

## Minority Education for National Sustainability: The Case of the Indigenous Kambari in Nigeria

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### Abstract

*The thrust of this paper is to examine minority education in the context of its role in national sustainability. This is done with particular reference to the indigenous Kambari in Nigeria. Having delineated the concepts of minority education and national sustainability, a concise theoretical framework was put in place to give the paper a focus. The paper also examined briefly the minority groups around the globe as well as the indigenous Kambari in relation to their culture and occupation with a view to showing why they qualify to belong to minority groups in Nigeria. The relevance of minority education for national sustainability was stressed bearing in mind the particular case of the indigenous Kambari. It is recommended among other things that, the minority and indigenous people should be provided the opportunity to participate in all aspects of the development process such as education, economy and politics. Until this opportunity is provided, the likelihood for them to make their own contribution to national development is bleak, let alone its sustainability.*

### Introduction

Education as a social service is required for life and development in society. According to Fafunwa (2004) the role of education as an instrument for the survival of the individual and society, the fostering of national unity and the transformation of the social and economic features of society is widely recognised. The National Policy on Education (2004) clearly emphasised the provision of education to the Nigerian citizens without prejudice to socio-economic, socio-cultural, place of origin and religion. This emphasis might not be unconnected to the relevance of education in socialisation and social integration of people in the society.

The constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (1999) further emphasised the importance of ensuring social justice for all by way of providing equal opportunities irrespective of social class, tribe/ethnic group and religion. In addition, the Nigerian Constitution in chapter 2, section 18, states that "Government shall direct its policy towards ensuring that there are equal and adequate educational opportunities at all levels".

Charles (2002) in an introductory remark contends that, several key world conferences took place with a view to ensure equal educational opportunities for all irrespective of socio-economic, geographical and gender status. Some of these world conferences include those on environment and development in 1992, social development in 1995 and women in 1995. All these world conferences reinforced the view that access to basic education was not simply a question of individual right, but a key input to the attainment of development goals including the elimination of poverty.

However, despite these emphases, there are still some social groups that are excluded from formal education which is a giant factor for personal and national sustainable development. One of these social groups is the indigenous Kambari, which is a minority ethnic group, found in Kebbi and Niger states of Nigeria. It appears that the Kambari are insulated from the development taking place around them, and more especially in the area of formal education. Looking at the problem from the point of view of general human endeavour, like education, economy, technology, politics and freedom, it can be seen that the minority groups are exposed to a lot of exploitation and

marginalisation in various sectors of life endeavours. The aim of this paper therefore, is to examine critically the role of minority education and how it can help to bring about the desired national sustainable development. This is done with particular interest to the case of the indigenous Kambari in Nigeria.

**The Conception of Minority and Minority Education**

Minority groups are few in number, socially inferior when compared to other population in the community, state or country. This means that they are often marginalised, secluded, insulated and isolated in society, in the various sectors, mentioned earlier. This trend poses a great problem in their participation in sustainable national development. However, according to Giddens (2006); Sociologists frequently use the term minority in a non-literal way to refer to:

a group's subordinate position within society, rather than its numerical representation. There are many cases in which a minority is in fact in the majority. In some geographical areas such as inner cities, ethnic minority groups make up the majority of the population but are nonetheless referred to as minorities. This is because the term "minority" captures their disadvantaged positions. Women are sometimes referred to as a minority group, while in many countries of the world, they form the numerical majority. Yet because women tend to be disadvantaged in comparison with men the term is referred to them as well (pp. 489 – 490).

In addition, Giddens (2006) maintains that members of the minority groups often tend to see themselves as a people apart from the majority. They are usually physically and socially isolated from the larger community. In view of this, it is pertinent to mention that the group of people who are socially marginalised are citizens who should have equal rights, chances, like other people in society, regardless of their socio-cultural and socio-economic traits or characteristics. The realization of this would justify the provision of education for the minority groups in society so as to enable them participate in national development, which is the responsibility of all.

The education of the minority has for long become a talk of the day as both the minority groups, the government and non-governmental organisations are growing serious concern for their education. The national education policies needed in this pursuit is such that should cater for all without prejudice to socio-cultural, religious and geographical location of people. Thus, the education policies in Nigeria, if they are to take care of the minority or indigenous people, has to be all encompassing, thereby allowing for people to participate in matters that relate to the nation's pursuit for sustainable development. Though the policy talks of providing education for all citizens, its implementation has not been rigorously pursued.

The provision of education for minority groups will mean to consider their differences, occupation, culture and interest and their peculiarities. The provision of such educational policies would also have to consider language, cultural activities, and occupation. Any educational policy that considers these aforementioned characteristics, is likely to be more acceptable and useful to the minority people in the society.

**The Conception of National Sustainability**

The concept of national sustainability in the context of this paper includes components and factors for strategic national development. Sustainability is a concept that is used to refer to the economic and socio-political self reliance of a nation and its development in the various sectors. National sustainability involves all levels of organisation, all organs and sub-systems of a nation, be it economy, polity, social, and education.

National sustainability implies meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs (WCED 1987). It also refers to economic growth that provides fairness and opportunity for all the world's people, not just the privileged few, without further destroying the world's finite natural resources and carrying capacity (Pronk and Haqq 1992).

However, in every aspect of national development, it is important to involve all sectors in all stages of development. This may involve the educational, technological, economic development as well as political stability of a nation. By so doing, a nation is expected to achieve long-term sustainable development by increasing incomes, improving public health and sustaining other aspects of society, like education, security, social welfare and reduction of poverty, disease and famine. National sustainability is meant to encompass all the population of the nation and therefore, breaks all barriers or all forms of segregation, exploitation, marginalisation, insulation and isolation in society. This is to ensure social, economic, political, environmental and cultural development in the country. It is when these are available or achieved that national sustainability can best be attained or accomplished.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The idea behind a theory is to clarify issues and to have guiding principles as well as direction for the explanation and interpretation of social phenomena. Otite and Ogionwo (2006) maintain that, a theory is a system of ideas that help to explain facts about a phenomenon. Therefore, in order to be scientific, facts are obtained and arranged in a particular order. Sociological theory attempts to explain events, factors, ideas or behaviour in a comprehensive way. Shaefer (2005) saw society as a vast network of connected parts, each of which help to maintain the system as a whole. The functionalist approach holds that all aspects of social life contribute to a society's stability or survival. Structural functionalism therefore, examines components, sub-systems, individual groups and social organisation based on their roles and functions in the society.

The conflict perspective argues that the society is about struggle for and against each other by means of domination and exploitation of one group over another. In this case, the interest of every individual is to own power and chances for socio-economic domination. Horton and Hunt (1984) argue that conflict theorists see a society as held together through the power of dominant groups or classes. They claim that the "shared values, which functionalists see as the forces holding society together do not really form a true consensus, instead this is an artificial consensus in which the dominant groups or classes impose their values and views upon the rest of the people.

On the other hand the symbolic interactionist perspective focuses on the actions of people regarding the meaning they attach to symbols. This school of thought deals with human interaction, on the micro-perspective, that is, the micro level of relationship. Shaefer (2005) is of the view that, interactionist perspective views human beings as people living in a world of meaningful objects like signs, actions and other factors of relationships.

From the overview of some of the sociological perspectives, this paper falls under the functionalist perspective, as it tries to bring closer the importance of the minority groups, by providing them functional education, equip them with knowledge and skills to be productive and contribute to national sustainable development in the society. Macionis (1989) sees the role of education in the context of integration and stability of the society. This therefore means that, formal education helps people to participate in the larger social system.

Educational institutions help to promote co-existence in the society. From the point of view of the functionalist, all other organs and individuals serve one purpose. The purpose of keeping the social structure in a stable manner is for effective living of individuals and other sub-systems in the society. The issue of integrating the minority groups into the mainstream Nigerian society requires concerted effort to educate them.

### **Synopsis on the Minority Groups around the Globe**

There are numbers of developed and developing nations around the globe that are having minority groups and indigenous peoples. For example, among the developed nations, we have, Aborigines in Australia; the Inuits in Canada; the Gypsies, Blacks, Indians, Pakistanis and Chinese in Britain, the Hispanics, the Blacks, Puerto Ricans, Chinese, Spanish, Mexicans and American Indians in America. There are also the Roms in Hungary and in Finland. On the other hand, among the developing nations there are, for example, the Tuarage in Libya, the Somalians in Somalia, and the Moors in Mauritania. Others are, the Kamarizan in Uganda, the Massai and Turkana in Kenya, and the Fulbe, Shuwa-Arabs, Buduma, Kwanyan and Kambari in Nigeria (Mahuta, 2002 p. 132). Furthermore, Mahuta (2002) states that:

There are various policies and programmes for the provision of education for minority groups and indigenous peoples in various countries (both developed and developing) ranging from assimilation and cultural pluralism aimed at integrating the minority groups into the mainstream societies. The various states and federal governments in their attempts to provide educational opportunities have established boarding schools, portable classrooms, caravans equipped as libraries, reading rooms, medical clinics and science laboratories (pp. 132 – 133).

Assimilation as an educational policy for the minority groups has been inadequate largely because when educational policies are based on the melting-point theory, programmes developed are often incompatible with the educational, psychological, cognitive and linguistic needs of the ethnic students and their parents. It is in view of this that, it is noted that education should enable the minority group to cope with the majority group in the mainstream society, without renouncing their own cultural heritage. They should be able to deal with institutions, like; schools, government agencies, medical facilities, law enforcement agencies, political system, that affects their lives in society (Junaid, 1987).

Multiculturalism is another process adopted by the various countries of the world for the purpose of tackling the problems of minorities and indigenous people. This is used to recognise and respect multicultural and ethnic diversity. In this respect, there are multicultural classrooms, multicultural approaches to teaching and multicultural curricula. Multicultural approach to the provision of education is meant to eliminate prejudice and discrimination between the different minority groups and the majority groups in the society.

However, various efforts are being made by the Nigerian government to educate and consequently integrate the bulk number of minority and indigenous people. These policies and programmes include: mobile schools, boarding or day schools, enacting laws and ordinances, provision of special financial grants, provision of educational facilities, school feeding programmes, development of teaching materials in local languages, training of teachers, funding as well as action oriented researches.

### **The Indigenous Kambari in Nigeria**

Just like other ethnic groups in Nigeria, the Kambari ethnic group is one among these groups with distinctive features and an identifiable culture which brings out their characteristics to the fullest. The Kambari people today are scattered in different states. Particularly, they are found in Kebbi and Niger states. It is pertinent to mention that their population is yet to be established. This group of people still hold on to their values and their lives are bent seriously on their traditions. Despite the modernization and other forms of development in the society, the Kambari are scattered in the bush, they resist civilization of the west and modernisation. For example, Mahuta (2002) maintains that,

the indigenous Kambari parents reject the idea of sending their children to towns and villages for schooling. Parents' reasons for not sending their children to school have always been explained by the fear of cultural adulteration. The indigenous Kambari are very well known for their cultural conservatism and resistance for social change. However, despite the popularity of modern education and other foreign ways of life, they still maintain their culture and because of the strong hold to their culture many Kambari do not give their daughters to other ethnic groups for marriage, nor do they marry from other ethnic groups.

The Kambari are farmers. Among the principal crops they grow are guinea corn, millet, maize, yam and cassava, all of which are cultivated by men, while the women grow beans, ground nut and okro. They have considerable knowledge of medicine and they hunt during the dry season and there are fishermen among them. The major religion among the majority of the Kambari is the traditional religion and they worship the God which they call 'Magiro'. There are Muslims and Christians among them but they are mostly found in towns and villages.

The Kambari as a minority ethnic group having peculiar way of lifestyle that clearly differentiates them with the sedentary or dominant groups requires special attention, taking into cognizance their peculiar characteristics. This is because the indigenous Kambari seem to be cut-off from the sedentary groups. They live a natural life, they appear to be opposed to modernization, and instead they seem to stick to their cultural values and behaviour which are characterised by conservatism and traditionalism.

Education is central to globalization and development and sustenance of democracy in the modern world. There have been reasonable investments on education in Nigeria since independence. Yet many parts of the country lag behind in educational attainments. The indigenous Kambari group appears to be one of those indigenous peoples affected in education and excluded from the mainstream Nigerian society. This trend has many negative effects, which include marginalization of the group, inadequate and unskilled manpower. Hence, the chances that the group will contribute its quota to sustainable development process in the globalized world will be grossly insignificant without education.

There are no schools in the Kambari bush encampments; hence they are not attending schools. The major functions of education in society are socialisation and social integration for national development. It is therefore, believed that the provision of education for the indigenous Kambari will make their integration as well as contribution to development into the mainstream society much easier, efficient and effective.

### **The Relevance of Educating the Minority Groups for National Sustainability**

Education is the bedrock for human and social development. It is a tool for social and economic growth of the individual and the society. It is also a social endeavour that is capable of freeing people from domination, marginalization, insulation and isolation in the society. Every citizen of a nation has his/her own contribution to national sustainable development which include, self-discipline, obeying the laws and orders, contributing to the socio-economic and political development of the nation. Education through the school helps one to possess the essential qualities of self actualisation in the society. Education is a lifelong process designed to provide skills, knowledge and information for personal and national sustainability. It provides for every citizen information, skills and scientific knowledge, capable of paving way for national socio-cultural and economic development.

In the light of this therefore, the importance of providing education for the minority people for national sustainable development can not be overemphasised. The following explains justification for educating the minority people in the context of national development of the society:

- Minority groups' participation in society
- Provision of awareness for the minority groups

- Socio-economic development among the minority groups
- Education for development
- Education for knowledge, skills and information
- Education for the future
- Education for social integration and cohesion

However, having identified some of the justifications for minority education, it is pertinent to discuss them one after the other.

*Minority groups' participation in society:* Education for the minority groups is capable of enabling them to feel that they are part and parcel of the mainstream society. Educating minority will also enhance the total commitment of all, to properly engage in social and economic responsibility in the society. This can be achieved by developing and securing the environment, preparing it for sustainable development.

*Provision of awareness for the minority groups:* The minority groups, though they live in bush encampments and villages yet they form part of the whole society. Therefore, there is the need for making them aware of their role in the development of the society. In view of this therefore, they need to be made aware through literacy and education as well as citizenship education. According to the national centre of sustainability (from Internet undated), many educators are helping the society to achieve sustainability by teaching the three "E's" – Environment, Economics and Equity – along with the traditional three "R's" – Reading, Writing and Arithmetic. By so doing, they are fostering awareness of the need for education which will lead to national sustainability among individuals, communities, institutions and governments.

*Socio-economic development among the minority groups:* In many years to come, education has the potentials to serve as a tool for building stronger bridges between the classroom and business and between schools and communities. Educating the minority can help to ensure sustainability and the total exploitation of all resources within their reach. This requires a good understanding of the interdependence and interconnections of man and his environment as well as the ability to exploit abundant resources in the environment.

*Education for development:* To achieve sustainable development through the contribution of the minority groups, education should be relevant to their socio-cultural needs and aspirations. Education for the minority groups must take into consideration the cultural diversity of the people. This means that the content of the educational materials must reflect the divergent culture of the people. Educational materials should be made accessible to the entire minority groups devoid of all forms of restrictions and barriers. Educating the minority by means of their culture and community development is likely to address the problems of poverty, backwardness, illiteracy, disease and further improve on their economic and social potentialities in the context of national sustainable development in society.

*Education for knowledge, skills and information:* To the minority groups, education for sustainable development will be of great benefit to them as education will develop their skills, knowledge, and culture as well as promote other forms of interaction in the society. Therefore, education for the minority is capable of developing their knowledge, skills and access to information. It is important to mention that, education in this regard should not be limited to the formal school setting. It can take place in a wide range of non-formal settings, for example, at work, home and any social organisation. Education for minority people can significantly help in addressing the problems of inequality, quality of life, social cohesion and promote national unity and understanding among people without prejudice to socio-ethnic and cultural inclinations.

*Education for the future:* Education is one of the important and primary agents of social transformation and development in the society. Therefore, education for sustainable development is a dynamic and continuous process. Further, education can help to create a better future for national sustainability, especially when the minority groups are integrated into the mainstream of the society through education.

*Education for social integration and cohesion:* Bearing in mind that the minority groups by their ways of life differ significantly from the majority or sedentary population, because they live in villages, bush encampments and most of the time opposed to modernization and social change. The provision of education is capable of integrating them into the mainstream Nigerian society. Education is a powerful agent of social change and development, thus, it can help to make the minorities accept the majority people in the society.

### Recommendations

In view of the enormous relevance of the minorities and indigenous peoples to national sustainability as well as the need for the provision of education for the minority groups like the Kambari, the following recommendations are put forward.

The issue of educating the minority groups is a global issue that requires the attention of all and sundry, such as, governments and non-governmental organisations. This therefore requires concerted effort towards integrating the Kambari into the national development in Nigeria.

Education should be provided without restrictions or barriers of any form. It should therefore, be made accessible to all people, with a view to enabling them to develop their knowledge, skills and potentialities, so as to be able to contribute positively to national development.

The minority and indigenous people should be provided the opportunity to participate in all aspects of the development process such as education, economy and politics. Until this opportunity is provided, the likelihood for them to make their own contribution to national development is bleak, let alone its sustainability.

The National Commission for Nomadic Education should be made to incorporate the education of other ethnic minorities in Nigeria. In other words, it should not only restrict itself to the Nomadic pastoralists and the migrant fisher folk. This therefore means that the scope of National Commission for Nomadic Education should be more than what it is today to include plans for the Kambari.

The various sections of the Nigerian constitution and the National Policy on Education which emphasises equality in the provision of education for all Nigerians, devoid of all forms of discriminations should be respected and implemented appropriately or possibly enforced.

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