



**RE-POSITIONING NIGERIAN EDUCATIONAL
SYSTEM FOR SOCIO-ECONOMIC ATTAINMENT:
THE AKWA IBOM STATE EXPERIENCE**

BY

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**BEING THE 17TH IN THE SERIES OF OBONG
SAMPSON UDO ETUK MEMORIAL LECTURES
PRESENTED AT THE MBOHO MKPARAWA
IBIBIO INTERNATIONAL
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Preamble

It is with utmost pleasure that I accept to give the 17th (2011) in the series of the Obong Sampson Udo Etuk lectures organized by the prestigious Mboho Mkparawa Ibibio. It gives me even more joy that apart from other philanthropic ventures which Mboho encourages in, that Mboho values education as the key in human development. It is worthy of note also that Mboho has engaged in educating Akwa Ibom children at the primary and secondary school levels. This lecture series is seen as an attempt at mass education on topical issues of concern. This year the topic is Repositioning the Nigerian Educational System for Socio-economic Attainment: The Akwa Ibom State Experience. Before entering into the full discourse, it would be of some importance to attempt some definition of the key terms; first socio-economic attainment and thereafter education.

Socio-economic Attainment

Socio-economic attainment refers essentially to attaining a social and economic status in the society in which the individual lives. This status can either be high average or low. In the present circumstance, it is common knowledge that material wealth or the lack of it determines to a great extent the socio-economic status of people at any given time. The said status can be inherited or attained. To another extent, the profess to which one belongs may also determine one's status.

Inherited status can only subsist when parents i.e. those who worked for the status are still alive or for as long as the estate remains viable. What this means is that when one is born into a well established family, wealthy in cash, desirable popularity, landed property, shares, professional recognitions and the like, one shares this socio-economic recognitions as an appendage of the incumbent. It is common to introduce one as the son of XYZ. Depending of course on what is known about XYZ, respect is given to the son. More to it, opportunity to remain or even acquire greater socio-economic status is given when one is born into an affluent family.

For socio-economic status to be attained, the onus is placed on the individual to work for the level of the status earned. Many people realize the need to attain personal socio-economic status early in life and therefore work assiduously towards attainment of the desired level. Whereas many others simply get satisfied with inherited status and sit back to complain and be moan when family fortunes wane. Factors affecting socio-economic attainment have been identified to include family background, peer influence and education among others while challenges to attainment may include these, poverty and harsh economy. (www.wikipedia.org).

For the topic at hand to be adequately treated, it is worthwhile to recognize that:

- (1) Socio-economic status can be inherited, attained and most importantly improved upon; if not, the inherited status can wane.
- (2) The socio-economic attainment of individuals

makes up the socio-economic attainment of the society. In this case, the socio-economic attainment of Akwa Ibom State (AKS) citizens living in Akwa Ibom State, who have the interest of AKS in mind and therefore contribute to the growth of AKS culminate into the socio-economic attainment of the entire state.

- (3) Through education, the inherited status can be improved upon. Education is a vehicle through which the attainment can be made possible.
- (4) The way the topic is couched assumes that the education system as practiced at present can not bring about socio-economic attainment, hence the need for repositioning. It is possible to reposition the educational system in order that it serves the purpose for which education is intended.

These realizations will therefore form the major thrust of this lecture with particular reference to what education entails and the expectations from education. An examination of how education is practiced at present will be attempted and some tips will be highlighted towards repositioning the ingredients within education to ensure that it responds to the need for individual citizens to attain improved socio-economic status thereby improving upon the entire socio-economic status of the state.

Education: The vehicle to Socio-economic Attainment

Education is known to mean the change in behaviour as a result of experience. This definition therefore brings to the fore that in human existence, every human being has had some form of education. If he has ever had any experience which has made him change his behaviour, then education has taken place. Education as an enterprise facilitates change in human behaviour through the process of teaching and learning. This process is essentially organized around the national goals, which include the building of:

- (a) a free and democratic society
- (b) a just and egalitarian society
- (c) a united, strong and self reliant nation
- (d) a great and dynamic economy
- (e) a land full of bright opportunity for all citizens.

(NPE 2004:6)

The dividend expected from education includes "the full integration of the individual into the community" (NPE, 2004: 7). It would be counter productive if after being educated, the individual aspires to live abroad instead of being fully integrated into the "community" and in this case Akwa Ibom State. Physical living abroad may be punctuated with nostalgia such that the tendency of the "forengie" would be to spend the time out (abroad) for as long as it offers what he would bring back home (to invest in Akwa Ibom State). In this way, Akwa Ibom State reaps the dividend. Education is expected to foster the worth and development of the individual for his sake and the general development of his society. This belief would

certainly not hold true, where selfishness thrives. Even when one may not need some funds for immediate use, just because he has access to public or common funds, he spends all his time, energy and efforts to consider how he would convert it to personal funds. He may be rich thereby "changing his personal economic status" but his social standing in the society would certainly go lower. More importantly, he has contributed significantly to lowering the socio-economic status of the community to which he belongs and where applicable Akwa Ibom State.

Among several other values expected to be inculcated into citizens, it is realized that Nigerians and by implication Akwa Ibom citizens need to acquire competencies necessary for self reliance; the right type of values and attitudes for the survival of the individual and the society (NPE, 2004: 8).

ORGANIZATION OF EDUCATION IN AKWA IBOM STATE

Apart from the informal sector, education, in Akwa Ibom State is organized into the pre-primary, primary sections. All these levels adopt the specific objectives laid down for them by the National Policy on Education (2004).

Pre-primary Objectives

Purpose of Pre-primary Education shall be to:

- (a) effect a smooth transition from the home to the school;
- (b) prepare the child for the primary level of education;
- (c) provide adequate care and supervision for the

children while their parents are at work

- (d) inculcate social norms;
- (e) inculcate in the child the spirit of enquiry and creativity through the exploration of nature, the environment, art, music and playing with toys, etc;
- (f) develop a sense of co-operation and team-spirit;
- (g) learn good habits, especially good health habits; and
- (h) teach the rudiments of numbers, letters, colours, shapes, forms etc, through play.

Primary Objectives

The goals of Primary Education are to:

- (a) Inculcate permanent literacy and numeracy, and ability to communicate effectively.
- (b) Lay a sound basis for scientific and reflective thinking.
- (c) Give citizenship education as a basis for effective participation in and contribution to the life of the society.
- (d) Mould the character and develop sound attitude and morals in the child.
- (e) Develop in the child the ability to adapt to the child's changing environment.
- (f) Give the child opportunities for developing manipulative skills that will enable the child function effectively in the society within the limits of the child's capacity.
- (g) Provide the child with basic tools for further educational advancement, including preparation for trades and crafts of the locality.

Secondary

In specific terms, Secondary Education shall:

- (a) provide all primary school leavers with the opportunity for education of a higher level, irrespective of sex, social status, religious or ethnic background;
- (b) offer diversified curriculum to cater for the differences in talents, opportunities and future roles;
- (c) provide trained manpower in the applied science, technology and commerce at sub-professional grades;
- (d) develop and promote Nigerian languages, art and culture in the context of world's cultural heritage;
- (e) inspire students with a desire for self improvement and achievement of excellence;
- (f) foster National unity with an emphasis on the common ties that unite us in our diversity;
- (g) raise a generation of people who can think for themselves, respect the views and feelings of others, respect the dignity of labour, appreciate those values specified under our broad national goals and live as good citizens;

Tertiary Education

The goals of tertiary education shall be to:

- (a) contribute to national development through high level relevant manpower training;
- (b) develop and inculcate proper values for the survival of the individual and society;
- (c) develop the intellectual capability of individuals

to understand and appreciate their local and external environment;

- (d) acquire both physical and intellectual skills which will enable individuals to be self-reliant and useful members of the society;
- (e) promote and encourage scholarship and community service;
- (f) forge and cement national unity; and
- (g) promote national and international understanding and interaction.

Apart from these, there is the adult and non-formal education which forms the complementary loop to ensure that whatever effect of accident which may have occurred during the course of formal child to adult hierarchical education is corrected.

All these forms of education are pursued in Nigeria and specifically in Akwa Ibom State with vigour. The table below gives a picture of the presence and levels of education in Akwa Ibom State.

Akwa Ibom State Statistics of Schools

S/N	Type	Ownership	No. of Schools	Enrolment		Total
				Male	Female	
1	Primary	Public	1,146	433,789	468,210	901,999
		Private	608	1,195	1,286	2,481
2	Secondary	Public	227	149,571	168,269	317,840
		Private	243	*	*	18,772
3	Tertiary	Public	5	*	*	67,262
		Private	2	*	*	12,919

Figures from AKS Ministry of Education.

South-South Educational attainment (in %)

States	No. Educ	Some Pry	Complete Pry	Some Secondary	Complete Secondary	Above Secondary	Dont know
AKS	6.1	23.0	19.4	24.2	16.9	10.0	0.4
Bayelsa	6.7	21.6	8.3	25.8	27.9	9.0	0.8
CRS	10.8	28.0	13.8	23.4	14.1	9.0	0.8
Delta	7.3	24.0	14.8	22.3	21.6	9.9	0.1
Edo	9.5	22.2	12.4	23.0	20.1	10.9	1.8
Rivers	6.1	17.5	13.2	17.4	29.5	15.9	0.4

Culled from NPE (2009).

Permit me to note that despite the availability index of schools and colleges observed above, that the expected dividends are not achieved. Self reliance in terms of desired socio-economic attainment, individual integration into his community and societal improvement are yet to be achieved. This assertion is deduced from the following:

- (1) The growing rate of unemployment in Nigeria, the graduates from our schools are found helpless. They continue to roam the corridors of offices in search of "work".
- (2) Only a few of these graduates would attempt to be self employed. Even when this attempt is made, only a few of them succeed with their engagements.
- (3) Others still abandon their field of study to go into unclassified businesses. Some look for jobs in establishments unrelated to their specialty.
- (4) Children from well established affluent homes who should manage the estate already

established properly end up selling off the estate for selfish interests. The only fall out from such families are accusations and unwarranted wickedness among brothers/sisters.

- (5) Lack of co-operation among business partners and the tendency of "let me do it alone". These always end enterprises directly after the death of the proprietor.
- (6) Lack of dedication of subordinates to masters/employers.
- (7) Lack of respect generally for constituted authority.

All these are indices of education not being well positioned for socio-economic attainment of the individual and the society.

These occurrences have been blamed on the fact that teaching in our schools and colleges are largely theoretical, where practice is brought in at all, students are not serious with the practice and lecturers/teachers let them be. In fact, the pointer also shows parents who would regard practicals as unnecessary stress on their children. They would join their children to brand any teacher who would want to insist that practicals are necessary and should be properly done as 'wicked', old fashioned and discuss these openly with their wards thereby, killing even the last interest of the student's effort for practicals. The result is obvious, the students will dodge practicals, gain more incompetence, exhibit this lack of

knowledge on graduation.

Does it surprise us that before today, graduates were employed for their worth directly after graduation with only oral interview if any. But today, actual tests are conducted to sieve the grain from the chafe. Even after this, rigorous interviews are also conducted to further screen candidates before employment. Agriculture and Home Economic graduates for instance will be seen looking for jobs in the bank and teachers would run away from classrooms. These are indications of non-acceptance to practice the job for which one was trained for either fears of the practical experience which one is not well versed in or unnecessary pride.

Families and the general society are not left out of the blame. Education as defined in this paper cannot start and end in the classroom. The unnecessary chase for material wealth has made parents to abandoned Akwa Ibom children such that the values, which Akwa Ibom holds high is fast disappearing. These values include respect for elders, constituted authority and hard work. We completely believe that people no longer get positions on merit. So instead of our children becoming studious, obedient, properly nurtured and civil, efforts are made to find who we will know in establishments. Even when highly placed jobs are eventually secured, unnecessary pride and non-compliant behaviours may stand between the individual and sustaining the job. In this way socio-economic attainment is compromised.

Please join me to notice a new trend which is a fall out of our educational system's failure to equip our children/citizens adequately for satisfactory socio-

economic attainment. This new trend is that of overschooling. Although we presently have unemployed graduates, the impression the society gives the youth is that there are many other paper qualifications which would still work the magic. Our youths stay perpetually in school as an escape from entrepreneurship acquire Diploma's degrees and higher degrees. For all these, only one qualification would have been sufficient for the job require. Valuable time is spent. In many cases, even for the subsequent degrees, not much concentration is paid.

THE WAY FORWARD

- (1) The first realization is that the goals and objectives of Nigerian education are capable of equipping the desired functionaries in the community. The implementation of these goals and objectives has missed a point in the strategy used to deliver education to the beneficiaries. Education has been made largely theoretical and this does not seem to serve the contemporary society. There is need therefore to restructure the curriculum and introduce more subjects which will engender skill acquisition into the curriculum. In fact we can put this into one holistic phrase/sentence "let us vocalize our educational system".
- (2) **Practicuum:** Straight schooling after secondary school should be discouraged. Adequate practice should be in-cooperated into every educational programme to ensure that the graduates are adequately groomed for the world of work.

When students work to earn marks, they tend to be more serious. Intermittent work experience should be compulsory for all courses. Practicum ensures that the individual is groomed into a sound and effective citizen by providing him tools for full integration into the community. Besides, the training requirements for certification, practicum is expected to empower the trainee to the extent that on completion of the training, he can set up his own practice without having to wait to be employed. In fact practicum should be planned to equip interns with functional skills which they can use for gainful employment after training.

- (3) Nigeria is the 6th most populous nation in the world of 7 billion people. Population can be a source of strength. When white collared jobs are de-emphasized, individual families will look inwards to manufacturing, agriculture and other small scale industries. These promote apprenticeship.
- (4) Education should not be made free beyond the basic level. Scholarships should rather be given but strictly on merit.
- (5) Efforts should be concentrated on access to and affordability of infrastructure such as electricity, water supply, health services, justice and most