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EDUCATION FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA

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Abstract
The population of Nigeria is growing at an alarming rate with over 160 million people. A nation's process of promoting socioeconomic growth and poverty alleviation must entail some structural, institutional and attitudinal changes among stakeholders in relating to the provision of sustainable educational development. However, it appears that there are inadequate resources to develop appropriate knowledge, attitudes and skills in learners in institutions of learning in Nigeria. There have been agitations for efforts at addressing problems with a view to proffering lasting solutions. Therefore, the paper posits that education in Nigeria needs to be reformed to shift from a certification- driven focus to a competence- driven focus which demands functionalism and skill acquisition that will pave way for sustainable development, poverty alleviation and job creation.

Introduction

Education is an indispensable process of cognitive, affective and psychomotor development. As a matter of cultural compulsion, the Nigerian child must be socialized for peace and progress to be experienced in our community. Thus, education is considered a fundamental human right. Education is associated with numerous individual and collective benefits in terms of improving opportunities and increasing the well-being of the individual and groups. Even in so-called advanced countries of the world, education is considered as the master-key to rapid social, political and economic development. The strong faith in education for development is shown by the proportion of the annual public and private expenditure devoted to the educational sector. In fact, education and society share a symbiotic relationship. Just as education contributes greatly to both human and material resources development and determines the fate of many political leaders, the society in search of sustainable peace and progress must continue to plan, administer and finance the educational system.

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Several factors have affected sustainable development in Nigeria. Some of such factors are population explosion, bad culture, low scientific and technological development, high rate of poverty, social exclusion, social conflicts, mismanagement of national economy and bad governance which leads to political instability and poor educational development. A data showing recent trends in world development suggests that a sixth of the world's population produce 78 percent of goods and services and receive 78 percent of the world's income while three-fifth of the world's people receive 6 percent of the world's income (World Bank 2000). Indeed, the entire African continent is rated as third world and the countries therein Nigeria inclusive are classified as less developed nations, ranking among the 61 poorest countries in the world with per capital income less than $2.0 per day. The basic characteristics of these less developed nations include high population growth rates, low level of urbanization, low life expectancy, high infant and mortality rates, national expenditure exceeding national income on the national budgets leading to deficits and huge foreign debts, low GDP and per capital income and a poor balance of trade. All these have led to the poverty syndrome on the continent.

No doubt, this situation constitutes a major challenge of the present millennium. The nations of the world have tried to put up a concerted effort to respond to this challenge in a variety of ways. Millennium Development Goals have been set and a number of poverty reduction strategies have being put in place to promote sustain able development. However, some of the gains of these strategies are been eroded in most of the African countries by social conflicts, health pandemics and the social exclusion of the girl child, women and physically challenged individuals.

The Importance of Basic Education to Sustainable Development

Basic education has been adjudged to be the foundation for lifelong education. It is the springboard on which all other levels of education subsist. Basic education inculcates in its recipient, numeracy and literacy; that is the ability to read and write. It is an essential aspect of education that makes an individual to develop in the three domains of learning: the cognitive, the affective and the psychomotor. Historically, Nigeria had a sound non-formal functional, traditional, basic education. The curriculum of the traditional functional basic education included; vocational training, character molding, the history of the community, dance, culture, oratory, religion and local numeracy and crafts. The education of the people was fashioned to build an egalitarian and self-sustaining society.

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With the advent of various missionary groups and the British colonial government, Western formal education was introduced to replace our traditional education. The Western education was tailored to meet the needs of the missionaries and colonial masters for interpreters and trade clerks. Hence, it was not that functional for indigenes. It created a wide army of white-collar job seekers. This imposed a non-functional type of education until the late 1970s when the threat of unemployment and the clamor for a reform gained momentum. This led to the birth of the new national policy on Education and the 6-3-3-4 structure. The introduction of pre-vocational subjects to the junior secondary curriculum was a dividend of this reform.

Later after the 1993 World Conference on Education and the declaration of the Education for All by the year 2015, Nigeria formulated a compulsory free Universal Basic Education policy which was codified as UBE Act 2004. The Universal Basic Education bill was sponsored by the executive arm of government and sent to the National Assembly for legal backing. The 1st and 2nd reading of the Bill was on the 26th and 27th of August, 2003 respectively while the 3rd reading was on the 28th of August, 2003. The Bill was passed into law by both houses of the National Assembly on the 28th of August, 2003. President Olusegun Obasanjo signed the Bill into law on the 12th of May, 2004. The Bill, according to the Federal Republic of Nigeria (2003), seeks to provide a compulsory, free Universal Basic Education (UBE) for all children of both primary and junior secondary school age. It further seeks to melt out punishment to parents who fail to comply with its provisions.

By the UBE Act (2004), the education children receive from age 3 to 15 (i.e., Early Childhood Care and Development Education at Primary through Junior Secondary levels) has now been classified as Basic Education. For Basic Education to be functional, it must not only give cognitive and affective development but also make the citizens acquire some basic skills. A functional education must give people a vocation and rather than create a pool of job seekers, develop a consortium of job creators who are self-employed. A functional basic education must be tailored to meet the needs of the locality. Public awareness and response to the need for a functional basic education seem to have acquired political significance as a tool for poverty eradication. Moreover, the primary and junior secondary curricula are being reviewed to refocus the system to functionalism by the introduction of local crafts, primary science and Social Studies at primary schools and Introductory Technology, Business Studies, Commerce and Woodwork are introduced at the junior secondary schools. The schools, however, need to be provided with better laboratories and workshop facilities to promote their effectiveness.

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Education for Sustainable Development

The philosophical basis of our investment in education in Nigeria is to create a free, fair and egalitarian nation. The word egalitarianism is derived from the French word egal which means equal. It applies to a situation where all people are treated as equals with uniform political, economic and social rights. Egalitarianism holds that people are equal under the law and the society at large. Egalitarianism is usually considered to be a protean ideology or social philosophy which could be applied to the society in a variety of ways, such as economic egalitarianism, legal egalitarianism, gender egalitarianism, racial egalitarianism, and egalitarianism in education opportunity. Many developed nations are striving for egalitarians because it is believed all men are created equal hence, each person should be treated equally before the law. This forms the basis of most civil right policies. In fact, in the last few centuries, egalitarian philosophers have given birth to socialism, communism, progressivism and human right activism which in turn have helped to promote sustainable economic, political, social and legal egalitarianism in some nations.

There is no single definition of the term sustainable development. A lot of researchers and opinion leaders perceive the term differently. In a similar vein, education for sustainable development is seen as a lifelong process that teaches the recipients the ability to be creative, develop problem-solving skills, scientific and social literacy, and commitment to engage in responsible, individual or co-operative actions. Sustainable development is a process of improving the range of opportunities available, such that people will achieve their aspirations and full potential over a period of time in social, political, economic and physical areas.

The definition of Sustainable Development has been amplified to integrate issues of economic growth, social development and environmental protection following the Rio Earth Summit of 1992 and the Johannesburg World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) of 2002. Documents emanating from these conferences suggest that Sustainable Development is anchored on three pillars of sustainability, economy, environment and society. The Rio conference specifically identified four major areas of education for sustainable development to include: (i) promotion and improvement of Basic Education; (ii) reorienting existing education at all levels to address National Development; (iii) developing public understanding and awareness of sustainability and (iv) training.

Obviously, education plays a vital role in promoting sustainable human resource development. A good proportion of a person's growing years

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of childhood and adolescence are devoted to it and it is a major focus of parental care, hence, for any nation to achieve social egalitarianism and sustainable development, education must be instrumental. In Nigeria, we could move in the direction of social egalitarianism and sustainable development if we make our Universal Basic Education truly functional and universal. However, we need to ask ourselves some questions. Do we actually provide the equality of education opportunity in our schools as to expect the equality of output? How about the social and cultural barriers to education and the completion of schools in some areas? How do we tackle the political issues of the quota system of education? What about some ethnic cum religious discrimination in access? Is social poverty not a barrier to social egalitarianism and sustainable development in Nigeria?

The Federal Government has a 60:40 admission ratios in favor of science and technology. Are we able to maintain this ratio in our higher institutions? What about the issue of inclusion of the 'advantaged' groups such as women, the girl-child, the disabled, rural dwellers and child-laborers? There is also the issue of improved funding of education. Apparently, in Nigeria, the proportion of our annual expenditure, that was devoted to education, is less than, 26% prescribed by UNESCO. What can we do to convince our government at all tiers to do more? Also, it is believed that for education to aid sustainable development the quality of teachers must be high. We need to critically appraise the teaching force with a view to ensuring greater effectiveness and the efficiency of education. Above all these, we need to ruminate on the issue of the relevance of our educational curricula and its products to the needs of future employers and the economy. These and many more similar issues and problems must be thrashed by the participants at this conference to pave way for sustainable development in Nigeria.

Essentially, education should develop the individual to become a contributing member of the community and not just a parasite on others. A truly contributing member is one who is self-reliant. Sound education can lead to sustainable development only if it advances knowledge, wisdom and understanding of the products in experimenting, practicalizing, innovating, improvising and thinking scientifically and reflectively. For our current education system to move in the direction of educating for sustainable development, there is the need to reorient our people to change their attitude towards the dignity of labor. People must be prepared to use their hand productively and no job should be regarded as menial or inferior. The education system must be prepared at all levels to introduce to their curricula local crafts (such as sculpting, carving, pottery, weaving, hair plaiting,

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culinary art, painting, dressmaking etc.) and vocations. Students must also change their attitude to locally produced goods and services. Our secondary schools must be supplied with adequate workshop and laboratory facilities to aid the teaching and learning of both science and vocational subjects.

Moreover, for education to promote sustainable development, there must be entrepreneurial training. Young people trained in various trades must also be taught how to establish those trades and also run their businesses carefully. The implication of this for curriculum development is that such requirements like business survival skill training, life survival skill training, health and recreation skill training must be budgeted for. It is believed in this paper that, when adolescents and youths are skilled, productive and capable of self-employment, they tend to be less disposed to social deviant behaviors that are inimical to sustainable social peace and economic development. The issue of sustainability features greatly in the development strategy devised for promoting socio-economic growth and poverty reduction, particularly for women.

The vital questions that need to be answered are as follows: are the various states and federal governments in Nigeria really committed to the idea of using education to achieve sustainable national development? Is the educational system adequately funded and result-oriented? Is the curriculum really socially relevant as to ensure its products can establish and stay in business? What values and attitudes are required for our nation's education to move smoothly in this direction? It is our hope that, given the multitude of scholars and experts here assembled, this conference will surely be able to come up with good answers to these questions and proffer possible solutions to all important problems of using education to achieve social egalitarianism and sustainable development in Nigeria.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Apparently, a nation's process of socio-economic growth must entail some structural, institutional and attitudinal changes that provide sustainability. One critical agent with great capacity to generate and sustaining socio-economic and political growth is the educational system. The test of the leadership of a nation is its ability to device useful strategies to solve given problems of the society. Nigeria presently faces a myriad of problems such as massive unemployment, great social poverty and the need for economic empowerment of our women. Education in Nigeria needs to be reformed to shift from a certificate-driven focus to a competence-driven focus. This demands functionalism and skills acquisition, as well as entrepreneurial

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training for its products. This will help us to ensure that our graduates can establish their small and medium scale industries, thereby making meaningful contributions to the socio-economic development of the country. Integrated and functional learning should be encouraged in basic schools as this will bring about sustainable development in the social, economic and political sphere of the country.

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