EDUCATION: A TOOL FOR COMMUNITY TRANSFORMATION AND DEVELOPMENT IN 21ST CENTURY NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT
This paper is position paper that seeks to explain the role of education in community transformation, growth and development. Education is not only an end but a process or procedure that enhances a society. Education is an important goal by itself and because of its relevance, it must be ensured that all children have access to education, for without education, communities, families or individuals cannot adopt new technologies that would improve their lives, farming and entrepreneurial endeavours and alleviate poverty and hunger. Access to basic quality education is needful for the eradication of poverty, reduction of child and maternal mortality, attainment of gender equity and the elimination of diseases that kill millions of people around the world. Education is therefore seem in this paper as a very vibrant tools for community transformation and development in 21st century Nigeria.

Keywords: Education, Transformation, Community development

INTRODUCTION

The primary aim of education is to sustain individuals and bring sustainable development in human society. The process contains both tangible and moral dimension. Educational programmes and policies play a pivotal role in these social and individual progress. Social progress clearly indicates a general development in the community in terms of economic, social and cultural aspects. In other words, a society which is considered to be progressing and changing from a fairly less decent situation to a favourably better conditions with respect to economic, social and political issues. Therefore, without education, man cannot live a life of his own. The Greek philosopher Aristotle has said that man is a social animal by nature and by necessity. If good is the aim of man’s life, then its pursuit and achievement involves fulfilment of certain conditions. This implies that every individual should be conscious of his own good and develop his power of action to realise it. But simultaneously, he must be conscious of the good of the others and help in creating those conditions which lead to the development of their power of action. Consciousness of this fact that individuals’ good can be realised in the common good of the others is the essence of rights (Rattasingh, 2015). Education is the basis for development and empowerment for every nation. It plays a vital role in understanding the participation in day to day activities of today’s world. It builds one’s
character and plays a significant role in transmitting one’s culture, belief and values to others in the society. It helps in creating innovations and meeting the growing needs of every nation. The development of a nation is not measured through the buildings it has built, the roads it has constructed, bridges it has constructed but by the human resources. The nations develop through well-defined system of education. Although the physical facilities are usually important they are perishable and valuable. In the absence of proper education, the nation can hardly develop these and maintain them. Education is therefore a more crucial factor not only equipping the new generations with skills essential for earning a livelihood but also to create in them an awareness to social and environmental realities and inculcate in them scientific temper, independence of mind and spirit which are of importance for them to become responsible citizens (Mehta & Poonga, 1997).

The importance of education cannot be over-emphasised as its fundamental purpose is to build the human personally into a pattern of perfection through a synthetic process of development of the body, the enrichment of the mind, the sublimation of the emotions and the illumination of the spirit. It is preparation for living life here and hereafter. Therefore, education liberates people from ignorance which shrouds the mind, liberation from superstition which blinds the vision of truth. Mohanty (1982) maintained that without education, it is not possible for a society to grow. It is with this reason that almost all the eminent educationists have unanimously agreed that education is the pillar on which the entire fabric of a nation resides. Whether a society is formed through contract or communication, education plays its vital role in preservation and transmission of societal values. The process through which they are transmitted is educational and the process through which people are brought up and made conscious of their right and duties is social. A non-social human being is made social through an educational process and therefore education is called a social process. Mohanty posited that education prepares the child for adult life where he will be in a position to fulfill his responsibility of adult life.

It is pertinent therefore to note that the education policies adopted by any country play a pivotal role in the realisation of its societal goals. I strongly believe that we should focus on education for sustainable growth and development which depends on a literate and skilled citizenry. We require the caring and informed decision makers at all levels and across all sectors: people capable of making the right choices for a sustainable future. It is the task of education to produce this caliber of personalities that our communities require to move us to the next level. Education must face the challenges of our century and help us learn our way to sustainability, growth and development.
Educational systems contain both transformative and reproductive elements. The balance and tensions between these have varied extensively over time and continue to vary across countries and the world’s regions. Ideally, education would reproduce the ‘good’ and transform the ‘bad’, but ‘good’ and ‘bad’ are value-based and inherently political in nature. Accordingly, the prevailing form of governance and nature of power relations, as reflected in the dominant socio-cultural and socio-political institutions in a given context, profoundly condition the balance and tensions between these elements (Desjardins, 2015).

Education has played a crucial role in transforming societies. In countries involved in Organization of Economic Cooperation Development Countries (OECD), education has played a central role in the modernization process- where modernization is defined as moving from ‘traditional values’ to ‘secular rational values’ and from ‘survival values’ to ‘self-expression values ’ as defined by Desjardin (2015) He further noted that it is not just education per se, but the socio-cultural and socio-political context in which education is delivered that matter for the transformation of society in ways that are consistent with the notions of social justice. Education has the potential to foster the emancipation of individuals as well as of collectives. Thus, the comprehension and explanation of the role of education as a panacea for community transformation, growth and development is very imperative so as to ginger community self-help efforts for positive change and development in our local communities.

CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATION

In this paper, there are certain key concepts which need clarification. This is necessary to enhance proper and comprehensive understanding of the subject matter under discussion.

Education

Education has been defined as a process of development which consists of the passage of a human being from infancy to maturity. It is the process by which human being adapt gradually in various ways to his physical and spiritual environment. In this definition the ability of social adaptation means the development of social qualities like co-operation among social groups and communities. Education involves all experiences that an individual acquires inside or outside the school. Education is one of the major agencies of socialization with teachers and educational institutions as socializing agents. It is an instrument of social change. Three things are important: agents of change, the content of change, and the social background of those who are being changed, that is, students. In other words, education is a process which brings about changes in the behaviour of society. It is a process which enables individuals to effectively participate in the activities of society and make positive contributions to the progress of society. Education is the most critical instrument that unlocks the development of a person and opens
the potentials for national development and change. Uju (2013) opined that education is the bedrock for any meaningful and sustainable development hence the need for continuous emphasis on its attainment. It is a tool through which a country’s socio-economic, scientific and technological development is achieved. Education entails a systematic training and instruction designed for the purpose of imparting knowledge and development of skills, ability, character and intelligence. It remains the only instrument for empowering young people with knowledge, skills, values, attitudes and habits which provide them access to productive employment and effective living.

In this respect, education is quite a significant process generating the basic foundations of socio-economic development. It is not sufficient to evaluate the value of education in terms of vocational knowledge and skill alone but also on the moral, cultural and virtues transmitted to generations. The economic value of education relies upon attitudes, values, social and communicative skills rather than productive norms and technical knowledge. No matter the project regarding social development whether it is national or local, it has to be considered within the framework of social relationship (Turkkahrama, 2012).

The most important contribution of education is not only to upgrade the living standards of citizens but also to enable them to become better citizens. Education improves and strengthens developmental capacities of individuals, communities, groups, institutions, and countries. However, as Roosevelt in Vashish (2018) said, ‘trying to educate a person mentally without educating him morally is to bring a menace into the society’. Mental and moral education is possible via educating people to become supporters of each other and not enemies at all. In this vein, education can create a safer, healthier and more prosperous world and enhance the living standards by changing the visions and perspectives of individuals (Turkkahrama, 2012). Vashish (2018) also maintained that education is a synthesizing factor that builds both common ethos and institutions which are of paramount importance for national growth and security, whether political, economic, social or cultural, as Mahatma Gandhi said “Education without character is evil”. Today economic necessities make technical and professional education very important so as to fully utilize the natural resources of the country.

**Transformation**

There are almost as many definitions of transformation as there are writers on it. These definitions depend however, on the orientation of the scholar offering the definition. For instance, from an individual viewpoint, transformation entails a revolutionary overhaul of the individual. This implies a complete change like a caterpillar turning into a butterfly. In mathematics, transformation means the movement of a shape to a different position but still
retaining its area, size, angles and line length. From the organizational perspective, transformation connotes a change that moves an organization in a new direction and takes it to an entirely new level of effectiveness where there is no resemblance with the past configuration or structure.

The main string in this definition is change and change is constant. Change is both progressive and educational and can be both good and bad, depending on who observes the change. Change can mean political changes, new and improved technology, advanced customer requirements or new competitors on an increasing complex and global market. To transform therefore will involve a shift in the orientation of individual, organisation or society in such a way that new actions and results becomes possible. Transformation is such a topical concept that sheer mention of it attracts a lot of attention. This is because like reform, it conjures the notion of change. As attractive as this concept is, its achievement can hardly be feasible without a conscious and deliberate effort of the individual or society. In achieving societal transformation, education becomes indispensable as it is an effective catalyst that brings hope to humanity and transforms societies positively (Musa, Jimba & Ogundele, 2015).

**Community Development**

Over the years, many concepts have been employed to describe the concept of community development. Akukwe in Abugu (2014) noted that community development had been associated with such names like social education, mass education, functional education and rural constructive work. It has also been described as a fusion of community organization and economic development. Community development fundamentally involves a series of actions and decisions that improve the lot of a community not just economically, but in terms of economic functionality. Local government councils play an important role in the economic development of a state and in ensuring the well-being and safety of community members. It also provides local leadership and supports community recreational and cultural ideals. The goals of government in the community development policy are to: Ensure the local government has input into the formulation of policies and strategies aimed at enhancing the level and scope of community, social and economic development and services; and maximize local government’s access to funding and resources to provide appropriate community services and facilities (Cavaye, 2003).

Mabogunje (1980) observed that rural or community development is concerned with the improvement of the living rural standards of the low-income people living in the rural areas on a self-sustaining basis through transforming the socio-spatial structures of their productive activities. The author held that this required a broad reorganization and mobilization of the
rural masses and resources, so as to enhance the capacity of the rural populace to cope effectively with the daily task of their lives and with the changes consequent upon this. Abugu (2014) posited that the goals of community development are to improve people’s productivity and enable them to participate in social, political and economic life in the future. This gives them more confidence in managing their own affairs and also helps to protect the environment.

EDUCATION AS A MEANS OF COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

Education is regarded as a prerequisite for community or rural transformation. The relationship between education and community or rural transformation is very clear. Educated people have higher income earning potentials and are better able to improve the quality of their lives (International Labour Organisation [ILO], 2012). Education empowers people to become more proactive and gain control over their lives and widen the range of their choices in life. Education also promotes social and group relationships as it trains individuals to relate to and interact meaningfully with others in the society and also appreciate the importance of effective organization for human progress. Here, the school system within the educational system fosters this development. The school brings people of different cultural backgrounds together for a common purpose. This promotes mutual co-existence among the different students, which is further extended to the wider society. The society and of course nature have a significant role in determining the function of education. In other words, society and education complement each other. The society cannot carry on without education and vice versa. Education affects not only the person being educated but also the whole community by starting from his/her family. Consequently, raising sufficient number of efficient people for a prosperous society is the function of education and educational institutions in the community.

Orji (2013) held that education also promotes the culture of productivity by enabling individuals to discover the creative potentials in them and apply same to the improvement of the existing skills and techniques of performing specific tasks, thereby increasing the efficiency of their personal societal efforts. Education teaches or trains people to be useful to themselves and the society they live. By this, they have to be productive and discover their creative abilities and use this to perform specific tasks to attain self-actualisation. Education also develops in the individuals those values which make for good citizenship, such as honesty, selflessness, tolerance, dedication, hard work and personal integrity, all of which provide the rich soil from which good leadership potentials is groomed. Therefore, education is the greatest force that can be used to bring about change. It is also the greatest investment that a nation can make for the quick development of its economic, political, sociological and human resources (EFRND, 2010). The National Policy on Education (NPE) affirms this position as it emphasizes the
inculcation of national consciousness and national unity; the inculcation of the right type of values and attitudes for the survival of the individual and the Nigerian society; the training of the mind in understanding of the world around; and the acquisition of appropriate skills, abilities and competence both mental and physical as equipment for the individual to live in and contribute to development of the society (FRN, 2013).

In a study titled *The Role of Community Development in Tackling Poverty in Ireland*, Motherway (2006) sees community development as:

... a process whereby those who are marginalized and excluded are enabled to gain in self-confidence, to join with others and to participate in actions to change their situation and tackle the problems that face their community.

Motherway argued that community development entails active participation in decision making and collective action, leading to an agenda for social change regarding equality, social inclusion and amelioration of poverty. There is also a ‘spirit’ of community development, with a focus on the process as much as the outcome, on rebalancing power inequalities and on action learning. Motherway (2006) further affirmed the importance of community development as:

a way of strengthening civil society by prioritising the actions of communities, and their perspectives in the development of social, economic and environmental policy. It seeks the empowerment of local communities, taken to mean both geographical communities, communities of interest or identity and communities organizing around specific themes or policy initiatives. It strengthens the capacity of people as active citizens through their community groups, organizations and networks; and the capacity of institutions and agencies (Public, private and non-governmental) to work in dialogue with citizens to shape and determine change in their communities. It plays a crucial role in supporting active democratic life by promoting the autonomous voice of disadvantaged and vulnerable communities. (P.118)

It is pertinent on the followership to give the leadership of the Community Development Association the moral support and cooperation in its quest to bring transformation in the community for the good of all.

Fundamentally, development is the creation of wealth; wealth meaning the things people value. It involves ongoing economic, social and environmental improvement – sustaining a desirable environment; having a vital social system that fosters collaboration, equity and freedom and a vital economy that is diverse, competitive and accessible. Development increases choices, sustains positive attitudes, improves the function of institutions and enhances quality of life (Cavaye, 2001).
It must be mentioned here that development within rural communities depends on several interdependent components; these include the following:

1. Adequate infrastructure: infrastructure like good roads are needed to support economic activity and community life.
2. Establishment of new businesses: - a healthy economy depends in part on new business starts, access to venture capital, improving the efficiency of existing firms or the establishment of new industries or enterprises.
3. Good government policies: - policy settings can help position rural communities and regional areas in an economically competitive, socially just, and environmentally responsible position.
4. Delivery of services: - the delivery of services in rural communities allows the local economy and social system to function, sustaining employment, population and quality of life in the rural areas.

Further studies like Cavaye (2001) have shown that investment in infrastructure or major businesses, development such as irrigation, transportation, or industrial development have transformed some local economies. Cavaye also observed that changes in policy, the export enhancement program or welfare reforms have also dramatically influenced local communities. He noted that lasting development within rural communities also relies on less tangible components of development such as community ownership, local leadership, action, ‘rethinking’, and motivation. He further stated that the ‘concrete’ benefit of community development, such as employment and infrastructure, often come through local people changing attitudes, mobilizing existing skills, improving networks, thinking differently about problems and using community assets in new ways.

A critical look across rural communities in Nigeria shows that there are many communities that are adapting to change and implementing community initiatives. Yet there are also many communities struggling to take action. Some community-based initiatives cease after external funding ends, suggesting a less than genuine connection with local passion and contribution to community capacity. There is large investment of community and government resources in planning and prioritization but limited local action. Community leaders and volunteers are “burning out” and struggling to foster broader participation and shared vision. While adequate resourcing is crucial, some communities and agencies can “chase” funding without engaging genuine community ownership.

Pritchard and McManus in Cavaye (2001) rightly observed that:
Many rural people are angry, frustrated and upset about low commodity prices, eroding rural infrastructure, cutbacks in services, the deterioration of communities and a perceived lack of government attention. (p.18)

Many people feel that their life chances are deteriorating; and this has often led to political fundamentalism. Many rural people blame government and other external bodies for lack of sponsorship and assistance. This generates anger and frustration from the part of the rural people making them sceptical to the impact of change in many rural communities.

**CHALLENGES**

There are many challenges facing community development. A few will be discussed here.

1. Community development is fundamentally based on values. Development, whether it focuses on infrastructure, business expansion or the environment, will only be an improvement if it is consistent with values of the community.
2. Community development starts with citizens fundamentally considering how they want their community to be.
3. The difficulties many communities have in taking or maintaining action is not necessarily due to lack of venture capital, poor access to funding, or limits to community engagement. Rather, difficulties exist because individually, or as communities, people struggle to discern a clear direction for action and lack the confidence to act. But some communities are very successful at taking action. However, the scope and extent of development options can overwhelm others.

**SOME POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS TO THE CHALLENGES**

In spite of the challenges, there are suggested solutions that can effectively address the challenges of community development. These include:

1. the provision of infrastructure and other basic necessities of life and good governance to the rural masses should be steady as a means of coping with the problem of poverty and to sustain economic growth and development.
2. attitudinal change through value re-orientation of both the leaders and the led, especially with regards to government work, property and public life. The perception of government work and property as no man’s business must be discouraged at all cost.
3. effective and efficient dissemination of information and the use of propaganda to sensitise and arouse the interest of the rural masses in community developments is needful. Information is power and thus, vital in all human dealings. Without effective
information and subsequent dissemination, persons in rural areas may not be aware of
the benefits of community development.

CONCLUSION

Education should be a major priority for communities considering its significance in
transformation and development. We must endeavour to invest in education for sustainable
development in our communities. Through education, we get the caring and well-informed
decision makers, people capable of making the right choices at all levels with strong will to
push development in our communities and the country at large. Persons with at least a basic
education are more likely to bring about a range of social services, and participate more actively
in local and national governance through civic involvement. They are also less likely to be
marginalized within the larger society. Education empowers; it helps people become proactive,
gain control over their lives and widen the range of available choices.

Emphasis should be placed on self-help community projects so as to reduce over
reliance on government. If people continue to wait on government, rural dwellers will continue
to suffer because of deteriorating infrastructure. Communities must therefore adopt the agenda
of social change regarding equality, social inclusion and the amelioration of poverty amongst
their people through the spirit of community development.

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