

The Impact of the Socio Economic Development Agenda Formed by the Braced Commission on the Niger Delta States

Nwaeke Godwin Chukwuemeka Ph.D
Department of Economics
Ignatius Ajuru University of Education
Rumuolumeni, Port Harcourt, Rivers State, Nigeria

Abstract

This paper examines the socio-economic development agenda formed by the “Niger Delta” states of Bayelsa, Rivers, Akwa-Ibom, Cross- River, Edo and Delta (Braced Commission). The paper appraised the idea of economic formation as a basis for regional development of Niger Delta area of Nigeria. Education was identified as a major factor in the development process which must be taken seriously by the Niger Delta States for effective regional development. The paper x-rayed the historical development of the educational sector in Nigeria and posited that for there to be effective sustainable education in Nigeria relevant and adequate educational resources must be provided because paucity of educational resources frustrated meaningful educational policies in the past. Useful suggestions were made for effective functional education in the Niger Delta States.

Keywords: Education, Niger Delta and Development

Introduction

The idea of regional integration and economic cooperation championed by the BRACED states of Bayelsa, Rivers, Akwa Ibom, Cross Rivers, and Delta is a welcome development. The benefits of regional integration and economic cooperation cannot be over-emphasized because of its appeal in the development process. Economists have agreed that autarky states are no longer possible, that is no state can afford to be autarky (self sufficient) because of difference in natural endowments, technology and human resources, hence the idea of integration, co-operation and interdependence. The relative peace enjoyed by the world today is as a result of international cohesion, achieved through co-operation, interdependence and exchange relations. Some European Nations like Greece, Poland, just to mention but a few are surviving the recent economic “melt down” today because of economic and social assistance provided by the European Union (EU), otherwise most countries in the Euro Zone would have failed, or at least worse-off because of the recent economic crises. So the regional co-operation pursued by BRACED states will promote faster socio-economic development in the sub-region, if sincerely and objectively pursued.

It is becoming clear that development process in the 21st century will be better pursued through economic and social co-operation by regions and states, especially among the developing nations. I therefore heartily welcome the idea of BRACED commission, especially this submit organized by the BRACED commission for the “thinks-tanks and the egg heads” to brain-storm and chart a way forward in the development of the Niger Delta region especially now that Nigerian nation or Nigerian peripheral social formation is in deep crises, emanating from internal and external contradictions.

Education

Education is the process by which the cultures and values of any society is transferred from one generation to another, or from one person to another person, Enaohwo (2000). It can be formal or informal but our concern in this paper is formal education, which involves the process of impacting knowledge, skills and experiences from one person to another, in order to equip them for worthy living in the society.

Nigeria is one of the third world countries that desire education as an instrument per excellence in the development of the national economy, (national policy on Education 1981). This desire has been heightened by the fact that the development history of advanced countries such as Britain, America, Germany and France, to mention a few, is strongly hinged on functional formal education; Agabi (2003). The enviable giant industrial stride and technological development achieved by countries like Japan, Taiwan, Belgium, France and a host of others are attributed to sustained investment in technical oriented education. These are pointers to the fact that Nigeria generally, and BRACED states in particular need sustained investment in functional education.

The social demand approach and welfares orientation of education adopted in Nigeria and its accompanying resources need have been steadily growing at a phenomenal rate, because people have recognized education as a means of socio-economic and political development. Governments have acknowledged the importance of education as a weapon for mobilizing the people towards social changes, and instrument for societal transformation

It is my appeal, that the BRACED commission, and indeed the governments of the BRACED states, should accept education as latent instrument for the achievement of rapid economic development and technological progress, as well as macroeconomic instrument for poverty reduction and social upliftment, Nwaeke (2009). Therefore positive attention should be conceived by the BRACED commission on the need for adequate funding and supply of relevant educational resources for effective operation of the educational systems. Recent study by Nwaeke (2006) reveals that total financial budgetary allocation to education in Rivers State from independence till date, has not reached 26% budgetary allocation recommended by UNICEF for developing countries. This is a mockery and a lip service to the idea of functional and quality education which Universal Basic Education (UBE) emphasizes.

Resource Challenges

Developmental aspirations and efforts cannot be achieved, without realistic fiscal policies for programme actualization as expressed by Enaohwo (1990: 127). Educational resources are teaching/ learning enhancer; their availability in schools improves teaching/learning process, and leads to the attainment of school goals and accomplishment of national education objectives. Their inadequacy frustrates any meaningful education programme and contributes to the falling standard of education.

Unfortunately, the colonial education ordinances that were in operation between 1926 and 1949 failed to provide Nigerians with the type of education necessary to launch her on the part of national development due to poor funding, inadequate supply of qualified teachers, poor learning facilities and weak administrative machinery. The universal primary education in the regional levels between 1957 and 1989 also failed largely for the same reason. The beautiful report of the Ashby commission of 1960 was not effectively implemented, infact frustrated by poor staffing, weak infrastructural development and poor funding. Nwaeke (2006), Agabi (2003), Enaohwo (2000) and Okeke (2001).

The introduction of the Universal Primary Education (UPE) in 1976 at the national level to improve mass literacy level, and supply the high level manpower needed for national development, could not be adequately implemented due to inadequate resources. The failure of UPE due to paucity of resource inputs saw the introduction of a new national policy in 1977 called 6-3-3-4 system adapted from the American educational system. This policy which was lauded at its inception as one of the best developmental policy instrument formulated by this country due to its vocational and technological skill orientation was again frustrated due to inadequacy of educational resource inputs such as teachers, funds, and educational facilities. The failure of this laudable education policy is in fact disheartening.

Obasanjo's administration has introduced the Universal Basic Education (UBE) which emphasizes free and compulsory education from primary up to the end of the first three years of secondary education. The massive public response to this new education policy calls for adequate provision of educational resource inputs like trained and quality teachers, funds and infrastructural facilities for the effective implementation of the programme, otherwise the programme may also fail like other ones before it. Although it has started failing in most of the BRACED states.

Conclusion

Education in a world of scarce resources must witness short falls or set backs in its funding. It is a long term investment in human resources for the future development of the nation. The benefits of a functionally educated individual go to the individual, his immediate environment and the society (country) at large. It should therefore be a joint effort by these beneficiaries to ensure effective funding of education in Nigeria.

Recommendations

In order to improve the standard of education in the BRACED states, and rescue our educational system from eminent collapse due to paucity of resources for effective education in the region, the following recommendations are necessary.

1. For education to meet the objectives of the region's development, relevant educational resource inputs must be adequately provided for effective operation, not lip service as experiences has shown in the past.
2. There must be co-operation and collaboration in the development of the educational sector by the BRACED states in order to tap ideas, and work in synergy for the purpose of educational advancement of the region.
3. There must be sincerity of purpose by the BRACED Commission in the area of educational development, because mass literacy without functionality will not promote development but rather pose danger in the development process. This is why 65% literacy rates attained by countries like Tanzania and Ethiopia in Africa, even though commendable by all standards, has not led to

- economic transformation of these countries. Emphasis should be placed on functional education which bestows relevant skills for the socio-economic transformation of the region.
4. Investment in education should adopt the principle of economic rationality, which is expected benefits from such investments, rather than the production of such literate gentlemen which the social demands or welfare policy emphasizes.
 5. Funding of education should be a joint effort of the beneficiaries of the educational system namely individual beneficiaries, households, government and private sectors; it should not be left for the government of the BRACED state alone. All over the world, education is financed by joint efforts of parents, public and private sectors, Niger Delta should not be an exception.
 6. There must be aggressive re-training of the unemployed youths into relevant skills and trades that can make them contribute meaningfully to the socio-economic development of the region instead of constituting nuisance in the development process through vandalism, kidnapping, stealing and other nefarious activities that are anti-development in the region.

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