Inclusive Education and Sustainable Peace in Africa

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Abstract

Inclusive education is an innovative approach to education by which all children, youths and adults on the globe have equal opportunities to learn comfortably in the same academic environment regardless their intellectual and physical ability/disability and irrespective of their political, ethnic and socio-economic background. It is a brain child of UNESCO (the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization); part of its Education For All (EFA) initiative which seeks to overcome the global challenges of marginalization, discrimination and exclusion. In this light, this paper examines the concept of inclusive education as a means of attaining long-lasting peace in Africa, which in turn will rekindle socio-economic and political progress. The paper provides copious evidence of the fact that socio-economic and political exclusion and marginalization are major sources of conflict and instability in Africa. Its underlying assumption is that inclusive education is a sure means of attaining optimum integral development and sustainable peace in Africa.

Keywords: Inclusive education, sustainable peace in Africa

1.0 Introduction

Education is both a right and a foundation for sustainable social and politico- economic transformation of any society. It can then be said that education consists of "all human activities … geared toward enabling a person to develop into a well matured, fully-functioning human being in [her or] his society; … a process [that leads to] full development of personality intellectually, physically, socially, emotionally, and spiritually" (Akubue, 1992: 6). Thus education empowers its beneficiaries and equips them with the necessary skills and confidence to find crucial information and make informed choices that have a direct impact on their families, communities and the nations. As Adeola (2009: 6) helpfully points out, education has both a quantitative and a qualitative side. While the quantitative side of education refers to the economic dividends that ultimately accrue from it to both individuals and their country as a result of increased earnings, the qualitative aspect has to do with "values, culture and needs." Education is therefore indispensable in nation building. No wonder the late legendary South African freedom fighter and former president, Nelson Mandela, believed that the way forward was education. He described education as the "highest [instrument] that can be used to change the world" (n. d.). This signifies that the political, economic and social stability of any society can be directly linked to the degree of inclusiveness of its educational system.

Nonetheless, contemporary knowledge-driven economies rely on opportunities for life-long learning which imparts to people the ability to adapt to rapidly changing situations and respond to unforeseen crisis in the world. On the one hand, education empowers people with requisite knowledge and skills to improve their lives, and with the values and attitudes, to live together amicably. On the other hand, certain kinds of education, or rather indoctrination, are also been known to instigate conflicts and other negative issues and trigger violent conflicts in some societies (Luzincourt and Gulbrandson, 2010). Thus as history has shown, education not only promotes ingenuity, prevents, mitigates and resolves conflicts but also generates conflicts.

The merits of education cited earlier can only be realized if the educational system is such that integrates and addresses the particular needs and aspirations of all citizens within the mainstream educational system; irrespective of physical, socio-economic and political status or background, giving everybody a sense of belonging. In other words, inclusive education is a possible way to go in the quest for the realization of sustainable peaceful co-existence among different classes of people in society. At this point, it is necessary to closely examine the concept of inclusive education and sustainable peace. This is necessary especially in Africa where educational, socio-economic and political exclusion, segregation and marginalization of minorities among others, have resulted to violent conflicts and general insecurity which impede development.

2.1 Inclusive education

African countries are in dire need of establishing long lasting conditions which inculcate positive attitudes and promote peaceful co-existence among their citizenry. The respective governments must find ways of building mutual trust among their people. Inclusive educational systems have been known to foster mutual understanding, respect, tolerance and dialogue among people. According to UNESCO (2009), inclusive education is a process that involves the transformation of schools and other centers of learning to cater for all learners including boys and girls, students from ethnic and linguistic minorities, rural populations, those infected and affected by HIV and AIDS, those with disabilities and difficulties in learning and as well provide learning opportunities for all

youth and adults. UNESCO (2011) adds that inclusive education is "a process of addressing and responding to the diversity of needs of all learners through increasing participation in learning, cultures and communities, and reducing exclusion from education and from within education." From the above definitions, it can be deduced that the inclusive education system thus has the responsibilities of providing opportunities for all learners' success, by facilitating and fostering enabling learning environments that meet individual learning needs, and where teachers and learners embrace the challenges and advantages of diversity.

History informs us that inclusive education is a United Nations (UN) innovation through the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). It is one of the main strategies that UNESCO has applied to address the global challenges of marginalization, discrimination and exclusion in response to the fundamental principle of Education for All (EFA). Through this means, all children, youths and adults on the globe have equal opportunities to learn comfortably in the same academic environment no matter their physical, political and socio-economic status (UNESCO, 2000). Consequently, the UNESCO and other education related agencies of the UN have since made remarkable efforts in the advancement of this innovation in the world through both policy and action. The 1990 Jomtien Declaration on Education For ALL (EFA), the UNESCO Salamanca statement (1994) which calls on all governments to give highest priority to inclusive education, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2006), which calls on all state parties to ensure an inclusive education system at all levels, and the 2009 *New UNESCO Policy Guidelines on Inclusive Education*, are some of the major international legislations on inclusive education.

UNESCO has also gone further in creating special chairs for the promotion of inclusive education around the globe and the organization of conferences and forums to assess and monitor the progress of member states in the implementation of inclusive education legislations. One of those forums was the World Education Forum, 2000, that held in Dakar where member states of UNESCO adopted the *Dakar Framework for Action*, and committed themselves to achieving the global objectives on 'Education For All,' through the implementation of the various legislations on inclusive education (*EFA Global Monitoring Report*, 2011)

Cognizant of the fact that education takes place in many contexts, formal, non-formal and informal, and within family circles and the wider community, inclusive education is consequently not a marginal issue but rather central to the achievement of high quality education for all learners. Its effective implementation will produce more inclusive societies that will ensure meaningful development and promote sustainable peaceful coexistence among citizens. Inclusive education therefore aims at eliminating exclusion arising from negative attitudes and lack of response to diversity in race, political, economic and physical status, social class, ethnicity, language, religion, gender and ability/disability (which are often sources of major conflicts and insecurity in most African societies), and introducing educational reforms that foster the inclusion of all social groups, for sustainable peaceful co-existence among citizens.

2.2 Sustainable peace

The word peace can be understood from various angles. Peace is more than the absence of war. While some sources take an instrumental perspective to peace, seeing it as a means to an end and others take a functional view of it, that is the purpose it serves, Ibeano (2006) highlights its intrinsic value. Whereas some give philosophical, sociological and political definitions of peace, he favours a process definition of it. For him, peace is a process by which activities that lead to development are increased and those that generate conflict are reduced, both within specific societies and in the wider international community (Ibeano, 2006: 10). Thus, somehow, peace is integrally linked to development. According to Babalola (2013: 3), "development is concerned with the transformation of the individuals, households, communities, private as well as public institutions through building of human capacities to ensure that available resources are properly managed and directed towards societal and ecological improvements."

Peace is an urgent necessity in the world today. This is because no political economic and social development can take place in a conflict stricken society. A peaceful world was the vision of those who drafted the United Nations Charter in 1944: "*We, the peoples… have resolved to save the succeeding generations from the scourge of war*" and UNESCO's motto: "*To build peace in the minds of [people]*". This signifies that in allocating resources by member countries and international organizations, meeting human needs such as health and education must be accorded priority in order to build true sustainable human security. During the post-cold war era, the former UN Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali published *An Agenda for Peace*, which advocated the need for "an action to identify and support structures which will tend to strengthen and solidify peace in order to avoid a relapse into conflict" (UNICEF, 2011). Apart from the chronological demarcation of this agenda from preventive diplomacy, peacemaking and peacekeeping, the surge of interest in the role of education in the promotion of peace in conflict-affected zones has been running parallel to the attainment of this agenda. This has been stimulated by the consciousness that most conflicts in the world results from inequitable provision and lack of social services among citizens, and most of the world's out-of-school children are located in these conflict stricken zones and are often used in the escalation of the conflicts.

Consequently, achieving long lasting peace in tandem with other development goals like the Millennium

Development Goals (MDGs) are largely dependent on addressing the equitable 'Education for All' objectives. It also entails providing educational access and quality in these conflict affected areas. In this regard, McCandless (2011) saw the incorporation of education within the UN cluster approach as a humanitarian response, under the auspices of UNICEF and Save the Children. Similarly, current UN Secretary-General, Ban Ki-Moon, in his 2009 report on peace building in the immediate aftermath of conflict, places social services, including education, among the five recurrent priorities for post-conflict reconstruction (UNO, 2009). The focus, since 2000, has been on both increased coordination between agencies, assisted by the emergence of the Inter-Agency Network on Education in Emergencies (INEE), and on increased international advocacy, supporting inclusive education in conflict-affected countries in which the African continent seem to be the most affected (McCandless, 2011).

Since the attainment of political independence by most African countries, peace and security have remained elusive and unresolved issues. Wars and conflicts caused and are still causing loss of lives, immense destruction of property and negatively impacting development. This situation has heightened insecurity, aggravated poverty and caused a decline in the human condition in many parts of the continent. While the African Union (AU) and other international agencies working with the conflict affected countries made commendable efforts towards preventing, managing and resolving these conflicts, all seems not to be well yet. Peace and security largely remain a mirage in most of the African countries. The causes of these conflicts partly range from illiteracy, political marginalization, exclusion, ethnicity, apartheid, religious intolerance to poverty and unemployment, among others. Some examples will be in place.

3.1 The case of South Africa
The main cause of insecurity in South Africa from the 1940s to the 1990s was the political, economic and social exclusion of the black majority by the white minority. The apartheid laws classified people according to three major racial groups—white; Bantu, or black Africans; and coloured, or people of mixed descent. Later Asians or Indians and Pakistanis, were added as a fourth category.

The laws determined where members of each group could live, what jobs they could hold, and what type of education they could receive. Laws prohibited most social contact between races, authorized segregated public facilities, and denied any representation of non-whites in the national government. People who openly opposed the apartheid regime were considered communists and the government passed strict security legislation which in effect turned South Africa into a police state. It was as a result of this separatist policy that the African National Congress (ANC) and other African political organizations were created by those who wanted a more inclusive society to address the situation. Thus the escalation of violent activities by the different groups created a state of fear and insecurity in the nation (Naicker, 2006).

3.2 The case of Rwanda
In Rwanda, it was ethnicity and the quest for political domination between the Hutu ethnic majority and the Tutsi minority that culminated in one of the bloodiest conflicts in Africa, namely the 1994 Rwandan genocide (Uvin, 1999).

3.3.1 The Nigerian saga
In Nigeria, we are all living witnesses to the past and present states of terror and insecurity in Nigeria, characterized by kidnappings, political thuggery, gang robbery, ethnic clashes, militancy, and religious extremism. Clearly, some of the causes of all these violent activities partly lie in illiteracy, unemployment, lack of education, political and economic exclusion, among others. However, there are indications that some of the conflicts in some parts of Nigeria are not just ordinary conflict. They border on a quest for political supremacy, as adduced from the comments of spokespersons of the terrorist groups who have openly admitted that the Christians and the government are their target; that they are on a jihad. Sadly, most of the citizens involved or being used in the perpetration of the violent activities include: street children, school drop-outs, frustrated persons with disabilities, unemployed youths and illiterate youths who have been brainwashed with distorted religious dogmas and philosophies by egotistical political and religious individuals.

3.3.2 Educational versus security budgetary allocations
Even though a lot of resources have been committed to addressing the problem of violence and conflicts in Africa, social services, and in particular education, do not receive priority as compared to interventions in the security sector and political processes in the fostering of long lasting peace in the continent. According to the 2011 *UNESCO Global Monitoring Report,* out of the 192 project on peace building sponsored by the Peace Building Fund (PBF) since its creation, only 25 were in the area of social services and very few of these involved education.

The highest percent of the 2012 Federal budget in Nigeria was allocated to the acquisition of security apparatuses and the funding of security agencies with the aim of fighting the present insecurity. In the education sector, the most significant innovation was the building, equipping and take off of Almajiri Schools in the northern parts of the country. While we commend the ministry of education for this reform, it is also necessary to point out here that this innovation by way of the 'Almajiri schools' is a misplaced priority. The Almajiris belong

to the group of children with special needs and constitute the group of street children often used by self-seeking individuals in the perpetration of violence. At a time when the international community is advocating for a shift away from segregated schools to that of inclusive education, and the need to integrate these children in the main stream schools for effective social interaction, character formation, inculcation of peaceful values, and eventual integration into society, we find it contradictory and unacceptable for this group of children to be educated in special schools where they will grow up to continually see themselves as a special group of citizens who do not fully belong.

Furthermore, in the view of one of the authors the recent decision by some state governments in the South East of Nigeria (Abia and Anambra) to hand over primary and secondary schools to religious organizations and missionaries is condemnable. This is not only detrimental to the educational future of innocent children from poor and unrelated religious backgrounds, but contradictory to inclusive education practices, and dangerous to the peaceful co-habitation of children and citizens with diverse religious dogmas and philosophies. It's worthy to note here that one of the factors that has threatened the security and peace of Nigerian since independence is religious fundamentalism and extremism. It is also important to note that religion is a personal affair, and so respecting each child's personal faith, giving equal respect to every religion and the right to practice it at home or in its place of worship, are our inalienable right and duty. But forcing your religion/faith on others is where the problem lies. Consequently, it is important that we keep it out of the secular school setting for the sake of peace. Our governments thus need to be working towards inclusive education and innovations for sustainable peace building, and not archaic exclusive policies.

4.0 Case studies on inclusive education
4. 1 The South African example
At the end of the apartheid regime in South Africa for instance, the government engaged in far reaching reforms in the educational sector aimed at advancing the reconciliation process. The reforms sought to close the educational gap between the whites and the blacks created during the apartheid. Above all, it was to build long lasting peace in the polity for the sake of political and socio-economic development. As Naicka (2006) pointed out, there was a move from exclusive to inclusive education. Given the dark apartheid history, every policy intervention ushered in refresh changes where human rights ethos prevailed. It was on these bases that the government in 2001 launched the inclusive education program. Through its publication of the policy document, *Education White Paper 6 on Special Needs Education: Building an Inclusive Education and Training System (2001),* it officially set out to create a single education system for all learners within a twenty-year period. No wonder the apartheid wounds were able to heal so quickly even though some of the scars are still left to be seen. Today, the South African education system and economy are rated among the best in Africa and have attracted a good number of economic and educational immigrants from other countries.

4.2 Rwanda's success story on inclusive education
Rwanda is one of those African countries with a very rugged and bitter political past. Eighteen years after the gruesome genocide in that country, it needed a leader with good conscience, political uprightness and determination to be able to change the negative picture of that country and set the pace for sustainable peace through the creation of an all inclusive society in every domain. Education in post-genocide Rwanda was seen as a tool for development, reconstruction and reconciliation (Schweisforth, 2006). Such reconstruction efforts could not have been effective with the exclusion of persons with disabilities (PWDs) and other minority groups (who make up a considerable number of the population) from the mainstream educational system. The government and its supporting international agencies thus saw the need to introduce inclusive education practices in the Rwandan educational system, especially in the higher education domain. According to Karangwa (2010), a good number of measures were taken to facilitate the inclusion of these minority groups especially the PWDs into the university system in Rwanda. Some of the measures included the construction and equipping of resource rooms for the deaf and blind in state universities, employment of special assistants in state universities that would assist PWDs in areas of difficulty, and the adjustment in the application and admission procedures into all state universities to take into consideration the needs of all Rwandese, no matter their ethnic background or social and physical status. Today, Rwanda is not only known for its fast growing economy but also for its massive women participation in nation building. It is noteworthy that Rwanda has the highest percentage (56.3%) of women in parliament in the whole world. Thus, having made great strides in promoting inclusive education, it has also thereby greatly contributed to bridging the gap between the Hutus and the Tutsis, the society and PWDs, and the restoration of the much needed peace.

The *World Bank's World Development Report* (WDR) (2011) and the *Global Monitoring Report* (GMR) (2011) both recognized the important contributions of the education sector to sustainable peace in Africa, with the GMR in particular advocating for early engagement and prioritization of education in pre- and post-conflict areas. Having seen the importance of inclusive education in building sustainable peace in our society in the preceding paragraphs of this paper, it is vital to say here that there is need for reforms and the commitment of more

resources to the advancement of an inclusive education system that will not only promote ingenuity, but also create a sustainable peaceful environment where this ingenuity can thrive. The question that therefore remains unanswered is: what are the educational reforms needed for the advancement of inclusive education for sustainable peace? The subsequent paragraphs will answer this question.

5. 0 The suggested way forward

Available literature on sustainable peace building draws an important distinction between 'negative peace' (the cessation of violence) and 'positive peace,' namely, the structural changes that address social injustices that may be a cause of violence (Galtung, 1976). Consequently, inclusive education as recommended below for achieving sustainable peace in Africa aims not just at achieving 'negative peace,' but most importantly, 'positive peace.' This is because the absence of positive peace ultimately results to the search for negative peace. This is in conformity with the peace building theory (Lederach, 1995) which, among others, advocates for education to support transformation processes related to issues of security, political institutions, economic regeneration and social development within pre- and post-conflict societies.

First and foremost, there is need to provide free and compulsory primary and secondary education by African governments to all children of school going age, not in separate schools but in inclusive secular ones. It is pertinent for state-run and private secular schools to be open to children of all communities, secular and religious to ensure equitability in access and quality. These schools must be able to address the different socio-cultural and linguistic needs of pupils/students, and provide an educational environment which does not threaten, alienate or divide, but accepts differences and yet seeks to provide an overriding culture that is composite in nature, based on the ideals that Africa treasures secularism, social justice and equity, and a democratic society.

5.1 Secular versus private/mission schools?

In a bid to foster inclusive environments for inclusive education, there are disparate views on how best and where best inclusive education can best thrive. For instance, one of the authors of this paper has this to say:

> Rather than hand over schools to religious bodies that will practice or preach the tenets of any one particular faith/religion, governments should ensure that schools inculcate a spirit of scientific humanism, of peace and sisterhood/brotherhood, and a value system based on truth, beauty and goodness, social equity and justice, working for national unity and a global consciousness. It is only when children of different communities, physical and social status work and play together that they understand and accept each other's differences, and build a climate of tolerance, developing a common identity and composite culture. They begin to speak the same language of togetherness and national identity. If children of different cultures and communities are isolated and studying in their mono-cultural schools, where will we get the inter-mingling of different cultures and statuses, and the weaving together of the different threads of our various national fabrics?

In reference to the above sentiments, the other author has a different opinion. This author believes that religion is not the problem in the country but rather pseudo-religion or the lack of true religion, properly understood and practiced. As to the question of hand over of schools:

> It is not as if it is a case of the government building and handing over schools to religious bodies. Rather, it is the case of certain state governors returning schools previously built by particular missions/churches and managed by them until the government confiscated them in the aftermath of the civil war. Thus there is a political dimension to it which is too much outside the scope of this paper to address here. Moreover, there are other realities that fly in the face of the elements and merits of inclusive education. After all said and done, the brainwashing that has been found associated with terrorist groups that assume different names in different locations in the world does not yield to dialogue. One has no idea how to reverse the course of jihadist movements using inclusive models of education.

Therefore, having made these disavowals, all that can be said is that the authors' claims to the benefits of inclusive education stand in so far as all are playing on a level field where no snakes nor scorpions are lurking. At any rate, inclusive education can be used to achieve sustainable peace in Africa through the introduction of peace and civic education in all schools curricula and a multi-cultural approach to educational delivery, to the extent practically possible. Peace education includes the cultivation of peace building skills; for instance, dialogue, mediation and so on. The responsibility of teachers in this case is to teach: the values of respect, understanding, and non-violence; skills for analyzing international conflict, alternative security systems and democratic and participatory learning principles.

Thus, peace education demands the matching of complementary elements between education and society, where the social purposes (why teach?), content (what to teach?), and pedagogy (how to teach?) of the educative process are conducive to fostering peace (Nwafor, 2007 and Kester, 2008). In order to give a multicultural touch to the education system, there should be a broad-based holistic curriculum and pedagogy, with special

adaptations in the textbooks, the co-curricular activity programs and the re-orientation of teachers.

Furthermore, the introduction of inclusive adult literacy programs by governments' education agencies will also pay off a great deal in the advancement of sustainable peace in Africa. This is because most individuals who engage in anti-peace activities do not do so voluntarily but rather through ignorance, brain-washing, and inability to personally discern the issues at stake, especially in political matters. An adult literacy experience will therefore help individuals to acquire knowledge and reading skills for peaceful, effective, participation in the democratic processes; to claim a voice in community organizations, gain political knowledge and thereby contribute to shaping the quality of public policies. By so doing, there is greater possibility of strengthening mutual understanding by enabling people to share ideas and to express, develop, preserve and complement their cultural identities and diversity.

Finally, there is a great need for substantial investment in inclusive vocational education/training. This will offer opportunities for citizens to acquire technical employable and social interactive skills to help them create and gain jobs for themselves. No doubt this will reduce unemployment which often proves to be catalysts to violent activities in the African society.

6.0 Conclusion

No society in the world has ever made political, economic and social progress amidst political, economic and social insecurity. In other words, no nation has ever succeeded in the presence of disunity among its citizenry; nor has any thrived in a climate of fear and tension, socio-economic and political exclusion of some citizens, and above all a limping and non-functional education system. This denotes that there needs to be a positive correlation between inclusion, education and sustainable peace for any society to achieve significant transformation. This paper has thus succeeded in positively linking inclusive education to sustainable peace, which is what Africa in particular requires for sustainable socio-economic and political revolution. Having advocated for it in the preceding paragraphs, the effective implementation of the recommended way forward will therefore depend on the political will and willingness of policy makers and implementers in the various African countries.

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