

## REBRANDING NIGERIA'S EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM FOR EFFECTIVE NATIONAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

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### ABSTRACT

*The battered image of Nigeria's educational system has continued to destructively affect the nation's economic growth and development. This is in view of the fact that education has decisive effect on the mind, character and physical ability of the individual, hence the society. The numerous problems of education in Nigeria has/have continued to exacerbate the scope of poverty as citizens lack requisite capacity building skills for self-actualization. Then came the rebranding Nigeria project campaign which is aimed at projecting Nigeria better and bringing about national rebirth. The argument of this paper therefore is that as a country, it is not Nigeria that needs rebranding, but rather it is Nigerians that must be rebranded through the internal process of rebranding the educational system for national economic development. In other words, there is need for a re-orientation on the provision of qualitative education if Nigeria is going to be liberated from the burden of grime image of half-baked-graduate syndrome.*

**Keywords:** National Economic Development

### INTRODUCTION

In the Nigerian society today, when the issue of educational crisis is raised or mentioned, the thoughts that readily come to mind are decline in quality, deterioration of facilities, inadequate funding, lopsided and educational policy inconsistency, gender bias, teacher quality, ASUU strikes (in recent past), etc. As Africa's largest black nation, with over 140 million population (NPC, 2008), Nigeria has a national policy on education as far back as the 1980s. However, if there is anything the rebranding Nigeria campaign by Akunyili (2009) is reinforcing, it is that Nigerians do not have much confidence and faith in their government and her policies. This is quite understandable when gauged against the fact that the government has not done its duties to the best interest of the majority of the Nigerian masses, most of whom have consistently remained below the poverty line despite the apparent opulence of wealth. Consequently, it is instructive to observe that Nigeria cannot continue to wait until all her problems are solved before according serious consideration to rebranding the battered image of the educational sector. This is in view of the fact that the negative perception of the products of Nigeria's educational system has not only dealt a deadly blow to the nation's image before the international community, sits destructive effects on the citizens have stymied the economic growth and the progress of national development (Jude, 2009).

The question is: who is /are responsible for Nigeria's educational crisis and low quality, or put differently, what went wrong? How can the educational sector be successfully rebranded towards giving the nation her true image among the committee of great nations in the world? There is no doubt that Nigerians are good people living in a great country. In the same vein, Nigerians are very confident people who believe in themselves. In this respect, an average Nigerian sees success in his/her life in the form of overcoming the innumerable odds. Therefore, the crisis bedeviling our educational system can also be stemmed by the rebranding process. This is the basic trust of the paper. The paper is therefore collapsed into five (5) sections including this brief introduction as section one (1), while section two (2) reviews briefly the problems bedeviling the Nigerian educational system. In section three (3) we examine the quality of education in Nigeria as bedrock for capacity building and poverty alleviation, while section four (4) highlights the issue of successful rebranding agenda of the

educational system for national economic development. The final section concludes the paper with some recommendations.

### **The Problems of Education in the Nigerian Society**

For a nation to attain optimum economic development, it entails more than physical capital investment or bridging the capital gap. It encompasses acquisition and usage of knowledge, in addition to closing the knowledge gap. Consequently, the challenges for sustainable development can only be successfully tackled by a developing nation like Nigeria if three (3) major fundamental tasks are undertaken: a) Acquisition and adoption of global knowledge as well as local knowledge creation, b) Investment in human capital to increase the ability to absorb and utilize knowledge, c) Investment in modern technology towards facilitation of both acquisition and absorption.

From any perspective therefore, education can be seen as an act or experience which has decisive effect on the mind, character and the physical ability of an individual. In its technical form, education is a process by which a society uses to transfer its knowledge, skills, and norms from generation to generation through institutions. In the Nigerian society, education is seen as the wheel that can stir development in terms of the nation's economic, human, socio-cultural and political resources. However, the foundation upon which this conviction is based is not only weak but very faulty (Suleiman, 2009). Numerous factors have been identified as being responsible for the sordid state of the educational system in Nigeria. Nevertheless, whatever the case may be, what constitute a hard fact is that education remains the most critical aspect in the individual which in the long-run aids in the overall development of a nation.

Thus, the educational crisis in Nigeria has continued to defy all solutions. Perhaps one may be compelled to ask such questions as: what went wrong considering the enormity of its effects on the output of the system in the area of productivity and the level of acceptance of its products in the labour market? A lot of factors have been isolated as being responsible for the stagnation of the educational system in Nigeria. Some of these factors include poor funding versus ASUU strike, gender bias, poor parenting and guidance, poverty scourge, lack of research and development, faulty curriculum innovation, etc. We discuss some of these problems briefly as follows.

#### ***Poor Funding versus ASUU Strike***

The gross under-funding of the educational sector in Nigeria as well as the neglect of the maintenance of the physical facilities, instructional materials and living conditions, etc., have continued to deteriorate. In all institutions of learning across the nation (primary to tertiary), classrooms, libraries and laboratories is nothing to write home about. Over the years, particularly after the introduction of the Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP), following the IMF/World Bank conditionalities, the allocation of financial resources to the educational sector had continued to dwindle, while the Naira devaluation compounded the problem of procuring imported technical and scientific equipments, books, journals and other instructional materials.

These foreign bodies (IMF/World Bank) who established their hegemony on the nation's national priority dictated the pace of education and its funding contrary to the UNESCO's recommendation of (26% of the total annual budget of a nation). In Nigeria, the budgetary allocation to education began its downward dwindle and today it is barely less than 1% of the nation's budget, i.e. just 0.76% of GDP compared to some African nations like Ghana (4.4%), Malawi (5.4%), South Africa (7.9%), Tanzania (3.4%), Uganda (2.6%), Angola (4.9%), Cote de' Voire (5.0%) and Mozambique (4.1%) (Abdullahi, 2008:166; Worugji, 2009:19; Abati, 2009:18).

The various regimes were less concerned about this pathetic allocation to the sector, knowing fully well that education is a fundamental human right. Mere less than 1% allocation to this sector is inimical to human capacity development by a nation who claims to be a giant of the black race. The pathetic funding condition of the educational sector was what the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) stood up to defend by continually calling for improvement in instructional, infrastructural development. If Nigeria is going to actualize her vision 20-2020, appropriate funding of education generally is a must priority.

### *Gender Bias and the Girl-Child Education in Nigeria*

It could be recalled that Nigeria has a national policy on education as far back as the 1980s. However, due to inefficient and ineffective implementation principally because of lack of political will, poor management of the nation's scarce resources, the female segment of the population have been the worst affected. For instance, female literacy rate is only 56% while that of male is 72%. In some educationally less developed states, the situation is more pathetic for the girl-child. It has been reported that in Sokoto state for example, the girl's net enrolment is only 15% compared to the 59% for boys (UNICEF, 1999). A number of factors have been isolated as being responsible for the poor state of the girl-child education in Nigeria, hence constituting serious impediment to the general economic development of the nation. Some of these factors include religious and cultural obstacles, gender bias in the process of teaching, e.g. corporal punishment which create intimidating environment in the classroom, thus inhibiting the girl-child assimilation process, early marriage and teenage pregnancy, poverty and other socio-economic factors, as well as lack of basic infrastructures like inadequate sanitation facilities, etc. The following table (1) lends support to the gender gap in education in Nigeria.

**Table 1: Girls Education in Nigeria at a Glance**

Level	Enrolment Ratio		Gender Gap
	Boys	Girls	
Primary	38%	33%	5%
Secondary	33%	28%	5%
Adult Literacy	72%	56%	16%

Ranking in Human Development Index (HDI): 148 out of 173, Sources: HDI-UNDP Human Development Report (2002), Education System- UNESCO Statistical Year Book (1999), Others - The State of the World's Children (2002).

### *Poverty Scourge versus Private School Syndrome*

Education is supposed to help in the fight against poverty, ignorance and diseases. In Nigeria, the process of acquiring this all important knowledge has been reduced to mere monetary issue due to poverty such that it has become a source of exploitation by the providers with little or no consideration for quality of service rendered, as well as the available facilities. Today, there are proliferations of private schools, while being in school is merely an ability to pay the school operator's desire. The public schools on the other hand are worse-off due to the failure of the government to remunerate the teachers appropriately. Under this scenario, the children are left unattended in order to eke out a living. Most often, some state governments do not pay teacher's salaries as at when due. The cumulative effects of this is that education which should serve as a bridging gap between the rich and the poor has in essence widen the scope of poverty and its prevalence since only the rich can now send their wards to private schools or abroad. Little wonder the educational system has churned out graduates from universities that exhibit ignorance with regards to societal norms, values, rule of law and realities, as well as lack creativity due to all the inadequacies associated with the initial learning and training processes which is occasioned by those who offer this services out of greed and the sheer desire for profit maximization rather than human capacity development.

### *Poor Parenting/Guidance versus Poor Preparation and Examination Malpractices*

Parenting and guidance entails caring, protection, provision of basic needs for a child's up-keep so as to equip the child to adequately face the challenges of life in accordance with the laws of the land. In desperation however, many Nigerian parents have decided to innovate new ways of making sure that their wards pass public exams at all cost, by not only encouraging, but also financing activities around examination halls. There is no doubt that examination malpractices are associated with poor preparation of students and lack of self-confidence.

Teachers too also share some of the blames, especially those who do not cover their syllabus, as well as those who out of desperate socio-economic need aid and abet examination malpractices. Indeed, poor education breeds indiscipline and corruption in any society. Thus, given the high level of indiscipline and corruption in the Nigerian society today, one cannot help but call for total overhaul of proper academic culture where people are made to learn and not just the paper qualification.

### ***Lack of Research and Development versus Curricular Innovation***

The importance of research and development in the growth of a nation cannot be overemphasized. Investment in this area is nothing to write home about. This no doubt has culminated into the continuous usage of educational curricular that has become obsolete and can no longer meet the modern global challenges of development in the Nigerian society. At the tertiary level for instance, the curriculum is not meeting the current global economic challenges as a result of its being limited to mainstreaming perceived general education courses like computer appreciation, etc, which students only attend to make up graduation credit requirements. Curriculum innovation, especially in the area of transformation of traditional disciplines and professional studies into societal strategy for sustainable development and knowledge economy specialities are yet to be evolved to a level that will translate the products of our educational system to a more functional one, relevant for accelerating the economic development of the Nigerian society under the current world order that has become a global village.

Indeed, the problems of education in the Nigerian society are by no means exhaustive. The question at this juncture is: how can the Nigerian society have qualitative education that will serve as bedrock for capacity building and poverty alleviation. The next sub-section throws more light on this issue.

### **Qualitative Education as Bedrock for Capacity Building and Poverty Alleviation in Nigeria**

On the need to eradicate poverty, the World Education Forum (WEF) (2000) identified qualitative education not only as bedrock, but also as an important variable to achieve the objective. This notion has been supported by Julius Nyerere, former President of Tanzania who opines that “education is not only a way to escape poverty; it is a way of fighting it”. According to UNESCO (2003), qualitative education can be used to fight poverty if only issues such as access and use of available resources are addressed appropriately, effectively and efficiently. In order words, there must be a paradigm shift away from the current style of interventions based on the principle of “snatch them out” which does not pay attention to sustainability as a powerful catalyst for change towards poverty alleviation, with the voice to say what is required, the skills and energy to take appropriate action. Qualitative education should thus be seen as a means of building awareness and positive mind-set and as a tool for capacity building.

Education generally plays a critical role in the life of human beings. Consequently, as an agent of change, education presents a solid vehicle for the transformation and empowerment of both individual and the society. Thus, the role of qualitative education in poverty alleviation in close cooperation with other social sector is not only fundamental, but it must also go beyond literacy skills and school enrolment to empowering people towards taking charge of their lives, to become active participants in social and economic development process.

No society can succeed if it fails to provide qualitative education for its citizens. This is in view of the fact that qualitative education plays a double-edged-sword role, i.e. poverty alleviation and wealth creation. Empirical evidences have revealed that education is the social institutions which can reach the largest segment of the population with the vision of directing it through systematic learning process that promote policies within a sustainable well-integrated sector framework (Ayo, 2007). The objective of poverty alleviation cannot be actualized without qualitative education as it creates people of quality that can usher into existence a sustainable economic development which is an imperative for a new Nigeria.

Thus, for sustainable economic development to occur there is need for capacity building, defined as the process of developing and strengthening the skill, instincts, abilities, processes and resources that organizations and societies need to survive, adapt as well as thrive in the fast changing world (Philbin, 1996). UNDP (2005) also sees capacity building as a means of promoting sustainable development. It could mean building abilities, relationships and values that will enable a nation, organizations, groups and individuals to improve their performance and achieve their development objectives. Capacity building is the element that provides fluidity, flexibility and functionality of a programme or organization towards adaptation to the new changing needs of the population that are being served.

It is useful to observe that capacity building has three (3) dimensions: a) Building awareness capacity, b) Building analytical capacity, and c) Building decision-making capacity.

While each of this is fundamental for poverty alleviation, they may involve different stakeholders with varying strategies. Therefore, a clear outlining of the set of objectives which are mutually agreed upon between beneficiaries and donors would help to effectively target activities, reduce redundancy and improve synergies, with target beneficiaries leading in the definition of the objectives.

Poverty alleviation is any process or modalities put in place by either governmental or non-governmental agencies to reduce the level of poverty in a society or among a group of people of a country. Qualitative education is one of the popular methods which countries around the world have used to alleviate poverty problem. In the Nigerian society, several elaborate poverty alleviation programmes have been implemented by successive regimes, e.g. Operation Feed the Nation (OFN) and the Green Revolution of the 1970s, DFRRI, BLP, FSP/FEAP of the middle 1980s, PTF of the 1990s and the NAPEP of 2000s, etc. The overall objective of all these programmes was improvement in the general well-being of the Nigerian masses, through the provision of the basic necessities and wealth creation. The overwhelming failure of all these programmes in relieving the masses from the crushing effects of poverty has to do with what Ayo (2007) refers to as the five (5) “Cs”, i.e. conception, content, coordination, corruption and continuity. In most cases, these programmes are conceived primarily to score cheap political point, with content deficiency and too many agencies coordinating resulting in overlap. At the end of the day, the rich become the beneficiaries rather than the actual poor class, with no continuity as each successive regime come up with a new agenda. The crux of the matter is that, if our educational system was right from the on-set, all these problems will not occur. Arising from the above is the crucial issue of how the Nigerian society can successfully rebrand the educational system that could foster rapid economic growth and development. This is the subject of discuss in the section that follows.

### **Towards a Successful Rebranding Agenda of the Educational System for National Economic Development**

Education no doubt will continue to remain the bedrock to every other sector of Nigeria's economy. The rebranding Nigeria project has been on since March, 2009 when it was first launched. To have a successful rebranding agenda for Nigeria generally, the need to accord qualitative education in Nigeria's economic reform programmes cannot be overemphasized.

In Management parlance, the concept of rebranding means to link a name or trade mark with a product or service. For a product to be rebranded, it means that there is an already existing brand. In the case of a country, rebranding a nation is the process whereby a country through deliberate pre-determined programme creates a unique and corrective identity for itself with the sole aim of repositioning the nation both internally and externally as a good nation for trade, tourism, and foreign direct investment (FDI). Based on this premise, Akunyili (2009) launched a campaign for rebranding Nigeria with the sole objective of projecting the image of Nigeria better and bringing about national re-birth. This rebrand campaign was anchored on a sensational logo and slogan “*Nigeria, Good People, Great Nation*”.

Unfortunately, for many decades now, the “Nigerian brand” had so deteriorated due principally to the decay occasioned by the erosion of old traditional norms and values of our society. The worst hit was the educational sector, whereby the Nigerian brand of “certificates”, especially “degrees” became mere paper qualifications. The impact of this at the international plane was tremendous, as Nigerian graduates could hardly compete at the global arena due to all the problems of the educational sector (see section two above). Therefore, rebranding cannot just be conjured up by mere logo and sloganeering. A rebrand must be built through an internal processing. As a nation, we need qualitative educational reform agenda to reposition our national value system and brand.

It is however, useful to observe that no amount of rebranding can change a bad product. In the same measure, it is not Nigeria that needs to be rebranded but rather, it is “Nigerians” that must go through the process via the rebranding of the educational system. In this regard, there should be a re-orientation on the need for qualitative education if our desire of liberation from the burden of grime international image of “half-baked-graduate-syndrome is to be reversed!

Also, there is no doubt that Nigeria is a great nation and Nigerians are good people. However, Nigerians though courageous tend to have negative mind-set, hence negative manifestations. This negative software in the hearts of our policy makers resulted into the relegation of education to the backyard, while politics assumed the central stage, thus sucking the nation dry of her scarce resources, consequently bequeathing debacle and socio-economic kwashiorkor to Nigeria's educational sector. Low quality education no doubt is the grandmother of poverty, unemployment, criminality, etc.

Arising from the above therefore, if Nigeria as a nation is sincere in her rebranding campaign agenda, the rebranding lens should focus on the provision of qualitative education as it is a major key to sustainable national economic development. To make a difference, let us do things differently, because when education leads, positive changes follow. Together, we all can help Nigeria to actualize her dream by first and foremost redeeming the image of our “degrees” at the international labour market via qualitative education.

## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The rebranding Nigeria project should not just be seen as another ideology of sloganeering, consuming millions of Naira, more or less creating another avenue for looting the national treasury. The success of the rebranding agenda will to a great extent depend on the attention accorded qualitative education. This is in view of the fact that Nigeria cannot attain an economic development that is sustainable without heavy investment in human resources via qualitative education. Empirical evidences abound regarding literacy level in the Nigerian society, as well as the scourge of poverty in the midst of provocative opulence. The effects of poverty are best imagined: It creates frustration, loss of hope, loss of prospect or value for life, disillusionment and purposeless life, etc. Thus, for a successful rebranding agenda to occur generally, qualitative education must be accorded the highest position as it is all embracing. To achieve this, we proffer the following recommendations.

Firstly, the ambiguity of the Constitutional provisions for education may have been responsible for the mixed misfortunes of education in the Nigerian society. In order to avoid further tragedy, genuine efforts should be peddled by the committee on the rebranding Nigeria project to the policy makers on the need to channel all available resources for the development of the educational sector. If this is done (private and public resources pulled together), the battle of rebranding Nigeria will be easy to win.

Secondly, rebranding Nigeria needs to start from the minds of all and sundry. This has to do with a new attitude and re-orientation. Attitudinal change is imperative because internal attitude is correlated to external attitude. So the real issue is not rebranding but changing of the mind-set of Nigerians by all accounts. In the light of this, while rebranding should be a systematic revolution, such revolution should start from the educational sector which must carry with it a great force of change that is not only transparent, but also enduring and endearing to the people.

Thirdly, for the educational sector to develop and thus translate to economic growth and development that is sustainable, a more proactive approach should be taken through the re-orientation of the teachers, parent/guardians, students/pupils on the need to shun and abhor examination malpractices in schools. In the light of this, all stakeholders in the educational sector should be involved, while independent inspectorate committee should be put in place to regularly monitor all activities in schools.

Fourthly, qualitative education is not possible without adequate funding. Government should as a matter of policy increase the budgetary allocation to education (at least the UNESCO minimum of 26%) for a start, while it is gradually reviewed upward. This will not only guarantee meeting up with global educational challenges, it will also enable the government to adequately remunerate the teachers, thus making qualitative education available and affordable.

Fifthly, infrastructure development and upgrading in all tiers of institutions (primary to tertiary) should take prominent position in the scale of preference in the rebranding agenda. In the light of this, the need to actively involve the Educational Trust Fund (ETF) by increasing the tempo of its activities cannot be overemphasized. School environment should be made conducive for learning through appropriate staffing and equipment. In this respect, a leaf should be borrowed from advanced societies where education through research and development has taken them beyond the moon.

Sixthly, it is generally accepted that education is a fundamental right of all citizens as well as a key to social, economic, political and other areas of development in the life of both individual and the nation. In this regard, more concerted efforts are required on the part of the government in the provision of vocational and technical education towards capacity building. In the light of this, the government should create an enabling environment, with appropriate policy as well as legal community participation. This is in view of the fact that capacity building is a long term process that involves the active and full participation of all stakeholders. Therefore, more technical and vocational training centers should be established, while the existing ones should be strengthened with equipment and appropriate manpower.

Seventhly, it is useful to observe that in the good old days, school experience in Nigeria used to be one of the best moments of one's life. However, the de-industrialization of the past decades together with the general failure of the Nigerian economy has disrupted the school-to-work system of yester years. That Nigerian graduates no longer have a future to look forward to is not an exaggeration. This is in view of the fact that education in Nigeria is no longer a ladder, but rather it has become a zebra crossing, with many well-to-do parents sending their wards to either private schools or abroad, while the public schools are left to the children of the poor. While this damage can be seen to be at the personal level, however, we are creating a generation of Nigerian youths who are being taught that their country does not care for them or has nothing to offer them. For a nation aspiring to be among the 20 great nations by the year 2020, we should be bold enough to accept the fact that this may just be another dream without high human capacity or resource profile. The rebranding therefore must start with heavy investment in the educational sector, which means investment in the development of human resources, especially the youths who are the future leaders. The time to stop alienating the youths is now. This is in view of the fact that the young ones are Nigerians that will drive the 20-2020 process and beyond.

Finally, educational policy inconsistency, outdated and haphazard curricula development, gender bias, teacher quality, etc., are very crucial issues that must be urgently addressed, especially by the committee on rebranding Nigeria project.

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