

## Education and Development: Dynamics of Access, Equity, and Social Justice in Nigeria

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### ABSTRACT

Widening access to education as social justice is basic in any discourse on educational investment, growth and development in developing country such as Nigeria. Presently, there is disconnect between educational development expectations and public policy frameworks designed to drive the united nations sustainable development goals (SDGs) in 2030 through access, equity and social justice in educational provision in developing countries. This paper focuses on education and development deficits in the light of the challenges of ensuring access, equity and social justice as envisaged in the SDGs 169 targets. The paper adopted a qualitative research method as it is analytical in framework. Among other things, this study showed the elements of exclusions and inequalities which are prevalent in public policies that are meant to achieve sustainable development goals through education. The paper sustains that inequalities, corruption, leadership deficit and weak institutions among others constitute major obstacles to access and social justices in educational delivery in Nigeria. Also, financial and information poverties respectively were found to have accounted for sustained deprivation indexes in access to educational development which compromise access, equity and social justice for sustainable development in developing countries. Recommendations are made on ways to mitigate exclusionary factors on access, equity and social justice in educational development in developing countries.

**Key words:** Access; Educational Development; Equity; Exclusion; Social Justice

### INTRODUCTION

The conception of the sustainable development goals (SDGs) in 2015 was premised on two fronts, namely; that the millennium development goals (MDGs) targets were not met by many developing countries and secondly, the need to ensure that those gains that were made in the MDGs are enhanced for humanity and human livelihood. However well throughout the SDGs are, the fact remains that there cannot be sustainable development without investment in education. As noted in the literatures on education and development, Bholá (2006) wrote that education is development. Therefore, the relationship between education and development that is sustainable is defined absolutely and infinitely according to Oghenekohwo (2013) by the elements of education, namely; empowerment, engagement, experience and evidence. This relationship can only be sustained through a commitment to the funding of education in order to:

- (i) ensure access, equity and social justice through which poverty and hunger can be mitigated;
- (ii) ensure healthy lives and promote wellbeing for all ages;
- (iii) ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all;
- (iv) reduce inequality within and among countries;

- (v) ensure sustainable assumption and production patterns; and
- (vi) build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization and foster innovation, among others.

The provision of access to education of equal opportunity and social justice is essential elements in the funding of sustainable development goals. This is underscored by the estimate summations from intergovernmental committee of experts on financing sustainable development, which put the cost of providing a social safety net to eliminate extreme poverty at about \$66bn (£43bn) actual investments in improving infrastructure (both soft and hard) that are inclusive of water, power, agriculture, transport, education, information, ICTs and could demand up to a total of \$ 7Tn globally. Essentially, public finance and aid would be central not only to support the implementation of SDGs in Nigeria, but also in the sustenance of access, equality and social justice in education for development.

In specific, we posit that education plays a critical and definite role in development process more broadly within the scope of economic growth, workforce development, environmental sustainability, health, nutrition, peace and

social justice. Consequently, access must be basic, because, the right-based approach to education and continuing learning emphasizes its role in addressing social inequalities and factors of financial and information poverties in developing economies. Hence, education stakeholders need to influence a wider process and convince decision-makers of the intrinsic value of access to quality and equitable education and its contribution to the global development as a measure of social justice that define the overall objectives of sustain.

Underscoring the benefits of learning as a constantly renewable but under-exploited resource, widening access to education is a matter of guaranteeing equity and social justice to marry persons in the society. So, we submit that the development of educational opportunities starts with access, equity and social justice. Given the principles set forth in article 26 of the universal declaration of human rights with article 13 of the international covenant on economic, social and cultural rights, and also, in article 10 of the convention on the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women as well as the principles contained in the convention against discrimination in education, it is obvious, that there are global commitments to ensure unrestricted access to education (United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organization, 1999).

In view of opportunities that education provides, we acknowledge the fact that we live in a rapidly changing world where governments and their citizens are facing simultaneous challenges of demographic shifts, employment, migration, cultural diversities, social cohesion, health and nutrition, scientific and technological advances, climate and human insecurity among others (European Union, 2013). These challenges portend serious exclusionary setbacks to widening access, guaranteeing equity and sustaining social justice in the enterprise of educational development particularly in developing countries.

### ISSUES OF RESEARCH CONCERNS

The concern of this paper is that correlating education with development is measuring education and skills opportunities and outcomes. Thus, education is a reflection of experience and evidence which are basic to the demonstration of adaptive ability to solve problems in technology-rich environment, that adults use in the workplace at home and in their communities. Besides, such ability also gathers information on the degree to which such skills as well as interpersonal skills like communicating and working with others are actually used and their relationship with social and economic outcomes. In this respect, Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD, 2017) provided indicators that offer a snapshot of the state of education in more than forty (40) countries. The annual compendium of statistics covers issues such as:

- (i) Structure
- (ii) Finances
- (iii) Performance of education systems
- (iv) Participants (stakeholders) in education
- (v) Beneficiaries of education
- (vi) School environment.

All these six measures of education statistics in developing countries define the quantum of skills opportunities and educational outcomes as mediated by access, equity and social justice in educational provision. Therefore, the focus of expanding access to affordable, equitable and quality education must first be based on adequate and comprehensive funding at all levels without any form of inequality.

In present Nigeria, the failure of successive governments to adhere strictly to the UNESCO (1999) recommendation of budgetary provision of to 25% of national annual fiscal funding on education is a major deficit on education and development. This failure is a serious negation of access, equity and social justice in educational delivery. Besides, there is a very weak global expectation of the SDGs as, funding is acute and irregular, systems are fraught with poor human capacity, and the benefits do not correlate with job and market demands of a knowledge economy.

### EDUCATION AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

UNESCO (2014) maintains that education has long been identified as key to translating the ideals of sustainable development into practice through enhancing people's skills and capacities to respond to change and supporting the transition to a green economy. In this process, UNESCO's International Research and Training Centre for Rural Education (UNESCO-INTRCRE, 2012), reported the significance of an integrated approach to education, training and support shaped around the three elements of sustainable development, namely:

- (i) claiming a stake for the marginalized (excluded) in development;
- (ii) responding to the feminization of poverty; and
- (iii) ensuring that sustainable production and consumption involves everyone, not just the poor.

To attain these elements, sustainable development demands changes in the way we think and act. Education plays a crucial role in bringing about this change (UNESCO, 2013).

Education that has transformative potential built on participation, with emphasis on innovative, transformation teaching and learning methods that empower and motivate learners to take action is key to sustainable development (UNESCO, 2013). Thus, pillars of sustainable development such as economic growth and environmental sustainability are driven by access, equality and social justice in educational delivery. This once again lay credence to Bhola (2006) that education is development.

### FRAMEWORK ON ACCESS TO EDUCATION AS ISSUE OF RESEARCH INTEREST

We start this framework of reality on access to education by recalling that access to education has always been an issue because, it is central to the overall public policy instruments of planned socio-economic development, modernization and democratization of under-developed and developing countries. Initially, Bhola (2006) advocated that access to

education is merely a matter of educational expansion, that is, seeking to bring education to as many school aged children as possible, and in some rare cases, seeking to bring literacy or adult education to adult men and women who had been bypassed or underserved by formal school systems. However, other issues such as the nature of schools, funding and available facilities, and location of schools among others have challenged the debate on the framework on access to education.

It is in this context that access to education inevitably bounds up with exclusion or inclusion of particular groups of potential learners demanding structural intervention in developing countries. However, in developed economies as we noted, there is a universalized primary education and in most developed countries, secondary education was universally available and widely accessed (Obayan, 1999). Unfortunately, in developing societies, disparities in access as rooted in exclusion elements of race, gender, class, caste, and language have yet to be fully eradicated (Stash & Hannum, 2001; Wiley & Richardo, 2002). Meanwhile, we also observed that, in less-developed and developing countries, the features of access to education are not quite distinct; even more formidable is that most developing countries are wastelands with the orientation of political leaders knotted in colonial legacy of all sorts of exclusion with policies arising from corruption as masterminded by leadership failure. Thus, for development to be evenly distributed, access to education must be accepted as basic, and expanding access to education would be the right and urgent national focus of educational policy instruments in developing countries. This is because education, according to Bhola (2006), is development.

#### **PARADIGMS OF EXCLUSION IN ACCESS, EQUITY AND SOCIAL JUSTICE IN EDUCATIONAL DEVELOPMENT**

Access to education in the view of Ene (2007) implies making benefits of education possible for everyone and anyone who is entitled to education to receive it (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2013). By implication, we understand this stance as having the connotation that for access to be possible, comprehensive educational resources such as: classrooms, laboratories, teachers, instructional materials, school plants, among others, would be provided for everyone and anyone in the society without exclusion.

Consequently, obstacles that serve as exclusion of any variable to access to education must be eliminated so that equity in educational provision is made fundamental to the attainment of social justice which can then be sustained for educational development. Our thought here is fundamentally derived from the fact that equity in educational provision, unlike access to education, is determined by resource allocation and distributive efficiency (Oghenekohwo, 2010). This is premised on the fact that equity in education implies ensuring that all the segments of developing society get their "fair" share of access to whatever educational opportunities are provided. However, we are quick to query who determines the fairness and the sharing formula? To answer this query, we are convinced that the elements of exclusion may

not be totally eliminated, hence, public policy instruments on educational development must be isolated from all forms of exclusion.

Therefore, equity in educational provision would depicts fairness to all as it implies the provision of equal opportunities for those who are qualified to receive education (and we know that everyone is qualified, without prejudice) irrespective of circumstances of birth, ethnic group, religion and social status. Besides, Mohammed (1998) wrote that equity in education must be devoid of all forms of impediments to educational opportunities, which are not due to natural incapacities but which are the products of social exclusion, because equity sustains social justice in access to education for development.

In this sense, Oduaran (2006) submitted that the idea of social justice in educational provision centers on the need to resolve conflicting claims arising from upholding the principle of fundamental human rights while commodifying or marketizing education and so, limiting access to education for the poor in developing societies. To this end, our stance is consistent with Onokerhoraye's (1994) contention on social justice that we see it more often as the result of applying just principles to conflicts that arise from individuals' and communities quests for advancement, and principles that enable the social cooperation necessary for such advancement to be achieved. In his respect, Onokerhoraye (1994) had proposed criteria to assess the implementation of social justice as: equity, inherent equality, inherent rights, need, merit, contribution to common good, actual productive contribution, efforts, sacrifice and valuation of service. These to us are consistent with the measures of social justice in education. Though these criteria are not exhaustive in themselves (Oduaran, 2006), yet, we established that most nations have defined, examined, clarified, interpreted, analyzed, criticized, synthesized, juxtaposed and applied them in their efforts to promote the expansion (access) to education as social justice for educational development. Hence, equity and social justice in education is to ensure a reversal of discrimination against those who are already disadvantaged for any exclusion reason. This is to ensure qualitative concern for equality, justice and legality been matched with affirmative action, because of the growing exclusion factors in educational development in developing countries.

#### **RATIONALE FOR EQUITY AND SOCIAL JUSTICE IN EDUCATIONAL DEVELOPMENTS**

Irrespective of the arguments that may be put forward on social justice, we are concerned that for educational development purpose, the debate must always be juxtaposed with inclusion and exclusion variables. This is because, for example, whereas western countries' *per capita* incomes and life expectancies are among the highest in the world, and their rates of illiteracy and infant mortality are the lowest in the world due to access to education, coupled with equity and social justice in educational development, the reverse is the case in developing countries due to exclusion. Hence, advocacy for access, equity and social justice in educational provision is rational, consistent

and sustaining for the development of nations. In the view of Burr (2005), for which we align with as measures of equity and social justice in access to education, there are two causes of exclusion, namely, financial poverty and information poverty. Any strategy, policy, programme and project for access, equity and social justice in educational development must first address both. Information poverty is deficiently emphasized, but it denotes that ignorance is a disease whose therapy is education. Burr (2005) wrote that actions to inform school children and raise their aspiration is critical. Further, the worst exclusionary experience in the debate on access to education is for someone who has never even thought of going to school of any sort based on information deficits. This is due to information poverty. Financial poverty is basically lack of finance to pay for educational provision. Therefore, differing social exclusionary factors and practices that are capable of negating access, equity and social justice in educational development are evident in developing countries. Kabeer (2000) highlighted certain exclusion practices which we observed are also fundamental to the paradigms of exclusion in access, equity and social justice in educational development in developing countries. Three categories of these practices as reported by Kabeer (2000) are:

1. First, the mobilization of institutional bias, which is seen as a predominant set of values, beliefs, rituals and institutional procedures (rules of the “game”) that operate systematically and consistently to the benefits of certain persons and groups but at the expense of a majority of others. Those who benefit are placed in a privileged position to defend and promote their vested interests. Such mobilization of institutional bias is evident in developing countries and, serve as exclusionary variable to educational development as it negates the principles of access, equity and social justice;
2. Second, social closure through which social collectivities seek to maximize rewards by restricting access to resources and opportunities to a limited circle of few eligible (Parking, 1979 cited in Kabeer, 2000). Unlike the first, social closure is usually a deliberate strategy of exclusion and virtually any group attribute - race, language, social origin, religion - can be seized on for “the monopolization of specific, usually economic opportunities” (p. 45). This is also prevalent in developing countries and it is used to breed corruption, nepotism and abuse of rights and core democratic values. Example of social closure is “credentialism” which refers to the practice of demanding entry qualifications and procedures which far outweigh the actual skills and qualifications required for a given job (Kabeer, 2000) opportunity or position in order to eliminate certain groups; and
3. Third is ‘unruly practices’ which refers to the gap between rules and their implementation which occur in all institutional domains. According Fraser (1989), Gore (1993) contrary to the premise of legal positivisms which characterize series of analysis on entitlements but in reality, “courts only apply the rules when they want to, and that, the judiciary bends the rules to sup-

port particular class, gender or ethnic interests whilst invoking the rules to maintain an illusion of impartiality” (Gore, 1993: 442).

Exclusionary outcomes in the public sector, especially in educational provision, frequently take the form of unruly practices because of the particular character of public provisioning as institutional practice. Studies of the delivery of public education in many developing countries also throw up many examples of how the organization of a service interacts with the existence of informal interest groups, both within the system and outside it in determining issues of access, equity, quality and social justice (Probe Team, 1999). All these constitute the dynamics of the exclusion in access, equality and social justice in educational development in developing countries.

### CHALLENGES OF EDUCATIONAL DEVELOPMENT THROUGH ACCESS, EQUITY AND SOCIAL JUSTICE

The exclusionary perspectives above help to highlight particular sets of challenges for those concerned with making policy and the academics. The rationale for social policy on equity and social justice for educational development lies in the recognition that neither individual need nor the collective good can be left solely to private initiative, and that there is a case for purposive public action (social justice) to be taken to ensure that both are addressed and reconciled as far as possible, particular with reference to educational development (Wiley & Richardo, 2002).

The remit of social policy therefore has to encompass the causes and consequences of social exclusion in the past, present and future (Kabeer, 2000). Interestingly, while we advocate social justice to address exclusion variables, certain challenges still need to be addressed to enhance access, equity and social justice. These, according to UNESCO (1999) centre on issues such as:

- i. gender gap in school enrolment;
- ii. socio-economic, cultural and security barriers faced by girls in access to education;
- iii. inequitable primary education enrolment across and within developing countries;
- iv. completion of primary education remains a challenge for pupils in the poorest countries: only 59% of children in low-income countries (due to exclusion) entering school reach the last grade of primary, compared to 98% in high-income countries (due to access, equity and social justice);
- v. poor quality of education persists such that pupils do not obtain basic skills or attain minimum learning standards. An estimated 250 million of the 650 million children enrolled in primary school either fail to reach grade 4 or lack basic reading and numeracy skills by that grade. More than 775 million adults are illiterate, reflecting decades of poor learning opportunities; and
- vi. high pupil/teacher ratio persists in Africa and south and West Asia due to enrolment surges, leading to challenging learning and teaching environments in public primary, secondary and university institutions.

## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

For educational development in developing countries, the dynamics of access, equity and social justice is critical in the drive to attain a knowledge based economy through the instrumentality of education. Converging priority areas in this conclusion for educational development are that equity must be sustained, provision of good quality education is central to going beyond primary education, and educational provision must be skills and competences based for sustainable development. The correlation between education and sustainable development is evident only in demonstrable adaptive skills that can solve societal problems which undermine development in a literate environment.

Therefore, access and social justice in educational provision shall enhance equality of learning opportunities for all and consequently drive development. The structure, finance, performance evaluation of educational systems, investment partners and other environmental considerations must be factored into the advancement of access and social justice in education for sustainable development. Social policy must prioritize lifelong learning or learning throughout the life cycle, with emphasis on adult learning that has measurable indicators. Also, accountability and transparency among leaders in all sectors must drive education policy implementation by making its goals relevant to poverty reduction and sustainable development.

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