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EDUCATION AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA: ISSUES AND CHALLENGES

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ABSTRACT

This paper focuses on education and economic development in Nigeria. One of the essences of education is to produce human resources that are skillful and knowledgeable; positioning man to be a critical resource upon which national economies, especially that of a developing nation like Nigeria hinge upon. In this paper, an attempt was made to correlate Nigeria's investment in education since independence and economic development so far attained, analyze the issues and challenges of economic development, the current state of education in Nigeria and the way forward. The paper contended in the light of overwhelming literature that education is the greatest investment that the nation can make for quick development of its economic, political and sociological development. Basically, the paper was discussed under the following broad headings; Nigeria's philosophy of education, economic development in Nigeria, issues and challenges amongst which the challenges of funding, responsibility and control, and the problem of relating the curricula to national manpower needs were identified as underlying factors for the deplorable standard of education in Nigeria and ridiculous pace of human development in spite of the much touted annual economic growth rate of 6%. To attain economic development through education in Nigeria, there should be serious commitment of government at all levels to effective educational policies from pre-planning stage through planning stage to post-planning stage (implementation) in realization of the fact that Nigeria is a developing country and it cannot afford to neglect the educational sector that is most crucial in the provision of the needed manpower for growth and development. The need for such commitment has become so palpable given that education is a tool for human capital development, and how well and fast a nation develops is dependent on its literacy level. It was on this note that the paper was concluded.

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INTRODUCTION

Education policy issues continue to be a question of critical concern in developing countries in Africa as a tool for development (Imam, 2012). From time antiquity, the role of education in economic development has never been denied. Castle in Adeyinka (2012) defines development as "a situation wherein man himself becomes both the object and the subject of his own improvement, not merely an instrument in a process imposed from above and from without." The issue is that what role education plays has not been as clear and agreed upon-or so it seems, otherwise it beggars believe that countries especially the developed and developing nations allocate grossly disproportionate resources toward educating their citizens. While some countries see education as primary propeller of economic development, some others see it as luxury.

The relationship between education and development has been established, such that education is now internationally accepted as a key development index and it is in recognition of this importance that governments all over the world have made commitments in their countries' educational policies for their citizens to have access to education (Odukoya, 2009). In this paper, an attempt is made to correlate Nigeria's investment in education since independence and economic development so far attained issues and challenges of economic development, the current state of education in Nigeria and the way forward.

Nigeria's philosophy of education

Nigeria's philosophy since independence has been anything but static. At independence, Nigeria's foremost educational objective was to train its nationals to take over its civil service. In Nigeria, educational policy at independence was most concerned with using schools to develop manpower for economic development and Africanisation of the civil service (Woolman, 2001). Due to the narrow and unsatisfactory scope

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of this policy, in 1969 the National Curriculum Conference was convened which reviewed the educational system and its goals, and identified new national goals for Nigeria which would determine the future and direction of education in the country (Nigerian Educational Research Council, 1972). In 1976, the Federal Government of Nigeria under General Olusegun Obasanjo, embarked on the very ambitious Universal Free Primary Education (UPE) programme that expanded access into tertiary education and increased the number of unity schools in the country. By 1976, when the states of the Federation were increased to nineteen, each state promulgated an edict for the regulation of education, and its provision and management. Each state also amended the Federal education law when necessary, which resulted in all the states' edicts having common features, such as state takeover of schools from individuals and voluntary agencies, using similar curriculum and the establishment of school management boards as well as a unified teaching service (Fabunmi, 2005).

The most significant changes of the period was the takeover of schools from the missionaries by the government resulting in a unified educational system based on the 7-5-2-3 educational policy: 7 years of primary education, 5 years of secondary school, 2 years Higher School Certificate Levels, and 3 years of university education. This was in the stead of the 8-5-2-3 educational policy: 8 years of primary education, 5 years of secondary school, 2 years Higher School Certificate Levels, and 3 years of university education (Imam, 2012). In addition, the large-scale government financing of education included tuition free university education and the setting of the stage for a national policy on education that was relevant and suited to the needs of the people.

Viewing the educational policy in Nigeria during the first 13 years of independence, the following are pertinent:

- a) The influence of political change on the educational policy;
- b) The roles of the federal and states government in the regulation and control of education;
- c) The promotion of education to the level of a huge government enterprise by expanding education access to raise enrolments and presumably bridge the educational gap; and
- d) The overall policy approach of government which was geared towards the development of an educational policy blueprint that took into cognisance the hopes and aspirations of Nigerians (imam, 2012).

Nigeria adopted its first National Policy on Education in 1977 and followed subsequently with revisions in 1981, 1985, 1998, 2004 which was Nigeria's first indigenous educational policy. The policy has the following peculiarities:

- 1) It set specific objectives for the nation and its education;
- 2) it addressed the problem of unity and laid foundation for national integration;
- 3) It aimed at realising a self-reliant and self-sufficient nation to meet the country's developmental needs.
- 4) It gave a comprehensive structure of educational system and laid the foundation for the 6-3-3-4 system of education in Nigeria (i.e. six years primary schooling, three years

junior secondary education, three years senior secondary school and four years university education);

- 5) It made education in Nigeria the government's responsibility in terms of centralized control and funding of education;
- 6) It had a broad curriculum which aimed at creating learning opportunity for all children, irrespective of their sex, peculiar background or ability; and
- 7) It also specified the functions of adult education, non-formal education, special education and open and distance learning. (Federal Government of Nigeria, 1977 Revised 1981, 1985, 1
- 8) 998 and 2004).

It is a fact that every government that came has brought with it an agenda that includes education, the most recent being presidents Olusegun Obasanjo's National Economic Empowerment Development Strategy (NEEDS), Umar Musa Yar'Adua's 7-point Adgenda and Goodluck Jonathan's Transformation Agenda. However, beyond sloganeering, each of these schemes has yielded poor results in terms of gains on social development indices as well as economic productivity.

Economic development in Nigeria

Nigeria's economic outlook in the past decade, and more recently, under this present administration been painted rosy and blossoming. According to Wikipedia (2013),

Nigeria is a middle income, mixed economy and emerging market, with expanding financial, service, communications, and entertainment sectors. It is ranked 30th (40th in 2005, 52nd in 2000), in the world in terms of GDP (PPP) as of 2012, and 2nd largest within Africa (behind South Africa), on track to becoming one of the 20 largest economies in the world by 2020. Its re-emergent, though currently underperforming, manufacturing sector is the third-largest on the continent, and produces a large proportion of goods and services for the West African region. Previously hindered by years of mismanagement, economic reforms of the past decade have put Nigeria back on track towards achieving its full economic potential. Nigerian GDP at purchasing power parity (PPP) has almost trebled from \$170 billion in 2000 to \$451 billion in 2012, although estimates of the size of the informal sector (which is not included in official figures) put the actual numbers closer to \$630 billion. Correspondingly, the GDP per capita doubled from \$1400 per person in 2000 to an estimated \$2,800 per person in 2012 (again, with the inclusion of the informal sector, it is estimated that GDP per capita hovers around \$3,900 per person). (Population increased from 120 million in 2000 to 160 million in 2010). These figures might be revised upwards by as much as 40% when the country completes the rebasing of its economy later in 2013.

Beyond the glossy picture above, the latest report of the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) notes that Nigeria accounts for almost half the total number of out-of-school children in the world at about 7 million (UNESCO, 2012). Despite this, projections from the United Nations indicate that Nigeria's population could rise to 440 million by 2050. Such uncontrolled population growth of largely illiterate (and

ultimately idle) people poses serious threat to our national survival. It would not be out of place to re-emphasise that if the economy is actually flourishing at growth rate of 6.5% as claimed by the finance minister, Ngozi Okonjo Iweala, and the same government is investing less than 5% of budgetary allocation to education, then one can conclude that they do not place much premium on education as one of the key drivers of the economy. According to El-Rufai (2012), at independence, Nigeria spent an average of 40 percent of her budget on education (compared to today's two percent). The Old Western Region under Chief Obafemi Awolowo's visionary leadership devoted 55% while the Northern Region under an equally committed leadership of Sir Ahmadu Bello spent 46% of its budget on education. Today's funding for education is a far cry from UNESCO's recommendation of public spending on education of at least 25% of annual budget, in spite of our statistical prosperity in economic parlance.

According to Nigeria's National Policy on Education (NPE, 2009), education was to be used to rectify the developmental imbalances inter-state and intra-state wise. The same NPE asserts inter alia, that education "... is also the greatest investment that the nation can make for quick development of its economic, political, sociological and human resources and that education is the most important instrument of change as any fundamental change in the intellectual and sociological outlook of any society has to be preceded by an educational revolution (NPE, 1977:5).

The national education goals which derive from the philosophy are:

- i. The inculcation of the right type of values and attitudes for the survival of the individual and the Nigerian society.
- ii. The training of the mind in the understanding of the world around.
- iii. The acquisition of appropriate skills, abilities and competences both mental and physical as equipment for the individual to live in and contribute to the development of his society (NPE, 2009).

Nigeria's philosophy of education is therefore based on the belief that:

- a. Education is an instrument for national development and social change;
- b. Education is vital for the promotion of a progressive, united Nigeria;
- c. Education should maximize the creative potentials and skills of the individual for self fulfillment and general development of the society;
- d. Every Nigerian shall have a right to equal educational opportunities irrespective of gender, social status, religion, ethnic background and any peculiar individual challenges;
- e. Education should be qualitative, comprehensive functional and relevant to the needs of the society and emerging concerns;
- f. The covenant with every Nigerian child is equal access to quality education relevant to the needs of the Nigerian economy. With this, we will nurture the mind to create a good society that competes globally (NPE, 2009).

Lofty as the goals of the national policy on education are, the Nigeria educational system has consistently underperformed to the point that it can aptly be said to have failed the economy. If the worries had been unemployment alone, the outlook could have been more optimistic. However, the recent references to products of the system as "unemployable" by key managers of the economy points to the current level of decay.

Issues and Challenges

1. Funding: The first and perhaps the greatest challenge facing Nigeria and making it difficult for good quality education that is capable of bringing about sustainable development is inadequate funding by Federal, State and Local Governments. In 1997 and 2000 statistics show that Federal Government expenditure on education was below 10% of overall expenditure. It is noticed that, the national expenditure on education cannot be computed because various states expenditure on education cannot be determined, in relation to the UNESCO recommendation of 26% of national budgets. However, since 2007, Nigeria spent an average of about 0.7% of GDP and about 3% of the budget on education - among the lowest five ranked countries in the world!(El-Rufai, 2012).

2. Responsibility and Control: There is a clash in the control structure of education in Nigeria. The conflict between the federal, state and local governments in the management of education at various levels is one of the prominent challenges of educational development in Nigeria. Under the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria 1999 (as amended), education is an item on the Concurrent Legislative list upon which both the federal and state governments can legislate upon. While it has been contended that the federal government should have little or nothing to do with primary and secondary schools and the states everything to do with them, the reverse has been the case. Ironically federal government owned universities are nowhere to be found in the top 1000 universities in the world. State governments on the other hand routinely abandon primary and secondary schools to witness infrastructural decays, incessant industrial actions and gross underfunding, preferring instead to embark on white elephant projects like the establishment of universities they cannot fund in most cases. This is a great barrier for effective educational development at basic level.

3. The problem of relating the curricula to national manpower needs: The Nigerian National Policy on Education emphasises the need to relate school curricula to national manpower needs. Nigerian education curricula have been criticized as being "too literary; ... not practical, not adapted to the needs of a developing agricultural nation..." and only "tends to produce proud, lazy people who dislike manual labour and prefer white-collar jobs." (Adeyinka, 2012). In many respects, the curricula need to be updated and tailored to the needs of the 21st century economy. For instance, Nigeria is placed 128th (WDI – 2009), 91st in Internet Access in Schools, 97th in Quality of Mathematics and Science Education, 115th in overall Quality of Scientific research institutions, 90th in Networked Readiness Index, 102nd in percentage of Internet users, 117th in Broadband internet subscribers. (ITU – WTI, 2008 -2009).

The way forward

In order to raise the standard of education and economic development in Nigeria, the following suggestions should be considered. Adequate budgetary provision to funding education sector is necessary in this dimension. Government at all levels should by all means allocate appropriate fund to education sector. Apart from reviewing spending levels on education, we must enhance supervision to ensure strict adherence to standards at all levels.

The states and local government areas must take up more responsibilities in educational development. More private sector participation should be encouraged with the right incentives - access to free land, single interest-long tenor loans, subsidised teacher training, etc! Political considerations should not be the yardstick in establishing tertiary institutions. Teachers' education and welfare must be improved as priorities. At personal levels, those of us that have had the benefit of affordable and quality public education should all offer to teach voluntarily at the Nigerian university and public secondary school nearest to where we live.

Conclusion

To attain economic development through education in Nigeria, there should be serious commitment of government at all levels to effective educational policies from pre-planning stage through planning stage to post-planning stage (implementation) in realization of the fact that Nigeria is a developing country and it can not afford to neglect the educational sector that is most crucial in the provision of the needed manpower for growth and development. Given that education is a tool for human capital development, how well and fast a nation develops is dependent on its literacy level. The accumulation of intellectual capital can help a nation strengthen its technology and become prosperous. Even though oil, gold and diamond may generate wealth for some countries, it is evident that they are no longer determinants of wealth - intellectual capital and technology rule the world. It is easy to neglect education because the consequences are not immediately felt.

But if we bear in mind that the current decay are the results of policies of the mid-1970s and spending cuts of the late 1980s, it becomes imperative for Nigeria to urgently review and refocus educational policy, and spending priorities to ensure quality of output.

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