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CURRICULUM AGENDA FOR POVERTY ALLEVIATION: FOCUS ON HUMAN DEVELOPMENT INDICES

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ABSTRACT

A comparative study based on a random sample of 21 African and 11 non-African countries shows appalling deficiencies in Human development Indices (HDI) among the African countries, significant differences in life expectancy, literacy level, population growth rate, income per capita and availability of communication media in favour of the non-African countries. Curriculum provision in Nigeria must sharpen their focus on HDI in the next millenium if poverty must be alleviated. Grater focus on and government funding of the primary and junior secondary education, sustained environmental education based on local Agenda 21, greener curriculum in all subject areas, utilitarianism in curriculum orientation, greater focus on computer education and technology; faster transfer of information rather than human movement and improved attention to the curriculum personnel, among others, have been proposed

INTRODUCTION AND PROBLEMS

The scourge of poverty has been known globally and in all ages but its venom seem to be worst felt presently among the developing countries of Africa. Governments, organizations and individuals have always attempted to solve the problem posed by the vicious circle of poverty with very little or no success. Education that seems to be the only hope of the poor to get acquitted from the dungeon of poverty has been bastardized. The fear of poverty has driven many people to various forms of crime. Others have channeled such fears into constructive virtues and purposeful ventures. Yet to live currently above poverty line in Nigeria is elusive. Perhaps that is one reason why an anonymous in Ulbricht (1976) laments:

*I was hungry and you formed a committee to investigate my hunger;
I was homeless and you filed a report on my plight;
I was sick and you held a seminar on the situation of the underprivileged.
You investigated all aspects of my plight and yet I am still hungry, homeless and sick.*

Poverty line, according to Anya (1998) is put at N3290 for an average person or N13,462 per month for a family of five. He opines that 60% of all Nigerians live below poverty line while Ogunbunmi and Nehikhare (1999) say 49% of us in Nigeria live in abject penury. Moreover, citing the World Human Development Report for Nigeria, Ogunbunmi and Nehikhare (1999) reiterate that Nigeria occupies the 16th position out of the 25 poorest countries of the world. It therefore beats one's imagination that a country so

rich in human and material resources, so blessed by nature with abundant sunshine, water and minerals can be so bastardized, spending 35.8% of her annual budget on servicing of debt (accounting for 14% of Africa's debt burden) at the rate of \$104.54 for every one dollar borrowed (Ogunbunmi & Nehikhere, 1999).

It sounds incredible yet true that Nigeria spends more money on debt servicing (not paying back) than on health and education put together. This therefore affects the Human Development Indices (HDI) (life expectancy, literacy rate, population growth rate, income per capita and communication channel distribution). But all hope is not lost for the present government has determined to put a number of strategies in motion towards poverty alleviation. For example, realizing that the current population growth rate of 2.83% per annum could take the 1999 current population of over 110 million to nearly 236 million within the next 25 years and thereby increase the incidence of poverty, the Federal Government has decided to implement key strategies. These include fertility reduction, status improvement for women, awareness programmes and poverty alleviation (Onwubiko, 1999). Unfortunately, formal education is not highlighted despite its values for attitude change, population control and skills development as insurance against poverty and improved HDI.

Based on the situation highlighted above, this presentation is designed to answer the following questions:

(a) What is the status of poverty indicators in Nigeria based on the HDI in African and non-African countries?

(b) Is there any significant difference between the HDI of the African and the non-African countries?

(c) What curriculum agenda can upgrade the HDI and alleviate poverty in Nigeria?

METHODOLOGY

Library research was adopted for this study involving 32 (21 African and 11 non-African) countries. A random sample of 21 of the African countries was carried out. African countries were grouped into north, east, west, south and central, with a corresponding proportion of 2, 5, 8, 2 and 4 countries respectively selected from each zone. The 11 non-African countries were also selected to represent North and South America, Asia, Australia and Europe. The World Almanac and Book of Facts (1998) provided the major data source especially, as contained in pages 737 to 837. The simple percentages, means, standard deviations and independent t - test analysis provided the major statistical framework.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Each question posed above provided the basis for the discussion presented below along with their relevant tables.

Question a

What is the status of poverty indicators in Nigeria based on the HDI in African and non-African countries?.

TABLE 1
HUMAN DEVELOPMENT INDICES

Country	Life Expectancy (1997)		Average Literacy Rate (%)	Pop. Growth Rate	Income per capita (\$)	Communication Media			Newspaper Circulation per 1000
	M	F				Radio	TV	Tel	
Algeria	67.5	69.8	62.	2.2	3,800	1:4.2	1:13	1:24	46
Angola	45.1	49.6	40	2.7	700	1:33	1:152	1:180	11
Benin	51.2	55.2	37	3.3	1,380	1:11	1:194	1:182	2
Cameroon	51.2	53.4	63	2.9	1,200	1:6.8	1:224	1:224	NA
Chad	45.5	50.4	48	2.7	600	1:4.1	1:714	1:1,209	NA
Egypt	59.8	63.8	51	1.9	2,760	1:3.3	1:9	1:22	64
Eq. Guinea	51.2	55.8	79	2.6	800	1:2.4	1:104	1:159	NA
Ethiopia	45.5	47.8	36	2.8	400	1:5.1	1:233	1:401	NA
Ghana	54.5	58.6	64	2.3	1,400	1:4.4	1:11	1:285	18
Kenya	54.2	54.6	78	2.2	1,300	1:11	1:91	1:111	NA
Liberia	56.4	61.7	38	3.1	770	1:4.4	1:53	1:625	14
Mali	45.5	49.1	31	3.2	600	1:23	1:769	1:573	NA
Mauritania	46.5	52.6	38	3.2	1,200	1:6.8	1:40	1:246	NA
Niger	41.4	40.7	14	3.0	600	1:16	1:204	1:677	NA
Nigeria	53.3	56.0	57	3.0	1,300	1:5.1	1:26	1:275	18
Rwanda	38.6	39.6	61	1.8	400	1:15	NA	1:530	NA
S. Africa	54.4	58.2	82	1.5	4,800	1:3.2	1:10	1:11	33
Tanzania	40.3	43.1	68	2.1	800	1:38	1:476	1:328	NA
Togo	56.1	60.6	52	3.5	900	1:4.7	1:133	1:91	NA
Uganda	39.3	40.1	62	2.4	900	1:9.3	1:191	1:440	NA
Zimbabwe	40.9	40.8	85	1.3	1,620	1:12	1:37	1:71	NA
Australia	76.7	82.7	100	0.7	22,100	1:0.8	1:2	1:2	258
Brazil	56.8	66.3	83	1.1	6,100	1:2.5	1:5	1:13	45
Britain	74.0	79.3	100	0.2	19,500	1:0.7	1:2	1:2	351
France	75.0	83.0	99	0.2	18,670	1:1.1	1:2	1:2	237
Germany	73.0	79.4	100	-0.2	17,900	1:1.1	1:2	1:2	317
India	59.5	60.8	52	1.6	1,500	1:12	1:25	1:78	21
Japan	76.7	82.8	100	0.2	21,300	1:11	1:2	1:2	576
Pakistan	58.0	59.6	38	2.4	2,100	1:1.1	1:53	1:61	21
Switzerland	74.7	80.7	100	0.2	22,400	1:1.2	1:2	1:2	409
Taiwan	73.7	79.1	94	0.9	13,510	1:2.5	1:3	1:2	NA
United States	72.8	79.5	96	0.6	27,607	1:0.5	1:1	1:2	228

NA = Data Not Available

Compiled from: The World Almanac and Book of Facts (1998)

TABLE 2
THE BASIC NEEDS INDEX AND GNP PER CAPITA RANK ORDER BY COUNTRY

Country	Basic needs index		1991 GNP per capita	Difference in rank
	Value	Rank for neediest	Rank from Lowest	
<i>Very needy (BNI ≤ 0.50)</i>				
Mali	0.198	1	14	-13
Somalia	0.203	2	4	-2
Guinea	0.229	3	29	-26
Niger, The	0.241	4	16	-12
Sierra Leone	0.271	5	9	-4
Liberia	0.277	6	30	-24
Burkina Faso	0.288	7	19	-12
Djibouti	0.295	8	28	-20
Sudan, The	0.295	9	25	-16
Mozambique	0.296	10	1	9
Chad	0.311	11	10	1
Central African Republic	0.338	12	23	-11
Ethiopia	0.339	13	3	10
Guinea-Bissau	0.340	14	6	8
Mauritania	0.348	15	32	-17
Gambia, The	0.366	16	21	-5
Senegal	0.382	17	38	-21
Benin	0.383	18	22	-4
Angola	0.431	19	34	-15
Uganda	0.432	20	5	15
Nigeria	0.449	21	15	6
Morocco	0.462	22	41	-19
Cote d'Ivoire	0.468	23	37	-14
Namibia	0.471	24	44	-20
Swaziland	0.474	25	42	-17
Zaire	0.475	26	11	15
Rwanda	0.479	27	13	14
Equatorial Guinea	0.481	28	17	11
Malawi	0.484	29	12	17
Ghana	0.497	30	24	6
<i>Moderately needy (0.75 ≥ BNI > 0.50)</i>				
Burundi	0.516	31	7	24
Congo, the	0.539	32	43	-11
Cameroon	0.540	33	40	-7
Madagascar	0.547	34	8	26
Togo	0.556	35	26	9
Tanzania	0.559	36	2	34
Kenya	0.584	37	18	19
Zimbabwe	0.599	38	36	2
Zambia	0.607	39	27	12
Comoros, The	0.610	40	31	9
Cape Verde	0.630	41	39	2
Gabon	0.639	42	49	-7
Lesotho	0.644	43	33	10
Tunisia	0.658	44	45	-1
Algeria	0.658	45	46	-1
Sao Tome and Principe	0.669	46	20	26
Botswana	0.669	47	48	-1
<i>Relatively less needy (BNI > 0.75)</i>				
Egypt, Arab Republic	0.754	48	35	13
Mauritius	0.903	49	47	2

Source: IFAD (1991:67). The state of world poverty: A profile of Africa

economic growth. Worse of it, the status of poverty in Nigeria tends to deepen with the passage of time. Table 4 shows that in both the rural and urban areas, greater percentage of Nigerians slip below the poverty line in more recent years than about 20 years earlier.

TABLE 4
Poverty levels in Nigeria (1980 – 1996)

Year	Urban	Rural
1980	17.2	28.3
1985	37.8	57.4
1994	56.7	62
1996	58.2	69.3

Compiled from: Anya (1999: 68) and (1998:5)

The increasing percentage of poverty as a percentage of the total population in Nigeria can be attributed to the dictatorial military leadership scum within the last thirty-three years. Then, monumental corruption, officially legitimized fraud and brazen looting by the scum of leadership were the rule rather than the exception.

Question b

Is there any significant difference between the HDI of the African and the non-African countries?

An independent t-test analysis of the components of HDI between the selected African and non-African countries was necessary. Table 5 shows the data analysis involving life expectancy for males and females, the average literacy rate, the population growth rate, income per capita (in dollars) and communication media. Findings indicate significant differences on all these variables.

Reasons for such differences are not far to seek. Apart from poor quality leadership in most African countries, Nigeria being one of the worst affected,

developing countries hardly take advantage of prior conditions for improving the HDI of majority of their population. Such conditions include educated citizenry with the requisite skills, a suitable, dependable and sustainable framework of physical infrastructure including energy, water, transportation, communication, housing, a network of export-oriented industrial production, diversified export oriented agricultural production, proper attitude set and full exploitation of her human potentials.

International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) (1991) points out that poverty is not just a state of being but also the effect of dynamic processes; not only a personal phenomenon but also a social status. Consequently, it is critical to acknowledge the causes which may be in-built in and closely inter-related with historical and socio-economic processes. Anya (1999) is in support of this position. He points out that historically, Nigeria's economic orientation was outward. Agricultural production was tied to the foreign industrial needs with almost no interest on the local industrial requirements. The result was that local scientific skills and technological ingenuity were stifled. Unfortunately the foreign buyers were also dictating both the price and what they wanted. And coupled with a largely selfish, ignorant, incompetent and uninformed scum of leadership elite with limited vision and experience, the state of perpetual mass poverty was set to perpetrate economic dependency. Worse still, the illusory sense of wealth was created with the emergence of the oil economy which misdirected national attention away from agriculture. Little attention was paid to the components of HDI because of selfish ends. Most of

The data on Tables 1 - 4 summarize the status of poverty based on HDI among the people in the aforementioned countries. For purposes of simplicity and clarity the HDI was operationalized as the scores on life expectancy, average literacy rate, population growth rate, income per capita and communication media (radio, television, telephone and the newspaper).

Table 1 shows that the African countries have less of the variables under review than the non-African countries.

This implies that the Africans, under the prevailing situation, are not only poor in educational status but also in per capita income and communication media distribution. Moreover, they hardly live long enough to adequately pursue goals and programmes, develop abilities and enjoy the success of their programmes. Longevity, according to IUCN/UNEP/WWF (1991) is valued because it increases the opportunity for a person to pursue goals and develop abilities (p. 198)". Longevity is highly correlated with good health and proper nutrition, all of which are tied up with education, income and awareness which are deprived majority of Africans.

Table 2 shows the Basic Needs Index (BNI) along with the Gross National Product (GNP). These variables further illustrate how starkly deprived the Africans are. The BNI summarizes the status of adult literacy rate, primary school enrolment rate, and population per physician, infant mortality rate and under-five-mortality rate. It shows that 30 African countries (61.2%) out of the 49 of them are very needy. Their BNI is less than 0.5 of the global minimum acceptable standard.

Mali has 0.198, Nigeria 0.449 and Ghana 0.497. The moderately needy countries that score between 0.75 and 0.50 are only 17(34.69%). Only Egypt and Mauritius (4.08%) score up to 0.75 but none scored up to one, which is the global minimum index.

All these agree that African countries are seriously deprived. Nigeria, the needy giant of Africa exhibits a debilitating degree of deficiency as Table 3 shows

TABLE 3

Poverty indicators for Nigeria as compared with other African countries N = 49

Poverty indicators	Value*	The index score Rank
Food Security Index (FSI)	0.848	22 in terms of insecurity
Integrated Poverty Index (IPI)	0.498	29 from poorest
Basic Needs Index (BNI)	0.449	21 from neediest
Relative Welfare Index (RWI)	0.509	27 from poorest
Women's Status Index (WSI)	0.338	13 from lowest

Compiled from: International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) (1991, 60 - 76). *An index value of 1.00 is the minimum acceptable index score for each indicator.

Table 3 shows the status of Nigeria in relation to poverty indicators. As compared with other African countries Nigeria ranks the 22nd in terms of food insecurity, 29th poorest, 21st neediest in terms of the basic needs, 27th poorest in terms of relative welfare and 13th lowest on the Women's Status Index.

This finding is supported by Anya (1999) that poverty is widespread not only in Africa but also more so in Nigeria and cannot be eliminated without sustained education and

Nigeria's wealth never benefited the common man as these were stolen away and stacked in foreign countries by the heartless ruling scum.

TABLE 5
Independent t-test analysis of the components of HDI between selected African and non-African countries.

Variable	Group	N	X	SD	df	t-cal
Life expectance (male)	A	21	49.45	7.36	31	7.47
	B	11	70.08	7.45		
(female)	A	21	52.45	8.2	31	7.44
	B	11	75.75	8.53		
Average(literacy rate)	A	21	54.57	18.26	31	4.43
	B	11	87.45	20.8		
Population growth rate	A	21	2.56	0.59	31	7.29
	B	11	0.72	0.72		
Income per capita (in dollars)	A	21	1,344.29	1097.19	31	5.66
	B	11	15,698.82	8370.1		
Communication (Radio)	A	21	10.61	9.56	31	3.09
	B	11	3.14	4.0		
(Television)	A	20	184.2	216.35	30	3.6
	B	11	9	15.38		
(Telephone)	A	21	317.3	280.5	31	5.33
	B	11	15.27	26.0		
Newspaper circulation (per 1000)	A	8	25.75	19.25	17	4.04
	B	10	246.3	171.39		

A = African countries, B = Non - African countries. When df = 31 t-crit = 2.042, df = 30 t-crit = 2.042, df = 17 t-crit = 2.11

Compiled from: The World almanac and book of facts (1998, 737 - 837)

Question c

What curriculum agenda can upgrade the HDI and alleviate poverty in Nigeria?

Among the numerous poverty-inducing variables, activities and relevant alleviating strategies that can provide a meaningful guide for proposing gemane curriculum agenda against it, the following are worthy of note.

- (i) *Ambivalent and dualistic national policies and institutions* can often accentuate structural socio-economic and political imbalance (Inyang-Abia, 1997) thus perpetuating poverty, inaccessibility of the poor to land, energy, water, credit facilities and educational facilities (Inyang-Abia, 1995). This situation leads to the *rubbish people* (O'Brien, 1991) within Agarwal's (1991) *biomass-based subsistence economy*. The curriculum must be used as a veritable instrument of reorientation against such a situation.
- (ii) *High population growth rate* leads to increasing infantile-to-youthful demographic structure, which heavily burdens the small productive group. In Nigeria the ratio of economically productive (20 - 65 year olds) to non-productive age (0 -19 and 65+) is about 1:1 indicating that every economically active Nigerian produces for, at least, one economically inactive person. Lack of investment capability is the obvious result and consequently reinforced vicious circle of poverty, higher

population growth rate, squalor and destitution. The curriculum has important role to blueprint alleviation for the poor and sustainability for local communities (Inyang-Abia, 1997:b) and thus obviate the impending doom in the next century.

- (iii) *Environmental resources mismanagement* leading to depleting of natural resources including forest, soil, water and minerals without adequate consideration to their sustainability leads to nothing but a harvest of dust. The curriculum can provide the right course out of the impending shock.
- (iv) *Marginalization of women* has been accentuated by rapid population growth rate, nuclearization of the family, socio-economic pressure, environmental variables, cultural and economic biases that underestimate women's capabilities and undervalue their contributions. The curriculum must emphasize equality of gender.
- (v) *International hegemony and exploitative intermediation* which appears ostensibly for the poor but which in reality are systems of exploitation, subjugation and control had long conspired and surrounded the poor countries with their dense network of iron grip. Consider the so-called Paris Club, the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) that have put the developing economies in perpetual subjugation. How can a loan of one dollar attract a

servicing value of \$104.54. Yet the economic world is tending towards globalization, downsizing and greater reliance on information super-highways. The curriculum must take advantage of these new developments.

- (vi) *Internal socio-political instability and distrust* have also been a major variable to the present national predicament. Astute investors hardly consider high-risk situations; where stability and trust are rare then it would be foolhardiness to invest. Moreover such a situation cuts the flow of developmental efforts and turns the net producer to a net consumer. These situations have failed us., They are unacceptable. Curriculum provisions must therefore be designed to reverse them.
- (vii) *Radical curriculum re-orientation:* The curriculum must be radically re-oriented to question some conventional knowledge practices and procedures. Agenda 21-based curriculum (Inyang-Abia 1997,b) must be put in place to take care of the emergent needs of the new century. It must be emancipatory and integratively functional, flexible and skills-oriented. Emphasis on cultural re-orientation, life-long education, sensitivity to processes and problems of poverty, decolonization of the hegemonic scum, greater awareness of collective power and a commitment against corruption, among others, must be part of the orientation. Such

a radical curriculum must enable the beneficiaries to be more visionary especially when taking fundamental decisions. Knowledge and wisdom must be recognized as vital qualifications for leadership and decision-making. The curriculum must be liberating, futuristic, egalitarian, and based on marketable utilitarian philosophies.

- (viii) *Environment-population-economy-education nexus* is required for the emergent curriculum can only adequately attack poverty when the interrelationship among environment, population, economy and education has been property established. It is not just enough to accept that the poor and hungry usually destroy their environment in order to live but also that the gluttonous rich equally destroy the environment to get richer. Poverty has to be attacked from the root cause by integrating population education and environmental education into all subject areas so that by age is the youthful educated Nigerians already firmly establish in their adolescent minds the nexus between the environment, population, education and the economy before parenting. Adult education curriculum must also be redesigned to reflect these changes so that continuity can be maintained.
- (ix) *Teacher education, recruitment and deployment* affect the quality of an educational system cannot be better than that of the teachers. Therefore teacher education programmes must

undergo radical changes to reflect the expected re-orientation in both content and attitude. Teacher recruitment strategies must be reassessed to emphasize, more importantly, their professional commitment and expertise not only in what they can teach but how best they can teach. Teachers at the pre-primary and primary levels must then specialize and be recruited by "portfolio" not by more certification. Regular reassessment of teacher fitness by written and practical examination and by learner evaluation should be introduced. Deployment should be based purely on needs. All these subsume improved conditions of service with inbuilt motivation, training and retraining facilities, different and attractive salary scale and improve allowances to entice young professionals and retains the older experienced ones.

- (x) *Federal funding of education of 3-15 year-olds* is an absolute requirement. No nation can develop faster than her educational system. That means the level of an educational system dictates the pace of the national development. Poverty cannot be eradicated in a nation where average literacy rate (57%) falls far below the minimum (70%) acceptable international standard. As a matter of urgency and national pride the education of all Nigerians aged between 3 and 15 years old should be fully funded by the federal government if poverty must be alleviated. This

can gradually ensure a growing skill pool in Nigeria, in the next century.

- (xi) *Science, technology and vocational education*: the rest of the world has already gone *dot com*. We must get out of the store age rut. Science, technology and vocational education involving computer education are not only skills-oriented but capable of re-directed efforts. The curricula in these areas must be made compulsory up to senior secondary two beyond which a student can select subject to offer. Imagine the man - hour and risk cost involved in human instead of moving information which is the current trend

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Poverty in Nigeria is becoming debilitating. The situation is evidenced by the appallingly low Human Development Indices and poverty indicators as compared with non-African countries. Ambivalent and dualistic national policies and institutions mismanaged environmental resources, high population growth rate, cultural variables, international hegemony, exploitative inter-mediation, internal socio-political instability, distrust and visionless leadership scum have been blamed for the present national plight.

The curriculum, a national mandate and the societal agenda is relied upon for urgent reversal of the unfortunate trend. A radical Agenda 21-based curriculum re-orientation, an environment-population-economy-education nexus, teacher education,

recruitment and deployment by portfolio, federal funding of the curriculum of the 3-15 year-olds, improved skills orientation through science, technology and vocational education among others have been proposed.

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