

Strategic Educational Management: Implications for Poverty Reduction in the Developing Countries

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Abstract: Several research findings have revealed that in spite of advances in science and technology, that have resulted in knowledge explosion, the major problem facing developing countries is poverty. Several factors are responsible for poverty. These are broadly categorized as individual, family, community, state, national, global and in recent times natural and environmental problems. In spite of progress made in achieving gender parity most cultural, political, religious, traditional practices deny women and girls education, employment and access to land, family inheritance and finances. At the World Conference on Education for All in Jomtien, Thailand from 5th to 6th March, 1990, the participating nations accepted to provide compulsory and free (relevant) primary education to all children and massively reduce adult illiteracy. Furthermore, there are fears that the second Millennium Development Goal which aims at ensuring that by 2015, children everywhere, boys and girls alike, will be able to complete a full course of primary schooling may not be actualized. The multi-faceted, and complicated nature of the problems of poverty, demand strategic educational management for human capital development. It is recommended that a broad based coalition of all levels of government, NGOs, key individuals especially philanthropists in a community in the provision of primary and secondary education will ensure quality education for all and reduce poverty in developing countries. [Researcher. 2010;2(1):35-42] (ISSN:1553-9865)

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1. Introduction

Over the years, humanity has experienced unprecedented knowledge explosion and wealth creation, yet millions of people die annually as a result of poverty occasioned by economic uncertainty, corruption in high places, war, violence, conflict, natural disaster, and environmental pollution among others etc. Serageldin (2003) emphasized that new scientific breakthroughs and new products have made it possible to develop high yielding plants that are more environment friendly, new remedies for killer diseases, edible vaccines, single-cell protein to feed cattle and clean wastes, hyper-accumulating plants to take toxins out of the soil, expanding forests and habitats where more species thrive so that man can dream of a future of sustainable development where humans thrive in harmony with others and with the environment. In spite of these advances the major challenge facing the world is poverty. In recognition of global dilemma, in 1992 the

United Nations General Assembly, through its resolution 47/196 of 22 December, declared 17 October the International Day for the Eradication of Poverty. The observation aims at promoting awareness for the need to eradicate poverty and destitution in all countries, particularly in developing countries which has become a development priority.

Poverty is multifaceted and comprises among others of hunger, malnutrition, illiteracy, lack of potable water and access to basic health services, social discrimination, physical insecurity, and political exclusion (Chronic Poverty Report 2008). According to World Bank (2002) 1.2 billion people live on less than US\$1 per day, one billion people do not have access to clean water, more than two billion people have no access to adequate sanitation, 1.3 billion people, mostly in cities, are breathing air below the standards considered acceptable by World Health Organization (WHO). The resultant effects of all these are vulnerability and human

suffering. The children of the poor frequently become sick and die of preventable diseases. The poor work and labour extensively to sustain themselves. The report further emphasized that the poor are the socially marginalized, members of ethnic, religious, indigenous, nomadic and caste groups, migrant, and bonded labourers, refugees and internal displaces, disabled people, the sick, and those discriminated against.

The complicated and heterogeneous nature of poverty necessitate strategic educational management that aims at human capital development. According to LISC (2007, p.1) "Human capital represents the knowledge, skill and abilities that make it possible for people to do their job. Human capital development is about investment in people, using a variety of means, including education, training, coaching, mentoring, internship, organizational development and human resource management". Education primarily serves the fundamental purpose of preparing an individual for useful living. It involves the development of the mind, body and character through intellectual discipline (Asiabaka, 2008). The process of education is complex. It starts at birth and continues for life.

2. Statistics on Poverty

Increasing international interest in poverty reduction has given impetus to several multinational organizations conducting surveys aimed at determining the estimated magnitude of poverty. This has become necessary because of the short and long term consequences of poverty on humanity in general. As stated earlier according to World Bank (2002) out of the six billion people in the world, more than one billion live in less than the equivalent of US\$1 per day and two billion live on less than US\$2.

In addition to the money –metric indicator, other multidimensional factors provide relevant information. Food and Agricultural Organization (2001) reported that about 800 million people live in hunger and chronic malnourishment. These people cannot work because of hunger. The report further revealed that more than 150 million children under 5 years of age are severely underweight, including a quarter of the children under 5 in developing countries. A strong relationship exists between hunger and disease. Malnourished children frequently become sick. UNICEF (2001) emphasized that 11 million children under 5 die each year and malnourishment is responsible for over half of

the deaths. According to ACC/SCN (2000) about 250 million children suffer from Vitamin A deficiency which causes eye damage. Half a million become partially or totally blind each year and may die. Lack of protein, vitamins, minerals and other micronutrients in the diet cause general debility. About a billion people suffer from iron deficiency. More than 400 million women of child bearing age have anemia caused by iron deficiency (Rush, 2000).

World Health Organization reported that tuberculosis infects about a third of the earth's population, with almost 10 million new cases and 2 million deaths each year. About 500 million people each year are infected by malaria and about a million die as a result of complications caused by malaria. UNAIDS (2000) reported that about 40 million people are infected with HIV, 7 of every 10 are women and children. Each year, about 3 million people die of TB, pneumonia and meningitis as a result of the HIV. These alarming problems are found amongst the "poorest of the poor" and these are mainly women and children in developing countries. UNDP (2001) revealed that the richest 1% of the World's population have the same aggregate income as the poorest 57%. In the midst of hunger, deprivation and disease, the problem of more than 50% of the US population is excessive wealth (US Surgeon General 2001). According to the UNAID (2001) about 600,000 babies are born each year with HIV while the number is about 200 in USA. These multidimensional factors have given impetus to the very urgent need for accelerated action. Humanity cannot afford to overlook the devastating effects of HIV/AIDS, malaria, malnutrition and hunger. Since research findings have shown that poverty persists over decades, lifetime, and generations, there is immediate need to responsibly, coherently, and cooperatively address poverty issues in the world through education.

2.1 Factors Responsible for Poverty

Basically, poverty is disaggregated along three dimensions namely; poverty breadth, depth and duration (Moore, Grant, Hulme and Shepherd, 2007). According to them, poverty breadth refers to the multidimensionality of poverty in terms of money metrics or material indicators such as low income, expenditure, consumption, physical assets or human capital indicators such as poor nutrition, health, education status. It may also be socio-political indicators such as lack of access

to services, common property or social network, powerlessness, marginalization and stigma. Poverty depth refers to how far below the poverty line an individual falls. This may also be called severe poverty, absolute poverty, extreme poverty, ultra poverty, poorest of the poor, hardcore poverty, indigent and destitution. They emphasized that poverty duration is the length of time an individual experiences a particular poverty state. When poverty persists for a long period of time, it is referred to as chronic poverty and a situation where by individuals move in and out of poverty is known as transitory poverty.

Multidimensional factors ranging from individual to global factors are responsible for the three categories of poverty. Some young adults are habitually lazy and do not listen to family or parental advice. Such people have no skill and no formal education and persistently depend on other people especially family members for food and shelter and may in fact resort to substance abuse. They constitute nuisance to their families and communities. These people are easy prey for anti political activities, armed robbery, civil disobedience and all other social vices. At the family level are the aged, the sick, the physically and mentally impaired, young girls who got married very early in life, the widows and widowers with several dependent children and the orphans. Also included in this group are over sized families with practically no reliable source of income. These people are income and assets poor and are mainly found in remote and high density areas. Children from these individuals and families are constantly sick as a result of malnutrition and most times die as a result of preventable and curable diseases. They generally experience stunted growth.

Several factors are responsible for poverty at the community level. These include among others, lack of public infrastructure, cultural exclusion and marginalization, discrimination and prejudice. Natural disaster has in recent times caused quantum leap in the number of communities displaced and devastated by storm and earthquake. These communities lost virtually all they had. They depend on assistance from individuals and groups. The increasing number of such communities has become a major source of global concern.

Policy and political leadership are responsible for poverty at the state, national and global levels. In spite of progress made in developing global framework for reducing poverty, substantial evidence abound that the MDGs may not be achieved in many countries especially Sub-Sahara Africa. The poor is generally left out in national processes of development. Uncontrolled population growth puts tremendous pressure on resources such as land, water and other resources. The increasing prices of oil, directly affects the demand and supply of food crops. UN (2008 p.6) emphasized that “overall, higher food prices are expected to push many more people into absolute poverty, with estimates suggesting that the increase will be as many as 100 million”. The report further revealed that the increase will occur in Sub-Sahara Africa and Southern Asia with the highest numbers of people living in extreme poverty.

Stern (2006) reported that although the poorest countries and populations contributed the list to climate changes, they will suffer earliest and the most. Short and long range policies responsible for climate changes directly complicate and contradict global framework for poverty reduction. Spore (2008) reported that the EU and USA are responsible for more than half of global green house gases emissions, sub-sahara-1.59% and the small Island states 0.37%. The resultant effects are more frequent and more violent cyclones in the Caribbean, floods in Africa, the gradual sinking of Islands in the Pacific, heat waves in Europe, the melting of glaciers.

High level of corruption among political leaders has consistently caused national governments to fail in addressing poverty issues in their countries. In the midst of abundant natural resources, political leaders fail to provide adequate health care services, education, water, sanitation etc. While the political class continues to amass wealth, the poor are denied opportunity for access to finance and capital.

A major contributory factor to poverty is violent conflicts. At community, national and international levels, individuals and families have experienced displacement occasioned by conflicts. Poverty can be a primary course of conflict. Crime and violence are more prevalent among the poor. The poor youths are readily available to serve as political thugs.

The poor are more vulnerable to crime and more likely to break the law. During war periods, the

poor are the most likely to suffer the effects and after effects of war.

UN (2008) stipulated that 42 million people are currently displaced by conflict or persecution, both within and outside the borders of their own countries, about 16 million people are refugees. Southern and Western Asia and Sub-Sahara Africa are home to the largest populations of refugees.

The poor are less likely to make maximum use of opportunities available to them. These may take the form of opportunities for gainful employment, loan, political participation, social integration, improved agricultural production, education, health care services. This inability to make maximum use of opportunities is responsible for chronic poverty. It makes it possible for people to join the poverty group and difficult for them to leave the group.

2.2 Gender dimensions of poverty

Woroniuk, Thomas and Schalkwy (1997 p.14) defined gender as “the socially given attributes, roles, activities, responsibilities, and needs connected to being a man (masculine) and being a woman (feminine) in a given society at a given time, and as a member of a specific community within that society”. Cultural practices assigned roles for men and women. The men perform the functions of heads of families while the women look after the families. The men dominate in all spheres of family and community life leaving the women with residual power in family and community matters. Most cultural, political, religious, traditional practices deny the women and girls education, employment and access to land and family inheritance and finances. UN (2008) reported that in Western and Central Africa in spite of progress made in achieving gender parity at the primary level, girls account for 55 percent of the out- of-school population. Furthermore, according to the report, drought, food shortage, armed conflict, poverty, lack of birth registration, child labour and HIV/AIDS are responsible for low school enrolment, and high drop out rates for both boys and girls but especially for girls.

Early marriages arranged by family members have continued to endanger the possibility of exit from poverty. In some extreme cases, women may not be in a position to determine their sex partners, consequently, they are exposed to life threatening diseases such as HIV/AIDS and

other venereal diseases. In Sub-Sahara Africa the number of people living with HIV rose from an estimated 29.5 million in 2001 to 33 million in 2007, about 60 percent of adults living with HIV in 2007 were women.

In spite of efforts by national and international governments aimed at liberating women at all levels, women have generally continued to suffer marginalization in public and private spheres. About 1.5 billion workers are in unstable and insecure jobs. Vulnerable employment is highest in Sub-Sahara Africa. It accounts for three quarters of all jobs. Women in developing regions are more likely than men to be in vulnerable employment situations. Generally, positions occupied by women are characterized by inferior status, lower pay and poorer working conditions (UN, 2005)

3.0 Education for All: The Journey so far

The sudden drop in primary and secondary school enrolments in the 1980s in parts of the world especially Africa and Asia and the obvious devastating global consequences necessitated the World Conference on Education for All in Jomtien, Thailand from 5th to 6th March, 1990. The participating nations accepted to provide compulsory and free (relevant) primary education to all children and massively reduce adult illiteracy. From 16th to 19th June 1996, at Amman, Jordan a Mid-decade meeting (Jomtien +5) took place on Education for All. In 1999, five regional conferences and a conference of nine high population countries on EFA discussed the assessment and prepared regional framework of action that guided the formulation of the Dakar framework of Action. The African Regional Conference took place from 6th to 10th December, 1999, in Johannesburg, South Africa. The World Education Forum (2000) adopted the Dakar framework of Action which sets 6 major EFA goals aimed at ensuring that all individuals realize their right to learn and to fulfill their responsibility, to contribute, to the development of their society. The goals are to:

- (1) Expand and improve comprehensive early childhood care and education, especially for the most vulnerable and disadvantaged children.
- (2) Ensure that by 2015 all the children, particularly girls, children in difficult circumstances and those belonging to ethnic minorities, have access and complete free and compulsory primary education of good quality.

- (3) Ensure that the learning needs of all young people and adults are met through equitable access to appropriate learning and life skills programmes.
- (4) Achieve a 50% improvement in levels of adult literacy by 2015, especially for women, and equitable access to basic and continuing education for adults.
- (5) Eliminate gender disparities in primary and secondary education by 2005, and achieving gender equality in education by 2015, with a focus on ensuring girl's full and equal access to and achievement in basic education of good quality.
- (6) Improve all aspects of the quality of education, and ensure excellence of all so that recognized and measurable learning outcomes are achieved by all, especially in literacy, numeracy and essential life skills.

The EFA 2000 (Jomtien +10) assessed 183 countries, 14 special thematic studies, quality of learning achievements in over 30 countries and the involvement of Non-governmental Organizations (NGOs) in education. The assessment revealed that progress made was uneven and slow and that about 113 million children had no access to primary school and at least 580 million adults are illiterates. In 2000, there were more children out of school (40 Million) than in 1990. Two third of them are girls. Sixteen countries suffered a decline in enrolment rates during the first half of the 1990s. UNESCO estimated that 142 Million African adults are illiterates compared to 126 Million in 1980 and that in 14 countries illiterate rates range between 60 and 70%. If current trends continue, there will be 57 Million African children of primary school age out of school in 2015. This will represent three quarter of all the children out of school by 2015. The poor performance was attributed to weak political will, insufficient financial resources and inefficient use of those available, the burden of debt, inadequate attention to the learning needs of the poor and excluded, lack of attention to the quality of learning, absence of commitment to gender disparities (Shabani 2006). The report further stated that, the number of teachers available is not adequate and a sizeable percentage of them did not receive adequate training and that the number of additional teachers needed to reach universal primary education in Africa by 2015 exceeds 3 Million, including more than 1 Million for Nigeria alone although the ravages of HIV/AIDS may make

this figure an underestimate. Various estimates indicate that the cost of achieving good quality universal primary education in Sub-Sahara Africa will amount to about USD 3.8 Million per annum for ten years, consequently, several countries will not be able to achieve quality EFA.

The NGO Declaration on Education for all, International Consultation of NGOs, Dakar 25th April, 2000 reaffirmed their commitment to work and co-operate with governments and a wide range of groups, individuals and institutions to reach the goal of quality education for all. They noted that the price for realizing Education for All is an additional USD 8 billion a year which is the equivalent of four days of global military spending and 9 minutes of international currency speculation. They emphasized that for 125 million children, the right to education is violated every day, leaving them trapped in poverty and for millions, lack of teachers, classrooms, and instructional materials cut short their education and they learn very little.

The International community adopted the eight Millennium Development Goals as a framework for the development activities of over 190 countries in 10 regions. The second Millennium Development Goal occupies a prominent second position. The target is to ensure that by 2015, children everywhere, boys and girls alike, will be able to complete a full course of primary schooling. According to the UN (2008) progress report, in 2006, the net enrolment in almost all the regions exceeded 90 percent the number of primary school age who were out of school fell from 103 million in 1999 to 73 million in 2006. In Sub-Sahara Africa, the net enrolment ratio reached 71 percent about 38 million children are still out of school. In Southern Asia, the enrolment ratio is about 90 percent, while more than 18 million children are still not enrolled. About 1.5 million school age refugee children live in developing countries and 1 in 5 of them has no access to formal education. In Sub-Saharan Africa, more children of secondary school age attend primary rather than secondary school. Girls' primary enrolment increased more than boys' in all developing regions between 2000 and 2006, but they account for 55 percent of the out of school population. For both boys and girls, drought, food shortages, armed conflict, poverty, lack of birth registration, child

labour, HIV/AIDS are responsible for low school enrolment and high dropout rates (UN, 2008).

4. Poverty Reduction through Strategic Educational Management.

Education is the key to human capital development and human capital development is the key to national and international development. The aggregate contributions of individuals, formal and informal organizations determine to a large extent the nature and magnitude of the well being and human conditions of the citizens of a nation. Education plays a fundamental role in directing and redirecting national resources for human capital development. Strategic educational management is the process of deliberate application of targeted interventions in the process of human capital development. It involves innovative, intellectual, and affordable strategies that will address the multidimensional and intertwined problems of hunger, poverty, and environmental degradation. A necessary focus of interest is the targeted mobilization of new technologies, economic, legal and institutional resources to fight poverty, end hunger, protect the environment, heal the sick, and create an enabling environment for self expression and socio-political participation and partnership. According to Shabani (2006) progress in EFA is uneven and slow. A contributory factor is that poverty hinders children from going to school. The children from poor and marginalized families have less access to basic education, where the opportunity is provided; they are least likely to attend school. These vulnerable children are found both in urban and rural areas and they constitute a major challenge to the realization of the EFA goals and MDG targets.

5. Conclusion and Policy Implications

The deliberate channeling of economic resources for the education of the vulnerable children, requires strong political will and genuine commitment to the EFA and MDG goals by government and civil society, national and international organizations and foundations. A true coalition of government and NGOs especially religious groups and community development organizations will facilitate escape from poverty traps. The involvement of these groups will provide the multifaceted approach to investment in education. The government alone cannot carry the financial burden of providing education for all. Currently direct community participation in education is through the board of

governors and parents teachers associations. The former is made up of few selected influential members of the community in which a school is located while the latter is made up of parents and guardians of particular school children. A broad based involvement of key individuals especially philanthropists in a community in the provision of primary and secondary education especially as it relates to provision of instructional and infrastructural facilities will ensure quality education for all. A fundamental issue that must be addressed in the provision of education is the issue of quality of education children receive.

Shabani (2006) defined the following five dimensions or principles of quality in basic education:

- 1) Learner who are healthy, well-nourished and ready to participate and learn and supported in learning by their families and communities.
- 2) Environments that are healthy, safe, protective and gender-sensitive and provide adequate resources and facilities.
- 3) Content that is reflected in relevant curricula and materials for the acquisition of basic skills, especially in the areas of literacy, numeracy and skills for life and knowledge in such areas as gender, health, nutrition, HIV/AIDS prevention and peace.
- 4) Processes through which trained teachers use child-centred teaching approaches in well-managed classrooms and schools and skillful assessment to facilitate learning and reduce disparities.
- 5) Outcomes that encompass knowledge, skill and attitudes and are linked to national goals for education and positive participation in society.

A genuine legal backing is needed to give impetus to broad based community involvement in EFA. This will ensure community/local variations in curricula review, development and implementation. The problem of corruption has continued to mar EFA. High level misappropriation of funds without legal measures taken to check the excesses of individuals responsible for such acts negates the objectives of the legal arm of the government. Furthermore, coherent legal involvement will adequately address the issue of equity in resource

allocation to all schools irrespective of location. Experience has shown that schools located in remote rural areas have consistently been deprived of basic human and material resources while those located in urban and semi urban areas generally have more qualified teaching and non teaching staff. Targeted legal effort is needed to redirect the resources. Government and non-governmental agencies responsible for resource allocation to schools will face legal actions when they fail to equitably distribute resources to all schools.

The application of information and communication technology (ICT) in education is indispensable. The world has been reduced to a global village and mobilization of new technologies for improving teaching and learning requires partnership between the developed and developing nations. Affordable and effective ICT will reduce the gap between the targeted needs of the latter.

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