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ECONOMICS EDUCATION AS A TOOL FOR SUSTAINABLE NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA

KASGAK CHRISTMAS DUNGRITDI
Department of Arts and Social Science Education,
College Of Education,
Veritas University Abuja
Bwari Area Council, Abuja

ABSTRACT

Every economy whether developed or developing is faced with the problem of insecurity as a result ofyouth unemployment. Economics Education is that education aimed at equipping the learner with analytical tools, knowledge and skills for the solution of society's economic problems. The paper examined the role of economics education in promoting sustainable national development in Nigeria. The paper also explored the concept of economics, economics education, sustainable development and the role of economics education in promoting sustainable development. The paper recommended that economics education should be the central focus of every nation's educational curriculum, especially Nigeria.

KEYWORDS: Economics, Economics education, Sustainable development

INTRODUCTION

Every country strives towards not just developing itself but working towards sustaining that development. That is why in the 21 st century, all developing nations seek to ensure sustainable development. And to achieve this sustainable development, education especially economics education needs to be brought to the fore

Education in a broad sense is a process by which an individual acquires physical and social capabilities demanded by the society in which the individual is born to function effectively. It is an ultimate value through the provision of social services; it is an agent of change. The importance of education cannot be overemphasized for it equips the individual with the necessary knowledge, skills, and values that enable him/her to function effectively in society. Education alone, if well planned and delivered, is capable of strengthening Nigerian democracy and engendering economic growth (Aruwa, 2004). Thus, it is an important key for the development of any society and the best legacy a country can give to her citizens .

Education helps in the development of individuals and society at large. It plays a vital role in the industrialization of the economy, by providing manpower with professional, technical and managerial skills. It creates positive attitude and makes possible attitudinal changes necessary for the SQcialization of individuals, modernization and overall transformation of societies. For a society to be transformed, it requires that individual minds be broadened in order to explore emerging opportunities. And one of the areas which people can explore that will result in the development of society is the aspect of how society decides what, **how** and for whom to produce goods and services.

Economics studies how society decides what, how and for whom to produce goods and services. Eneasator (1996) summarized economics as essentially dealing with the following areas: production of goods and services to create wealth; income distribution involving devising equitable means toensure fairness and equity in distribution; allocation of scarce resources using appropriate criteria; human capital utilization to take care of the problem of unemployment, under-employment and productivity; economic growth and development; planning, financing and costing of plans to ensure effective and efficient use of resources.

Through economics education, people are trained in institutions to teach economic concepts to the public through the students in secondary schools, thereby focusing attention at providing solutions to the economic problems in the society to bring about sustainable development. This points to the fact that economics education is key in promoting sustainable development in every given society. This paper therefore, seeks to explore the role of economics education in the promotion of sustainable development in Nigeria.

Economics

Different scholars have different views about economics; however, the generally acceptable definition of economics is the one given by Lionel Robbinson which sees economics as a social science which deals with human behaviour in relation to how he solves the problems of limited or scarce resources to satisfy his unlimited wants. The National University Commission (NUC) describes Economics as "the study of the factors that influence income, wealth and well-being". From this perspective, it seeks to inform the design and implementation of economic policies. Its aim is to analyze and understand the allocation, distribution, and utilization of scarce resources at both the individual (micro) and the aggregate (macro) levels. The study of Economics requires an understanding of resources, agents, institutions and mechanisms existing at the national level since virtually no economy operates in isolation

The history of economics is buriedin ideas from different scholars of different schools of thought. But what contributed to the development of economics as a separate science was the ever growing importance of economics phenomena in the society. Human society is a complex phenomenon and is subject to a large number of interacting forces. Therefore, economic ideas were bound to be tied up with other ideas for man's "attitudes" are related to his environment. But with the passage of time, the forces restricting the development of economics have given way to those which favour it. The expanding economic activities of modem governments are playing an active role in the development of economic science. Their operations provide an important segment of the totality of economic phenomena and have helped in the provision of necessary infrastructure for the growth of economic science

Goshit citing Bhatia (1985) contended that the world now realized the budgeting and other activities of government and cannot be neutral in their effects on economics as it is scarcity of resources (both human and material) that brought about economics. Scarcity ofthese resources varies from one society to the other.

Economics Education

Economics as a social science subject that concerns itself with making choices and finding alternatives. It studies how society decides what, how and for whom to produce goods and services. Economics education as an area of study cannot be said to be a separate field of inquiry that is totally different from ordinary economics. Economics education is the application of economic principles, concepts, laws to the process of education. In fact, economics education studies human behaviour (in terms of human decisions), action(s) and reaction(s)] about schooling (Babalola, 2003). It further looks into how human behaviour affects economic development. Economics education employs the use of some elementary concepts commonly used in labour economics, public sector economics, welfare economics, growth theory and development economics. On the whole, economics education is the marriage between 'Mr.' Education and 'Miss' Economics, and once married, Miss Economics must have her department and bear the name of Mr. Education. The two then merge to become one and thereafter are referred to as Economics Education. It must be noted however, that there is a difference between economics of education and economics education.

Nwadiani (2000) has defined economics education as the study and practice of resources generation, allocation and utilization, and their relationship with education and the general economy of the society. This definition recognized three critical factors, namely, the concern for the generation, allocation and utilization of available

=sources in education, the symbiotic relationship bet\\'een education' and the economy and the innuence of the economy on education.

OBJECTIVES OF ECONOMICS EDUCATION

Economics education is a field within economics that focuses on two main themes: :he current state of, and efforts to improve the economics curriculum, materials and pedagogical techniques used to teach economics at all educational levels; and =search into the effectiveness of alternative instrbctional techniques in economics, de level of economic literacy of various groups, and factors that influence the level of economic literacy. It is worthy of note that economics education is distinct from economics of education which focuses on the economics of the institution of education. Numerous organizations devote resources toward economics education '.\'hose primary purpose is the advancement of economics education. Any school curriculum has general objectives for its teaching and learning. The objectives of :eaching and learning economics education include:

1 To help learners understand the concepts of economics and appreciate the fact that all societies face problems but do not solve the same problems in the same manner.
To help learners get involved and study the economic issues that affect their community, state, and country and even the international community.
To help the learner acquire the ability to solve economic problems analytically and be able to reason logically along economic lines.
4. To provide learners with the knowledge and skill base from which they can proceed to further studies in economics related areas, or in inter-disciplinary areas that involve economics.
To develop in the learner a range of transferable skills that will be of value in employment and self-employment.
To help learners develop their intellect towards capacity building, become economic planners, administrators, or advisers to the government and other stakeholders for the development of the country, among others.

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Sustainable development has been defined in many ways, but the most frequently quoted definition is from Our Common Future, also known as the Brundtland Report 1 2015) which sees sustainable development as a development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. It emphasizes the quality of life of people now with an eye on the future. Sustainable development in the view of Ibeanu (2006) is development aimed at improving the conditions in which human beings live. Ibeanu makes an inter-play of the views of Walter, Rodney and Okudiba-Nnoli to indicate three indices of

sustainable development. These include science that deals with man's understanding of the laws of nature (natural and biophysical environment), technology that measures the application of man's understanding of the laws of nature to creation of tools and other implements that improve man's working conditions and living environment, social relations of production that deal with social or inter-human environment measuring organization of work, and access to productive resources and distribution of rewards like workers' wages. The basic understanding here is that it is human beings that improve conditions of living that would plan for future generatrons.

According to Goteng, Tangkat and Randawa (2017), sustainable development implies continual improvement of the living conditions of human beings in a particular community (society) from one generation to another. Correlation of science, technology and social relations (the tripod) is indispensable for sustainable development. Therefore, persons special educational needs also need improvement on their living conditions to contribute their quota to sustainable development. Therefore, sustainable development is the continuous improvement of the standard ofliving of individuals living in a community.

Roles of Economics Education in Nation Building

In Nigeria today, there are lots of people, literate and Illiterate, who know and can say next to nothing about physical, economic, social and political environment of states other than their own or those near them (Argungu, 2000:25). Their education is not functional. Similarly, Akintola in Argungu (2000) maintained that so far, many people have rarely been educated for life or as responsible human beings. Economics is set to bridge these gaps.

Nigerians have made progress in different fields of human endeavour to the point of being recognized worldwide. Yet poverty, corruption, ethnicity, religious and political conflict are rampant. We've now reached a stage where people act as slaves. People who had lived together for years now kill each other because of religion, political or even ethnic factions. If economics is effectively taught in schools, it can be very effective in adressing the problems of the country. By nature, economics is a problem-solving discipline as it uses inquiry methods and techniques for its teaching, generalizations and theories from the arts to the humanities. It is dynamic, incorporating relevant and up to date issues of concern to the nation, as the subject tries to find and suggest ways ofresolving societal problems.

With the many economic problems in Nigeria, there is need for a subject like economics which teaches students among other things to :

1 Make decision: Economics is about choice and is the heart of all decision making. Individuals, firms and government are all faced with making choices in different situations and in a wide range of fields including business, administration, finance, law, local and national government and indeed most aspects of everyday life. Increasingly, policy debate in all areas is being cast in economic terms and understanding most current issues requires an understanding of economics.

11. Develop valuable set ofskrlls: Economics is valuable not only for the topics it studies, but also for its methods of analysis. The processes economists use in constructing models, analyzing arguments and testing empirical predictions against available evidence and develop several important skills can also apply to the society. Economics graduates develop their general literal, communication and numeracy skills as well as skills of abstraction balancing simplification against relevance., logical deductions including precise use of language, for example in relation to cause and effect; necessity and sufficiency and critical thinking skills of discrimination, flexibility and organizational ability are also enhanced. Learning economics gives insight into the general environment of resources and project evaluation that are critically important in the way we can be counter-intuitive to those that do not apply to economic reasoning.

111 As a good basis for getting a job: Because of the wide range of skills required and developed, training in economics opens up diverse career opportunities for graduates. Because the skill acquired in studying economics are transferable, Economics graduates get a wide variety ofjobs not just being an economist. In the current environment, transferable skills and flexibility together with strong personal characteristics tend to be more important than specific training in a narrow field. Vocational area employees are particularly keen on graduates of economics.

:conomics has a lot to contribute towards national development as national planning :3 production, distribution, exchange and consumption of scarce resources :onstitute the subject matter of economics. In other words, the purpose of education IS not only limited to individual (learner) but also encompasses national planning of -ie economy. According to Ologe (1 984), a great deal of ignorance among employers :\ists about the purpose and nature of economics. In other words, people are ignorant : :- alternative opportunities for economics graduates in the country. For example, a _ :'i of economics graduates are employed and engaged in the ministry of finance and

=onomic planning, revenue board, insurance companies and other similar

: :ganrzatlons,

Arguing further for the retention of economics in school curricular, Ologe (1984) stated that the utilization nature of Nigerian educational system justified the study of economics. That the moral values it teaches fosters national integration and progress. This stresses the role economics plays for the household, firm and government policy making particularly in prevailing situations of great economic recession.

Similarly, Needham (1977) in Chagga (2007) said that many of the best informed citizens of tomorrow will be those who are today studying economics. According to him, there are three important aspects of economics education which are considered to be ofpractical value to national development. They are:

i. Acquisition of useful knowledge: Economics education trains individuals in the acquisition of useful knowledge necessary for development of the socioeconomic environment. The discipline (economics) trains the learner to acquire desirable knowledge useful in the evaluation and management of scarce resources in the economy.
ii. Acquisition of useful mental abilities: This further stresses that economics education trains the learner to acquire certain abilities useful in teaching national development program. Needham (1977), continues to say that the science of economics is used by economists in their inductive and deductive methods of reasoning to solve problems. In other words, knowledge of economics emphasizes efficient allocation of scarce resources within the economy to realize production and helpful projects.
iii. Training for citizenship: A well trained economist by virtue of the subject matter of his discipline is broadminded to economic diversities existing in the society. Therefore, he simply applies or substitutes the relevant term, concept or knowledge to remedy the situation. He is therefore likely to view development programs from wider perspectives ofdiversities.

On the whole, teaching and learning of economics is worthwhile for national integration, progress and development especially in developing countries like Nigeria.

The Role of Economics Education in Promoting Sustainable Development

Economics education enriches people's understanding of themselves and the world. It improves the quality of their lives and leads to broad social benefits to individuals and society. It also raises people's productivity and creativity and promotes entrepreneurship and technological advances. In addition, it plays a very crucial role in securing economic and social progress and improving income distribution.

are role of economics education in development and its effect on labour productivity, poverty, trade, technology, health, in6ome distribution and family structure are empirically researched and sufficiently documented. Education orovides a foundation for development, the groundwork on which much of economic and social well-being is built. It is the key to increasing economic efficiency and social consistency. By increasing the value and efficiency of labour the poor are nised from poverty. It increases the overall productivity and intellectual flexibility of the labour force. It helps to ensure that a country is competitive in world markets now characterized by changing technologies and rfroduction methods. By increasing a child's integration with dissimilar social or ethnic groups early in life, education contributes significantly to nation building and interpersonal tolerance.

Economics education is also central to improving quality of life. It raises the economic status of families, improves life conditions, lowers infant mortality, and improves the educational attainment of the next generation, thereby raising the next generation's chances for economic and social well-being.

According to Obemeata (1980), the importance of economics education to any nation is very clear. It enables both leaders and citizens to understand basic economic concepts and principles as well as to understand, appreciate and seek to improve the economic situation for their own social good and that of the society. The understanding of economics is a pre-requisite for good citizenship which in turn promotes not just development, but the one that can be sustained. Furthermore, Obemeata (1991) stated that the position of economics in secondary school curriculum has been strengthened because it has been accepted that it has some civil values because of some topics as “the elements and determinants of national income, the structure and activities of labour unions, the working and influence of financial institution”. These are the basic tools that can promote sustainable development in any grven socrety.

According to Adu (2002), the study of economics serves a useful purpose in modem life. It gives facts and shows what may be expected to be the outcome of certain lines of conduct; it helps individuals to decide which of several alternatives to choose. It charges its recipient to make wise choices that will satisfy their needs in the presence of unlimited wants and resources. Obemeata (199 1) says economics as a subject has various values to the learners and these values include :

i. Cultural Values: -Economics has some intrinsic values that make it appealing as a school subject. It connects learners to the essentials of everyday life and is also concerned with topical events such as International Monetary Fund (IMF), Structural Adjustment Programmed(SAP) and so on .

ii. Intellectual Training: -Economics also contributes to intellectual training because it involves looking at issues from different perspectives.

This shows that economics education can greatly contribute to sustainable development as it presumably produces educated individuals who are expected to have enhanced productivity that is a driving force in sustainable development.

CONCLUSION

Economics education seeks to prepare learners especially youths to be responsible, innovative and above all becoming employers of labour rather than job seekers. It involves teaching someone to be creative, own and manage a business, be self-reliant and contribute meaningfully to the growth and development of society. Therefore, for any nation to witness sustainable development, there is need to introduce economics education at every level of learning.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In order to reduce unemployment, poverty, increase savings, investment and improve standard of living as well as ensure sustainable national development, the following recommendations are made:

1. Economics education should be taught right from nursery to tertiary levels of learning.
2. Qualifiedteachers shouldbeemployed.
3 . Private sector should supplement the effort of government in providing funds and material donations for the teaching of economics education.
4. The private sector should also collaborate with institutions of learning and help primary and secondary schools with the teaching of economics education as obtained in advanced countries.
5. Appropriate instructional materials should be used during the teaching and learning ofthe course.
6. Intensive efforts should be made in both electronic and print media to raise the awareness of the importance of economics education in achieving sustainable national development.

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