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### **Education: A Critical Tool for the Achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in Delta State, Nigeria.**

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#### **ABSTRACT:**

*The very definition of developing countries, which many African countries fall in are enervating prevalence of poverty, unemployment, illiteracy and inequality. This has been linked to what development writers termed “historical accident” (slave trade, colonialism, neocolonialism and brass exploitation of human and natural resources) meted on the economies of these countries by western imperialists. Various attempts have been made by governments of these developing nations to ameliorate the grotesque incidence of poverty and misery without any appreciable impact. On realization of this debilitating scenario and dangers of growing widespread and deep-seated poverty threatening the survival and security of mankind, especially in developing countries, United Nations (UN) in the year 2000 formulated and adopted the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) with the prime aim of eradicating extreme poverty and hunger, among other laudable goals by 2015. This paper centers on the place of education in attainment of the MDGs. The study used survey design and the population was purposively determined to be six (6) key government ministries/agencies of Delta State that are prima facie saddled with the realization of the MDGs. Using stratified and simple random sampling techniques, 600 sample sizes were drawn for the study and a 30-item questionnaire was used for data collection. It was found that the attainment of the MDGs, which are eight in number, is a function of education as knowledge and skills are necessary for positive impact. It was therefore concluded that the realization of the MDGs is precipitously hinged on education. It was recommended that education be given its pride of place through expansion of the MDGs Goal No. 2 on education, ensuring standards, teachers/lecturers/instructors training/development, government commitment, among others, for the programme to have positive impact on developing countries.*



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### **Introduction**

Abject poverty, unemployment, illiteracy, grotesque inequality and deprivation have continued to enervate and decimate a significant number of people in many nations. This disdainful condition is more prevalent in developing countries, many of which were submerged in the “historical accident” of colonialism and brass exploitation of natural and human resource. Ake (1981), laying credence to this fact stated that to date, the experience of Western imperialism, particularly colonization, remains the most decisive event in the history of Africa. More succinctly, Riddle (1981) asserts that Northern prosperity is the result of Southern denial.

An incontrovertible fact is that poverty anywhere is a threat to peace everywhere. Besley (1996) warns that people must not be allowed to become so poor that they offend or are hurtful to society; stating that the world has problem of poverty to the extent that low income creates problems for those who are not poor. Also, African sage, Nelson Mandela, very conscious of the backlash inherent in poor condition of life in many parts of the world, asserted during his campaign tagged “Make Poverty History” at Trafalgar Square, London, that as long as poverty, injustice and inequality persists in our world, none of us can truly rest as there will be no true freedom.

In realization of the debilitating incidence and danger of growing widespread and deep-seated poverty threatening the survival of mankind, the United Nations (UN) formulated and adopted what has been christened the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) at the Millennium Summit held in September, 2000 in New York, United States of America. 189 nations in this forum, agreed to partner to free people from extreme poverty and multiple deprivation. This pledge became the eight MDGs to be attained by 2015. These MDGs



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include: Eradicate Extreme Poverty and Hunger; Achieve Universal Primary Education; Promote Gender Equality and Empower women; Reduce Child Mortality; Improve Maternal Health; Combat HIV/AIDS, Malaria and other Diseases; Ensure Environmental sustainability; and develop a Global Partnership for Development (UNDP, 2013).

MDGs are a global synergy between developed and developing countries to improve the living standard of the people particularly in developing countries. These goals are no doubt laudable as it could serve as the elixir to the excruciating and dehumanizing economic hardship and health deficiency that have become the very definition of societies of most developing nations. However, the implementation and eventual achievement of the MDGs is what will make the difference. It is a tacit fact that the issue of poverty and underdevelopment are largely developing nations' phenomenon. Also, a major contrast between developed and developing nations is disparity in educational level in these societies. Therefore, education is a potent tool for the realization of the MDGs. This study consequently argues that the extent of achievement of the MDGs is a function of the level of knowledge, and skill acquisition which itself invariably depends on level or quality of education. It is contended here that no matter how laudable the MDGs are, their attainment depends on acceptance, understanding and partnership of the poor, which education can bring.

### **The Problem of the Study**

The MDGs is absolutely commendable and their achievement can be the panacea to the degrading socio-economic conditions that have continued to assail a large spectrum of the populace of many developing societies. The eradication of poverty and hunger, creating of better access to education, improvement of the health of children and mothers, among others enunciated in MDGs will enhance the standard of living in Nigeria. However, it is pertinent to state that MDGs do not significantly differ from the goals Nigeria



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Governments have variously envisioned and pursued over the years; like Poverty Alleviation Programme, Health for All by year 2000, Education For All by year 2000, and so on. The objectives of these earlier policies and programmes were not appreciably attained, and this failure might not be unconnected with the prevailing low education or literacy level in the society.

Taking a cursory look at the MDGs, how can poverty and hunger be eradicated when the rural populace with higher incidence of poverty lack appropriate skills, knowledge and positive attitudes? UNDP (2008) found that poverty is more severe in the rural areas; among farmers and large households headed by persons with lower levels of education. How can Universal Basic Education be attained when some parents ignorantly refuse to send their children and wards to school on account of poverty or religious leaning and now being compounded by the emergence of the Boko Haram sect in Northern Nigeria? How do we reduce child mortality, improve maternal health as well as combat HIV/AIDS, Malaria and Tuberculosis in face of reported cases of resistance and outright rejection of administration of ordinary oral polio vaccine on children in some part of Nigeria, attendance of antenatal clinics is still low just and knowledge on methods of prevention of HIV/AIDS are not generally accepted? How can environmental sustainability be ensured in the face of a large population who lack the basic knowledge and disposition to efficiently manage resource endowment, such as forests, water, clean air, mineral resources, etc.?

Against this background, is it not incontrovertible that education is sine qua non to the realization of the MDGs? This is the central concern of this study.

### **Research Questions**



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The following research questions guide the study:

1. Is education a potent instrument for the realization of Poverty and Hunger Reduction and non-discriminatory trading and financial system among nations components of the MDGs in Delta State?
2. To what extent does attainment of health related facets of MDGs depend on level of education or literacy in Delta State?
3. Is education a necessary variable in the success of MDGs in areas of Gender Equality & Empowerment of women and environmental sustainability in Delta State?

### Definition of Term

Education is used in this context to include formal and non-formal facets of education. It encompasses structured class room and curriculum oriented activities as well as learning activities undertaken outside the formal school setting such as functional literacy programmes, entrepreneurship development centres, youth skills development projects, computer courses, typing classes, French or English proficiency classes, woodwork training, public enlightenment programmes designed for the youths and adults who have no formal education.

### Method

The study employed survey design, which enable the collection of detail and factual data on the place of education in the actualization of the MDGs in Delta State. The population of the study was purposively determined to be key government ministries/agencies of Delta State Government that are prima facie associated with the realization of the MDGs. These include Ministries of Special Duties (MDGs Office), Women Affairs, Education, Health , Environment and Commerce and Industry in Asaba, the State Capital. Sample comprised 600 (100 from each of the six ministries listed above) government official between Grade Levels 7 and 15. Stratified and Simple random sampling techniques were used to arrive at the sample size.

The instrument used for data collection was a 30-item questionnaire titled The Importance of Education in Achieving the MDGs (TIEAMDGs) Questionnaire. It consisted of two



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major sections; A and B. Section A sought information on the demographic characteristics of the respondents, while Section B dwelled on the Centrality of education in attaining MDGs in Delta State. The validity of the instrument was subjected to professional scrutiny by experts in Measurement and Evaluation drawn from The Federal College of Education (Technical), Asaba, Delta State University, Asaba Campus and Delta State Polytechnic, Ogwashi-Uku.

The instrument was personally administered by the researchers complemented by two trained research assistants. 582 copies of the questionnaire were retrieved, out of which 524 were properly completed, which shows a response rate of 87%. It was structured on a modified four point Likert type scale of Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (D) and Strongly Disagree (SD). Mean (X) was used to analyze the data by computing the mean responses of the respondents as follows:

SA = 4

A = 3

D = 2

SD = 1

Mean (X)  $4+3+2+1 = 10/4 = 2.5$

For decision making, mean score of 2.5 was used as cut-off point. A mean score of 2.5 and above was accepted as positive while below was not accepted.

### **Results**

The results of this investigation are presented in table according to the research questions of the study as shown below:



Research Question 1:

Is education a potent instrument for the realization of Poverty and Hunger Reduction and non-discriminatory trading and financial system among nations’ components of the MDGs in Delta State?

**Table 1: Mean Scores of Respondents on Potency of Education as Instrument for Achieving Poverty & Hunger Reduction and non-discriminatory trading & Financial System among nations components of the MDGs**

S/ N	ITEM	SA	A	D	S	TOTAL	N	X	REMARK
1	Education enhance employment opportunities	1248	543	40	11	1842	524	3.52	Accepted
2	Education boosts agricultural productivity	1356	372	120	21	1869	524	3.57	Accepted
3	Education enhances the realization of non-discriminatory trading & financial system; making available the benefits of new technologies, especially Information and Communication with foreign partners	1644	303	20	2	1969	524	3.76	Accepted
4	Education reduces the level of income inequality in the society	2016	57	2	-	2075	524	3.96	Accepted





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	unenlightened ones	1944	63	34	-	2041	524	3.90	Accepted
3	Education enhances parents administration of drugs as prescribed by physician	1992	78	-	-	2070	524	3.95	Accepted
4	Education results in ensuring good hygiene/sanitation practices for the new born	1608	360	4	-	1972	524	3.76	Accepted
5	Education improves the proportion of births carried out by skilled birth attendants (delivery in hospitals)	2040	42	-	-	2082	524	3.97	Accepted
6	Education enhances women attendance of antenatal clinics	2072	18	-	-	2090	524	3.99	Accepted
7	Educated pregnant mothers are more likely to embrace safe motherhood initiatives, Intermittent Prevention Preventive Treatment (IPT) of malaria	2004	60	6	-	2070	524	3.95	Accepted
8	Educated pregnant mothers are more likely to benefit from the roll back malaria programme, like getting and sleeping under insecticide treated mosquito nets	1992	75	2	-	2067	524	3.94	Accepted
9	Educated pregnant women are more likely to benefit from prevention of mother-to-child transmission of HIV/AIDS	2044	39	-	-	2083	524	3.98	Accepted



10	Education reduces the spread of or prevents the prevalence rate of HIV/AIDS	1760	165	58	-	1983	524	3.78	Accepted
11	Education facilitates voluntary counseling and testing for HIV/AIDS	2024	54	-	-	2078	524	3.97	Accepted
12	Education reduces the prevalence rate and enhance effective treatment of malaria, tuberculosis in the society	1964	69	12	4	2049	524	3.91	Accepted
Grand Mean								<b>3.92</b>	

**Source: Field Survey, 2015.**

**From Table 2 above, the respondents stands as it relates to the second research question of the study stated above. All the items were accepted as the least mean score is 3.76, while many of the mean scores fall within 3-90 – 3.99, resulting in a grand mean score of 3.92. This aptly shows that education is a critical factor in the realization of health related goals of MDGs.**

Research Question 3:

Is education a necessary variable in the success of MDGs in areas of Gender Equality & Empowerment of women and environmental sustainability in Delta State?



**Table 3: Mean Scores of Respondents on central role of Education in actualization of Gender Equality, Women Empowerment and Environmental sustainability**

S/N	ITEM	SA	A	D	S	TOTAL	N	X	REMARK
1	Level of Education of women determines their representation in government, eg. National Assembly	1960	96	4	-	2060	524	3.93	Accepted
2	Low education engenders gender inequality	1968	96	-	-	2064	524	3.94	Accepted
3	Education boosts women economic empowerment; employment, credit, grants	1904	120	10	3	2037	524	3.89	Accepted
4	Education reduces use of firewood as dominant source of energy for cooking	2080	12	-	-	2092	524	3.97	Accepted
5	The educated are less likely to increase the level of deforestation due to felling of wood for firewood	2084	9	-	-	2093	524	3.99	Accepted
6	Education facilitates access to safe water	1920	78	36	-	2034	524	3.88	Accepted
7.	Education enhances sanitation	2064	24	-	-	2088	524	3.98	Accepted



8.	Education curtails the rate of pipeline vandalism & blowing up of flow stations	1248	42	372	13	1624	524	3.19	Accepted
Grand Mean								<b>3.85</b>	

**Source: Field Survey, 2015.**

**The table above indicates that the respondents are favourably disposed to the issue that education is a critical factor in the realization of gender equality, women empowerment and environmental sustainability as the least mean score is 3.19 with grand mean score of 3.85.**

Discussions

The results of the study show that education is vital for the attainment of poverty reduction and non-discriminatory trading and financial system among nations components of the MDG. Table 1, items 1-5 with grand mean of 3.76 obviously reflects this position. This result is in tandem with The World Bank’s finding that despite strong economic track record, poverty is significant, and reducing it will require focus on human development (World Bank, 2013). Also UN (2013) emphatically stated “we can reduce poverty and hunger by universalizing education”. It is a trite fact that education enhances job/employment opportunities which is a key tool to escape poverty and eschew hunger. It is obviously ridiculous for the uneducated to partner with the educated on equal or level playing ground. The uneducated are usually exploited. Also, Agih (2010) concludes that broad-based education of good quality is among the most powerful instruments known to reduce poverty and inequality.

The results equally indicate that education is fulcrum for the realization of the health related indices of MDGs. Table 2, items 1-12 all lay credence to this. This is in line with The World Bank’s stand that education greatly benefits personal health, particularly powerful for girls and profoundly affects reproductive health as well as improve child



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mortality through better nutrition and higher immunization rates. Adding that education may be the single most effective preventive weapon against HIV/AIDS.

Also, the Delta State 2010 MDGs report asserts that low literacy rates among mothers is one of the factors that hindered efforts at reducing infant mortality in the State. UN (2013) equally states that disease (HIV/AIDS) can be combated by educating and empowering women.

There is no gainsaying that it takes an educated person to take preventive measures against child killer diseases, HIV/AIDS, malaria and adhere to antenatal and ancillary issues.

It was further found that education is critical for the actualization of gender equality, women empowerment and environmental sustainability aspects of MDGs. Table 3, items 1-8 with grand mean of 3.85 shows this. This is consistent with the FGN (2008) assertion that one of the major challenges in addressing gender inequality is low education and adopts the strategy of solving same as promotion of girl-child enrolment, retention, completion and high performance in school as well as capacity building, training and advocacy for women in politics. Also Obi (2010) states that a major recurring problem identified as hindrance for women effective participation is illiteracy among other things. The World Bank further concluded that to achieve gender equality and women empowerment, improvement in women's and girls' education and life skill, increasing rate of literacy among women are necessary (World Bank, 2013). These are apt since the illiterate cannot compete or claim to be equal with the enlightened while environmentally friendly practices are enhanced by education.

### Conclusion

This study has shown that education occupies a central place in the realization of the MDGs. Consequently, it is not surprising that Goals two and three of the MDGs are purely educationally inclined. Zanna & Ibrahim (2010) assert that education in general is crucial in any society for the preservation of the lives of its members and maintenance of the social structures. The World Bank categorically stated that education is critical to the world's attainment of the MDGs (World Bank, 2013). It is therefore, unequivocally concluded that the realization of the MDGs is precipitously hinged on education.



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### **Recommendations**

Sequel to the findings and conclusion of the study, the following recommendations become pertinent:

- Goal 2, which is Universal Primary Education is not adequate to provide meaningful and lifelong skills necessary to lift people out of poverty. Instead of restricting to primary level of education, it should be extended to the tertiary level to make it more relevant and enduring.
- Education should be given its pride of place in the scheme of things. Government should desist from paying lip service to education. It is a common knowledge that funding of education as reflected in budgetary allocation to the sector has been grossly inadequate. UNESCO recommended that 26% of budgetary allocations be committed to education but actual allocation in Nigeria has been consistently low and in some year, from 2000, were paltry 1.83% - 105% (Duze, 2011). Government should see expenditure on education sector as investment and fund it adequately.
- Standards should also be ensured in the education system through adequate supervision and inspection. Arong & Ogbadu (2010), report that only 20% of Nigerian graduates have quality (sound) education to make them compete for jobs in the labour market; just as the World Bank (2011) also casts doubt on the quality and relevance of tertiary education in the Nigerian context.
- Government should make concerted efforts to revamp the non-formal as well as the informal dimension of education. This will make a greater number of the populace, especially adults who had not the opportunity of acquiring formal education earlier in life to be part of the development process.



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- There is no gain saying that education cannot be complete without teachers. There should be deliberate effort to enhance the skills, attitudes and capacity of teachers/lecturers/instructors at all levels of education to enable them perform optimally.
  
- The rural areas, where a large spectrum of illiterate members of the society are concentrated and with higher incidence of poverty compared with urban centres, should be given more attention.

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