

# Vocational Technical Education as an Instrument for Achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in Nigeria

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## Abstract

The Millennium Development Goals [MDGs] are a series of eight time-bound development goals that seek to address issues of poverty, education, gender equality, health, the environment and global partnerships for development, agreed by the international community to be achieved by the year 2015. Half way to the 2015 deadline, the overall success in meeting the MDGs in Nigeria is not assured due to problems and challenges. Hence this paper focuses on the need to pursue vocational technical education towards achieving the MDGs. An overview of the topic has been presented and recommendations on the way forward suggested.

## Introduction

Over the years, successive governments in Nigeria have repeatedly initiated and adopted policies and programmes intended to provide necessary infrastructure to stimulate economic activities enhance incomes and improve living standard of its teaming population. The millennium development Goals (MDGs) is one of such initiative which united nation member states, Nigeria inclusive, have agreed to try to achieve by the year 2015. The MDGs are eight goals aimed at eradicating poverty and elevate the standard of the living of member nations of which Nigeria is one.

It is intended that almost all of these goals will be achieved by 2015. Unfortunately, while some significant progress is been made towards meeting these goals in some of the affected countries, in many countries including Nigeria, progress is too slow or non existence. Nigeria has taken only a few steps towards achieving the MDGs. For instance, Nigeria's MDGs info -kit [2006] shows that some of Nigeria's core policy is directed towards the achievement of the MDGs targets plans. A presidential committee to monitor the progress towards meeting the MDGs has been set up. Dept Relief funds are being dedicated to

MDGs specific spending and the international community is being mobilized to increase their contribution. It was however noted that there are enormous challenges that are resistive to meeting these goals. The 2007 progress report on the MDGs by the United Nations (UN) indicated that though half way to the 2015 deadline, there has been some progress toward implementing the MDGs; however, their overall success is still far from assured. The report added that there is still a long way to go in order to keep the promises made to current and future generations.

Igbuzor (2007) reported that even though Nigerian government is a signatory to the Millennium Development Goals, Nigeria is far from achieving the MDGs. He noted that it is the lack of political will that is the greatest stumbling block to the achievement of the MDGs in Nigeria. According to 2005 review of Nigeria Millennium Development Goals, it is stated that though Nigeria has adequate potentials to attain some of the millennium Development targets, the progress is slow. It was added that there has to be an enabling policy environment and strong political will for reasonable progress to be recorded. Against the background that Nigeria is very far from achieving the MDG's come 2015, there is therefore the need to pursue more skilled- oriented programmes which is only obtainable in vocational technical education towards achieving the Millennium Development Goals.

### **Concept of Vocational Technical Education**

Education is an instrument which enables an individual to improve himself and develop the right attitudes, abilities and competence necessary for effective adult life. (Fafunwa, 1974). It implies that education liberates the mind from ignorance, poverty and diseases. Vocational education, according to Makama (2005), is that type of education that deals with the development of abilities, understanding, attitudes, work habit and appreciation needed by a worker to enter into and to progress in an employment in a useful and productive basis. It therefore means that any education which is necessary for effective employment

in an occupation is vocational. In this regard, Okoro (1993) noted that the training of doctors and lawyers which takes place in the universities may be regarded as vocational since its primary purpose is to equip individuals with necessary knowledge and skill to enable them enter specialized occupations. Technical education as defined by the National Policy on Education (1998) is that aspect of education that leads to the acquisition of practical and applied skills as well as basic scientific knowledge. In a sense, this forms only a fractional segment of vocational education. There is yet another definition of technical education given by Osuala (1981) as education to earn a living in an occupation in which success is dependent largely upon technical information and understanding of the laws of science and principles of technology as applied to modern design, production, distribution and services. Vocational technical education as discussed above lays emphasis on the development of abilities and skills necessary for the world of work.

The goals of technical and vocational education as stated in National Policy of Education (2004 revised) are:

- (a) provide trained manpower in the applied sciences, technology and business particularly at craft, advanced craft and technical levels;
- (b) provide the technical knowledge and vocational skills necessary for agriculture, commercial and economic development;
- (c) give training and impart the necessary skills to individual who shall be self-reliant economically.

It is evident that if these goals of vocational and technical education are vigorously pursued and achieved, majority of the Nigerian people will be in employment and as such wealth will be created which will consequently reduce the level of poverty and hunger and improve standard of living. This is in consonance with the millennium development Goals.

## **The Millennium Development Goals**

The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) were adopted in the year 2000 by all the world's governments as a blue print for building a better world in the 21<sup>st</sup> century (United Nations, 2000). The MDGs represent a global partnership and this is arising from commitments and targets set at the world summits of the 1990's. As a universal declaration, it consists internationally agreed frame work of 8 goals and 18 targets which was complemented by 48 technical indicators to measure progress towards the millennium development goals. Simply the MDGs focus the efforts of the world community on ways to achieve significant and measurable improvements in people's lives. The first seven goals are mutually reinforcing and are directed at reducing poverty in all its forms. The last goal which is global partnership for development is about the means to achieve the first seven goals.

The Millennium Development Goals are:

1. Eradication of extreme poverty and hunger
2. Achieve Universal Primary Education
3. Promote Gender Equality and Empower Women
4. Reduce Child Mortality
5. Improve material health
6. Combat HIV/AIDS malaria and other diseases
7. Ensure environmental sustainability
8. Develop global partnership for development

From the foregoing, it will be noted that the MDGs were formulated in order to eradicate poverty, promote human dignity and equality achieve peace, democracy and environmental stability. The target set for the attainment of the goals is 2015.

## **The Role of Vocational Technical Education in Achieving the Millennium Development Goals**

As noted earlier the overall aim of the MDGs is to reduce poverty and improve standing of living of the people. It is however disheartening that the rate of poverty in Nigeria since the adoption of the MDGs is on the increase and unemployment is not declining. It is obvious that poverty in Nigeria is in the midst of plenty. Buttressing this, Igbuzor [2007] noted that it is ironic that Nigeria is the sixth largest exporter of oil and at the same time host the third largest number of poor people after china and India. Unless this trend is averted the achievement of the MDGs by 2015 will remain a mirage.

Vocational technical education is expected to play an important role in averting this ugly trends towards achieving the MDGs. This is because there is a link between Vocational technical education and reduction in unemployment through acquiring work-skills. There is no doubt that unemployment is one of the major causes of poverty in Nigeria. The alarming rate of unemployment is common among youth and women. Vocational technical education will provide for individual interest in terms of gainful employment, it will provide the requisite skills necessary to gain entrance into employment. In this regard Afeti [2006] asserted that one of the most important features of vocational technical education is its orientation towards the world of work and the emphasis of the curriculum on the acquisition of employable skills. Vocation technical education delivery systems are therefore well placed to train the skilled and entrepreneurial work that Nigeria needs to create wealth and emerge out of poverty.

One of the goals of vocational technical education is to provide self employment. Individuals are trained to acquire entrepreneur skills. Attainment of this will contribute to the enhancement of employment oriented skills training for Nigerian youth and women to access employment and income generating opportunities. It therefore mean that vocational technical education promotes establishment of small and medium scale enterprises necessary for wealth creation and poverty reduction. If this is achieved, it will be in line with the

achievement of the millennium development goals (MDGS 1&3) in that it will contribute to poverty reduction through the improvement of skill, expertise and the competitiveness of beneficiaries. In addition, it will foster progress towards gender equality and women's independence through the provision of skills training opportunities to the women.

The Millennium Development Goal number 3 is concerned with gender equality and women empowerment. It therefore means that the imbalances between men and women have to be corrected. Vocational technical education is one of the greatest forces that can be used to bring about redress. Nyerere (1993) emphasized the importance of woman participation in development through appropriate vocational technical education. He stressed that just as a woman's development in Africa is dependent upon national economic empowerment, it also connotes that development cannot not easily take place without them (women). In the same vein, Azikiwe (1990) advocated for vocational technical education for women to take their rightful place in our national economic empowerment strategy. she agitated for functional education which enable woman to acquire skills and knowledge that will solve their basic needs. Therefore gender equality and woman empowerment which is one of the MDGs could be achieved through vocational technical education.

It has been established that vocational technical education is any education which is necessary for effective employment in an occupation which will also lead to wealth creation, poverty reduction and improve standard of living. Therefore, in order to achieve some of the MDGS, there is the need to train people in vocational areas. The major vocational areas according to Osuala (1981) are: Vocational Agriculture, Business Education, Health Occupation, Trade and Industrial Education and Technical Education. Hence, there is the need to train adequate and qualified Teachers, Engineers, Doctors and Nurses. Teachers will handle schools adequately in order to achieve universal primary education (MDG.2). Engineers will build roads, school and hospitals towards achieving the MDGs. Adequate and qualified Doctors and Nurses will handle hospitals and provide

health services that will improve maternal health, reduce child mortality, HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases (MDGS 4, 5&6). It is worthy of note that nothing less will help to achieve the goals.

### **Conclusion**

It has been noted that the MDGs are important due to the fact that they are human development-oriented. However, the slow progress towards achieving the MDGs in Nigeria indicated that meeting the goals come 2015 is difficult. There is therefore the need for all stake holders to direct efforts towards empowering people especially at the grass root with vocational skills in order to meet the MDGs.

### **Recommendations**

For the Millennium Development Goal [MDGs] to be achieved in Nigeria by the year 2015, the following recommendations are offered.

- Local governments in Nigeria should come up with concrete programmes such as vocational skills training for rural dwellers especially women at the grass root so that they can be empowered economically towards achieving the MDGS.
- Recognizing the importance of the MDGS, an enabling policy environment should be provided by federal, state and local governments and there should be improvement in service delivery by all stakeholders in order to meet the MDGS.
- More funds should be injected into MDGS programmes and a means of checking corrupt practices should be put in place in order to achieve results commensurable to funds expended.
- Nigerian government should placed more emphasis on the vocationalisation of secondary and tertiary education so that those in school will not only be schooling to be employed but also schooling to be empowered toward the realization of the MDGS.

The annual budgetary allocation to the health sector in Nigeria should be increased towards the reduction of child and maternity mortality and combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases.

State and local governments should make complementary efforts towards increasing the Impact of the federal government reforms on MDGs.

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