

Ensuring Sustainable National Development In Nigeria Through Entrepreneurship Education For The Visually Impaired

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ABSTRACT

The question of sustainable national development in Nigeria especially with the full participation of the visually impaired has continued to generate a lot of interest. This is more so in the wake of widely held belief that this category of exceptional persons do not seem to be capable of contributing meaningfully to the development of the nation. This paper attempts to identify, examine and discuss some of the issues involved when considering the feasibility of ensuring sustainable national development in the country through entrepreneurship education for the visually impaired. These include an overview of the essential elements for national development, the concept of entrepreneurship education, the visually impaired as deficit units and involving them in entrepreneurship education. It further examines the benefits of involving the visually impaired in entrepreneurship education, the problems that may militate against the provision of entrepreneurship education for the visually impaired in Nigeria and offers useful suggestions and/or recommendations on how best to achieve success in ensuring sustainable national development in the country through this novel enterprise for the visually impaired.

Introduction

There is no gain saying the fact that vision is a person's primary method of gaining information about the environment and that it also acts as a counter-check for all other sensory information. According to Sykes and Ozoji (1992) visual impairment is the reduced function of the eye which is often measured by specific visual tests such as those for visual acuity, visual field, colour vision and near vision. Lack of sight or inadequate vision therefore serves as an impediment for the successful performance of individuals in activities that can ensure their personal economic survival and their ability to contribute meaningfully to the development of their immediate communities and society generally. This is more so when considered against the background that one needs to be mobile in order to carry out his or her daily life activities safely, efficiently, independently and satisfactorily. Therefore, as noted by Moven, Yakwal and Milaham (2004), lack of sight or inadequate vision is a great impediment to successful mobility which is in turn absolutely necessary for the acquisition of entrepreneurial skills that will ensure sustainable national development.

In the light of the above, the paper examines the feasibility of ensuring sustainable national development in Nigeria through entrepreneurship education for the visually impaired.

An Overview of Sustainable National Development

Development implies change and describes the process of economic, political and social transformation which countries with this process quite often following a well-ordered sequence and exhibits common characteristics across countries.

Sustainable development, according to the National Planning Commission and United Nations Development Programme (1997), could be regarded as a process of change in which the exploitation of resources, the direction of investments, the orientation of technological development and institutional change are all in harmony and enhance both current and future potentials to meet human needs and aspirations. In this respect, satisfying human aspirations and needs is the major objective of development while sustainable development is development which meets the needs of the present generation without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.

Sustainable human development, which forms an integral part of sustainable national development as a process of change, stresses the importance of participation as a means to sustain the development process and to ensure a more equitable distribution of beneficiaries created by development initiatives. The NPC and UNDP (1997) posit that the main focus of sustainable human development is utilization of national resources both physical and human to

- meet the country's needs;
- achieve sustainable livelihood systems in a given community;
- eliminate poverty;
- maintain the physical and human environment for the present as well as succeeding generations of members of the community and
- achieve global inclusion by ensuring the mobilization of the participation of all members of the community in the development process as well as equitable distribution of benefits produced.

(NPC & UNDP, 1997:51)

There is no denying the fact that development in Nigeria has become something of a pyrrhic victory in which one thinks positive changes have occurred and yet know very well that poverty have taken a heavy toll on the people. Based on the fact that poverty is on the rise in Nigeria as depicted by current socio-economic trends, there is no doubt

that there is still a lot to be achieved in the education of Nigerian children. In line with this, technical cooperation resources were prioritized to take care of identified areas of weakness in institutional and human resources. The key priority areas as identified by the country's Technical Cooperation (TC) policy include:

- ✓ Agriculture and rural development
- ✓ Industry and manufacturing
- ✓ Manpower and training
- ✓ Education and training
- ✓ Health
- ✓ Infrastructure and
- ✓ Social development

(NPC & UND, 1997: 109-110)

It is pertinent to note that in the manpower and employment priority area, emphasis for the sector focused on reduction of the level of unemployment and entrepreneurship in agriculture, cottage industries and utilities. On the other hand, in the education and training priority area, education programmes were to be geared with special attention to revamping and revitalizing educational and training institutions that will be in line with the human resource needs of the country. This perhaps explains the present deliberate attempt to include entrepreneurship education in the Nigerian educational curriculum ostensibly to beef up sustainable national development.

The Concept of Entrepreneurship Education:

There seem to be no clear path to the understanding of the concept of entrepreneurship education. Instead, when one attempts to get a clear picture of what entrepreneurship education is all about, a person may be confronted with either a description of an entrepreneur, its classifications and learning processes or what entrepreneurship should or should not be involved in. Many available literature on entrepreneurship education conclude that it seeks to provide students with the knowledge, skills and motivations necessary to encourage entrepreneurial success in a variety of settings cutting across all levels of schooling.

Entrepreneurship education trains students to examine their communities to discover unmet commercial needs and then develop business plans to meet those needs. According to the Centre for Entrepreneurial Development (CFED) (2005), incorporating entrepreneurship education into the existing traditional school system normalizes self-employment as a life goal while exposing youth and young adults (including the visually impaired) to entrepreneurship education outside of the school system allows them to think creatively about the economic challenges and opportunities available in their own areas. (<http://www.cfed.org>).

The Visually Impaired as Deficit Units:

Visual impairment results in visual disability which Sykes and Ozoji (1992) view as the reduced abilities of an individual in tasks such as reading, mobility and daily living skills. Visual impairment, which is severe enough to interfere with progress in normal educational programmes, is considered a handicap.

There are three levels of visual capability recognized by the World Health Organization which became mandatory for international reporting on January 1st 1979 (Sykes & Ozoji, 1992). These are normal vision, low vision and blindness. Normal vision lies between 20/20 and 20/70 while low vision is used to describe those children with moderate, severe or profound levels of visual impairment but who have residual vision to function primarily in a sighted way. Blindness, on the other hand, refers to children who are totally blind or whose degree of remaining vision is so marginal that it is of little or no use to them in their daily functioning. The resulting effects of visual loss are severe because blindness, being a medical phenomenon that relates to an impaired vision, affects the cognitive domain. Vision is the most actively used sense by human beings and knowledge grows in the human being largely from visual experience. Visual impairment therefore imposes three basic types of limitations on the individual. These include:

- the range and variety of experiences
- the ability to get about successfully and safely and
- the effective control of the environment and of the self in relation to it.

These three obstacles to independence and self-fulfillment, according to Yakwal (2008) have to be countered through special education provisions for the blind. The visually impaired are therefore regarded as a deficit unit not because of their disability resulting from visual impairment. They are deficit units because they are essentially the unit that is expected to benefit from a modified version of entrepreneurship education through specialized methods and materials provided by specialized stakeholders.

Involving the Visually Impaired in Entrepreneurship Education:

Every individual is unique and therefore the ideal education scenario is expected to address the need of individual learners. According to Yakwal (2009), this is more so when we consider the intricacies involved in entrepreneurship education for the visually impaired. In order to involve them as individuals in entrepreneurship education successfully, there are certain issues that may require urgent attention. Blindness results in some restrictions in experiences and mobility as a result, visually impaired children who are devoid of visual experience need a wide range of non-visual experiences to cope with the seeing world. In that respect, the considerations to be made should take cognizance of the process of education, training and vocational rehabilitation which may or may not include community based rehabilitation. Panwal, Yakwal and Goshit (2006) emphatically stated that the visually impaired have been known to obtain education which include participation in entrepreneurial activities like farming, marketing, accounting, law, public education etc. Having been known to be involved in such vocations clearly indicate that the visually impaired can perform equitably well in entrepreneurship education if given the opportunity.

The visually impaired (blind) depend on receiving information through sensory media other than vision. Therefore, when teaching the visually impaired, it must be emphasized that touch and hearing are very important senses.

Another teaching medium for the visually impaired is kinesthetic sense which refers to the involvement of muscular activity in the teaching/learning situation. The adjustment the blind student makes when his or her muscular movements have not achieved a satisfactory result is one phase of kinesthetic awareness. One important aspect of teaching which uses kinesthetic sense requires that the instructor takes hold of the student's hand, arm or the part of the body involved and practically manipulating them. In the use of the one-on-one method for teaching visually impaired children effectively, one important responsibility the teacher has is to ensure that such children are in a position to use the available instructional time productively.

Benefits of Including The Visually Impaired in Entrepreneurship Education

The benefits of including the visually impaired in entrepreneurship education for the nation's national development are numerous considering the indicators of national development which include literacy, health, water/sanitation environment, industry and manufacturing, agriculture and rural development, manpower and employment as well as infrastructure and social development. Apart from the fact that providing entrepreneurship education to the visually impaired will enable them to play a significant role in the sustainable development of the nation, the benefits derivable from such a venture will result in greater opportunities for them to pursue their dreams of self-employment.

The Nigerian economy needs entrepreneurs to translate ideas and innovations into commercially viable propositions and to connect them to the marketplace. Entrepreneurship education is believed to have enormous potentials for engaging the visually impaired and their communities in defining their own economic destinies as well as providing a counterbalance to the hitherto economic rigidity bred by the years of dependence on oil and other mineral deposits as major sources of income. It will expectedly allow the visually impaired in Nigeria to re-examine their immediate and larger communities from a new perspective, discovering bright niches of opportunity in which before appeared daunting.

Vocational education, training and rehabilitation tracks traditionally have been the main thrust of entrepreneurship education efforts for the visually impaired within government and non-governmental service provision for them in Nigeria. With a wider understanding and careful planning of entrepreneurship education for the visually impaired, it will enable them expand their horizon in terms of capacity building for the nation's march towards sustainable national development.

Indeed, in a very real sense, entrepreneurship education for the visually impaired would build job readiness skills including goal-setting, time-management, self esteem, team work as well as benefit the community as it does the individual.

At the family level, entrepreneurship education would enable the visually impaired and their families to share intergenerational messages about entrepreneurial success with legitimate businesses and new perspectives on how to succeed in the mainstream economy.

Problems Associated with Entrepreneurship Education For The Visually Impaired In Nigeria:

There may be two main obstacles to entrepreneurship education for the visually impaired in Nigeria – resources and curriculum constraints. Entrepreneurship education could be very expensive to introduce and maintain especially with the generally known and acknowledged profligacy of Nigerian educational planning and implementation strategies. Curriculum constraints that may mitigate against successful entrepreneurship education for the visually impaired may include:

- Attitudes of the society towards the disabled which is seen as negative. As a result of the negative attitudes towards the visually impaired, they are denied certain rights and privileges even though they may have demonstrated coping ability, are independent and have social maturity as well as being productive.
- Lack of concerted efforts to encourage the visually impaired to attend institutions or register for courses that would enhance entrepreneurship skills for them
- Lack of funding for the visually impaired to establish cottage industries and apply their entrepreneurial skills for the benefit of the nation.
- Inadequate training in entrepreneurial skills
- Apathy on the part of the visually impaired themselves some of who believe they cannot cope with certain vocations that are direct outcomes of entrepreneurship education.

Recommendations:

The following suggestions/recommendations are being made as a way of ensuring success in the provision of entrepreneurship education for the visually impaired in Nigeria. They include:

- If entrepreneurship education for the visually impaired should form part of the educational system, then it must also be part of the teacher training programme as it is an important part of the structure.
- Supplementary courses of entrepreneurship directed towards teachers should be introduced as part of the general structure.
- There is need to create arenas of dialogue where head teachers, teachers and students/pupils can meet to discuss entrepreneurship from different perspectives in order to reach an agreement on how to make it part of the education in their schools
- Dedication to entrepreneurship education especially for the visually impaired must be matched with avenues of opportunity and community support.
- There is need for concerted efforts to be made to ensure attitude change towards the visually impaired. This change could generate adequate recognition and acceptance of the visually impaired as competent enough to benefit from entrepreneurship education for positive national development.
- Deliberate government policies and legislation should be enacted to provide guidelines for the provision of needed resources to ensure the success of entrepreneurship education not only for the visually impaired but all categories of 'normal' and children with special needs in Nigeria.
- Government, non-governmental and other stakeholders in the education enterprise should ensure the availability of adequate funds to promote the outcome of entrepreneurship education for the visually impaired.

Conclusion

This paper examined a number of issues relating to the insurance of sustainable national development in Nigeria through entrepreneurship education for the visually impaired. In view of what has been discussed, useful suggestions and recommendations were offered as a way of facilitating this novel idea. The paper concludes that if the suggestions/recommendations contained in this paper are adhered to by all the stakeholders in the education enterprise in Nigeria, the nation's sustained national development would be practically guaranteed.

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