

Education, Democracy and National Development: The Way Forward

BY

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Abstract

This paper examines the present state of Education, Democracy and National Development in the present Democratic dispensation in Nigeria. It proposes a number of steps for improving and reinforcing the foundations of our educational systems for a sustainable national development. A major tool of development is democracy. It needs to be understood, nurtured and applied appropriately so that majority of Nigerians who are yet to enjoy the dividends of democracy not only in education, but also in other areas of National development can do so. The paper concludes by challenging the present legislators to leave up to their expectations as true representatives of their people in ensuring that education is given the highest priority over and above all other sectors of the economy. It is the writer's believe that once education is funded properly and adequately, other sectors of the economy would have been indirectly funded.

Introduction

There is no doubt in the fact that Nigerians over the years have always wanted "good quality education", based on "equity" and "accessibility to all", much have been invested heavily in its quest. Similarly, Nigerians have strained and struggle for democracy at great costs, albeit with frustrating dividends. Nigerians have also worked hard for national development, seeking to provide the people with such basic needs as housing, food, clothing and minimal education. This is necessary because a major objective of development must be to raise people out of primary poverty and to provide basic needs simultaneously. Unfortunately, there is no doubt that all the aspirations and expectations with regards to these important concepts/issues have remained elusive. Although there is a logical and necessary connection between education, democracy and national development, it is important to recognize that reconnection is only tangentially relational. The relationship is neither linear nor casual, and there is therefore, no automatic, invariably, positive link between education and democracy, or between democracy and national development, or between education and national development. As important as these concepts are, they are only necessary, but not sufficient conditions, for national progress and development.

The Present State of Education in Nigeria

Education is generally regarded as a necessary and essential requirement for national development. It is central to socioeconomic and technological advancement, and it is critical to self-sustaining and self-generating process of positive transformation of modern society. Education is partly about primary socialization, partly about the process of imparting

knowledge and skills, and essentially about the preservation as well as extension of knowledge for progress and development both at the individual and group levels. It is, also, about culture sustenance and reproduction. Education is not just about literacy and numeracy. It is about value-information, value-oriented and regeneration. Thus, education is a complex process of setting the context for societal self definition and reproduction.

The significance of education in societal development precisely defined the con text of the roles that the individual, society and the state have to play in order to facilitate, nurture and develop it with the requisite institutions, materials and facilities. It is therefore not enough for society or, indeed, for state officials (like in Nigeria) to merely annually budget, allocate and spend money for education. These have to be accompanied by principal conduct, careful planning and an adequate conceptualization of, and commitment to, the public good.

It is clear that the modern nations that have advanced technologically and scientifically have done so only to the extent they have paid more than verbal commitments to education. They have advanced only to the extent that they have committed substantial energy; well applied and directed resources, in the quest for education. In Nigeria, education has long perceived as important to national development, unfortunately it has not been accompanied with the seriousness that it deserves.

Writing on "The State and Education in Nigeria Today" Jega, (1997) observed that the deplorable state of education in Nigeria can be back top the colonial era. He noted that the colonialists used

education as an instrument for domination, for serving the administrative requirements of colonization, and especially as an instrument of dividing and ruling Nigeria. He further lamented that the post-colonial governments, on their part, especially since the 1996 Military coup, have treated education with levity and evident lack of seriousness. The cumulative result is that today, education in Nigeria is in a terrible shape, circumscribed by a general, persistent and chronic crisis in terms of finding, staffing, curricula, infrastructure and facilities.

Successive Nigerian governments have for long pursued poorly; planned and executed politics with profound and devastating consequences on the development of the country. For example, priorities have been misplaced, and huge resources squandered with virtually (if any) results to show for it. It is unfortunate that enormous resources have been wasted in the name of education for so long, with so infinitesimally little results for the objective requirements of our desired national development.

The key aspects of the crisis that has engulfed the Nigerian education sector since the middle of the 1980's can be summarized below:

Academic Year	Total Enrollment	Federal University	Allocation (Million) Total	Allocation per student (Fed. Univ.)	All Urban consumer price index (1994-100)	Allocation per student In constant Naira
1994	211,460.61	150,778	5,031.12	5,031.12	1,256.88	2,585.4
1995	220,150.49	156,190	4,895.15	4,896.15	1,300.95	2,379.5
1996	228,840.37	161,602	4,759.18	4,759.18	1,345.02	2,173.6
1997	237,530.25	169,014	4,623.21	4,623.21	1,389.09	1,967.7
1998	246,220.13	172,426	4,487.24	4,487.24	1,433.16	1,161.8
1999	254,910.01	177,838	4,351.27	4,351.27	1,477.23	1,555.9
2000	263,599.89	183,250	4,215.3	4,215.3	1,521.3	1,350
2001	272,289.77	188,662	4,099.33	4,079.33	1,565.39	1,144.1
2002	280,979.65	194,074	3,943.36	3,943.36	1,609.44	938.2
2003	289,669.93	199,486	3,807.39	3,807.39	1,653.51	732.3
2004	298,359.41	204,898	3,671.42	3,671.42	1,697.58	526.4
2005	307,049.29	210,310	3,535.45	3,535.45	1,741.65	320.5
2006	315,739.17	215,722	3,399.48	3,399.48	1,785.72	114.6
2007	324,429.09	221,134	3,263.51	3,263.51	1,829.79	—
2008	333,118.93	226,546	3,127.54	3,127.54	1,873.86	—

- a. Gross and chronic under-funding of education: public expenditure on education rapidly declined, in real terms. Table 1 illustrated this very clearly.
- b. General inadequacy of infrastructure and facilities, and actual decay of existing ones due to poor maintenance.
- c. Poor conditions of service and of work for teachers and students.

The Present State of Democracy in Nigeria

Democracy is generally perceived as the best system of government, which serves as the framework for societal development in this modern era. There are many models of democracy, which have been experimented

in the world. But the western liberal democratic model has, through propaganda and skillful indoctrination, become the dominant model presently. Indeed, American hegemony in the contemporary world system has established its version of liberal democracy as the dominant one amongst the comity of democratic nations.

The key principles underlying liberal democracy have a wide populist appeal, which makes it attractive to many in the modern era. For example, principles, such as popular sovereignty and perception, representation, guarantee of basic freedoms, equality, have great wide attraction; even if in reality, "their actualization leaves much to be desired. They contrast with the

personalized, autocratic, if not absolutist modes of government and their despotic and inhuman in ancient times.

In Nigeria, the attraction of democracy has been great, if not phenomenal. For example Jega, (2001) noted that:

In the Nigerian context, democracy is something much talked about, greatly aspired and strenuously struggle for. It is evidently a set objective pursued with apparent vigor but not yet attained. It is an aspiration dearly cherished by many but far from being realized. Democracy seems to be turning out to be a sort of a profound mirage. For democracy through constitutional reforms and transition programs and they have been continuously disappointed. For all practical purposes democracy has remained elusive in Nigeria despite substantial expenditure in energy and resources in political engineering and experimentation”

The modern context of Nigeria’s quest for democracy originated with the struggles for independence from colonial rule and the desire for self-government and self determination. Nigerians wanted to rule themselves and be in charge of their own destiny. They wanted elected Nigerians to manage the affairs of Nigeria and to make policies, which would facilitate the socioeconomic development of the country. However, subsequently, the quest for democracy came to be driven by collective rule. Not so with authoritarian military rule and the desire for a return to civil democratic rule. Not so long after the attainment of independence, a brutal military intervention, capitalization on the mistakes of the new rulers, rubbished the collective aspiration of democracy. But, the prolonged nature of military raised awareness, once again, of the dangers of authoritarian rule, and motivated Nigerians to keep on struggling for a return to civil democratic rule.

He further lamented that the tragedy of democracy in Nigeria, however, is that, the major actors in the Nigerian democratic terrain, the so-called political class, are themselves, essentially anti-democratic and undemocratic. Many of them are merely “interested in power and its acquisition by any means necessary”. All they want in democracy is to be in charge of the

political machinery dispensing patronage and easing wealth. Fundamental elements of democracy such as free and fair elections, popular participation, guarantee of fundamental rights do not seem to concern them, unless of course if they find themselves on the receiving end, only then “democracy is treasury if it can facilitate access to power, create a window of opportunity to loot public desirable and keep the people in check and at their mercy”.

The Present State of National Development in Nigeria

Development implies change. It describes the process of economic and social transformation within countries. No country can be regarded as developed if it cannot provide all its people with such basic needs as housing, food, clothing and minimal education. A major objective of development must be to raise people above primary poverty and to provide basic needs simultaneously.

The present state of national development in Nigeria is a reflection of an underdeveloped country. It is a country characterized by poverty with beggars in the cities and villages eking out for bare subsistence in the rural areas. It has inadequate supply of power, insufficient government services, poor communications, few hospitals and few institutions of higher learning. Most of the people in Nigeria cannot read or write. In spite of the generally prevailing poverty of the people, there are isolated islands of wealth with a few persons living in luxury. The banking system is not very much efficient and its export to other countries usually consists almost entirely of raw materials ore or fruits or some staple products with possibly more admixture of luxury handicrafts. Often, the extraction of these raw material exports is in the hand of foreign countries.

The country is poverty stricken where food is the major item of consumption with low per capital income which reflects low living standards of the people. Agricultural activities are carried out in an old fashion with absolute and outdated method of production. The dualistic and or triples nature of the economy which is characterized by foreign directed enclaves is thus not conducive to healthy economic progress of the country.

The natural resources are underdeveloped in the sense that they are either under-utilized or mis-utilized. The population is growing rapidly, thereby adding a substantial number to the total population every year. There is high population growth rate potential characterized by high crude birth rate and high but declining death rate. It is also characterized by vast open un-employment and disguised unemployment. The urban unemployment is spreading with urbanization and spread of education. But the industrial sector has failed to expand along the growth rate thereby increasing urban unemployment. Also, there are educated un-employed who fail to get job due to structural rigidities and the lack of manpower planning. There is the problem of enterprise and initiatives that entrepreneurship is inhibited by several systems which deny the opportunity for creative facilities.

Services like education and health are still a problem and hardly flourish. Though there is an expansion in educational facilities more rapidly, still, efforts fall short of the manpower requirements of the economy of the country. Moreover, the type of education being imparted to the majority of the school and colleges going children is ill suited to development needs of the country. Thus the vast majority of our people are ill-fed, ill clothed, ill-housed and ill-educated.

Another major obstacle towards achieving national development, like planning, has become taboo in Nigeria. For example, when the Federal, and the other levels governments, seek to publicize their achievements, they simply tabulate projects and the expenditure incurred on them; without any mention of what indices of human development they have improved, how they inter-related to improve the lives of the people, and how they are going to be sustained. This focus on human development requires project planning, execution and monitoring. But, these and the collection of reliable statistics, have been, almost completely, abandoned.

The Way Forward

Nearly after forty years of gaining independence, with, consistent reoccurring problems, there is the need to circumscribe and x-ray with medicinal remedies the way forward for the three issues/concepts raised. Recent events in the country as pointed by Ejiofor, (2002) should be of concern to well meaning Nigerians. It is about time that Nigerians ask questions devoid of rhetoric's. Such as why has there been the

inclination towards one party democracy even during the ill-fated second republic? Why is there a fierce opposition to derivation funds from some sections of the country? Why are there no serious and genuine concerns for the advantage of our educational institutions from nursery to tertiary? On the issue of the Niger-delta crisis, what happened to social infrastructure development in our country, and what happened to our taxation system?

The answers to the above questions need to be juxtaposed with the observation of Sen. Amartya in the book "Development as Freedom" where he opined that ... if increasing incomes in a country are not accompanied by other factors that define high standard of living to wit: Political freedom, availability of social goods, infrastructure, viz: education, healthcare for all, protection from hunger, disease, justice, fairness, etc. The country is said to be only getting richer, it is not truly developing." Ejiofor, (2002). The 2007 strike by Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) and other labour unions in the country is a struggle to attain the goals envisaged by Amartya devoid of partisan political undertone.

Education

How can the crisis in the education sector be addressed, so that education can contribute positively to national development in the 21st century? First, we should not just abstractly and vaguely blame "society" for crises and problems for which are the real culprits who have turned the education sector as a lucrative avenue for self-enrichment. They have exhibited a quire and weird brand of selfishness, lack of direction, foresight and even enlightened self-interest. They have failed to recognize that education given its critical role in societal transformation and progress needs to be addressed first and foremost as matter of the obligation of the state towards its citizens. Unless this minimum obligation is discharged, the state loses the moral high ground from which it could persuade, compel or sanction "society" or the parents to contribute their own quota in the resolution of the crisis in the education sector.

Table 2: Indicators of Educational Priorities of Some Selected Countries iv

Country	Education Expenditure as % of GNP		Education as % of total Public Exp.	Adult Literacy Rate
	1990	1999		
			1999	2008
Algeria	5.6	9.4	27	57
Brazil	1.9	3.7	18	81
Ghana	3.8	3.4	23	60
Cote D'Voire	4.6	6.6	23	54
Kenya	4.6	6.4	27	69
Libya	2.8	10.1	21	64
Nigeria	1.5	1.5	12	51
All Dev. Countries	2.2	3.6	18	M

The Nigerian public officials ought to get their facts together and introduce measures, which can bring about what the late Dr. Mahmud Modibbo Tukur referred to as “a rational distribution of the cost of education”. For example, the 2% education tax on all profits of registered companies operating in Nigeria can and should be increased to 5%.

The following additional measures can generate stable and adequately funding for education, without imposing an unnecessary burden on the already pauperized Nigerian parents:

- 1) Nigeria should strive to commit at least 5% of its GNP on education annually for the next five years.
- 2) An average of 26% of annual public expenditure should be committed to education for the next ten years.
- 3) Military expenditure, which presently represents highest proportion of the annual public expenditure should be reduced to no more than 8% of public expenditure, and frozen at the level for the next twenty years.
- 4) All secondary schools should have an elected management committee, drawn from the committees in which they are located and the **PTA** which can monitor and regulate the running of the affairs of these schools as well as assist in fund-raising and staff discipline. This is especially because community input and participation in education management is a very useful way of getting the “society” involved long before a crisis becomes imminent. After

a period of trial and necessary review, these can also be introduced at the primary school level.

- 5) For the next ten years at least, it should be made illegal for any Nigerian to purposely send his/her child abroad for primary and secondary education.
- 6) The task of building public libraries in all state and local government headquarters, adequately stocked with especially the recommended basic texts for secondary and primary schools, should be accelerated.

Democracy

However, it needs to be stated that the popular conception of democracy can have positive meaning if the Nigerian political class takes democracy a bit more seriously, and the electorates becomes educated and enlightened. A combination of reckless political class, illiteracy and poverty, which presently pervade our society, can further depoliticize the masses, and push democratic empowerment and participation out of their reach. In this kind of context, democracy, no matter how beautifully conceived would have no intrinsic value for the majority of the poor masses.

Perhaps, it is essentially in this sense that we can better perceive a connection between education and the viability of democracy in Nigeria.

National Development

What is to be done for Nigeria to achieve “modernity”, “progress”, and “development”? In fact, the present state of national development is

a reflection of an underdeveloped country. To improve on that, we have to take into cognizance the economic realities of our country by judicious use of our country's earnings from export for productive investment. As such, real as opposed to phony, investment should be improved in the productive sectors of the economy.

In order to minimize over-spending of our foreign exchange earnings, all forms of capital flight, by means of outright theft and other financial crimes by public office holders and private entrepreneurs should be checked. Wasteful spending on imported goods, including foodstuff easily grown in Nigeria; and, in massive payments for foreign travel, foreign transport, foreign telecommunications, and foreign financial and other services should be stopped. This is because, the severe damage this economic hemorrhage has done and is doing to the country cannot be covered up by the gleam and glitter of imported luxury vehicles, and imported cellular phones, the increase has been as spectacular, even though their contribution to the sectors of the economy has been insignificant.

Concluding Remarks

Democracy can serve our national interest best if it could facilitate the emergence of a leadership cadre, which is responsible, and responsive to the needs and aspirations of Nigerians regardless of socio-cultural differences. Such leadership could lead by example and accelerate the much desired aspirations of Nigerians for rapid technological, scientific and national development.

It is such a leadership that could establish and sustain the connection between education, democracy and national development.

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