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CONTENTS

Don Nwosu:	Education For Social Change, Training of the Total Person, And Evolution Of Holistic Universalism/ Holistic Globalism.	7
David O. Fakeye and Christianah O. Olatubosun:	Language Policy Provisions And Implementation at Lower Basic Education Level In Ogun State, Nigeria.	23
Mary Olufunke Adedokun:	Failure Of Community Development Projects: Reasons and Solutions.	32
Okediji, Hannah Adebola Aderonke:	The Participation Of Nigeria In The Millennium Development Goals, Towards Eradicating Gender Inequality By 2015.	43
Asaaju, Olayemi Aderokun:	Effective Teacher Certification And Recruitment as Determinants of Quality Assurance For 21 st Century Educational Realities.	56
Okediji, Hannah Adebola Aderonke:	The Contribution Of The University Village Association (Univa) Towards Achieving Millennium Development Goals And Poverty Reduction Among Women In Oyo State, Nigeria.	66
Ogunmola, David Leke:	Evaluation Of The Impact Of Politics on Nigeria's Educational System in the 21 st Century and its Realities.	74
Josephine Azuka Onyido:	Technical Education In Nigeria: Challenges and the Way Forward.	83
Nkechi J. Okoli:	African Education From Independence To Globalisation: Emerging Issues.	93
Benjamin Nyewusira and Nkechi J. Okoli:	The Imperatives Of Traditional Education For 21 st Century And National Development In Nigeria.	100
Adelekan, Akeem Tunde:	Teacher Effectiveness, Motivation And Retention: A Critical Factor For Realizing The Philosophy and Goals Of Education In Nigeria.	111
Olugbenga Ajere and Omoluwa Olusegun:	Educational Constraints Of Migrant Fishermen and Nomadic Fulanis In The Nigerian Society.	121
Ijeoma Chinedu Ajileye:	Adolescent Social Development And Adjustment: Educational Implications.	132
Young Denson Torunarigha and Comfort E. Mbachu:	Curriculum Development For Higher Education in Nigeria: Challenges In This Age Of Globalization.	139

A.F. Oyelade:	Nigeria In The 21 st Century And Educational Development.	154
Ahmodu J.O:	Vocational and Technical Education: the Nigerian Implementation Approach.	162
Jayeola-Omoyeni:	Theoretical Foundations Of Andragogy as a Relevant Approach To Effective Teaching and Learning Of The Matured Mind.	179
Zubair, S.S.:	The Role of Islamic Education in the Development of Nigerian Community.	188
Adegbenga Onabamiro A.:	A Path Analytic Study Of Some Socio-Psychological Factors Predicting Secondary School Students' Academic Achievement.	196
Abdulkadir O. Rasaq:	Teacher Education And National Development In The 21 st Century: Counselling Implications.	209
S.O. Oniyangi; O. O. Oyerinde and Olawore P. O.:	Utilization Of Exclusive Breast Feeding Among Nursing Mothers In Ilorin-South Local Government Area of Kwara State.	218
Sofoluwe, Abayomi Olu:	Capacity Building Imperatives And Government Participation In Nigerian Pre-Primary Educational Development	229
Modupe M. Osokoya:	Curriculum Development And Evaluation: Issues, Problems And Strategies For The Improvement of Teaching-Learning Of Science In Nigeria	238
Gbenro, A. I.; Azeez, F. M. and Adekunle, A. A.:	Perspectives, Challenges And Prospects Of Adult Literacy And Non-Formal Education In Nigeria	250
Ononuju N.A.:	Early Childhood Stages Of Development.	263
U.A. Ajidagba; A. Yusuf And C. O. Olumorin:	Integrating Mobile Learning To Achieve Effective Implementation Of Nomadic Education Programme In Nigeria	272
Adeniran, Olugbade Solomon:	Funding And Management Of University Education In Nigeria: Problems And Strategies For Improvement.	281
Peter Iwunna:	The Agents Of Colonial Education in the Context of the Catholic Mission's Primary School Educational Activities In Igboland, Southeast Nigeria (1925-1960).	293
T.A Asiru:	Gender Access to Primary Education in Oyo State (1992-2007).	312
Olayanju, Oladapo Johnson:	The Funding of Colleges of Education in Nigeria: 1990-2009.	320

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NIGERIA IN THE 21ST CENTURY AND EDUCATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Oyelade A.F.

Abstract

This paper discusses the issue of Nigeria in the 21st century and educational development. It considers Nigeria in the light of happenings in the world in the 21st century and in the light of happenings in Nigeria in the 21st century; and discusses what attention should be given to education in Nigeria in the 21st century, based on United Nation's declaration of 2000 in terms of Millennium Development Goals. The Millennium Development Goals are expected to enhance national and world development. Most of the goals including the educational goals (goals 2 and 3) are expected to be pursued substantially by 2015. How far has Nigeria gone in the pursuit of the goals for national development? What else can the nation do for national development? These were the questions examined in the paper. The discussion featured philosophical analysis of the issues including logical, linguistic, expository and critical analyses. It was found that Nigeria has not gone far in the implementation of the developmental goals in spite of its intention to do so (as found in the National Policy on Education 2004) and in spite of its immense oil revenue. The reason for its inability to go far in the implementation was traced to corruption in the socio-political fabric; and it is recommended that the nation attacks the socio-political malaise more realistically for robust educational and national development.

Introduction

The 21st century is a period that has so far attracted United Nations attention in certain major areas of concern. The major areas of concern can be gathered from the United Nations Millennium Declaration at the Millennium Summit of 2000. The Millennium Declaration featured eight Millennium Development Goals prominently, these are:

- eradication of extreme poverty and hunger (goal 1)
- achievement of universal primary education (goal 2)
- promotion of gender equality and empowerment of women (goal 3)
- reduction of child mortality rate (goal 4)

- improvement of maternal health (goal 5)
- combating of HIV/AIDS, malaria, and other diseases (goal 6)
- ensuring environmental sustainability (goal 7)
- development of a global partnership for development (goal 8) (Millennium Development Goals – Wikipedia, 2010).

Many of the Millennium Development Goals are expected to be pursued substantially by 2015, which indicates that the early part of the 21st century is very crucial for the attainment of many of the Millennium Development Goals of the United Nations. Goals 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, and 7 are expected to be pursued substantially by 2015 (Millennium Development Goals – Wikipedia, 2010).

However before the United Nations Summit of 2000, a coalition of national governments, civil society groups, and development agencies such as United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) and the World Bank had met to initiate the pursuit of Education for All in all nations. The meeting was in Jomtien, Thailand in 1990 (Education for All – World Bank, 2010). Education for All (EFA) was considered to be so important in the meeting to the extent that 2015 was set as the target year for the attainment of the goal by all nations (Education for All – World Bank, 2010).

In 2000 the United Nations considered education for all to be of crucial importance too, and this was why goals 2 and 3 among the Millennium Development Goals of the United Nations Declaration, considered the need to pursue the attainment of Free and Compulsory primary education and equal educational and employment opportunities for men and women. The target year for attaining the two goals (goals 2 and 3) was also 2015 – which tallies with the target year for the attainment of Education for All by the initiators of Education for All in Thailand in 1990.

It follows that the world is interested in the pursuit of *education for all* among other important developmental pursuits: the rest being eradication of extreme poverty and hunger (goal 1); reduction of child mortality rate (goal 4); improvement of maternal health (goal 5); combating of HIV/AIDS, malaria, and other diseases (goal 6); ensuring environmental sustainability (goal 7); and development of a global partnership for development (goal 8) (Millennium Development Goals – Wikipedia, 2010).

Moreover it follows that the early part of the 21st century is expected to be the period when the world would have free primary education and equal educational and employment opportunities (2015) (Millennium Development Goals – Wikipedia, 2010; Education for All – World Bank, 2010). But goals 1, 4, 5, 6, 7 and 8 listed above can not be realised easily without the world having free and compulsory education.

Eradication of extreme poverty and hunger (goal 1), reduction of child mortality rate (goal 4), improvement of maternal health (goal 5,) combating HIV/AIDS, malaria, and other diseases (goal 6), ensuring environmental sustainability (goal 7), and development of a global partnership for development (goal 8) can not be attained if the citizens do not have adequate education to make them aware of the details involved in the various issues listed above and how they can play their various parts to develop themselves individually and the society collectively.

It follows that education is of crucial concern in the attainment of all the Millennium Development Goals of the United Nations declared in the Summit of 2000. But is the world paying good attention to the realisation of all the eight goals of the United Nations declared in the Summit of 2000? If the world is paying good attention to the realisation of the goals, then the world is paying good attention to the realisation of *development* since the goals are Millennium *Development* Goals. On the other hand if the world is not paying good attention to the realisation of the goals then the world is not paying good attention to *development*.

This paper would therefore be interested in considering how much attention the world is paying to the United Nations Millennium Development Goals such as to see how much concern the world has for *development*. But the paper would pay special attention to how much concern Nigeria has for development in the light of interest in pursuing United Nations Millennium Development Goals. In this regard Nigeria would be seen as a member of the United Nations and as a nation in the 21st century that should aspire for development. Moreover Nigeria would be seen in terms of the socio-political terrain in the nation since the commencement of the 21st century, and the role that education has been playing in the development of the nation and the role that it can still play in the development of the nation.

The World in the 21st Century

This part of the paper can not consider every part of the world in terms of how much attention the world pays to pursuit of the Millennium Development Goals, with the view to attain development in the light of the Millennium Development Goals. It can only consider a few nations among the developed nations and a few nations (including Nigeria) among the developing nations.

Besides, the paper can not consider *every detail* of the various issues of the Millennium Development Goals. It will only consider some details of the various issues by way of highlighting the pursuit of the various goals by some nations, such as to pursue development in the 21st century. Moreover the goals will not be considered in separate manner in all the cases, for in certain cases some goals will be treated along with others. The developed nations that would be considered include the United States of America, United Kingdom, and Japan; while the

developing nations that would be considered include Nigeria, Ghana, and South Africa. The issues (the goals) as stated earlier, would be treated in such a way that it would be possible to see at a glance and casually (not into great detail) how much concern the various nations mentioned above appear to have for the pursuit of the Millennium Development Goals, towards national, and eventually world development.

The developed nations mentioned above appear to attach great importance to the eradication of extreme poverty and hunger (goal 1) as can be seen in the current per capita income of the nations: United States of America \$512,612; the United Kingdom \$408,753; Japan \$493,241 (Akinboade, 2010). They also encourage Universal Primary Education and Mass Literacy (Education in the United States of America – Wikipedia, 2010; Education in the United Kingdom – Wikipedia, 2010; Education in Japan – Wikipedia, 2010). Moreover they promote to a great extent gender equality in education and employment (Demographics of the United States of America – Wikipedia, 2010; Demographics of the United Kingdom – Wikipedia, 2010; Demographics of Japan – Wikipedia, 2010). They also promote sound health education and sound health care delivery; which in turn encourage reduction of child mortality rate, improvement of maternal health, combating of HIV/AIDS, malaria, and other diseases (Demographics of the United States of America – Wikipedia, 2010; Demographics of the United Kingdom – Wikipedia, 2010; Demographics of Japan – Wikipedia, 2010). The good amount of education pursued in the developed nations mentioned above, ensures good level of awareness and enlightenment that promote environmental sustainability and development of global partnership for development. Besides, the governments of the developed nations mentioned above also promote to various extents global partnership for development.

The developing nations mentioned above (Nigeria, Ghana, South Africa) however do not appear to attach as great importance as the developed nations do, to many of the issues in the Millennium Development Goals. When one considers eradication of extreme poverty and hunger (goal 1) for instance, Nigeria's per capita income is \$2,748; Ghana \$10,748; (Akinboade, 2010). Moreover the developing nations encourage Universal Primary Education and Mass Literacy, but not to the extent that the developed nations encourage them (Demographics of Nigeria – Wikipedia, 2010; Demographics of Ghana – Wikipedia, 2010; Demographics of South Africa – Wikipedia, 2010).

The developing nations also promote health education and health care delivery, but not to the extent that the developed nations do. The foregoing imply that child mortality rate, maternal health, combating of HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases would not be as good as what obtains in the developed nations.

Furthermore education for environmental sustainability as gathered earlier can not be comparable with what obtains in the developed nations. Finally development of global partnership for development lags behind what obtains in the developed nations.

It follows that the pursuit of the Millennium Development Goals is more rigorous among the developed nations than among the developing nations; and consequently the citizens in the developed nations are reaping the benefits of the pursuit more than the citizens in the developing nations. Thus while citizens in the developed nations are progressively getting out of poverty and hunger and enjoying progressively reduced child mortality rate, improved maternal health, and other health benefits; citizens in the developing nations are enjoying less of all these. *But* the difference in the enjoyment of the developmental benefits can be seen to derive *basically* from the difference in the disposition to dispensation of Universal Primary Education and Mass Literacy by the developed nations as compared to the developing nations. For, education as has been seen earlier appears to be the bedrock for the realisation of all the eight Millennium Development Goals.

It follows that the developing nations including Nigeria need to be more serious in their disposition to the attainment of the Millennium Development Goals if they really want to attain robust national development in the 21st century. But what is the case of Nigeria in particular in this connection?

Nigeria and Development in the 21st Century

In this part of the paper, the case of Nigeria in terms of the pursuit of the United Nations Millennium Development Goals will be more closely considered, with the view to see what the nation has done so far in the 21st century and what it can still do. The discussion will however be very concise, not into great detail.

In connection with the provision of Universal Primary Education (goal 2), Nigeria has a National Policy on Education that is interested in pursuing this laudable goal. Besides, the Universal Primary Education scheme was launched in 1976 by former President Olusegun Obasanjo and even improved upon to the level of Universal Basic Education (that is free education from primary to junior secondary school level) in 1999. The Universal Basic Education scheme has however not enjoyed robust implementation. This is because some children of primary and junior secondary school ages are still constantly roaming the streets when they are supposed to be in school; besides, some of the children in the primary and junior secondary schools still pay certain fees before they could really benefit from the basic education.

Moreover when one considers the issue of gender equality and empowerment of women (goal 3), it would be found that the nation encourages

equality of educational opportunities and pursues it more realistically in recent times; it also pursues the issue of women being given more recognition in the scheme of things in the nation; even in political matters (Azuatalam, 2010). But the issue of eradication of extreme poverty and hunger (goal 1) can be seen to be receiving inadequate attention by the nation, in spite of the fact that the nation has a good source of national revenue, crude oil (Nigeria is the fifth largest oil producing nation in the world). The revenue is not allowed to be greatly enjoyed by the masses, because a few people at the helm of affairs in the public and private sectors prevent the masses from enjoying the revenue as a result of great level of corruption in the socio-political milieu (Clinton, 2009; Orintunsin, 2010; Ogunlewe, 2010).

It follows that because the Universal Basic Education could not enjoy robust implementation as noted above, and because equality of educational opportunity that could enhance women employment could not be pursued to the utmost level, health care delivery (goals 4, 5, 6); environmental sustainability (goal 7); and development of global partnership for development (goal 8); could also not enjoy robust pursuit. All these goals as noted earlier, could not be pursued robustly in Nigeria because of the existence of corruption in the socio-political fabric (Clinton, 2009; Oyeboade, 2010; Ogunlewe, 2010). Finally it is the corruption in the socio-political fabric that makes it difficult to pursue *realistically* eradication of extreme poverty and hunger (goal 1) in spite of the nation's good source of revenue (crude oil).

Conclusion and Recommendations

It follows that the main reasons for Nigeria's inability to pursue rigorously the Millennium Development Goals for national development in the 21st century are inability of the nation to pursue educational goals 2 and 3 rigorously and particularly inability of the nation to find a *realistic solution* to the problem of corruption in the socio-political fabric.

Thus for Nigeria to be able to implement realistically the eight United Nations Millennium Development Goals, for national development the nation needs to address more realistically the issue of corruption in the socio-political fabric. Next it needs to address more rigorously the issue of Free Basic Education and Mass Literacy. It would be seen that the other goals would naturally lend themselves easily to implementation.

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