

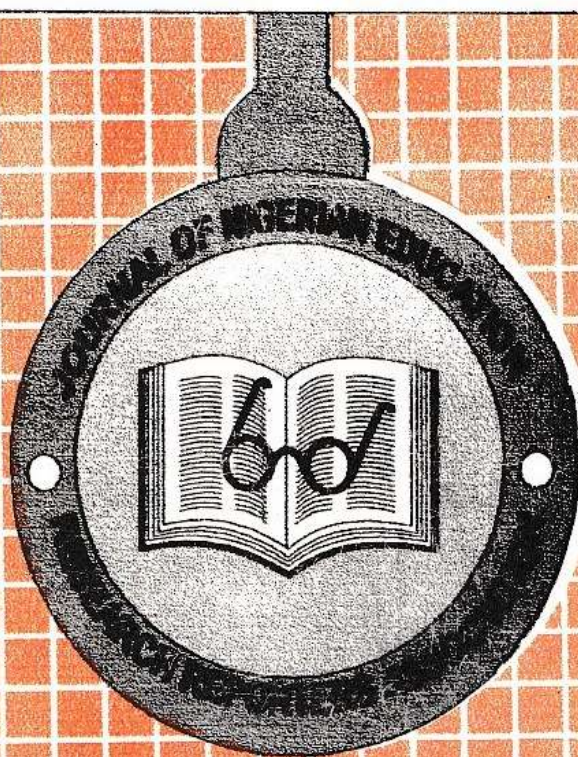
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IMPACT OF GOVERNMENT AND NON GOVERNMENTAL ORGANISATIONS ON THE EDUCATION OF THE UNDER – PRIVILEGED

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Introduction

The under privileged has always had immediate sympathy at gatherings especially when they are recognised as such. On the spur of the moment, government officials like the military administrator, the first lady, commissioners are normally compelled by emotions to make promises amounting to what they would do to ensure alleviating suffering of the under privileged. Non Governmental Organisations (NGO's) in their several moves, especially to project themselves, also contribute towards comfortable living of the under privileged. The extent to which these promises and far reaching statements are kept may be another matter. This paper attempts an understanding of who is termed the under privileged, governmental inputs specially towards his education, the contribution of NGOs and other private sectors towards the educational well-being of the under-privileged.

What does it mean to be privileged or under privileged

The dictionary meaning points to rights or advantages available only to a person or a class of people. More light thrown on this would reveal special favour which includes rights to do or say something without the risk of punishment. The privileged class refers exclusively, to these who enjoy advantages of the best education, wealth and secure social position in a society.

By contrast, to be under privileged denotes those who do not have sufficient access to education wealth and security. This terminology connotes poverty and suffering. It would be worthwhile to point out that this set of people may not know that they do not have sufficient access to these social facilities.

WHO Constitutes the under privileged

Population Reference Bureau (1998) attests to the fact that more than ½ of the world's population are poor, hungry and live in the rural area. 70% of this number reside in the third world countries. Taking, therefore, the African situation into consideration, to enumerate those who may be termed under-privileged, the following can be reached.

1. Those who cannot afford 3 square meals a day.
2. Those whose parents are poor economically and cannot afford their school fees.
3. Those who live in houses which they cannot be sure would survive the next three years or more.
4. Those who cannot afford hospital bills/who therefore do not go to the hospital when ill.
5. Exceptional persons this includes all forms of exceptionality: the gifted, the blind, the auditory impaired, the mentally retarded etc.
6. Inmates in the prison, orphanages and remand homes and all other such persons.

After defining those we may term privileged and under-privileged, we are well armed to discuss what the government has done so far towards the education of the under-privileged. The role and contributions of the non-governmental organisations would also be discussed.

Governmental Inputs:

Structures have been put in place for the education of citizens. In Nigeria, these structures are embedded in the National Policy on Education (1981). Specific aims have been stipulated for different levels starting from the primary to the tertiary levels. All these gear towards ensuring the 5 major objectives of the Nigerian Educational System.

1. a free and democratic society
2. a just and egalitarian society
3. a United, strong and self reliant nation
4. a great and dynamic economy
5. a land of bright and full of opportunities for all citizens.

On government's part, social services have been provided. In the area of education, schools have been established, teachers employed and in some cases tuition fees subsidized if not completely abolished. One would consider this fair enough as these measures would be seen as equalizing opportunities between the privileged and the under-privileged. A careful look however reveals the following:

1. In contemporary times, the public school system has been so devastated by several strike actions and other detrimental processes that dependence solely on this system of education may not yield much desired result. Infact Obinaju (1996) views the Nigerian primary education at a brink of collapse, an educational level which cannot produce a literate populace. Yet this is the system which may be available to the Nigerian under-privileged class. The privileged has had an alternative especially with the spring-up of private schools all over the country.
2. Even in the public schools where education is seen as subsidized and affordable to the under-privileged, other requirements such as books, uniforms, levies (handwork and PTA) as well as "bring writing desks and stools to school" continually militate against the acquisition of education by the under-privileged. These people are continually marginalized when these provisions are demanded by the schools.
3. Individual health as we know is a major part in educational attainment. Obinaju (1995) examines the relationship between the child's health and his social interaction in school. She found that there is a positive relationship between the child's health status and his social interaction in school. By implication, there is also an association between the child's health and achievement in school. Infact Obinaju (1995) concludes;

The aim of the school may be defeated and the provision in the National Policy on Education may suffer great jeopardy if the health of children who attend school is poor.

The under privileged is always seen as not able to acquire, at the least, comparatively average health status. In hospitals, the doctors are often available

to prescribe drugs but the hospital pharmacies are also often empty. Even when the pharmacies are stocked, citizens are required to pay for the drugs they need from the hospital pharmacies. This phenomenon continually place the under-privileged at a disadvantage vis-à-vis his other better placed citizens. When this situation is considered, the under-privileged considers it a waste of time to even go to the hospital when ill as he already knows that he would not be able to afford the drugs. Yet it would be argued that the government has provided hospitals and Health Centres for its citizenry.

4. Food security and housing and other sectors which impact on education are often neglected. A well feed child is bound to settle down in class, study, carry out assignments as required of him while a hungry child would behave in several other ways. Assessment which offers the blue print to educational achievement, of course, assess these behaviours. An under-privileged who, by definition, hardly can afford 3 square meals a day, can hardly settle down to exhibit the desired behaviours. Consequently he would hardly be rated highly enough in his achievement.

By the same analysis he would be noticed as absent from school especially on such days that a wind storm caused damages to their roof or flood water disturbed their house. He definitely has to absent himself from school to help in repairs of their house. To say the least, this is not in the interest of his education.

5. It is agreed that the government has established scholarship schemes which the under-privileged can benefit from. Considering his disadvantaged position as far as food security and housing are concerned and their cycled effect on his school attainment, is it possible for the under-privileged to perform well enough to attract government scholarship? Of course we know that government scholarship is normally decided using performance as an index. With the above discussed variables. It is often noticed that government scholarships are enjoyed more by the privileged than the under privileged.

After all the analyses, it can be observed that broad aims of education and the provisions made by the government are far not enough to educate the citizenry especially when the under-privileged is concerned. Other avenues must be sought or some improvements must be injected if the desired results must be acquired. This leads us to consider what the non-governmental organisations have been doing in providing education to the under-privileged in the Nigerian society.

The Non-Governmental And Private Inputs

Each non-governmental organisation (NGO) is opened with specific aims and objectives. It must be noted that several of them may not be geared towards education. Those which make incursions into education at all do those as a means of boosting their public image. Thus, NGOs are seen offering gifts of bags of rice, garri, milk and the like to orphanages, motherless babies and remand homes. Scarcely, however do they do this without deliberately ensuring media coverage. This is a clear indications that, the NGOs may not be too interested in the well being of these under-privileged as they are to their public image. On another consideration, one would ask; How often do these NGOs do this? Or for how long do the materials provided last for the in-mates before another one is provided?

From the education axis, NGOs are seen opening up schools. Examples are the Baptist High Schools, Christ the King Nursery/Primary School, Adiaha Obong Nursery/Primary Schools, Access schools, Igbenedion etc. These could be seen as very highly beneficial in multiplying the opportunity available in the country. Nevertheless, this consideration should not veil our eyes, against one of the primary aims of opening such schools/institutions. These ventures are, above all, profit oriented which places the participation of the under-privilege at the minimum possible as the latter would not be able to afford fees charged by such institutions.

Upon all these the government and the private sector must be commended with regards to their interest in providing education for the exceptional children. For the gifted, the gifted child academy in Suleja is provided by government. For the handicap, several schools for the handicap including those in Imo State, Plateau and Abia are provided by the various governments. The one at Ikot Ekpene is a private concern. The government has gone a step further by establishing and running a College of Education (special) at Oyo for the training of teachers for special schools. More importantly education for this class of citizens is made free especially in schools established by the government. The National Policy on Education in section 8 sub-section 2 stipulates "The education of handicapped and gifted children will be free at all levels up to the University level where possible" (NPE 1981:37). But how many of them are aware of these provisions for them? These call for some careful examination of basic strategies to provide better education for our under privileged in the society.

The Way Forward

It has been observed that the Nigerian government has good intentions about the education of all categories of his citizenry. This is inferred from its broad aims and objectives. But the implementation and the provisions made seem to be portraying something towards the opposite of what is intended. As a way forward from the observed situation and as a means of being more responsive to the educational needs of our under-privileged citizenry, the following proposals are made.

In the first place, government should show more commitment than what is obtained at present to the education sector. Public schools should be better equipped. Free education, at least, at the primary school level should be made a reality. No fees in the form of handwork or PTA levies would be charged if equipment of schools are adequate. It has been observed that this is the system which is patronized more by our under privileged class. Moreover, making our schools functional would also reduce in the privileged, the urge to send their children to special schools. Should this be the case, the under privilege would have the opportunity of mixing and cross fertilizing ideas with the privileged. This in itself is a means of fruitful education.

Moreover, there should be awareness campaigns as regard provisions made for the under privileged. In addition to those campaigns made on the television and radio, such ones could be injected into churches and village gatherings. This proposal is made with the awareness that the under-privileged may not have sufficient access to electronic media and the sociological tendency which supports the position that they attend and display faith in church functions more regularly than the privileged.

The next proposal borders on the mainstreaming/institutionalization controversy. It is an agreed position that our exceptional citizens should be main-streamed. With

mainstreaming, special equipment like the Braille machines and others need should be provided to schools to aid in their education. To reduce their physical suffering, architectural designs of schools should be modified to include tarred paths, ramps on buildings to permit easy access for those on wheel-chairs and others like these. This is an area where NGOs like the Rotary, Rotaract, Lions, Inner Wheel Clubs and several others should come in to help. Amendments of already existing infrastructure may not cost so much that NGOs cannot afford.

NGOs can also provide school buildings, they can donate school materials or decide to provide materials like exercise books or essential text books to all the children in the school for a particular year. By so doing, the under-privileged would have less trauma to cope with in his educational attempts.

Where mainstreaming is not possible, as it seems that what is most prevalent in the society is institutionalization, the government should offer to pay salaries of all teaches of special schools be they government owned or private. After all government has accepted the responsibility of making provision for trained teachers in special education as well as the supportive staff required by such schools, colleges, clinics and centres in this area (NPE, 1981). NGOs could undertake provision of the basic requirements of these schools. In these ways the under privileged would be reached in the society.

Conclusion

In this paper, we have taken a look at who is termed the under privileged, what government has done so far and the lapses observed in the provision of functional education, for him. The role of the NGOs have also been highlighted. Proposals have been offered for improved conditions for the under privileged as far as his education is concerned. What one would hesitate to recommend is the establishment of a special school for them as this will instead of improving their social status, further segregate and seclude them. When the proposals made above are implemented the government and the Non governmental organisations would be seen as contributing positively towards the education of the under privileged.

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