

SOCIAL STUDIES EDUCATION AS A VEHICLE FOR THE ATTAINMENT OF MILLENNIUM DEVELOPMENT GOALS IN NIGERIA

BY

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Abstract

Accruing benefits envisaged by leaders of nations of the world for Millennium Development Goals transcend borders of nations. It includes energising citizens of the world, poor or rich, for a better and sustainable future within a time frame. For Nigeria, it could make a reality the national aphorism "Good People, Great Nation". Social studies education contents in cognitive, affective and psychomotor domains are veritable vehicle for attainment of much of the MDGs. The paper examines the conceptual framework of social studies, its methods and evaluative processes vis-à-vis the Millennium Development Goals. It concludes that there is the need to reposition the subject through updating of the social studies teachers and the monitoring officials, better funding of schools and stemming the use of social studies as dump sites for less intellectually endowed would be teachers.

Introduction

Education is an instrument par excellence for social engineering and transformation. It provides a generative process of capacity building in all spheres of life for individuals and nations. However, this is subject to its being adequately planned and articulated towards desired ends and outcomes. Social Studies curriculum as a core discipline at the foundational and transformative levels of the Nigerian school system provides the large chunks of social-cultural and civic components in formal school system in Nigeria.

Nigeria has many issues to tackle on the development plane. As an underdeveloped nation state, Nigeria is besotted with myriads of developmental bottlenecks and problems. Amongst these are high poverty level, widespread hunger, gender discrimination, high unemployment rate, significant illiteracy ratio, and oil-product dependent economy. Other significant obstacles towards national development include insecurity, prevalence of HIV/AIDs, environmental pollution, inadequate accessibility to health care and general infrastructural decay.

There is, therefore, the need to harness various efforts at the national, state and local government levels to energize the citizenry towards the achievement of Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Social behavioural components such as values, attitudes, habits are vital ingredients for achieving the MDGs. A nation that is striving for social, economic, political and technological development must do all within her power to promote socio-civic attributes in her youths. Since the MDGs are geared towards the upliftment of general living conditions of the peoples of the world irrespective of status, creed, gender, age or location, it is pertinent for the Nigerian nation to encourage the attainment of the enunciated goals. To attain the improved standard of living and its future sustenance, fundamental changes need to be consciously planned for and desired by the leaders and followers alike. Education, therefore, provides the location for the changes. Social Studies education, in particular, when properly articulated and implemented would go a long way to bring the millennium development goals into fruition.

The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)

The Millennium Development Goals were adopted by 189 independent nations under the umbrella of the United Nations Organization. It is a blueprint for implanting and sustaining improved living standard in the 21st century. The MDGs are to:

- Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger
- Achieve Universal Primary Education
- Promote gender equality and women empowerment
- Reduce child mortality
- Improve maternal health
- Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases
- Ensure environmental sustainability
- Develop Global Partnership for development.

Source: The Nigerian Economic Society selected papers for the 2005 Annual Conference.

The MDGs are deliberate intentional statements committed to achieving appreciable improved standard of living by both developing and developed nations. It depicts an acknowledgement of wide yawning gaps between two divides. There is a mutual understanding of their respective inadequacies and strengths. While the rich countries pledged to support developing poorer countries through aid, debt relief, better trading ties and terms, the poorer nations showed their intentions to improve education, health and living standards of their citizens.

Most of the MDGs are to span through a period of twenty-five years (1990-2015) for the attainment of the stated goals. With just five years to its attainable period, the MDGs have remained largely unfulfilled. In Nigeria, the millennium intended targets have remained, to a reasonable extent, mere mission statements devoid of actualization.

For the purpose of this paper, we are more concerned with the education component. It should be noted that education being a catalyst in all aspects of human activities would rub on other spheres of development as contained in the millennium development goals.

To a large extent, the achievement of Universal Primary Education in Nigeria by 2015 is on course. Universal Primary Education was launched in 1976 for the first (six)6 years of schooling. A further step had been taken with the launch of Universal Basic Education which has increased the free and compulsory education for every child of school age to nine years. The Universal Basic Education as an education programme is intended to provide educational opportunities for all Nigerians – both children and adults (including nomads where applicable). It covers formal and non-formal education for life-long learning. It is expected that by the targeted period of MDGs (2015), almost all the children in Nigeria will be able to complete compulsory schooling for the first nine years of their lives at the primary and early secondary school levels.

Social Studies Defined

There are various descriptions of social studies as a school subject. What is incontrovertible about the discipline is its nature and objectives. It exposes the young ones to their environments, their possibilities and problems. DuBey and Barth (1980) view social studies as the process of education which utilizes the study of human life for the purpose of giving children the opportunity to practise and solve problems of crucial importance for the individual and society. Sebiomo (2004) views social studies as integrated broad field of knowledge which studies man in all his ramifications as he relates, influenced and being influences by his environment in order to solve the societal problems.

Fageyinbo (2000) describes social studies as a course of study that deals with man and various possible interactions between him and the environments and the outcomes from such which make him to understand, interpret, manipulate and adjust within, with or to such environments. Omoshin (2000) perceives the subject as a distinct integrated single subject that attempts to study virtually the totality of man's existence on earth purposely to encourage learners to acquire knowledge, skills and values needed for understanding and coping with various problems confronting man in the course of his survival. Simply, social studies is the study of man as he interacts with different environments to get maximum benefits from them.

From above definitions, the process, intents and purpose of social studies are clear. Millennium development goals are to solve problems of man in order to evolve a better and more efficient environments for his optimal survival. To effect this, man needs to acquire basic knowledge, values and skills to realize the lofty millinneium development goals. Appropriately conceptualized, implemented and evaluated from the primary levels, social studies education would go a long way to realize the MDGs.

Social Studies and Millennium Development Goals

We shall examine the impact of the objectives, nature, content, methodology and evaluative processes that in social studies would have on the attainment of millennium development goals in Nigeria. As earlier observed, Nigeria is an underdeveloped country with her attendant socio-cultural, political and economic problems. These problems are largely self-inflicted. Nigeria has in abundance the financial and material resources to implement and have sustainable national development (Akande and Olomola, 2008). There is need to fashion out a comprehensive social education that is more values-oriented, habits-forming and attitudes-binding (Fageyinbo, 2009). Social studies as a discipline provides the best option for a formal social education curriculum in Nigerian schools especially at the Universal Basic Education level.

Social Studies makes a deliberate attempt at inculcating values which are very essential to achieve the MDGs. Looking through all the enunciated millennium development goals, the importance of inculcation of desired values tailored towards improved and sustainable higher standards of living cannot be over-emphasized. As noted by Ogunyemi (1999), human activities revolve around and are determined by values. Commenting further, he noted that everywhere social studies has been introduced, it has contributed as an intervention programme for addressing some problems arising from human values and social attitudes.

The National Policy on Education (2004) equally acknowledges the paramount importance of inculcation of right type of values and attitudes for the survival of the individual and the Nigerian society. Nigeria's national anthem and national pledge reinforce the desirability of entrenchment of ethical values in our everyday living and interactions. Human beings, including Nigerians, face conflicts in valuing such areas as religion, health, politics, family, friendship, material possessions and cultural practices. All these are intricately interwoven with choices by individuals and nations which affect directly or indirectly their present attainment levels of the millennium development goals.

Social Studies essentially differs from social sciences such as economics, geography and government as taught in secondary schools because of its emphasis not only on knowledge but also on the acquisition of desirable values and social skills for effective citizenship. Social Studies education is deliberately designed to emphasize functional application of knowledge from many subjects, especially the social sciences in order to attain not only the cognition but also the affective and psycho-motor domains of educational learning. Knowledge, no doubt, contributes to the choices available to, and choices made by individuals. The uses to which knowledge acquired are put dependent to a large extent on the values internalized and manifested. For instance, the MDGs include eradication of extreme poverty and hunger,

improvement of maternal health, reduction in child mortality and promotion of gender equality. All these are influenced by the attenuating values and attitudes as practised in different parts of the world. On gender equality and women empowerment, for example, many African men irrespective of their socio-economic statuses still perceive opposite gender as intellectually inferior, socially unequal, politically immature, and economically at below par with them.

IPG (2003) identifies poor representation of women at decision-making levels, poor economic and human development status in terms of health and education; and gender bias, violence and persistent stereotyping based on cultural practices as three major challenges confronting Nigerian woman. If right ethical values are taught and internalized within the social studies curriculum, most of these gender discriminatory practices would diminish significantly if not eradicated totally. When gender empowerment is enhanced from the cradle, problems like infantile and maternal mortality, poverty and hunger, diseases and illiteracy would be drastically reduced. A confident, capable, bold and empowered woman is an unquantifiable asset to the family and national development.

Contents of the social studies curriculum are largely derived from the social sciences but not solely dependent on them. A well designed social studies programme aids acquisitions of social and civic literacy, skills and competencies. Social Studies curriculum has been re-aligned and re-structured to include the former primary and junior secondary school curricula to produce a 9-year Basic Education Programme in social studies in the context of National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategies (NEEDS) and the Millennium Development Goals (NERDC, 2007). Some of the themes include “Health Issues”; “Social Issues and Problems”; “Social Values”; “National Economy”; “People and Environment”; “Infrastructural Facilities”; “Science, Technology and Society”; “Government and Non-Governmental Agencies”; and “Culture”. They are organized from Basic 1 to Basic 9 (former P1 to JS III) in increasing complexity from the lower through middle to the upper basic classes.

The social studies content taught in envisaged dosages with attendant appropriate instructional aids and resources would contribute significantly to the attainment of MDGs. For example, the theme: “Social Issues and Problems” has been broken down into sub-themes such as “Gender Discrimination”; “International Conflicts and Organisations”; “Drug Abuse” and “Peace Education”. Juxtaposing the content of social studies with millennium development goals shows that the former is well attuned to the latter. A child from the formative years, if properly guided by the well-oriented social studies teachers to learn the major themes espoused by the 9-year Basic Social Studies Curriculum, would likely become a well-wounded citizen strategically placed to contribute to the attainment of the MDGs. Knowledge, values and skills acquired, for example, in teaching “Health Issues”; “Social Issues and Problems” and “National Economy” for many repeated years with clearly enunciated objectives at each level would contribute significantly to the eradication of diseases, ensuring environmental sustainability, improving maternal and child mortality, and promoting gender equality and woman empowerment.

Social Studies methodology is pupils-centred, activity-driven and goal-oriented. Effective teaching of social studies ought to give students opportunity to interact among themselves and with their environment for the purpose of trying out, validating and internalizing concepts (Nwagu, 2007). Again, this is an area in which social studies is significantly different from social sciences. Pupils, activities such as observing, discussing, debating, drawing, painting, demonstrating, role-playing, dramatizing and questioning are emphasized in and out of social studies classrooms. Hence, methods that facilitate self-discovery, value-clarifications and reflective inquiry are to be considered to achieve the intended outcomes.

Social Studies as a contributory facilitator towards the attainment of MDGs is not strait-jacket package. There are many hindrances that could stall the attainment of the lofty goals. The most important obstacle to the translation of intentions to realities in achieving the goals is the social studies teacher. Most teachers of social studies in the 9-year Basic Education programme rarely apply right methods and strategies of teaching social studies. They mostly talk the themes, hardly use instructional materials and generally have poor perception of the subject as to its aims and objectives in general school curriculum. The methods which the teachers prefer for social studies instruction are impediments to the realization of the goals of the discipline (Udienya, 2005; Nwagu, 2007).

Many teachers of social studies use inappropriate evaluative procedures. Emphasis is usually placed on testing. Even, when it is adopted, the concentration is on the cognitive content of instruction. Affective and psychomotor domains of educational learning are hardly assessed. Overall grades accumulated, ideally, should reflect affective behaviour of the learners, the demonstrative psychomotor skills and the knowledge acquired.

Added to the above problems, many social studies teachers lack the attributes of a sound teacher. Fageyinbo (2005) identified amongst others, the attributes of intuition, commitment, sincerity, enthusiasm, cheerfulness, resourcefulness, communicative and adaptiveness to innovations as essential personality traits of an effective social studies teacher. Moreover, Otelaja (2009) advocates that a social studies teacher is to avoid indoctrination, be approachable and create a democratic classroom atmosphere in which children feel free within reasonable limits to influence decisions on work selection, learning procedures and evaluation of findings. On the long run, no teacher can effectively give what he/she does not possess.

Conclusion

Nigeria as a country with the largest concentration of Negroid stock and the sixth largest producer of crude-oil in the world has enormous human and material resources. Her potentials, however, have not been harnessed at fifty years of independence. Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) are desirable intentional aspirations for an under-developed countries like Nigeria. Education is the greatest weapon for upward development capacity for individuals and nations. Social Studies as a socio-civic dimensional content of the school curriculum would serve as a vehicular collaborator to reach the developmental terminus.

To concretize the mere intentions of the MDGs to visible realities, there is need to re-position social studies for effective teaching and learning in our schools. This can be done through seminars, workshops and in-service trainings for classroom social studies teachers and the monitoring officials of those schools. Social studies should not be made a dumping ground for feebly intellectually endowed teaching aspirants. Teachers' welfare and increased fundings for schools should be considered by the governments at various levels. When these efforts are made, there would be well-groomed intelligible and committed teachers; better school environments for learning; and co-operative, motivated and willing learners who can march with confidence within the millennium to achieve the millennium development goals.

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