

Review

Educational investments: A key to alleviating poverty and ensuring food security in Nigeria

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Education is key to a bright future for all global citizens. Many developing countries are severely challenged by a vicious cycle of food insecurity, poverty and under-education. The route out of this so-called poverty trap lies in multiple strategies for poverty reduction, whereby interconnected problems are tackled simultaneously. Promoting access to relevant, sound foundation education is a good place to start. This is because more than 70 percent of the world's poor are found in rural areas where hunger, literacy and low school achievement are common. Education for a large number of people in rural areas is crucial for achieving sustainable food security, poverty reduction and rural development. Poverty education strategies that emphasize skills acquisition, especially, agricultural skills need be put in place for rural and urban dwellers targeting children, youths and adults alike. This paper thus argues that increased investment in education is critical for speeding up improvements in food security. Education in rural and urban areas, improves farmers' ability to implement more advanced technologies and techniques for crop management. Education also improves rural residents' ability to find more profitable off-farm employment, boosting household income. Sound foundation education, especially in Nigeria should be relevant to the local context, focus on learners, needs and use agricultural and environmental experiences. This form of education is crucial for meeting with our rapidly changing technologies and increasing globalization necessary for sustainable livelihoods and rural economy competitiveness.

Keywords: Education, food security, poverty reduction, hunger, Nigeria.

INTRODUCTION

Effective poverty reduction policies, programmes and projects require a dynamic interplay between different sectors. These include quality basic agriculture and sustainable rural development. The challenges in these fields are enormous, especially in rural areas of developing countries where food insecurity, poverty and educational

deprivation often create a vicious circle from which underprivileged households and communities are unable to escape (Watkins, 2000). It is therefore timely and essential to explore feasible measures in which the interrelated issues of food security, sustainable development and relevant basic education can be tackled together, focusing on interventions which have the greatest effect on poverty reduction.

Many development strategies have tended to treat equitable access to quality education and food as separate

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issues. It is still rare to find national strategies which really combine and actively integrate rural development and basic education. This is often due to a division of responsibility, with one ministry having responsibility for basic education, and perhaps several other ministries (rural development, agriculture, forestry, water, health, etc.)

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Atchoarena and Gasperini, 2003).

OBJECTIVE AND METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY

This paper looks at how sound basic education influences food security, poverty reduction, and sustainable rural development. There are several recent initiatives around the world aiming to improve the relevance and effectiveness of basic education by linking learning to rural environments with a focus on issues such as agriculture, forestry, land and water management, sustainable development or environmental protection. These experiences suggest that successful projects in education for rural people have the potential of impacting rural livelihoods. This is a review paper in which the authors critically examined the benefits of sound education in food security and poverty reduction. Due to limited materials on the topic in Nigeria, the authors made use of materials from the web to support their write up.

The State of Education in Nigeria

The importance of education to human beings cannot be over emphasized. Education is a human right that should be accorded to all human beings solely by reason of being human. There are a lot of international human rights instruments that provide for education as a fundamental human right. These include the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (1966) and the African Charter on Human and Peoples Rights (1981). The relationship between education and development is well established such that education is a key index of development. It has been documented that schooling improves productivity, health and reduces negative features of life such as child labour as well as bringing about empowerment. This is why there has been a lot of emphasis particularly in recent times for all citizens of the world to have access to basic education (UNESCO, 2002).

The importance and linkage of education to the development of any society is well known. It is in recognition of this importance that the international community and governments all over the world have made commitments for citizens to have access to education. Meanwhile, it has been documented that across the globe, there are inequalities in educational access and achievement as well as high levels of absolute educational

deprivation of both children and adults. In order to confront this challenge, the rights based approach, which emphasizes the participation of citizens, has been advocated. Meanwhile, the Declaration of the World Conference on Education for All (WCEFA) which was made in Jomtien, Thailand in 1990 stated clearly in Article 1 that every person - child, Youth and Adult - shall be able to benefit from educational opportunities designed to meet their basic needs. This declaration was reaffirmed at the World Summit for Children also held in 1990, which stated that all children should have access to basic education by the year 2000. The World Summit for Children placed a lot of emphasis on raising the levels of female literacy. In a bid to achieve education goals, the Dakar World Education Forum was held as a follow-up meeting to the WCEFA where new sets of goals were set to be attained by the year 2015. The goals include:

- i) Expanding and improving comprehensive early childhood care and education, especially for the most vulnerable and disadvantaged children;
- ii) Ensuring that by 2015 all children, with special emphasis on girls, children in difficult circumstances and from ethnic minorities have access to and complete free and compulsory primary education of good quality;
- iii) Ensuring that the learning needs of all young people and adults are met through equitable access to appropriate learning and life skills programmes;
- iv) Achieving a 50 percent improvement in levels of adult literacy by 2015, especially for women and equitable access to basic and continuing education for all adults;
- v) Eliminating gender disparities in primary and secondary education by 2005, and achieving gender equality in education by 2015, with a focus on ensuring girl's full and equal access to and achievement in basic education of good quality;
- vi) Improving all aspects of the quality of education, and ensuring excellence for all, so that recognized and reasonable learning outcomes are achieved, especially in literacy, numeracy and essential life skills.

The severe decline of the oil market in the early eighties, combined with the Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP), led to drastic reductions in spending on education. The result was unpaid teacher salaries, degradation of education facilities at all levels and strikes in universities and schools. The end result is declining literacy rates in the country. The poor state of education in Nigeria is aptly captured in the National Empowerment Development Strategy as follows: the delivery of education in Nigeria has suffered from years of neglect, compounded by inadequate attention to policy frameworks within the sector. Findings from an ongoing educational sector analysis confirm the poor state of education in Nigeria. The national literacy rate is currently 57 percent. Some 49 percent of the teaching force is unqualified. There are acute shortages of infrastructure and facilities at all levels. Access to basic

education is inhibited by gender issues and socio-cultural beliefs and practices, among other factors. Wide disparities persist in educational standards and learning achievements. The system emphasizes theoretical knowledge at the expense of technical, vocational, and entrepreneurial education. School curricula need urgent review to make them relevant and practice oriented (NEEDS, 2004).

Similarly, according to the Nigeria Millennium Development Goals 2005 report, Literacy level in the country has steadily and gradually deteriorated, especially within the 15-24 years group. By 1999, the overall literacy rate had declined to 64.1 % from 71.9 % in 1991. The trend was in the same direction for male and female members of the 15-24 years age bracket. Among the male, the rate declined from 81.35 % in 1991 to 69.8 % in 1999. The decline among the female was from 62.49 % to 59.3 % during the same period (FGN, 2005). Statistics indicate glaring imbalances against girls in enrolment, attendance and completion rates in all levels of education in Nigeria, particularly in the northern parts of the country, due to a variety of socio-cultural and religious factors. It means that the rights of millions of children, especially girls, are violated. It is estimated that 7.3 million school age children are out of primary school majority of them girls (FGN, 2005).

Meanwhile, the education system in Nigeria is guided by the broad National objectives which are articulated in the National Policy on Education. At its inception in 1999, in response to the challenges in the primary education sector, the present administration launched the Universal basic Education Programme. Specifically, the Universal Basic Education Act (2004) and the Child Rights Act provide the legal framework for the implementation of the Programme, which makes basic education not only free but also compulsory. In addition, as a signatory to the 2000 World Education Conference, and the 6 Dakar Goals towards achieving Education for All (EFA), Government has also established a National EFA Coordination unit under the Federal Ministry of Education mandated to prepare a National Action Plan for the delivery of EFA in Nigeria.

Challenges Facing Education in Nigeria

There are a lot of challenges facing Nigeria and making it difficult for good quality education that is empowering and capable of bringing about sustainable development to be provided. In this paper, we shall attempt to highlight some of the challenges. The first and perhaps the greatest challenge facing education is inadequate funding by federal, states and local governments, to the extent that funding has been in response to conditionalities imposed by international financial institutions (IFIs). Statistics show that federal government expenditure on education between 1997 and 2000 has been below 10% of overall

expenditure. The national expenditure on education can not be computed because various states expenditure on education can not be determined, in relation to the UNESCO recommendation of 26% of national budgets.

Secondly, there is the problem of access which has attracted a lot of attention particularly in recent years. Studies have been conducted on the reasons why people do not go to school; the people that are usually excluded and the impact of the introduction of user fees. A study conducted by Action Aid published in 2003 showed that the reason why pupils do not go to primary schools include costs of schooling, opportunity costs, illness and hunger, limited economic costs of education and low quality of schooling (Action Aid, 2003). The costs of schooling include the costs of books, stationery and basic equipment, uniforms, admission fees, registration and examination fees, contribution towards building and maintenance fund, construction fees, transportation, mid-day meals, Parents/Teachers Association (PTA) fees, sports fees, library fees and extra tuition fees. The opportunity cost for parents sending children to school is the children's time that could have been of economic importance to the family either in terms of income generating activities or in supporting the functioning of the household, illness and hunger either of the children themselves or members of the family can prevent children from going to school. Limited economic benefits in terms of the fact that those who have completed school have no jobs do dissuade people from going to school. Finally, low quality of schooling particularly with regards to poor physical infrastructures, lack of motivated staff, poor utilization of resources, content of curriculum, nature of teaching methods and relationship of the school and teachers with the wider community can negatively impact on the urge to go to school (Action Aid, 2003).

It has been documented that there are categories of children who tend to be excluded from the formal schooling system- children from the poorest families, the landless, working children, children of minority groups, children of migrant or pastoralist families, orphans, children affected by HIV/AIDS and those with physical or mental disabilities (Action Aid, 2003). This is in accord with researches that have shown that whenever user fees are introduced in the provision of social services, the utilization by the rich increases while utilization by the poor decreases (Igbuzor, 1992). In Malawi for instance, two years after fees were introduced into the school system in the 1980s, enrollment rates fell by over 5 percent (Rose, 1998). Conversely, it has been documented that whenever user fees are abolished, enrollment increases (CHER, 2002). An example is Tanzania which eliminated fees for primary education in January, 2002 with the support of the World Bank and enrollments surged by as much as 1.5 million children. It should be noted that formally scrapping fees without a major increase in public financing can have a disastrous impact on quality and is unsustainable. It is

therefore necessary that whenever fees are abolished, there should be revenue and budget reforms and the need to train and employ more teachers, build new classroom and provide more facilities to meet the increased enrolment.

Thirdly, there is the problem of poor infrastructures and lack of teaching and learning materials. A huge number of primary, secondary and tertiary school buildings and facilities are dilapidated and unfriendly to pupils. The environment of teaching and learning is not conducive. Fourthly, there is the problem of irrelevant curriculum. Current issues should be taught in schools instead of what was taught twenty years ago.

It is interesting to note that when parents find persons who have received good education unable to get employment in the formal sector, they are dissuaded from sending their children to school. Similarly, parents and guardians would be reluctant to send their children and wards to dilapidated school buildings, to be taught by ill-motivated teachers. They would be reluctant to send their children and wards to school if the education that the kids are getting is not in any way relevant to their circumstances, or if there is a danger that they can be abused by teachers or members of the community on their way to school.

Rural Poverty in Nigeria

Nigeria has a population of about 150 million - the largest in Africa and a fast-growing economy. Agriculture is the main stay of the economy, contributing about 45 percent of GDP. The agricultural sector employs about two-thirds of the country's total labour force and provides a livelihood for about 90 percent of the rural population. Nigeria is the world's largest producer of cassava, yam and cowpea - all staple foods in sub-Saharan Africa. It is also a major producer of fish. Yet it is a food-deficit nation and imports large amount of grains, livestock products and fish (IFAD, 2006; Chikaire *ET AL.*, 2010).

Nigeria's huge agricultural resource base offers great potential for growth. Recent government policies have started to show results: between 2003 and 2007 the agricultural sector is reported to have grown by 7 percent annually. The area of land under cultivation could be increased by as much as 100 percent (IFAD, 2001; FAO, 2006). And there is larger area of land for irrigation which now covers only 7 percent of irrigable lands. Irrigation and other inputs would substantially increase average yields for major staple crops, currently below those in other developing countries (IFAD, 2006).

Despite its huge natural resource, poverty is widespread in Nigeria. Poverty statistics showed that poverty level has increased from 46.3% in 1985 to 65.6% in 1996. In absolute terms, the number of poor people of Nigerian has increased four-folds between 1980 and 1996 (UNO, 2005;

Babatunde, *ET AL.*, 2008). The poverty situation in Nigeria worsened since the late 1990s and the country was classified among the 20 poorest countries in the world (IFAD, 2006). The 2010 Global Monitoring Report (GMR) of the United Nation's Education, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) revealed that about 92 percent of the Nigeria population survey on less than 2 dollars daily. The level of poverty is increasingly alarming, this means that achieving the Millennium Development Goals by 2015 will not be possible (UNESCO, 2010). It is clear that Nigeria is still far from meeting the global economic development target. On the Human Development Index (HDI), Nigeria, with an index of 0.391 was ranked 142 out of 174 countries surveyed in 1998. In 2000, the HDI score was 0.433 and the country ranked 151. Nigeria increased its HDI score to 0.453 in 2003 but ranked 158 among 172 countries surveyed (Aliyu, 2002; UNO, 2005). The HDI index however fell again marginally in 2004 and the country ranked 159 out of 188 countries. Recent poverty assessment survey has shown that over 70% of the population are living on less than a dollar per day and over 50% live below the national poverty line (FAO, 2006; Babatunde, *ET AL.*, 2008). The situation is so bleak that an average salary earner cannot earn enough to support a family because of rising cost of food items, transportation, health care, among numerous other challenges (UNESCO, 2010). Added to this, is the fact that the material condition of women, who comprises 50 percent of the population is even worse than that of men. While government officials may continue to kick against these statistics, the basic fact is that the quality of life of most Nigeria has been on the downward trend. The rising poverty level is the consequence of mass unemployment and corrupt leadership, which denies the people access to basic infrastructure such as roads, potable water, electricity, health care, among others. The survey also revealed that poverty is especially higher in rural areas where majority of the people are resident and deriving their livelihoods from agriculture (NBS, 2006; UNDP, 2009).

Poverty is especially severe in rural areas, where up to 80 percent of the population live below poverty line and social services and infrastructure are limited. The country's poor rural women and men depend on agriculture for food and income. About 90 percent of Nigeria's food production is produced by small-scale farmers who cultivate small plots of land and depend on rainfall rather than irrigation systems (IFAD, 2006). Surveys show that 44 percent of male farmers and 72 percent of female farmers across the country cultivate less than 1 hectare of land per household. Women play a major role in the production, processing and marketing of food crops. The poorest groups eke out a subsistence living but often go short of food, particularly during the pre-harvest period. The productivity of the rural population is also hindered by ill-health, particularly HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis and malaria (NBS, 2006, UNESCO, 2010).

Women and households headed solely by women are often the most chronically poor groups within rural communities. Men have higher social status and as a result have more access to training and schooling. But women play significant roles in rural economic activities. In the last few decades, the number of men migrating from rural areas in search of employment has increased, and the number of household headed solely by women has grown substantially. Rural infrastructure in Nigeria has long been neglected. Investments in health education and water supply have been focused largely on the cities. As a result, the rural population has extremely limited access to services such as schools and health centres, and about half of the population lacks access to safe drinking water (Aliyu, 2002; IFAD, 2006).

Neglect of rural infrastructure affects the profitability of agricultural production. The lack of rural roads impedes the marketing of agricultural commodities, prevents farmers from selling the produce at reasonable prices, and leads to spoilage. Limited accessibility cuts small-scale farmers off from sources of inputs, equipment and new technology and this keeps yields low. As the population swells and puts pressure on diminishing resources, escalating environmental problems further threaten food production and degradation as a result of extensive agriculture, deforestation and overgrazing is already severe in many parts of the country. Drought has become common in the North, and erosion menace caused by heavy rains and floods in the east, while in the south-south, oil pollution is a major problem (Chikaire *ET AL.*, 2010).

Land is the greatest single asset of Nigeria, vast areas which are suitable for a variety of arable crops, trees crops and pastures abound all over the country. About 75% of the 92.4 million hectares (ha) which constitute Nigeria's land area can be used to plant a variety of crops. In other words, about 73.5 million hectares of land are available for crops and pastures. About 10% of 9.8 million hectares is in natural forests of various grades, while only about 15 million hectares are unsuitable for virtually all forms of crop production being rocks and poorly drained areas, roads, cities etc. (Awoyemi, 1999). It is therefore sad to say that despite the abundant wealth of this country, poverty still persists and looms tall.

The Poverty Reducing Power of Education

Throughout the world it has been found that the probability of finding employment rises with higher levels of education, and that earnings are higher for people with higher levels of education. A better educated household is less likely to be poor. The impact of education on earnings and thus on poverty works largely through the labour market, though education can also contribute to productivity in other areas, such as peasant farming (Orazem, Glewwe & Patrinos, 2007). In the labour market, higher wages for more

educated people may result from higher productivity, but also perhaps from the fact that education may act as a signal of ability to employers, enabling the better educated to obtain more lucrative jobs. (Ferreira & Litchfield, 1998)

It was previously thought that the returns to education (the quantified benefits of investing in education) were highest at primary levels. This belief provided a strong case for expanding investment in primary rather than higher levels of education (Psacharopoulos and Patrinos, 2004). However, new evidence seems more mixed. While some studies continue to show higher returns for primary education, there is now also much evidence that investment in education at secondary or even tertiary levels may bring even higher returns in some countries. This could indicate that returns to education vary with factors such as the level of development, the supply of educated workers, and shifts in the demand for such workers in the development process. It is well known that the demand for more educated labour rises as a country develops (Murphy & Welch, 1994). This increase in demand for highly skilled workers requires educational output to adjust accordingly, raising the relative returns to higher levels of education (Goldin & Katz, 1999).

Nevertheless, the absolutely poor in developing countries usually have low education levels. Some may still not even have access to primary education or may not complete their primary education. Universal primary education is therefore crucially important to reduce poverty. However, there are also examples of countries where the rapid expansion of education has resulted in lowering education quality, suggesting that countries face a trade-off between quantity and quality in the short to medium term. In such cases, the impact of education on poverty reduction may be small, and a lot of effort must go into protecting and enhancing the quality of education.

Education Improves General Living Standards

Some of the advantages that education provides (externalities) both improve the living standards of communities and contribute to the social and economic development of countries. The benefits of education result in changes in people's behaviour as a consequence of the knowledge gained. A long list of such benefits can be identified (Wolfe & Haveman, 2002), but not all of these changes in behaviour necessarily have an impact on poverty.

Frequently, these benefits to a society are particularly large when female education improves. It is well known, for instance, that lower fertility is strongly linked to higher female education. Mothers' education is also an important determinant of health care and sanitation in a household. This is reflected in, among other things, infant and child mortality levels that are much lower for the children of better educated mothers (Schultz, 1999). Better health

status (for instance, lower levels of stunting) is in turn translated into greater success at school, thereby bringing positive feedback to education itself in the next generation. Similarly, parental education - and again, particularly that of the mother - also influences the support that parents can give to children, improving the quality and success of education in the next generation.

The education of girls has a further strong and very important effect on the role of women in society. It tends to draw more women into the labour market. This increase in female labour force participation expands income-earning opportunities for many households and better utilizes the labour, skills, and talents of women. Education is seen as one of the most important ways of combating HIV and AIDS, both in developed and particularly developing countries. These effects of education on wider development influence poverty in a narrower or 'money-metric' sense as well as in the broader 'choice limitation'. In addition, there are other positive developmental impacts of education which may not be so clearly linked to poverty but which are nevertheless important. These include the fact that education improves the functioning, or even the sustainability, of democracy in poor and rich countries alike, even higher levels of education seem to reduce crime.

Education and poverty are inversely related. The higher the level of education of the population, the lesser will be the number of poor persons, because education imparts knowledge and skills which is supportive in higher wages. The direct effect of education on poverty reduction is through increasing the earning & income or wages. The indirect effect of education on poverty is important with respect to 'human poverty' because as education improves the income, the fulfillment of basic necessities becomes easier and raises the living standard which surely means the fall in human poverty. The education indirectly helps in the fulfillment of basic needs like water and sanitation, utilization of health facilities, shelter, and it also affects the women's behavior in fertility decisions and family planning (Jeffery and Basu, 1996). It is understood that such basic need's presence increase the productivity and wages consequently putting people above the poverty line. The linkages between education and poverty broadly can be seen in two ways: Firstly, investment in education increases the skills and productivity of poor households, It enhances the income level as well as the overall standard of living (human development). Secondly, poverty is also a big impediment in educational attainment Poverty affects the educational achievement in three dimensions. The very first one is from resource-side (learning and financial resources), second one is the generation of such social pressures which mutilates the mindset of poor student and when poverty grabs any institution it deteriorates the teaching standard (Bramley and Karley, 2005).

Lack of education is a key factor of income poverty and absence of sufficient income/earnings can't overcome the education poverty. Moreover, education helps in the fulfillment of basic needs (eradicating poverty) and basic needs themselves include the education availability, hence provision of education and fulfillment of basic needs both reinforce each other (Tilak, 2005). The inverse relationship between education and poverty has been recognized but there is a debate relating to the educational levels; whether primary education is enough for the ultimate outcomes or all educational levels (primary, secondary and higher education) have to be focused simultaneously. Even the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) of the United Nations and the Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSP) recommended by the World Bank focuses primarily upon the primary education and girls' education. In developing countries the social returns of primary education are much higher as compared to that of tertiary education and most of the time the relatively rich people continue their tertiary education, expanding tertiary education is twenty to fifty times costly as compared with the primary education expansion. Therefore, governments in developing countries want to reduce poverty in the cheapest manner and that's why education should be given priority attention (Coldough *ET AL.*, 2003; UNESCO-PROAP, 1998). The importance of basic education to improving individual lives has been argued from various perspectives. From a narrow perspective of agricultural improvements, basic education improves farmer productivity. From a somewhat broader perspective of food security and rural development, it facilitates off-farm employment and the economic development of rural areas. Often the returns are highest for primary education, more moderate for secondary education (some studies suggest however that the returns on secondary education are comparable to those for primary education), and lower (but still considerable) for higher education.

Education affects development through its enduring impact on various dimensions of cognitive competence: literacy (reading and writing), numeracy and problem solving. These cognitive skills affect an individual's productive behavior and ability to use the products of technological change correctly. Education affects development through its enduring impact on various dimensions of cognitive competence: literacy (reading and writing), numeracy and problem solving. These cognitive skills affect an individual's productive behavior and ability to use the products of technological change correctly. The cornerstone of any sustainable rural development efforts is education: primary education is its foundation. It improves the productive capacity of rural societies and their institutions. There are various explanations of why schooling contributes to economic productivity and

development. These include the following:

- Individuals acquire skills in school that enable them to be more productive.
- What individuals learn in school makes them more likely to adopt new technologies and practices.
- Schooling helps individuals function more effectively in modern production organizations.
- Schools socialize people into functioning effectively in modern society.
- The discipline of learning taught in school helps individuals learn new skills outside of school.

The Impacts of Investing in education for poverty alleviation in Nigeria

Apart from the 1960s and 1970s when a lot of emphasis was laid on education, because then were the eras of Universal Free Primary Education, the 1980's and 1990's have seen the worst with regard to keeping with the previous education standards (Ijaiya, 1998). It was in 1980's and 1990's that education standards started foiling because of government lack of commitments, prolonged strike actions by both academic and non-academic staff at all levels of education. These periods also witnessed the largest number of draft of academic staff from schools to other sectors of the economy and out of the country. These and many more did not only contribute to the fall in education standards, but also to increase in poverty in recent times,

One way of solving this poverty problem is for individuals, organizations and government to direct attention toward investing on education. Investing in education could take different forms, such as massive expansion of education facilities, vocationalisation of education, investing in non-formal (Islamic), and adult-education. Massive expansion of educational facilities would help eliminate education disparity between different individuals - male and female, poor and rich, rural and urban. More so, the massive expansion on the socio economic ladders; and get out of the poverty line (Ijaiya, 1998). Investing in vocational training would go along way in reducing poverty, in that most children from poor homes prefer functional education which would provide them skills for earning their livelihood. Thus vocationalisation of education, diversification of courses at the secondary and higher secondary levels and setting up of technical education centres most especially in rural areas would help in reducing poverty.

Equally important is investment on non-formal/non-western (e.g. Islamic education) and adult education. With these, mother tongues or regional languages can be used as medium of instruction. Students should be allowed to learn at their own pace, during a period which is convenient for them, and courses which are of interest to them should be taught through methods which are most

effective. To some extent, the use of mass-media and correspondence courses would also go a long way in helping to improve education standards.

The ability of the country in achieving some of these would help in reducing poverty in the country, given the importance of education. Lau, (1991) stresses that education enables the individual to perform new task; to receive and process new information; to communicate and therefore coordinate activities with one another; to evaluate and adjust to changed circumstances. Education also helps to reduce subjective uncertainty, and unnecessary anxiety, as fatalistic acceptance of the status quo, thereby enhancing the probability of adoption of new technologies or practices by the individual. Finally, at high levels, education will also help to bring about innovation in the production technology.

Given these advantages, the importance of education to individuals and the country at large in alleviating poverty would have no limit. For instance, subsequent to their commitment to education and training, Japan and Korea were able to make great strides in both human development and economic growth, thus putting other goals of development within reach. A one year increase in educational attainments has augmented wages by more than 10 percent, and same has raised farm output by nearly 2 percent in Korea, and 5 percent in Malaysia (World Bank, 1991). Increased investment in education would also affect productivity and growth through several channels. A better educated person would be able to absorb new information faster, and apply unfamiliar inputs and new processes more effectively. In Peru, farmers with additional year of schooling are able to adopt modern farm technology by 45 percent while, in Thailand, farmers with four years of schooling were three times more able to use new chemical inputs than farmers with one to three years of schooling (World Bank 1991).

Meire (1984) further stresses that there is no way physical capital would be accumulated without necessary attention given to human capital; such that it has become evident that the effective use of physical capital itself is dependent upon human capital. If there is under-investment in human capital, the rate at which additional physical capital can be productively utilized will be limited since technical, professional and administrative people are needed to make effective use of the material capital. In many newly developing countries, the absorptive capacity for physical capital have proved to be low because the extension of human capabilities has failed to keep with accumulation of physical capital.

Investing in education would not only improve people's ability to acquire and use information, but it will also deepen their understanding of themselves and the world, enrich their minds by broadening their experience, and improve the choice they make as consumers, producers and citizens. Education will also strengthen their ability to meet their wants and those of their families by increasing

their productivity, and their potential to achieve a higher standard of living. It will also improve their confidence and their ability to create and innovate, thus multiplying their opportunities for personal and social achievement (Ijaiya, 1998).

Investing in education, most especially women education, will also enhance their productive capacity, increase their income and make them better informed about the value of health care and personal hygiene. An educated woman will also be able to improve the health and life expectancy of her children, and create incentives for reducing family size, which in turn will help reduce poverty. For instance, in Brazil, a woman who has completed primary education makes 91 percent of income, more than her uneducated co-worker's income in the informal sector and 110 percent more than an uneducated woman in self-employment (Psachanopoulos and Winter 1990). Investing in education will also promote entrepreneurship. In any form of economy, entrepreneurs are the link between innovation and production. The entrepreneurs have the ability to plan and organize their businesses. They also take risk; perceive new economic opportunities and change their methods of production and distribution. With education, all these are further promoted for overall economic development. For instance, in a study of entrepreneurs in northern Thailand, 40 percent had university degrees. In Malaysia, entrepreneurs in large enterprises are more educated than entrepreneurs in smaller firms (World Bank 1991). In relation to the above, there is a wide-range of self-employment options and choice for more profitable alternative which education will give the people. In Peru, for instance, returns to an extra year of primary education are estimated to be as high as 33 percent for women self employed in the retail textile sector. Post primary education appears to have a relative high payoff, 14 percent for men in the service sector (World Bank 1990).

However, investing in education will not alone guarantee faster growth. When the economy is badly managed, investment in education may go to waste. Thus, improvement in infrastructure, health services, nutrition, accountability and transparency on the part of government are equally necessary for alleviating poverty in the country. Education therefore provides a higher relative advantage - and therefore has a higher economic value - when the environment is more unstable and more difficult to deal with. This gives empirical support to the notion that education improves the capacity to adapt to change and disequilibria, on top of its static technical effects. Increasing the educational attainment of farm households is impacting on off-farm activities, including the reallocation of time away from farm work. Off-farm work has a higher return to education than does farm work (Jolliffe, 2004). Households with better-educated members will therefore act more quickly in devoting more capital and labor to non-agricultural activities. As a result of these

allocative effects, education contributes significantly to sustained rural income growth.

CONCLUSION

The importance of basic skills, notably numeracy and literacy is a foundation for human development and basic education be given a high priority. Low literacy levels are sometimes recognized as a problem in developing agricultural and other basic vocational skills, but the role of basic education goes beyond that of laying a foundation for an individual's occupational skill development.

The role of primary education is to lay a foundation which will allow for these skills to be developed through non-formal, informal and further education. Most of the skills are interlinked and are used simultaneously in practice. Sound investment in human and social capital appears to be an essential part of any good economic strategy for broad-based and equitable rural development.

The problems of education quality and relevance in rural areas need to be recognized and addressed through coherent, explicit policies and strategies. There is strong evidence that the quality and relevance of schooling can influence productivity. Efforts to expand basic education programmes to reach more learners in rural areas need to be accompanied by measures to ensure that the content, quality, delivery and relevance of those programmes effectively meet learners' needs. Policymakers and others have to seek ways to make the content and approaches of primary education more meaningful and effective within the context of sustainable rural development.

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