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The Role of Libraries in the Preparation of Youths for Active Participation in Poverty Alleviation Initiatives

By

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Abstract

This paper highlighted the percentage of Nigerian population that is below the international poverty line. Poverty alleviation programmes, which had existed in the country are itemized. Facets of poverty alleviation programmes meant for preparing the youths for active participation are highlighted. Contributions of libraries towards preparation of youths for poverty alleviation exercise are identified.

Introduction

Poverty is largely concentrated in areas of low agricultural income and in households having low skills and high dependency ratios (Bussink, W.C.F. and Greetart, C.N. 1980). The absolute poor is defined as:

... those living on or below an income that allows only subsistence levels in food and other necessities (Johnson, F., 1993:01).

In Nigeria, the percentage of her population below the poverty line decreased in 1992-1993, Table 1 (World Bank, 1998). However in 1997, Nigeria recorded a remarkable increase in the percentage of her population below the international poverty line, Table 2 (World Bank, 2000). Hence Nigeria really needs poverty alleviation and the youths should be made to appreciate the programme.

Table 1: Nigeria's National Poverty Line
Population below the poverty line (%)

Survey Year	Rural	Urban	National
1985	49.5	31.7	43.0
1992-93	36.4	30.4	34.1

Table 2: International Poverty Line

Nigerian's Survey Year	Population Below US \$1 A Day %	Poverty Gap at US \$1 A Day %	Population Below At \$2 A day %	Poverty Gap at \$2 A day %
1992-93	31.1	12.9	59.9	28.9
1997	70.2	34.9	90.8	59.0

Source: (World Bank, 1998:197; 2000:63).

For poverty reduction, Johansen (1993) stated that the East Asian experience provides evidence that while provision of food and basic social services are essential, broad-based economic growth not only increases average incomes per capita but also lifts the poor above the poverty line. This is because it facilitates employment and financing of services for the poor, and lessens the need for subsidized social services. No intimated that:

He The fastest Economic growth in the 1980s (averaging 8.5%) and the most spectacular poverty reductions (declining from about a third in 1980 to barely 10% by 1985 and beyond) were in China. (Johnson, 1993:14).

Provision of social services such as safe drinking water and good sanitation, health services, including family planning programmes and universal primary education are factors in poverty reduction (Johnson, 1993; Mink, 1993). For poverty reduction to achieve its objectives, it would include activities that would incorporate development of micro-enterprises in rural areas. Such micro-enterprises based on the principle of comparative advantage could be based on agriculture, fishing, shrimping and coconut based industries.

Poverty Alleviation Programme in Nigeria

Previous governments devised several schemes to alleviate poverty. For instance:

The establishment of the National Directorate of employment NDE by General Ibrahim Babangida in 1986 was to promote skill acquisition and self-employment. But the project failed to achieve the set objectives due to inadequate funding and corruption on the part of its officials.

Other poverty alleviation programmes like the peoples' Bank of Nigeria (PBN), Nigerian Agricultural Advancement Programme (FEAP) and National Agricultural Land Development Authority (NALDA), have similarly failed to alleviate poverty in Nigeria (Atojoko, 2000:14).

President Obasanjo announced a poverty alleviation programme (PAP) early this year, 2000. The scheme which is to cost the Federal Government ten billion naira (N10b) was designed to offer micro-credit to semi-skilled and unskilled Nigerians as part of Government's plan to turn - around the prostrate economy (Atojoko, 2000). It was also aimed at creating 200,000 jobs for unemployed persons thereby stimulating production within one year. The Federal Government immediately constituted a poverty alleviation committee in each state of the Federation to supervise the implementation of PAP. The committee's mandate was to issue out forms to applicants, device PAP schemes at the state level and disburse funds to successful applicants.

Preparation of Youths for Active Participation in Poverty Alleviation

There was the need for mobilization and public enlightenment to sensitize the youths before the programme commenced. Radio, Television programmes and use of flyers facilitated the diffusion of information on poverty alleviation. Vans equipped with public address systems were also used to spread information on poverty alleviation to youths in rural areas, community organizations and local government areas. The programmes included the following:

1. Literacy Campaign

Education gives one the opportunity to be free from deprivations usually associated with illiteracy (Gana, 1987). It also ^{enables} one to develop ones potentials. In the pursuit of poverty alleviation, the Nigerian government had instituted literacy programmes like Universal Primary Education (UPE), Universal Basic Education, Nomadic Education and Adult Education.

The Universal Basic Education (UBE)

The UBE took cue from the Basic Education for all the people of the world programme which the international community set for itself in 1990 (Ochanda, 1999). According to Ochanda, (1999):

the Education for all initiative began in 1999 in Jomtien, Thailand where representatives of 155 governments, 33 inter-governmental bodies and 125 non-governmental organizations (NGOs) pledged to work towards the goal of education for all.

*The objective of the basic education is to enable every person,
- child, youth and adult to benefit from educational opportunities
designed to meet their basic learning needs (Ochanda, 1999:25).*

In Nigeria, the programme first set out to introduce free Universal Primary Education (UPE) and the introduction of free tuition in all Federal Universities. Later the UPE metamorphosed into Universal Basic Education (UBE) during President Obasanjo's regime. Under UBE, the free education has been extended to junior secondary school (JSS), and free tuition in Federal Universities still subsists.

How does UBE and free tuition in Federal Universities prepare youths for active participation in poverty alleviation?

The knowledge and skill acquired from school equips the youth for procurement of employment, which could be in the civil service or for self-employment. The youth then earns an income for a decent livelihood. Also employment growth is closely linked with poverty reduction (World Bank, 1999). Educational attainment remains not only one of the central determining factors of poverty levels, but it also determines who advances rapidly or falls behind in the society (World Bank, 1999).

2. Agriculture

Government could make agriculture attractive to the youth by establishing agricultural farm settlements. Provision of improved varieties of agricultural crops, supply of fertilizers, pesticides and agro-chemicals at subsidized rates could ginger the youths into taking up farming as a way of active participation in poverty alleviation. Emphasis could be diversified to include animal production especially poultry and book-keeping.

According to Squire (1990), policies to redistribute land have deservedly received attention. He observed that:

Policies that expand tenancy, provide clear land rights where traditional systems fail, and improve the management of common property resources, can create opportunities for many of the rural poor. Such policies help reduce poverty and make the land more productive at the same time (Squire, 1990:64).

Community farms where land is made available to youths for cultivation using already mentioned incentives could appeal to youths.

3. Infrastructure

Rural areas are usually inhabited by poor youths, and to make these areas appeal to youths will make increasing demands on infrastructure. Investments in infrastructure can improve living conditions and promote employment. Provision of good roads, drinking water, sanitation, health facilities and electric power for low-income areas help small businesses as well as households. This is because many informal businesses are based in the home. Once these facilities are available, the youths will become motivated to take advantage of them.

4. Access to Credit Facility

Credit facility can help the poor youths to accumulate assets and cushion their consumption in hard times. It is also risky because they cannot afford to provide the collateral's demanded by the conventional banks (Banjoko, 1996). To alleviate poverty, the government of General Babangida introduced the People's Bank (PBN) in 1990 (Oni, 1996). At the PBN, funds were disbursed to recipients without collateral (Banjoko, 1996). Recipients were required to provide guarantors while the Bank's officials monitored the disbursed loans. The poor youths took advantage of that to establish small-scale businesses. The government should re-introduce the students' loan Board. This will help youths to secure loans to sustain themselves in the institutions of higher learning.

5. Human Development

The government must also embark upon rigorous human development. There could be government-sponsored apprenticeships. Youths could be selected and sent to different firms and industries to learn a trade, craft or arts according to the flair of each youth. This could promote skill acquisition and self-employment. The cost of this training exercise should be borne by the government. This will enable the poor youths not only to be prepared to participate but will also enable them benefit from the poverty alleviation exercise.

Role of the Library in Poverty Alleviation

Under youth development for active participation in poverty alleviation, public libraries could be built in rural areas where youths should consult books, magazines and newspapers on development of small-scale industries. Available markets for buying/selling of certain goods and foreign exchange rates for certain currencies could be looked up. "Do it yourself" books are also available for consultation. The information obtained from these sources could help the youths to establish small business like soap making, processing and marketing of soy milk, bee keeping, snail rearing and poultry farming. These ventures could be embarked upon with minimum capital. Existing vacancies for employment opportunities abound in newspapers and magazines. These information sources could be consulted by the youths free of charge. The audio-visual section of public libraries could "shoot" films of "escape routes from poverty" to youths in the rural communities.

Under literacy campaign, books of varying levels of academic pursuit are ^{loaned} learned freely to registered members of public libraries. Autobiographies of "self-made" individuals are always available for consultation. Simple grafting and budding of economic trees as an occupation could be read from many simple books in public libraries.

Under human development, libraries also come in handy. Libraries can participate in the training of youths as binders, reprographic and photocopying technicians as well as indexers.

Recommendations

The Federal government should introduce policies to check corruption. This is because previous poverty alleviation initiatives had failed due to corrupt practices of the officials during the execution of such programmes.

More public libraries should be built in rural areas. These libraries should be adequately funded by governments to enable them participate effectively in poverty alleviation initiatives.

There is need for public awareness on the part of libraries. Public libraries should reach out to the poor masses like the craftsmen and the unemployed youths to keep them informed of what libraries can do for them. Distribution of flyers and pasting of posters at strategic places can be used for this exercise.

The handicapped youths should be housed in rehabilitation centres where they should be taught different types of trades and crafts. Education for the handicapped should also be emphasized in such rehabilitation centres.

Conclusion

Opportunities for preparing youths for active participation in the poverty alleviation initiatives are numerous. Libraries especially public libraries are also poised to be partners in progress towards poverty alleviation. It is expected that the exercise will help to reduce the rate of crime in the society.

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