
Diversifying Theological Education for Sustainable Development in Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

Theological education referred to education that is specifically about theology, about God (or, for some, about the experience of God), and is the training of person(s) to know and serve God. Though, this paper argues for the diversification of theological education for sustainable development. First, the paper argues for the significance of education in holistic development. Education being capital intensive requires that government at the various tiers cannot handle it alone, it therefore means that other stakeholders such as religious organisations and the like must co-operate. Secondly, the paper acknowledges the contributions of other major stakeholders in the education sector. The theological institutions have been at the fore-front of providing educational services to the Nigerian population. However, the traditional mode of education provided by many religious institutions in Nigeria has been grovadedon theological education, which seems inadequate, hence a need for diversification that will embrace not only the current educational needs of the society but also the diversified nature of education in the 21st century. This paper adopts the survey/analytical approach as a method of analysis and recommends that theological education should adopt and integrate or incorporate a holistic, vocational and technical educational approach in the diversification of theological education for sustainable development.

Keywords: Diversifying, Education, Theology, Sustainable Development

INTRODUCTION

The *United Nations System Task Team* on post 2015 United Nations Development Agenda adumbrates that, education, or the transmission, creation and adaptation of information, knowledge, skills and values, is a key lever of sustainable development. This is based on a vision of inclusive societies in which all citizens have equitable opportunities to access effective and relevant learning throughout life delivered through multiple formal, non-formal and informal settings. As such, education is essential for individual development as it is the development of their families, and the local and national communities to

which they belong, and to the world at large. As a fundamental human right enshrined in a number of international normative frameworks, and adapted into most national legislation, the right to education is to be seen as an enabling right for the realization of other economic, social and cultural rights, as well as a catalyst for positive societal change, social justice and peace.¹ The fact is that one of the extraordinary challenges of the Twenty-First (21st) Century is the role of religion as a major player in the lives and movement of people everywhere. Each religious community separately and collectively, insofar as is possible, are facing urgent questions about their understanding of and response to the great threats to deficiency of education in our time.

Religious communities have been at the fore-front of providing education through organized theological institutions: these communities, especially contemporary ones, which are now known as faith based organizations have since realized the need to provide conventional education alongside the religious education. However, the traditional mode of providing theological education is still in use by the orthodox or traditional faith leading organisations. Given the complexities of our society and the dire need to acquaint the custodians of theological education with contemporary tools, the aim of this paper is to highlight the limiting role of some traditional training institutions or some theological seminaries in Nigerian society and to explore alternative concepts of disseminating education in theological institutions' settings with a view of achieving sustainability.

THE CONCEPT OF EDUCATION

Education refers to the act of imparting and acquiring knowledge designed to develop a broad range of abilities, knowledge and skills of general application. The most basic services that most governments are expected to offer their people is education. Although, there are numbers of very different approaches to theological education, David H. Kelsey argued that there are 'two normative types of theological education' which he referred to as 'Athens' (which stresses the role of the academy in transforming the life of the individual) and 'Berlin' (which represents a university model which focuses on the need to educate competent professionals to strengthen the life of the Church).² Education can also be seen as a prerequisite for the economic development of the country as a whole and it greatly expands the world of the individuals who are educated.

The process of creating awareness to increase the knowledge of an individual is known as education. This means that education is an instrument for widening the horizons of an individual. It also refers to all processes by which a society inculcates its norms, values and attitudes into the young. Furthermore, it is a means of cultural transmission and renewal. Education is the process of inculcating that which is worthwhile in an individual. Education as we understand is a continuous process, which involves the transmission of societal accepted values, skills, attitudes and virtues for the proper development of an individual and positive contribution to his/her society. This is why Denga Chikwelu and Arinze³, noted that education is a dynamic instrument of social change and a means through which developing nations can achieve the maximum level of growth in economic, social, cultural, technological and political development.

Education as a concept, according to Aboho and Moudumogu⁴, is the training of the entire person to enable him not only to be able to read, write and calculate or to be proficient in a given job, but also to enable him to fit himself for living in a society. The purpose of education, therefore, is to produce efficient people with various skills and zeal whose social life and aspirations are in accordance to the demands and life style of their society. Desirable development and progress can only take place in a given society when its citizens are educated and well equipped to use their education as a means of solving the diverse and complex problems facing their society. Education tasks to change the behavioural patterns of individuals in some desirable ways. This means that, it will increase the knowledge people already possess, empower them to perform skills which otherwise they could not be able to perform and develop appreciation, insight and understanding of the world around them.

It is with this understanding that theological institutions regard education as the catalyst for sustainable development as well as a process of bringing positive changes in the society. Thus, over the years, Christian missions like Evangelical Church Winning All (ECWA) formerly Evangelical Church for West Africa, Anglian Communion, Catholic Church, Apostolic Church etc. have made tremendous contributions to education, inculcating the right type of attitudes and values for the survival of the individual and the Nigerian society at large⁵. Its standard maintains certain policies which are deemed essential for

good management and future-oriented planning of the schools system. These provide performance criteria specifying actions from which realization of objectives can be inferred.

EDUCATION AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Onu⁶, defined the concept of sustainable development from the perspective of the United Nations' Brundtland Commission, as a pattern of resource use that aims to meet human needs while preserving the environment so that these needs can be met not only in the present, but in the indefinite future. In other words, it is a development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs⁷. Nwali and Akuma⁸, in concordance with the above viewpoint posit that sustainable development is that process of change that have the ability to continue and keep going with the challenges that goes with it, without over looking human's need.

From the ongoing, sustainable development simply means efficient utilization of resources (natural or material) to solve immediate problems and making sure that they are not permanently damaged or depleted. Thus, sustainable development in a country is measured by the ability of the country to make effective use of its resources and conserve same for the next generation. To guarantee this in a country, there is therefore the need for capacity building (through diversification of the educational sector). Capacity building is central to economic growth and development in any nation. This is true because human capacity is the greatest asset of any nation. This is the reason why all countries of the world (whether developed or developing) focus on building human capital since only those countries with what it takes to be competitive can survive the current competitive global economy. Capacity building enhances the ability of human resources to perform or produce and therefore can be conceptualized as investment in human capital⁹.

According to Ebe¹⁰, development is a phenomenon associated with changes in human conditions through the use of their creative energies. It is therefore an unending improvement in the capacity of individuals and the society to control and manipulate the forces of nature so as to live better and make life more rewarding. Nigeria's sustainable development has the following intentions:

developing a stable broad-based democratic system, generating employment opportunities and meeting the basic needs of the people, achieving food security by way of massive investment in agriculture, investing and maintaining a solid educational system in Nigeria, establishing an effective macroeconomic framework that attracts huge investment to the economy which will increase the economic base and index of Nigeria, developing critical sectors of the economy by way of diversifying the economy instead of economic concentration, amongst others¹¹. But the thrust of this paper is on the diversification of theological education for sustainable development as encapsulated in one of the intentions of sustainable development in Nigeria.

THE NATURE AND TRAINING OF THEOLOGICAL INSTITUTIONS

Theological education in Nigerian society has been going on for many decades. The curricula designed and used by the theological institutions are the engines and road maps. They ought to reflect and justify the aims, objectives, goals and purpose of the institutions' existence. They should be implemented in such a way that will allow the institutions to achieve the proprietor's and denominational aspirations. This raises the question as to whether or not our theological institutions are really fulfilling the sole purpose of their existence. For example, some early theological institutions were started by the missionaries with the aim of producing well-disciplined and committed evangelists, pastors, church planters and other church related ministry workers¹² therefore, theological institutions should embrace new ideas and approaches in order to make theological institution education not only relevant but useful in every area of the society. For example, if theological institutions will also trained theologians who will incorporate other disciplines like lawyers, doctors, engineers, etc. this would be a way of diversification.

However, in recent years, some of the theological seminaries and Bible schools enrollment has changed dramatically which requires a change in the focus as well. We live in a media culture, surrounded by ever-evolving digital technologies. As a result, some schools and secular organizations have embraced the new teaching tools and models for learning that technology affords, while some theological institutions have struggled with how and why to do the same.

Additionally, some theological institutions (education) need a shift that will focus on embracing the new global trends and technology for global relevance. Most theological seminaries and theological colleges should embrace modern value methods and approaches of teaching, thus there is a tendency for them to be isolated from the realities of the world around them. It is possible for the faculty, students and staff to live in an environment that is protected from the world as they breathe the rarefied air of theological learning and reflection. The obvious danger of such an environment is that it does little to prepare the student for the realities of Christian ministry in a globalized context. Rather than being isolated and separated from what is going on, theological colleges and schools need to be in constant modern methods and approaches of training their theologian and integrating secular discipline as way of diversification.

Another gap to be close by some theological institutions is effective theological education to be relevant in technological age, theological institutions need a diversification of theological education with regard to changing patterns in the global information and communication technology (ICT) context. Nothing has a more profound impact on the patterns of education globally than the rapid transformation processes going on with regard to new ICT which is both opening up new potentials in theological learning (e-learning, research exchange groups via internet, distant Master courses using Digital formats; Digital libraries) as well as creating new problems and discrepancies. While the "global Digital divide" in terms of accessibility to the web and electronic libraries is still a major problem and challenge particularly in many African and some Asian countries, there is no halt to the global spread of modern ICTs in principle. Experts in global higher education have assured us that there is a historically unprecedented acceleration of knowledge in science and education which goes hand in hand with improved means of rapid dissemination of knowledge by modern means of ICTs though we also face the widening digital or knowledge divide (but this is not only between North and South, but very much also within many nations depending on their educational and socio-economic level of development in certain groups of the society. Therefore, for theological education to be relevant, Professors, Pastors, Seminarians, and anyone interested in theological education must enter into critical reflection on ways of engaging technology to enhance learning and serve as critical interpreters within communities of faith.

CHALLENGES OF THEOLOGICAL INSTITUTIONS

Theological education is vital for the transmission of Christian tradition from one generation to the other. Theological education is essential for the renewal and continuity of the church and its leadership. Theological education is a matter of survival for an authentic and contextual mission of the church in contemporary contexts. Theological education is crucial for the interaction between church and society where many issues demand for a sharpened stand and position of Christianity¹³. A key motive envisioned in this move toward assessment and action plan, was to help the institutions respond effectively to the theological need in modern Nigeria which, would, in turn, respond to the political, economic, educational, theological and social need in the African situation and context. This raises the question as to whether our theological institutions are really fulfilling the sole purpose of their existence.

As matter of fact, there is no endeavor in this world that does not have challenges. The challenges could be local, national, as well as international. Also, the challenges could be emanating from recent events or carried over from distance situations. In addition, the challenges could be due to lack of proper planning, lack of reflection and evaluation or complacency. In respect to some theological institutions, the following can serve to illustrate the context of this challenge:

Firstly, lack of diversification of theological education with regard to changing patterns in the global ICT context. Adjusting institutional capacities of theological colleges and faculties to growing demands for theological education. The impression is that in some areas the institutional capacities for theological education are not keeping pace with the growing needs and demands for theological education. There is an enormous challenge in theological education to equip a new generation of leadership and to bridge the wider generational gap between church leaders and theologians that exists after many years of inadequate theological training and planning.

Secondly, proliferation of theological Seminaries in Nigeria with poor modern facilities and curriculum that lack the capacity of molding graduates that can compete in the face of socio-economic challenges of contemporary Nigerian society. Kafang¹⁴ observed that some of the theological institutions lack lecture

halls, libraries, and lecturers or qualified man power that are indispensable for academic institutions. For example, Mission Institution of Theology, Kaduna where they are awarding “PhD” within a period of six month, some of their profession without a single publications, above all, with no qualified man power, library, lecture hall, etc.

Thirdly, the challenges of injustice and corruption, Embezzlements of funds by some theological institutions. For example, 2001 in ECWA Theological Institute, Gure, were the Principle embezzled the sum of 1.5 million; these have the capacity to create doubt and dis-integrity among staff. Divisive ethnicity (tribalism) in the church is finding its way even to the theological institutions. This includes the marginalization of some ethnic groups, the end result of which is tribal clashes and shame to the church. Another good example of this clashes is found 2015 in Assembly of God Theological Seminary, Saminaka, Kaduna where the School is divided into two camps, as a matter of fact, the State Governor have to closed the institution for safety of lives and properties. Lack of regional centers of excellence in theological research and post-graduate studies.

Fourthly, we must admit that theological education in some specific programs, at least, lack the intellectual muscle. To impact the modern world with the Gospel, seminary faculties and students need to increase their efforts at critical thinking within a specific Christian framework within an academic confessional framework. Theological education needs to apply that thought to biblical criticism, historical inquiry, philosophical studies, linguistics, and the arts. Consequently, acknowledging that there is no inherent contradiction between rigorous reason and fervent faith, the seminaries and theological education network should continue to foster strong commitment and robust scholarship. Theological education can maintain their doctrinal standards without being dogmatic, reactionary, or cranky.

The fact is that some theological institutions need to diversify education for sustainable development although, when compared to those early years of theological education in Nigeria most modern-day institutions curricula have changed immensely, there are strict entrance requirements and rigorous academic work in different fields of disciplines. In some of the theological institutions in Nigeria, like ECWA Theological College Biliri, for example,

secular subjects are taught side-by-side the biblical ones. But in most of the major or leading Seminaries, there is a need for diversification of courses and programs, the aim of such will be to respond to the social, political, technological, economic changes and the theological issues that constantly pose challenges to the church and the society. Other programmes can go hand-in-hand as a way of diversification, for example, to have a theologian who will also read medicine or veterinary, a theologian who is a Lawyer or Engineer etc.

DIVERSIFYING THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

From the time sustainable development was first endorsed at the United Nations (UN) General Assembly in 1987, the concept of education for sustainable development has also been explored. The 1992 United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) in Rio de Janeiro brought together representatives of Governments, international and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and the civil societies to discuss the challenges of the next century and to adopt a global plan of action to meet these challenges. The action plan, known as '*Agenda 21*', provided a comprehensive set of principles to assist Governments and other institutions in implementing sustainable development policies and programmes. *Chapter 36 of Agenda 21* affirmed education as essential for making progress toward sustainable development. Following UNCED, the Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD) appointed UNESCO to be the Task Manager for Chapter 36, responsible for accelerating education reforms and coordinating stakeholder activities. UNESCO was also charged with providing professional and technical support to member States; developing sample curriculum and training materials; and disseminating innovative ESD policies, programmes, and practices¹⁵.

The claim that functional and diversified educational system is a decisive decimal in the determination of development in any society cannot be disputed. The term 'diversification' may have different semantic meanings or variations, but in this paper, diversifying education means not investing everything you have in one area or specific academic field. Until recently, theological institutes offered a single line education (i.e. Theological Seminaries). However, with the recent establishment of some Universities by

some denominations, For Example ECWA, Catholic and the likes, coupled with some of the existing institutions (Eg. College of Health Technology Kagoro, School of Nursing Egbe, Zaria, etc), it's now crystal clear that theological institutions have expanded its outlook. The new outlook is different from the previous one, its aim of the schooling was to get people who would work for the missionary and the settler with educational philosophy and policies of the Sudan Interior Missionary (SIM) which was to train people for evangelism and the mission field.¹⁶ This is because, education was the most powerful tool and means of evangelization and Church planting in the Mission Field. Thus, there is a need for those Universities owned by denominations to go hand-in-hand with their Seminaries not as a separate educational institution but to integrate them as means of diversification.

As a significant guide to sustainable development, education should be given the right impetus by all stakeholders in the educational sector. Interestingly, the church has been actively involved in funding and provision of qualitative educational services in Nigeria before and after independence. Incontrovertibly, the history of education in Nigeria like other nations of the world is not complete without reference to the impact and contribution of the Christian church¹⁷. Ebhomielen & Idemudia further observed that, apart from the fallen and deplorable state of education in Nigeria, other critical issues are evolving. Among the very crucial ones is that of affordability and accessibility of functional, scientific, vocational and technical education by the average Nigerian¹⁸.

Education is a fundamental human right, which should be accorded to all persons for the simple reason of their being human¹⁹. The truth of the matter however, is that many people in Nigeria because of financial incapability are denied this fundamental right. The effect of the unfriendly and unfavorable economic situations in the country cuts across all spheres of life including education. It is not news that there is gross inequality in income distribution in Nigeria which by implication indicates inequalities in access to basic necessities of life including acquisition of functional education²⁰. While a few have access to good and productive education within and outside the country, the majority are left unattended to or at best, acquires "half education"- a substandard education. The global demand is such that a person with this kind of education

cannot effectively participate in the global market. This idea is yet to be fully appreciated in Nigeria as the attitude of the government towards education clearly implies. The fact that the gap between the rich and the poor in the society has turned unbridgeable chasm and continues to expand, again accentuates this position²¹.

The hope of the average Nigerian desiring a sound education is challenged by the harsh economic situation in the country. So many now wish for the revival of the good old days of the mission schools when the church played a leading and decisive role in educational matters in Nigeria. It is incontestable that the mission schools were effective as well as accessible. Education seemed to have run better in their hands than now. Many are now of the opinion that education would drastically change for the better if the church is allowed an unrestricted involvement²². This position holds not only in terms of standards but also in accessibility and affordability. It is not insinuated here that government should hands off completely in education. The advocacy however is that government should allow the church more leverage to participate more actively in the sector. The end product of such opportunity if given to the church would be education with solid moral foundation and the consciousness of human capital development.

However, in the face of this advocacy, theological education must expand its horizon in diversifying education for sustainable development. The conventional seminary would appear inadequate to offer the needed inspiration on the view that these conventional seminaries are faced with new realities and challenges that are not addressed by the curriculum of the institute. For any nation, including Nigeria, to attain sustainable development, there is need to recognize science education as a priority area of education for her citizens²³. Science education is described by Obianujuetal²⁴ as a process of teaching or training, especially in schools to improve one's knowledge about the environment and to develop one's skill of systematic inquiry as well as natural attitudinal characteristics. Science education has been recognized worldwide as a pre-requisite in technological development. Science education involves the study of science in depth and in addition, educational knowledge and concepts are learnt and verified. No country can be globally recognized without talking about its scientific innovations.

Science education identifies natural phenomena appropriate to child interest and skills. Science education also equips teachers, learners and the society with knowledge, skills, equipment and freedom to perform noble task useful for improving socioeconomic standard. In addition, science education courses are designed to produce capable scientists who contribute meaningfully to the academic excellence of the society and to raise the economic level of nations²⁵. Despite the importance of science education to national development, Nigeria lacks sustainable science education since its independence and as a result, science education has not been able to move the country into industrialization and above poverty level. Consequently, the conventional seminary should include in its curriculum the vocational/entrepreneurship and technical education as a way of nation building or development has to be sustainable in practical terms. This, however, is dependent on available resources, the ability to optimize the application of these resources beneficially as well as keeping the physical environment safe, healthy, stable and highly conducive. Sustainability, according to the World Commission on Environment and Development²⁶, is the development that meets the needs of the present without compromising future generations' opportunities to meet their own needs. Sustainability includes a just and peaceful society, gender equality, and intergenerational equity²⁷.

Vocational and technical education constitutes a vital thrust for economic, social, practical and all round development of any nation. It has been identified as a tool for a sustainable, virile and stable economy. In Nigeria, vocational and technical education was previously not seen as fundamental to national development or for economic development, but for school dropouts and individuals. Amedu further argues that vocational and technical education is also linked to human resource development and that it impacts on more than just economic growth. It also impacts on the overall development of the individual and society.

Akpomie as cited in Amedu²⁸ asserts that, no nation can move forward technologically, industrially and economically without developing a strong partner initiative in the creation of wealth, poverty reduction and employment generation with required skills. These skills include technical human and specific skills to cope with the challenges of the future since vocational and technical education is a vital tool for the sustainable advancement of any nation.

Vocational and technical education thus:

- i. Serve as learning and training centre for the translation of dreams and ideas into successful ventures.
- ii. Builds technical and conceptual skills in the individual that prepares him for today's world of work.
- iii. Leads to technological advancement.
- iv. Reduces poverty and idleness.
- v. Directs one towards self-reliance and sustainable means of livelihood.

If vocational (entrepreneurship) and technical education is efficiently implemented into theological institutions, it could assist the nation to overcome poverty and its associated problems of lack of adequate growth and development and the like.

CONCLUSION

This paper raises many possibilities and questions for diversifying theological education for sustainable development as a whole. It sets forth an educational analysis of fundamental and urgent needs that this generation must deal with. It offers a technological and theological education as foundation based on the academic performance of all institutions; and ends with a paradigm of missionry theological education that needs to integrate or change its method and approach in order to respond to the complex contemporary society and the world at large. At each stage in this process we have noted that priority should be given to the theological formation of local leaders, especially those who have traditionally been marginalized, because they are the ones most apt to follow the way of Jesus and most able to understand and respond to the challenges and the needs of holistic education.

The world is now complex and requires contemporary tools and methods to respond to its challenges. The theological institution appears to be limited in its present form and is required to be broadened in order to introduce clergies to wider perspectives. The establishment of Universities by church organizations, for example, ECWA health Technology institution and the likes are good attempts of diversification of education.

RECOMMENDATION

1. Universities that are established by church organizations should open campuses within their theological institutions as a way of diversification. For example, Bingham University should open campuses in Kagoro and Jos to further diversify
2. Theologians and pastors should undergo full conventional training alongside theological trainings in the University
3. The conventional seminaries should broaden its base and be transmitted into conventional institution, offering conventional courses side-by-side with theological programs.

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