

Curriculum for Poverty Alleviation, Economic Growth and Sustainable Development

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Abstract

Humans at the centre of living environment cannot make the environment likeable and livable without a dynamic and vibrant economic aura. Despite various articulated poverty reduction policy initiatives, the menace of poverty on human life remains unabated. Meanwhile, declarations at different levels around the globe have recognized education as a major tool to act on worlds problems. It is also seen that there is a link between education vis-à-vis its curriculum and development. On this background, the paper focused on curriculum for poverty alleviation, economic growth and sustainable development. The introduction provides explanation to poverty as it traumatizes the poor in developing countries before the concepts of curriculum, green economy and sustainable development were clarified. The poor, severity of poverty, causes of poverty and its effects on developing countries are later appraised. Thereafter a call for a virile and dynamic curriculum with its attendant strategies is made to alleviate poverty in the society. Among the recommendations put forward include the need for curriculum enrichment through a tripartite approach, economic empowerment strategies through informal and non-formal curriculum, and the application of Curriculum Schema Indicators for Poverty Alleviation (CSIPA)

Keywords: Curriculum, Economic growth, Poverty Alleviation, Sustainable development

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Introduction

One of the worldwide phenomena and a life threatening enemy of humanity attracting the attention of national government and international bodies in various places of the world is poverty. It traumatizes the poor and militate against the social, education, and economic development of nations. While the threats of poverty are global, their debilitating effects are most severe in the developing world especially among the people who have the least means to cope.

Among the classification of the countries of the world, a developed country is one which, having clearly articulated its objectives has achieved most of them if not all within a reasonable time frame while a developing country fostered in this paper are ones which having clearly articulate their national objectives in each case have achieved only a few of them but are putting in place continuous strategies and machineries towards achieving them, and have the will power and vision to achieve them. As a result, it is expected that such developing countries should be striving to become completely developed. Besides, the issue of poverty alleviation according to Ukpong (1999), cited in Aruofor and Erhi (2009), is recently emerging as a major subject of concern in national and international discourse after decades of its relegation to the background.

Our planet capacity to sustain us is eroding development (World Bank, 2002). Still the World Bank's economic development thrust in the developing countries in the 1980s, which was dominated by the Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) had led to various intervention programmes at local and global levels. Despite several quick intervention strategies review committees and commissions both at the federal and state levels in Nigeria for example, the menace of poverty on the economic well-being of the people remains unabated. Empirical endence abound which indicate that the level of poverty in the country is astronomically high and politically embarrassing with the resultant effect on the human population and economy really shameful especially considering the enormous wealth from oil, gas and other mineral resources at the disposal of the country for the earning of foreign exchange (Dappa and Tamuno-Omi, 2009: 610)

In reality the varied dimensions of poverty in terms of very low income, educational poverty and health poverty among others, which often deprive the poor in developing countries of their basic needs of life, have continuously weakened the economic growth and sustainable development of the citizenry – Poverty level has indeed remained very high. Where do we go from here? To alleviate poverty, one needs knowledge (education) on what to do, how to do it, the right time to do it, and what to use in the process (Awoyele and Akinsoto, 2010). In this regard, education through its curriculum at various levels as well as through the non-formal and informal process has significant role to play in preparing competent individuals who would solve the pressing problem of the society, poverty inclusive.

The remarkable economic success of any society calls for a virile, dynamic and living curriculum. Since the needs of a society are always changing due to the continuously changing pace of global market forces, population and the unique peculiarities of that society, the relevance of the curriculum to the society is in its

readiness to adapt to these changing realities. In other words, the curriculum within and outside the classroom must be synchronized so as to meet the societal challenge of poverty in an ongoing and continuous way. Consequently, this paper lucidly discussed how curriculum could serve as a means for poverty alleviation, economic growth and sustainable development in developing countries of the world.

Conceptual Clarifications

Curriculum as a Concept: The Latin route of curriculum presents it as ‘currus’ which means a ‘race course’. Currus originates from currere [to run]. Thus, the term curriculum from its historical context refers to a race course or runway. What exists in the race course are the total educative experience covering the programmes components: programme of studies, programme of activities and programme of guidance. Through these components, individuals are equipped to become functional citizens in the work places in the wider world. In a wider perspective, curriculum is a medium for preparing individuals to become productive citizens and useful members of the society. In brief, curriculum is a tool of education (Informal, non-formal and formal) to build the whole man. For curriculum to prepare productive citizens it must be used to fight poverty in all ramifications.

Poverty in Relative and Absolute Terms: Poverty is multi-dimensional in nature. People in different disciplines like the political scientists, sociologists, economists, agriculturists, anthropologists and medical practitioners use it in the context of their professions. For instance, economists defined poverty as a situation of low income or low consumption (Owoeye and Atoyebi, 2008). Ajuzie (2000) described poverty as that condition of living without adequate food, clothing, shelter, fund, water supply and other essential goods of daily living. Poverty connotes inequality and social injustice and this traumatizes the poor in the society. Aworawo (2000) and Zakaria (2006) agreed that there is a link among poverty, loss of livelihood, inequality, and youth restiveness as evidenced by the numerous violent protests against the wielders of power in Nigeria. Poverty is not new in the world, many people still remain poor in the midst of plenty, and this is baffling the economy watchers nationally and at the global level.

The boundary of the interpretations given to poverty shifts with time and culture. However, universal indices abound to describe a nation, people or country as poor or rich. The poor are those who cannot afford decent food, medical care, recreation, decent shelter and clothe: meet family and community obligations and other necessities of life (Okemakinde, 2010). In its 1990 report, the World Bank defines poverty as the inability to attain a minimum standard of living. Poverty is feared, abhorred and even hated by the citizens of any nation. Indeed, every activity and struggle of man is geared towards poverty eradication.

The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), in 1990, classified poverty into absolute and relative poverty, using the basic needs as their yardstick. While the explanations given to poverty above are relative to the commentators, absolute poverty is a term used to describe those who fall below the poverty line. Those who cannot provide themselves and members of their family the basic needs for physical and biological survival are in absolute poverty. The two variants of absolute poverty are primary absolute poverty which is marginally below the poverty line and secondary absolute poverty which falls very far below the poverty line making the victim of this category seemingly irredeemable. Absolute poverty thus connotes a condition in which life is so limited by lack of food, mal-nutrition, illiteracy, high infant mortality and low life expectancy which goes below any rational definition of human decency (Ogunmuyiwa and Okuneye, 2009). One can therefore define poverty as being poor: want; scarcity or lack; inferiority; poorness. The scourge of poverty, no doubt, should be tackled through the educational process for economic survival and development of nations.

Green Economy: The idea of ‘green economy’ was unfolded in the first preparatory meeting (17 – 19 May, 2010) of the United Nations (UN) Conference on Sustainable Development. The debate and interactive exchanges between UN Member States, UN Agencies and major groups presented their understanding of what a green ‘economy’ means in the context of sustainable development and poverty eradication. The idea of making national economies more environment ally sound or ‘greening’ was accepted (Ling & Iyer, 2012). The wide range of views with some fundamental differences between developed and developing countries determine how green economy concept is understood in the context of sustainable development and poverty eradication vis-à-vis how it should be addressed at the international level to prevent a green protectionism in trade and new conditionalities in financing for developing countries of the world.

“Green Economy” definitions require a certain degree of flexibility and the consideration of the diffident levels of economic, social and environmental development in different countries. By implication, a universal and uniform approach to the concept of green economy is not warranted in the developing countries, except in adapted form. According to Verhagen (2011), a sustainability sociologist, green economies are environmentally sound or sustainable economies. A green economy entails a monumental social change which also impact upon a nation’s economic structure.

In fact, the present Green Economy debate is not something new, it has its origin about 40 years ago

with the birth of the environmental movement and since then a very small number of economists, such as Herman Daly have been emphasizing the need for internalizing the environmental costs of economic activities essential to the development of a green economy (www.ussee.org). The debate and emphasis on the need for a Green Economy increased drastically in the late 90's and the first decade of the 21st millennium. Giving learners and the citizenry at large adequate hands on experience with the process of greening economies seems to be a more fruitful intervention strategy to poverty crises in the developing countries. This is the central role and challenge for curriculum. This perspective termed curricular approach should also connect with many inspiring programmes and projects that try to ameliorate the living condition of people. Perhaps the writer of this paper should submit that green economy initiatives which may be integrated into the curriculum would thrive well through team teaching as an interdisciplinary strategy that would promote integrated learning, alleviate poverty, improve economic growth, and sustain the citizenry.

Sustainable Development

In respect of human welfare, sustainable human development is development that:

- i. Generates economic growth;
- ii. Distributes the benefits of economic growth equitably;
- iii. Regenerates the environment rather than destroying it, and
- iv. Empowers rather than marginalizing them.

It is development that gives priority to the poor, enlarging their choices and opportunities and providing for their participation in decision that affects their lives (Atoyebi, Oweye & Adeoye, 2008).

Sustainable development is derived from the word development. Development involves a society's transformation of its environment through its institutions, organization, social rules to an extent that makes the society more and more positively responsive to desire modern changes (Onyesam, 2005). This implies that development involves transformation and that the transformations are dependent upon the society's institutional make up as well its social, cultural and attitudinal set up. Sustainable development for example, sustainable national development is the form of development efforts in a nation that can be continued for a long time in a way that does not harm the environment. The World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED) described development as development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of the future generations to meet their own needs. Sustainable development recognizes that general features of development should be identified, and consensus should also be reached on a board strategic framework for achieving it.

The Poor, Severity of Poverty and Causes of Poverty

The fact remains that in relative terms, a poor person in one locality may be regarded as non-poor in another environment. The poor can be varied in classes and such include the entrepreneurial poor, the self employed poor, the laboring poor and the vulnerable poor (Adeola 2000). Igeben (2001) reported that a poor person exudes wretchedness, unkemptness and under nourishment. He dwells in a ramshackle house devoid of facilities. In addition, he buttressed that a poor person:

Is not well clothed and cannot afford to change his dresses which often constitute his uniform. As a result of under nourishment, the poor and members of his/her family are often ill thus perpetuating absenteeism at work and at school... the poor is not bold enough to associate with other member of the community. If and when he summons courage to mix with other members of the community, he is not expected to speak because the other members of the society do not respect him nor do they believe that he will say anything useful (p.277)

A poor person or nation is thus someone who is in want, suffers, lack, weak, unhealthy, and lacks confidence among men or nations as the case may be. The poor exist mostly in extremely inaccessible area and social setting and in the rural and urban slums. Although, dominant perception has shown that poverty is a largely rural phenomenon, the influx of people to the urban area culminates in the growing incidence of the urban poor (Nweneazizi, 2011). On depth and severity of poverty in Nigeria, for example, he lamented that Nigeria with her abundant natural resources and ranking as the eight largest exporter of oil, ranks amongst the worst in Sub-Saharan Africa in social statistics. The World Bank record from the available evidence also declared that the poor of Nigeria have a cash income that is insufficient to cover minimum standard of food, water, fuel, shelter, medical care, and schooling.

Several factors often cause or lead to poverty, some of the myriad of factors is highlighted in this paper based on the author's observations from the environment and available evidences.

(1) Low education (2) Inadequate access to employment opportunities (3) Rural-urban dichotomy (4) Land based-environmental and ecological disaster like flooding, drought, earthquakes, e.t.c (5) Oversized population (6) Illiteracy (7) Polygamy (8) Inadequate access to markets (9) Neglect of viable sector e.g. neglect of

agricultural sector for the emergence of the oil sector (10) Devaluation of local currency and erosion of purchasing power (11) Conflict (12) High cost of living (13) Early marriage (14) Ill health (15) Extravagant spendings (16) Failure of government to provide adequate basic social amenities e.t.c

Effects of Poverty on Developing Countries

Poverty in its multidimensional manifestations has affected many livelihood system and nations at large. The social problem of poverty has devastating effect on the following obvious manifestations:

- (1) It generates social conflict and crises.
- (2) It leads to attendant health hazards.
- (3) Illiteracy and ignorance are seen to be on the increase.
- (4) Poverty constitutes a serious threat to social, economic, political and educational stability of a country.
- (5) Environmental degradation is heightened.
- (6) It generates high level of unemployment and corruption.
- (7) Dependency ratio of the poor on the rich becomes high.
- (8) It breeds criminality in the society.
- (9) Poverty undermines global competitiveness.
- (10) Job creation is at a low ebb.

Curriculum Strategies for Poverty Alleviation and Sustenance of Economic Growth

A commitment to poverty eradication was one of the most important outcomes of the World Summit for Social Development held in Copenhagen in 1995. Also, during the World Education forum held in Dakar in April, 2000, the international community emphasized the need to eradicate extreme poverty and gave its collective commitment to work towards this aim through education. All education action programmes should therefore support livelihood systems and survival skills to help poor people and the citizenry at large combat poverty. Education can best attend to poverty crises through its curriculum. No country has succeeded if it cannot use curriculum as the means of educating to at least reduce extreme poverty.

Education for sustainability is an issue of changing global socio-economic, political and cultural environment (Chikondi, 2010). As a result, the curriculum can be utilized and is indeed being used to direct the attention of school personnel to issue of development, particularly at post primary and tertiary level of education. Throughout the ages, curriculum in one form or the other has been associated with the development, promotion and sustenance of society's cherished cultural and other practices from one generation to another, and from era to era. In the developed nations of the world such as Britain, U.S.A, Russia, Germany, France, Japan etc, education through its curriculum has played a major role and is still functioning as a major tool for improved sustainable development and economic growth. For developing country like Nigeria to alleviate poverty and attain the level of economic growth plus sustainable development, curriculum as a tool deserves more attention. Hence, the following curriculum strategies are enunciated.

- 1. Formal Curriculum Enrichment through a Tripartite Approach:** The tripartite approach implies: -
 - a. More attention to indigenous needs and values during curriculum planning – consideration for societal needs in term of economic and social values of what curriculum accommodate;
 - b. Accessibility of a wide world knowledge, ideas, skills and techniques compared with what operates in the local environment for global competitiveness of the curriculum products from the developing countries.
 - c. Curriculum innovations and curriculum offerings should be diversified to include courses that are themselves predisposing to economic growth and development issues. For example, some innovative curricula have been developed and infused or integrated into existing school subject curricula for general implementation in Nigeria. Such innovative curricula according to Osuji (2004) are:
 - Environmental Education
 - Population Education
 - Family life/HIV – AIDS Education
 - Civic Education/Citizenship Education
 - Women (in development) education
 - Capital Market studies.

In this regard, as at year 2004, he buttressed that Nigeria has in the last five years demonstrated great political will towards refocusing education to meet educational goals and objectives for a meaningful economic development and poverty reduction through:

- Intensified advocacy and sensitization programmes for accelerated enrolment and general awareness

- Accelerated teacher education.
- Provision of school facilities.
- Regular monitoring for quality assurance.
- Teacher improvement programmes.
- Curriculum enrichment.
- Regular dialogue with all stakeholders.

The formal tripartite curriculum approach also signifies that a variety of core skills for lifelong learning, vocational awareness and vocational activities, entrepreneurship, creativity and so on should be given utmost attention.

2. **Economic Empowerment Strategies: - The roles of informal and non-formal curriculum:** It is obvious in Nigeria as an African country that poverty is overwhelmingly a rural problem. Rural poverty is common among small-scale farmers and self-employed artisans and petty traders (Atoyebi, Owoeye & Adeoye, 2008).

As a result, informal and non-formal curriculum have roles to play in economic empowerment. Although, informal curriculum otherwise known as hidden curriculum is presumed to be non-documented in nature because all that is learnt is done in an informal situations. The time is fulfilled to have an organized guiding document featuring the features of informal education and fostering economic empowerment. Specifically, it should contain the following components:

- i. Economic empowerment objectives e.g. Acquisition of saleable skills under apprenticeship system for self-employment/job creation.
- ii. Content and learning activities in crafts training; traditional medicine; priesthood; home maintenance; marketing and distribution of produce; processing of agricultural products; vegetable production; cottage industries like broom making, hand craft, making pottery; raising of sheep and goats; knowledge of ethics and so on.
- iii. Methods of teaching and learning should cover indoctrination, apprenticeship, oral literature, observation, participation, role playing etc.
- iv. Evaluation of in-formal curriculum should be based on standard criteria or system of thought of that particular society e.g. in Nigeria, through observation as a means of assessment, "Omoluabi" is a criteria. The documentation of informal curriculum, no doubt, would lead to cultivation of values and vocational skills development of the poor and results into economic empowerment. The response of non-formal curriculum to economic empowerment for sustainable development implies the vocational training given to the individual for a specific skill within or outside the school or classes under public supervision and control. Using a guided designed curriculum, it may also be implemented under contract with a state or local education agency. It can also be conducted as a part of a poverty reduction/economic empowerment programme to prepare individuals for gainful employment as semi-skilled workers or technicians, artisans or sub-professionals in recognized occupations and in new and emerging occupations.

Both the informal and non-formal approach to economic empowerment put forward here advocate the development of manipulative skills for employment and are also geared towards production. With this approach the formal curriculum overload would be reduced.

3. **Curriculum Schema for Poverty Alleviation, Economic Growth and Sustainable Development:** The curriculum that not only alleviate poverty or generate economic growth, but also empowers people by enlarging their choices and job opportunities in the emerging society must foster the following schema poverty alleviation indicators.

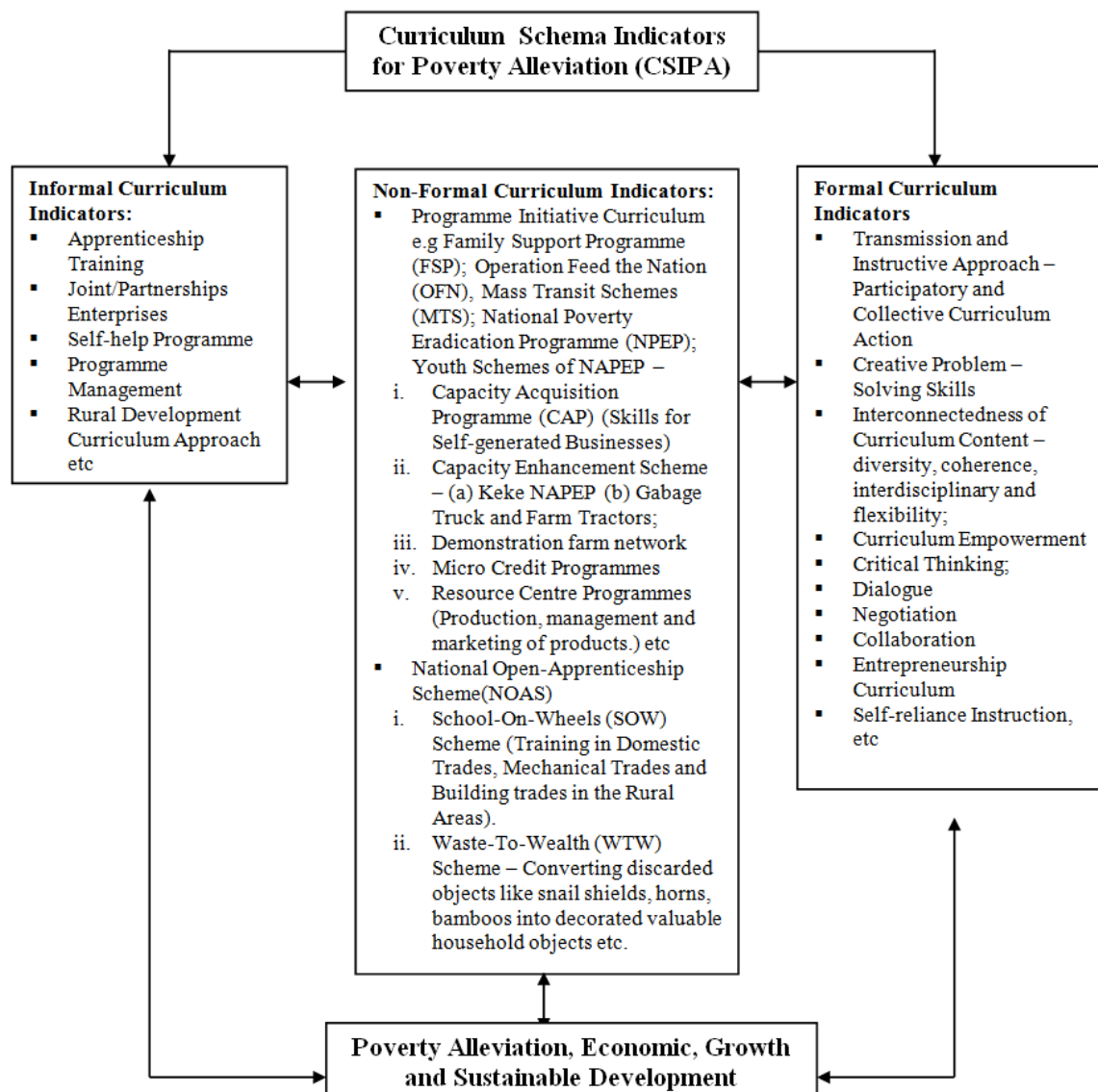


Figure 1: Curriculum Schema Indicators for Poverty Alleviation (CSIPA).

Source: The Author

The curriculum schema or paradigm in figure 1 in the context of this paper presents the issues of poverty alleviation, economic growth and sustainable development as the responsibility of informal, non-formal and formal curriculum. It is partnership curriculum approach. This approach entails reaching beyond schools to involve business and individuals with specialized expertise through the community to map out curriculum components for poverty alleviation and also providing formal non-formal and informal opportunities for learning Chikondi (2010) cited in UNESCO (2002) that partnerships enable all stakeholders to make concrete contributions aimed at furthering sustainable development. He buttressed that collaboration should be enhanced with educational institutions, communities and Non-Government Organization (NGOs) and industry to advance common objectives.

Curriculum Schema Indicators for Poverty Alleviation (CSIPA) is about empowering people to act for change from poverty to riches and sustainable economy. Thoughts, connection and harmony of purpose have to be made with issue of the current education paradigm as well as its curriculum at each level in the developing countries of the world.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The truism still stands that poverty is a common feature in various developing countries of the world though the base lines differ. In order to build truly great African democratic counties politically united and independent, interacted and stable, economically prosperous, socially organized and well equipped to becomes catalysts of renaissance in Africa, sustainable development which is a product of economic reform and growth implies constant improvement on human socio-economic welfare. As a result, education industry through its formal

curriculum and beyond schooling curricula (informal and non-formal) would yield more reward if channeled towards human empowerment for self-help and partnership enterprises.

From the foregoing, the matter of greening a nation's economy that is making it sustainable by alleviating poverty through the instrumentality of the curriculum has been discussed in this paper. Curriculum innovations, curriculum offerings and enrichment along with the economic empowerment strategies through the informal and non-formal curriculum avenues explored are noteworthy. Overdependence on the formal curriculum alone and its over-load are anti-poverty alleviation.

No African county is an island and so cannot operate in isolation. Since the world can truly be said to be approaching a global village, then poverty in any of its manifestations should not be condoned nor handled with levity. Thus, the Curriculum Schema Indicators for Poverty Alleviation (CSIPA) presented in this paper with the interconnectedness of the indicators as shown by the arrow heads are means of achieving real poverty alleviation and economic development. The CSIPA is not all in all but are very revealing in pointing to the right direction that as formal curriculum indicators are usable, likewise, stakeholders of education should not side-track the visibility and significant place of beyond-schooling curriculum indicators for a worthwhile development.

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