry of Education has also established and equipped 275 Women Centres. Each Centre has sewing machines, typewriters, industrial cookers, fridges, deep freezers, and materials for teaching skill in functional/literacy and skill acquisition. The Federal Government also set up the National Commission for Mass Literacy, Adult and Non-Formal Education Commission (NMEC) that mounts literacy programmes for out-of-school girls and women, which was to help them engage in activities that will alleviate poverty. It has devised a strategy for mass literacy known as Participatory Learning and Action (PLA) Programme.

Also in line with its commitment of achieving gender equality in education by 2015 such that both males and females are assured full and equal access to good quality basic education, government is collaborating with all stakeholders to promote programmes and activities towards elimination of gender gaps in education. Notable is the FGN/UNICEF/DFID and Strategy for the Acceleration of Girl's Education in Nigeria (SAGEN). It is noteworthy that in spite of all the afore mentioned efforts on creating level playing ground for both sexes in the field of education, the female gender is still lagging behind educationally, socially, politically and vocationally and this is a recipe for poverty and social exclusion.

Recommendations

Based on the above submission it is recommended among other things that counselling should be incorporated into our educational and societal activities. Guidance and counselling programmes should serve as basic tools for poverty eradication and social inclusion. If counselling is to be employed in tracking poverty alleviation and social inclusion the following areas need attention:

- Establishment of Counselling centres and implementation of counselling programme in schools.
- Entrepreneurial education at all levels.
- Establishment of a National Quality Assurance System.
- Improving access to education for the girl-child.

- e. Reform specific for the university system.
- f. Funding of education generally.

Mentoring, which a method of nurturing the young ones to attain maturity and self independence needs to be adequately emphasized in different organizations. NCCE, NBTE and NUC should encourage institutions to formulate and implement a sustainable mentoring programme in colleges of education, polytechnics and universities starting of course from the primary school level.

Economic development demands improvement in activities that will create jobs and enhance production. As it is the case in the developed countries, emphasis of the Nigerian university delivery system should be on the production of entrepreneurial graduates. The outlook is that all entrants into the system will be worked through a rigorous regime of entrepreneurial studies regardless of the course of study. Hence, all the over 140,000 graduates that will be exiting Nigerian universities from 2010 will be ardent job creators. With a large army of such resource coming out of our universities every year, the pace of growing the economy will quicken. To ensure the full realisation of this dream, special grants for implementing entrepreneurial education in Nigerian universities should be provided by government and other stake holders. The establishment and running of Entrepreneurial Study Centres should be considered as priority by all Nigerian universities. The establishment of such Centres will be a condition for accreditation. In these centres it is recommended that professional counsellors be employed for capacity identification and development of staff and students.

Education is a costly investment hence it is proposed that a minimum of 26% of national budget at each level (federal, state and local) should be allocated to education. It should be cautioned that raising the allocation to education is not the only major concern the available fund should be properly utilized. Nigerian institutions should have professional counsellors at all levels of student involvements such as admissions, orientation, learning and graduation.

Conclusion

Counselling contributes to individual and national social economic development. It leads to production of high level manpower development needed to man the affairs of the nation, leading to reduction in over reliance on expatriates in the management of the national resources. For higher education in collaboration with counselling to alleviate poverty, such education should expose students to creative and innovative problem solving strategies in science

and technology in order to equip them to find local solutions to local problems. Faculties should encourage practical industrial work periodically to reinforce students' practical base and to firm up industry-academia link. Nigerian institutions should also internalize the values of hard work, thrift, honesty, patience, and tenacity as well as equip their graduates to face challenges of new technology and encourage women participation in education.

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