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Education as a Tool for Poverty Reduction in Nigeria

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Abstract

This paper examined education as a tool for poverty reduction in Nigeria: Poverty has been identified as a state of not having enough materials possessions or income for a person's basic need. Poverty can have diverse psychological, social, economic and political causes and effect. There is a saying in America "One is poor only if he chooses to be". This paper has presented some vital courses of poverty and effect of poverty in the society such as lack of decent home, poor food, hunger, mental health and lack of portable drinking water. Consequently, education as a tool for poverty reduction affects the society in many positive ways, among which are; inculcation of morality and ethics, acquire employment opportunities, finance management, management of household responsibilities, promoting good health and well-being. The paper therefore, recommended among others that government and its relevant agencies should embark on public enlightenment campaign to create awareness and understanding of the importance of education in Nigeria.

Key Words: Education, Poverty, Poverty Reduction

Introduction

I would begin this presentation by stating indeed that education is a catalyst for poverty reduction. Education is the process that facilitates learning, the acquisition of knowledge, skills, values, morals, beliefs, and habits and indeed reduce poverty in someone's life. Educational methods include teaching, training, storytelling, discussion and directed research.¹

When a child is born into an impoverished family, they enter the first phase of a long and challenging cycle that can run for generations. When a family lives in poverty, they usually have very limited or no access to resources. This means they have few opportunities to further themselves, leaving the entire family fastened tightly on the poverty trap. This is why so many charities and NGO's focus on ways to break the poverty cycle. It is certainly why religious

organizations like early missionaries had such a strong focus on education. Our grandparents were evangelized through these ways.

Specifically; children living and growing up in a vicious cycle of poverty and poor educational background are at a significant disadvantage in life due to such factors as:

- ❖ **Malnutrition:** - Caused by hunger and low food sources.
- ❖ **Higher rates of illness:** - Caused by lack of nutrition and insanitary living conditions.
- ❖ **Lack of education:** - Due to underfunded schools in poor rural areas living too far from schools to travel, the need to care for younger siblings at home or the need to work and support the family.
- ❖ **Inadequate healthcare:** - Poor rural communities often lack adequate healthcare services. Visiting clinics and hospitals can be costly and difficult to obtain for the impoverished.

Barrack Obama the former president of America in a notable quote, said: “in the 21st Century, the best anti-poverty programme around is a world-class education”. This statement from a man of his wealth of knowledge goes a long way in emphasizing the ever crucial role of education in tackling poverty altogether.²

The Concept of Education

Education is an essential acquisition of wisdom upon which life, development and social wellbeing attained greatness. Education is not economic investment; it is the foundation of human development. Education provides one with sound mind to approach social issues, contribute to once society and advancement.

Education is empowering individual for greater opportunities, it helps one to be good citizens, know right from wrong and enhanced once human right knowledge. Education is acquiring of skills for better living.

Kumar & Ahmad³ define education as “a purposive, conscious or unconscious, psychological, sociological, scientific and philosophical process, which brings about the development of the individual to the fullest extent and also the maximum development of society in such a way that both enjoy maximum happiness and prosperity”. Thus, education is basically the development of an individual according to his needs and demands of society of which he or she is an integral part.

Nelson Mandela the former president of South Africa has rightly said that 'Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world... Education provides you the tools to improve the quality of life in modern society both economically and sociologically. Education is power and no one can ever deny this fact’.⁴

Formal Education: According to Coombs & Ahmed⁵ formal education is “the highly institutionalized, chronologically graded and hierarchically structured education system” spanning schools and university Non-formal education: Non-formal education is “any organized, systematic educational activity carried on outside the framework of the formal system to provide selected types of learning to particular subgroups of the population, adults as well as children”⁶ This form of education may be facilitated by professional teachers or by

individual leaders with vast knowledge and experience. Although non-formal form of education does not come with a formal academic reward in terms of certificate, this form of education greatly improves and builds up an individual's skills and capabilities. Non-formal education is mainly focused on equipping people with vocational training skills and knowledge to make them self-dependent and more functional in society. The long run effect of this form of education is improved living standards of citizens which will consequently reduce poverty or even totally eradicate it.

Importance of Education: It is one of the most important tools which provides a foundation for poverty eradication and fosters economic development. It lays down the fundamental basis on which most of the economic and social well-being of citizens are built and developed. Education is essential if significant progress is to be achieved in terms of economic and social development. Thus, education increases the value and productivity of the labour force which subsequently leads to poverty reduction levels⁶. According to Lucas⁷ the key factors that determine the standard of living in any given country is embedded in how well the country manages, develops and utilizes the skills and knowledge it possesses as well as ensuring good and quality education for its population. The lack of education among a country's population tends to have an adverse effect on the country's per capita income which tends to increase poverty levels, especially in developing economies of which Ghana is no exception.

The Concept of Poverty

Poverty is a state of lack (short of); these lacks can be materials things, cloths, foods drinking water, electricity and decent shelter, etcetera. These essential commodities are vital in once social life for better living, better social-wellbeing, society and personal development. Short of basic fundamental right of individual and lack of skill is element of poverty.

Poverty is defined as the “deprivation of common necessities that determine the quality of life, including food, clothing, shelter and safe drinking water, and may also include the deprivation of opportunities to learn, to obtain better employment to escape poverty, and/or to enjoy the respect of fellow citizens,”.⁸

Also poverty is a state of poor welfare of citizens in an economy. However, there is no objective definition of poverty and no objective way of measuring how many people are poor. The definitions of poverty vary widely among international agencies and countries. The most commonly used working definition for international poverty comparisons, and the poverty line is per capita expenditures of US \$1 per person per day (adjusted for differences in purchasing power)⁹ While for some, it is defined as US \$2 per person per day, others calculate minimum caloric requirement as the poverty line. Poverty has many diverse effects and consequences

Poverty may hinder educational attainment. With poverty in place, students are handicapped in the area they acquire learning and other pedagogic materials needed for class activities. Also poverty may generate social pressures which deviate the mindset of poor students, self-concept, and world view. With widespread poverty, social education institutions suffer in terms of deteriorating standard becoming the case.¹⁰

In the philosophical literature, the distinction between absolute and relative poverty is well set out by Richard Hull. The term poverty is commonly used in two ways. It is used to describe a

state of affairs in an absolute sense or to describe a state of affairs relative to another. When one is described as poor in the absolute sense, one is said to be living at or below the level of subsistence. The emphasis here is on biophysical survival: if one is poor, one's needs that make living possible are not met.¹¹

Furthermore, poverty exists according to this conception 'if people are denied access to what is generally regarded as a reasonable standard and quality of life in that society'.¹²

Traditionally, over the years some questions have raged on regarding the phenomenon of poverty. What is poverty? What is wrong with poverty? What should be done about poverty? This paper presentation is interested with the last question, What should be done about poverty?

Poverty and inequality are deeply interconnected and they can be broadly defined as the functioning and the outcome of the same system¹³ the economic system based on capitalism. Poverty plays a functional part within this system as it is about the increased value of the real income of people that fall shortly above the line of the non-poor, and it works as an illusion of a given state of affairs. Moreover, the second function regards the general conditions created by poverty because it ensures that the "dirty work" will be done, such as dangerous, precarious, underpaid and undignified jobs. Poverty allows for the formation of a labour force, people who need to work whatever the physical and metaphorical costs are. The third function of poverty can be described regarding ideological dominance, and therefore refers to the ideological hegemony necessary to maintain the power of the ruling class. In fact, the poor are easily identified as the criminals and deviants simply in order to support established, 'conventional' societal norms.

Causes of Poverty in the Society

There are many causes of poverty; but here I would discuss three of those:

- i. Lack of Education
- ii. Lack of Government Support
- iii. Lack of Infrastructure
- iv. High cost of goods and services
- v. Discrimination / inequality
- vi. Unequal distribution of resources
- vii. Insurgency/conflict
- viii. Poor governance, corruption, and poor infrastructure
- ix. Lack of Employment opportunities and
- x. Discriminatory Treatment against Girls and Women

Lack of Education:- As it has been understood that through the acquisition of education, the individuals are able to develop their skills and abilities that would enable them to acquire employment opportunities, manage the household responsibilities in a well-organized manner, differentiate between propriety and impropriety and inculcate the traits of morality and ethics. It is essential for the individuals to make use of their educational skills and abilities to alleviate the conditions of poverty. Due to the prevalence of the conditions of poverty, the individuals experience impediments within the course of acquisition of education and vice-versa. Lack of education gives rise to the conditions of poverty. When the individuals are not educated, it is

apparent that they would be unaware and would not possess the essential knowledge and skills that are necessary to sustain one's living conditions in an appropriate manner. Therefore, due to lack of education, there is prevalence of the conditions of poverty.¹⁴

Lack of Employment Opportunities: - It is apparent and is comprehensively understood that when individuals will acquire good and well-paid employment opportunities, they will be able to generate a source of income. Financial resources are regarded to be of utmost significance in promoting better living conditions. The individuals are able to satisfy all needs and requirements, such as, diet and nutrition, housing accommodation, health care and medical, education, travel and tourism and so forth. Therefore, the primary objective of all individuals is to acquire employment opportunities. Finding good employment opportunities is not easy. The individuals are even required to move away from their homes to get engaged in jobs. When they are unable to acquire employment opportunities, they are unable to generate a source of income. In other words, they experience problems and challenges within the course of sustenance of their living conditions and are overwhelmed by the conditions of poverty. Hence, it can be stated that lack of employment opportunities is one of the major causes of poverty.¹⁵

Discriminatory Treatment against Girls and Women:- In some rural communities, women and girls are discriminated against and are not provided with equal rights and opportunities. They are discouraged from acquisition of education and participation in employment opportunities. Some people hold the view that girls need to eventually get married and go to marital homes, hence, they should be trained in terms of taking care of household responsibilities, and taking care of the needs and requirements of family members, such as health care and well-being. Instead the individuals aspire to make provision of education to the male members. They feel that when males get educated, they would render an effective contribution in promoting the welfare of their families and communities. The families belonging to deprived, marginalized and economically weaker sections of the society usually spend financial resources in making provision of education to the male children. In families with girls, when resources are not made use of in an adequate manner in providing education to them and when they will be discriminated against, then the individuals and families would experience barriers within the course of sustenance of living conditions in a better way and continue to dwell in the conditions of poverty. Therefore, discriminatory treatment against female-folk is also regarded as one of the major causes of poverty in Nigeria.¹⁶

Effect of Poverty in the Society

As stated earlier the definitions of poverty goes on and on. In order to examine the effect of poverty in the society, I state here again that poverty is that one does not have enough money to meet one's most basic needs:- the cost of home, water, food, clothing and medication, the list is endless but I restrict myself to these:

- i. Lack of decent home,
- ii. Poor food,
- iii. Hunger,
- iv. Mental health,
- v. Lack of Portable drinking water,
- vi. Lack of utilities sanitation,

- vii. Lack of clothing,
- viii. Poor healthcare and
- ix. Increase in crime.

The vicious cycle of poverty means that lifelong barriers and troubles are passed on from one generation to the next. Unemployment and low incomes create an environment where children are unable to attend school. Children must often work to provide an income for their family. As for children who are able to go to school, many fail to see how hard work can improve their lives as they see their parents struggle at everyday tasks.

For society, poverty is a very dangerous factor that can destabilize an entire country. Regardless of its causes, poverty has devastating consequences for the people caught up in its web. Poverty accounts for the bulk of street crime (homicide, robbery, burglary, etc.), and these also account for the bulk of victims of street crime. Street crimes, include the deep frustration and stress of living in poverty and the fact that many poor people live in high-crime neighborhoods. In such neighborhoods, children are more likely to grow up under the influence of older peers who are already in gangs or otherwise committing crime, and people of any age are more likely to become crime victims. Moreover, because poor and near-poor people are more likely to commit street crime, they also comprise most of the people arrested for street crimes, convicted of street crime, and imprisoned for street crime.

Education as a Tool for Poverty Reduction

The role of education in reducing poverty cannot be over emphasized; first;

- i. Inculcation of morality and ethics
- ii. Acquire Employment Opportunities
- iii. Financial Management
- iv. Management of Household Responsibilities
- v. Promoting Good Health and Well-being and

Inculcation of Morality and Ethics: – Education helps in the inculcation of morality and ethics. Through the acquisition of education, the individuals are able to generate awareness in terms of morals, ethics, norms, values, principles and standards. They are able to understand that it is necessary for the individuals to be polite and ethical, especially when dealing with others; be considerate and thoughtful and treat each other with respect and courtesy. The inculcation of morality and ethics proved to be beneficial to the individuals in not only alleviating the conditions of poverty, but they would be able to acquire employment opportunities and maintain good terms of relationships with other individuals. Morality and ethics enable the individuals to move in the right direction.

Acquire Employment Opportunities:- Through the acquisition of education, the individuals are able to augment their knowledge and understanding in terms of various aspects. They are able to acknowledge the areas in terms of which they are interested in seeking employment opportunities. In other words, individuals are able to augment their competencies and aptitudes in a better way, so they are able to secure employment opportunities. In order to acquire employment opportunities, it is essential for the individuals to acquire at least the basic literacy

skills of reading, writing and arithmetic. The development of basic literacy skills would enable them to perform the tasks and functions, which may involve reading, writing or solving numerical problems. There is a direct correlation between the acquisition of employment opportunities and the level of education. Higher educational qualifications will enable the individuals to acquire well-paid employment opportunities. Acquisition of employment opportunities is one of the major aspects in causing a reduction in the conditions of poverty.¹⁷

Management of Household Responsibilities:— Management of household responsibilities is one of the important tasks that the individuals need to carry out. The ways that the individuals adapt in the management of household responsibilities are regarded to render a significant contribution in enhancing one's living standards. Through the acquisition of education, the individuals are able to generate awareness in terms of management of household responsibilities. They are able to make use of their skills and abilities in the making of meaningful decisions, attain awareness in terms of obtaining services from others, managing financial resources and so forth. The individuals, belonging to all categories, backgrounds and occupations are required to manage the household responsibilities.

Promoting Good Health and Well-being:- Through the acquisition of education, the individuals are able to gather right information in terms of promoting good health and well-being. The individuals, who are usually unaware and are residing in the conditions of poverty and backwardness are not aware in terms of methods and strategies that are necessary to promote good health and well-being. In order to promote good health and well-being, the individuals need to take into consideration certain aspects. These are: diet and nutrition, physical activities, positive thinking, health care and medical treatment and so forth. Research has indicated that individuals belonging to poverty stricken, deprived, marginalized and economically weaker sections of the society attend training centres to acquire information in terms of various areas such as, health and well-being, child development, home science and so forth.¹⁸

Barriers to Education in Nigeria

It is pertinent to note the individual differences to understanding the concept of education in Nigeria and among poor people or rural communities. It is not unusual to hear some parents saying, “My child cannot go to school; how can we start going to school? We do not have money” etc.

The presenter characterizes these as individual differences informed by ignorance or lack of awareness. This proves that many have no access to education in Nigeria. According to Okeke¹⁹ access to education means free and unlimited, unhindered and unfettered opportunities at each level of education to obtain knowledge, skills, and abilities available at that level needed to optimally participate and contribute to development in the society. He goes on to state that this definition of access to education covers the threshold of access or enrolling, attending and completing and possibly transiting to the appropriate level of education.²⁰

This proved that individual differences amongst pupils pose a barrier to equal educational opportunity in Nigeria. The educational system does not take cognisance of the ability and aptitude of the individual pupils enrolled into our educational institution. Abolishing fees,

providing common curricula, equipping schools with adequate instructional materials are not enough criteria for meeting educational needs of every child in a given society. As we have observed recently, free-school-feeding programme did not increase school-enrollment as much as desired in Nigeria. Therefore, there remain the fundamentals to reducing poverty in Nigerian through education.

Recommendation

Based on the findings of the presentation this researcher considers it pertinent to recommend as follows;

- i. Government and its relevant agencies should embarked on public enlightenment campaign to create awareness and understanding of the important of education.
- ii. Government agencies, NGOs and individuals should be involved in a concerted effort to remove barriers to education by impoverished families
- iii. Non-governmental organizations, religious institutions should join in effort to argument government efforts in increasing school-enrolment programmes through scholarships, especially among indigent Nigerians.

Conclusion

The key factors that determine the standard of living in any given country are embedded in how well the country manages, develops and utilizes the skills and knowledge it possesses as well as ensuring good and quality education for its population

Nigeria is blessed tremendously and generously with huge economic resources such as crude oil, cocoa, rubber and plantations, etc. Despite all these natural resources, it is really lamentable to see millions of Nigerians still living in absolute poverty in recent times. Poverty in rural areas seems to be higher compared to urban areas. In Nigeria, widespread and severe poverty is a reality. It is a reality manifesting in lack of food, clothes, education and other basic amenities. Severely poor people lack these most basic necessities of life to a degree that it can be wondered how they manage to survive.

From the foregoing, it is evidence that education is the catalyst to poverty reduction. Therefore, the roles of education in reducing poverty include but not limited to inculcation of morality and ethics, acquire employment opportunities, financial management, management of household responsibilities, promoting good health and well-being and participation in other activities.

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