INCLUSIVE EDUCATION FOR THE DISADVANTAGED GROUPS FOR NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

The paper examined inclusive education for the disadvantaged groups for national development in Nigeria. It discusses the role and play of the exceptional persons in Nigeria, the marginalisation as well as the concept of the disadvantage groups. Furthermore, factors that militate the inclusion of the disadvantaged groups in the developmental issues also form part of the write up. Issues/ matters that facilitate the enhancement of the inclusion of the disadvantaged groups for nation development are also highlighted. Lastly conclusion and recommendations towards the inclusion of disadvantage groups for national development have also been posited.

Introduction
Background to the Study

Special needs education for persons with different forms of special conditions has been receiving adequate attention worldwide. The trend seems to be suggesting that any system of education that does not cater for the entire population is lop-sided. In the quest for sustainable paths to national development various attempts have been made at different times and levels, international/ local in both the developed worlds' who have significantly made remarkable impact, so also the developing world, in a bid to fashion out how best the special needs populace could be included in terms of service delivery viz; education, healthcare, and provision of municipal services to foster development in their respective domains.

Unfortunately, the role and place of exceptional persons have for too long not been recognised in most developing nations (e. g. in a richly endowed nation like Nigeria). The consequences of harnessing human resources exclusive of exceptional persons unfortunately too has only exacerbated the sore of national life in terms of large segments of the population who have been dehumanised, destitute and cultured into perpetual dependence. Before the assimilation and adoption by Nigeria of the campaign for inclusive education system, the particular segment of the population that comprises mainly of persons with needs conditions were largely relegated and forgotten. By the National policy on Education, 1977, 1981 and 1998 Special needs education can be said to have been fully streamlined into the education system. However, a careful look at the

policy provisions-vis-à-vis what obtains on the ground, one may find that special needs education is yet to be fully all encompassing or all-inclusive.

The marginalised\disadvantaged groups are more elaborated and all encompassing, for it is beyond the traditional context of the diverse exceptionalities (namely cognitive and social, as well as physical exceptionalities). The said groups however, constitute a distinct cultural groups attached to a tiny proportion of a given society or population and are not categorisable with the majority of a population in any given Geographical entity. The major determinant on the issue of disadvantaged/marginalisation in most societies however, is mainly by the levels and types of service delivery in terms of provision of education, healthcare and other municipal services to the said groups.

The marginalisation however, is known to have some political undertone, that is why the status of a disadvantaged does not prevent or hinder service delivery, if they are not being adequately served, according to their needs it usually turn out to have political undertone (Akinpelu, 1994). Going by the description it is clear that a picture of anybody who falls into the description is indeed unique and individual being whose needs/conditions set him/her apart from the regular mainstream society (ies). However, such individuals/groups according to Kolo, (1995) are usually at risk and at the mercy of mainstreams of societies in terms of their chances of having or getting their basic needs attended to. Furthermore, the chances to life and survival in terms of the attainment s of basic rights are also bleak.

Disadvantaged Groups: The population within this category mainly comprises of the, geographically inaccessible, poor people in almost all societies; male gender dominance among societies; migrant people and the culturally distinct groups etc. The first however, are disadvantaged because the physical/geographical location of where they live. For instance, people from hilly/mountain areas, dense forests, deserts etc. However, owing to their situation natural factors have however made them inaccessible, communication is rarely feasible.

The conditions of poverty that define their lives however, make life almost difficult and unbearable. In most instances having their basic needs being met becomes a mirage or far cry from reality. In the same vein in most developing nations where male gender dominance is pronounced it is evident among such populations the female gender has always been at the receiving end. Hardly is any consideration given. There still exist some traces of it even in the developed nations. The migrant people, by nature of their condition lead a very mobile/ vibrant life, invariably; they hardly have a permanent abode. As such they are hardly recognised as important segment whose contribution to national development is given any consideration.

Factors That Militate the Inclusion of the Disadvantaged Groups in Development Issues

It is well-known fact that education as a pillar/gateway to developments is not receiving the much deserved attention it ought to. However, since the days of the Structural Adjustment Programme in the country this giant sector began and continued to take a new look. Invariably, even during the era of economic prosperity very little was done in terms of provisions and the need to get the groups in question fully integrated/mainstreamed into national life. On the other hand, in this era of economic down-turn, it has been the problem of increased destitution and dehumanisation. This is however, one of the major constraints that in no small measure hinder the inclusion of disadvantaged groups in higher education. The regular education sector in itself is embedded/ replete with problems. Unfortunately, in most developing nations Nigeria inclusive, it is even beyond the non inclusion of the disadvantaged/ marginalised in the national development agenda, in some instances it is total neglect which invariably, in most cases leads to denial of basic rights (life, education, and work).

Closely related to the above is the issue of unabated and pervading poverty, which for decades have been a serious constraint to development in all ramification inclusion in terms of provision of education inclusive. The United Nations has for over a decade indicated the scourge of the level of poverty in some developing nations of which Nigeria is one. It maintained that over 70% of Nigerians population are poor and live below the poverty line because they earn less than a dollar per day. The report further maintained that 40% of the 70% are core poor they lead a life defined by abject poverty. Hence, this grim picture however, is indicative of the remote chances of the feasibility of inclusion reaching out the groups in question.

Lack of political will in any given situation is also a factor to reckon with, this however, in no small measure retard progress among groups and even nations.

Enhancing the Inclusion of the Disadvantaged Groups for National Development

Inclusion in this context is the solution. This, however, is beyond the provision of education; it embraces preparations of the said groups into the economic and political as well as social life endeavours. This has received global acceptance, and that for any meaningful development agenda to be realised inclusion is bold stepping stone in the right direction all in a bid to minimise the impact of marginalisation on the lives of the said groups.

Invariably, for inclusion of the disadvantaged groups to be achieved into the mainstream of national development various service delivery modes have to be resorted to and implemented. It is a well known fact that every society has its own crop of marginalised groups, and that education is one of the strongest weapon/mechanism or tool that can be used to bail them out of the woes that are embedded in the trap of marginalisation. Furthermore, it also an insurance ticket which if acquired could facilitate

the chances of inclusion into all other facets of development in life, i.e. social and economic as well as political.

Various strategies can be employed to ensure inclusion of the marginalised/disadvantaged groups into mainstream of affairs. A very viable mechanism in this vein is mounting of strong/virile reach-out activities mainly education based. This is in the provision of basic literacy programmes to all the nooks and crannies of their places of abode. Major stakeholders in this dimension entail the involvement of International Development partners whose activities include sensitization and awareness programmes e.g. (UNICEF, UNDP, UNESCO, and other NGO's as well as religious organisations traditional rulers as fathers of their native lands, committed to the cause of promoting education and promoting human development.

The provision of inclusion in this perspective could be by ---Location reach-out education: This is the provision of education to the target groups in their various domains, which could be tents, under the tree, under the shades, uncompleted buildings e t c. It is pertinent to note that one of the major mechanisms which are known to promote the success of the programme is the active involvement of volunteers whose level of commitment is such that they can boost inclusion by delivering education to the doors of the target groups.

Education Broadcast. This entails the use of print and electronic media gadgets to deliver education to the disadvantaged/ marginalised groups. Media especially radio is very resourceful gadget that play a very vital role in conveying messages to the varied groups within a very short time period.

The mounting of integrative comprehensive services units within the domains of the varied groups to evolve various programmes delivery in terms of physical/health, education, social needs of the target groups. Bearing in mind the peculiarities of each group, this is possible by making the services appealing/friendly and accommodating of all differences that are inevitable.

Establishment of national centres across the six Geo-political zones is also another steppingstone forward, to be supervised by experts to conduct a periodic review of the activities and make amendments when and where necessary.

Conclusion

The disadvantaged/ marginalised groups and persons in especially sdifficult circumstances the globe over fall within the vulnerable groups owing to the peculiarities which made them labelled among the societies they find themselves. Moreover peculiarities that abound in most developing nations like Nigeria are not any different, where the political will is hardly feasible if any. So also dwindling resources this indeed, have been a very salient factor which contribute in no small measure in retarding the chances of inclusion among the said groups considerably in matters of national interest and development in all facets of life.

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