EXPLORING EDUCATION AS A TOOL FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

The roles education and schooling play in contributing to sustainable development is the focal point of this paper. It is very necessary to give attention to ways of promoting sustainable development through means such as formal, non-formal, informal education and skill development for employability in the light of the present political and social realities.

Keywords: education, skill development, sustainable development

1. Introduction

The real problem facing humanity today in terms of achieving sustainable development is how to motivate people to change underlying behaviours and activities that are problematic – in this case *unsustainability.* Human beings are very resentful to change. In other words, people should be encouraged to channel their energy towards contributing more to help alleviate poverty by acquiring relevant education and skills in order to promote developmental efforts that do not pollute good ideas and wasting scarce resources to destroy lives and edifices built over the years.

Here is where the idea of education for sustainable development has a special role in vindicating how various processes in education, which lie at the heart of promoting change in

human behaviour, can be used on a global level to help turn things around (Baha, 2005). Hence, this article on "Education, a tool for Sustainable Development", and an issue that has global dimension, is appropriate in times like this.

While a range of approaches is needed to cope with these problems, it is argued that education has a special role and responsibility in contributing to the challenges of sustainability. In this article, education is considered as the key to achieving sustainable development. The following concepts will be briefly discussed.

1.1 Education

The term education has been defined and conceptualized in a number of ways; Okoh in Okorosaye-Orobite (2005, p.19) sees education as a process, a product, and a discipline. As a process, it "is the activity of preserving, developing, and transmitting the culture of a people from one generation to another". As a product "it refers to change, whether over or covert, implicit or explicit, which education is expected to bring about". Also Akinpelu in Okorosaye-Oribite (2005, p.19) stresses that the product of education is the educated man, who in the African context is one "who shows evidence of a well integrated personality ... he is economically efficient, socially and publically competent, morally acceptable and intellectually and culturally sophisticated. Ukeje (1986, p.8) summed it up when he opined that

> *Education is power, it is a process of acquiring knowledge and ideas that shape and condition man's attitude, actions and achievements; it is a process of developing the child's moral, physical, emotional and intellectual power for his contribution in social reform; it is the process of mastering the laws of nature and for utilizing them effectively for the welfare of the individual and for social reconstruction; it is the art of the utilization of knowledge for complete living.*

Education is the largest part of UNESCO's operations, in terms of allocation, financial and staffing resources. UNESCO seeks to help its member states strengthen and upgrade education and schooling, with particular reference to promoting best innovative practices. UNESCO Medium Term strategy 2008-2013 para 3 (in Maclean, 2008, p.9) states

> *Development and economic prosperity depend on the ability of countries to educate all members of their societies and offer them lifelong learning. An innovate society prepares its people not only to embrace and adapt to change but also to manage and influence it.*

Education enriches cultures, creates mutual understanding that underpins peaceful societies. UNESCO is guided by upholding education as a human right and as an essential element for the full development of human potentials.

Maclean (2008) notes that, although there are many keys to development, such as improved infrastructure such as dams, roads, telecommunication facilities, ports and the like, education is regarded as being the master key to economic and social development. High quality and relevant education and schooling have been shown to open the doors to:

- poverty alleviation
- sustainable development
- equity
- justice and
- mainstreaming of the marginalised and vulnerable groups in society.

Education as a fundamental human right is very important to the wellbeing of humankind. Effective education can help ensure a safer, healthier, more prosperous, and environmentally sound world, while simultaneously contributing to social, economic, and cultural progress, tolerance and international co-operation. Education raises income levels and improves standards of living.

Ukeje (1986) notes that the role of education the world over, has tended to vary from place to place, and to change from time to time, in accordance with the needs of the particular age, and circumstances of the time. All over the world, the demand is on education that will sustain development.

1.1.1 Sustainable development

Kundan in (Ugoh, 2008) describes sustainable development as a construct, which envision development as meeting the need of the present generation without compromising the needs of the future generation. It implies that while education meets the need of the present it does not compromise the ability of the future generations to meet own needs. Nevertheless, this ability to meet the needs is determined by human capital (through education, technology advance) and through physical capital (machine, tool etc). Kundan argues that continued sustainable development is only possible or assured when it is agreed and indeed concrete steps are taken to raise the level of literacy and numeracy in any society. Educational institutions and their programmes are therefore, the tools with which to achieve development and its sustainability.

Sustainable development has also been defined by the Nigeria Study/Action Team (NEST, 1991) in Osuji (2004, p.55) as "an approach that combines the development needs and aspirations of the present without compromising the ability of the future while also maintaining ecological integrity". This implies according to Osuji a development process that is equitable and sensitive to ecological and environmental issues. It depends on the initiative, resourcefulness, and discipline of human beings who are the managers of developmental programmes.

2. Education for Sustainable Development

Education for sustainable development is lifelong process that leads to an informed and involved citizenry having the creative problem-solving skills, scientific and social literacy, and commitment to engage in responsible individual and co-operative actions. UK Panel for education for Sustainable Development (1998), states that education for sustainable development enables people to develop the knowledge, values, and skills to participate in decisions about the ways we do things, individually and collectively, locally and globally, that will improve the quality of life now without damaging the planet of the future.

Education for sustainable development is a holistic approach for school's management and the curriculum, not a separate subject. It therefore requires reflection on what to teach, and how to teach in order to

➢ clarify and extend the ability of students to think for themselves
➢ encourage students to reflect and debate issues to enable them to form their own opinions
➢ foster learning that emerges from discovery and is relevant to the learner's life experiences

2.1 Where Do Schools Fit In?

Agenda 21 signed by 178 countries in Rio states.

Education... should be recognised as a process by which human beings and societies can reach their fullest potential. Education is critical for promoting sustainable development and improving the capacity of the people to address the environment and development issues.

It is believed that education has a role to play in combating these problems. Education for sustainable development promises to make the world a better habitable place for the present and future generations. It calls for giving people knowledge and skills in terms of lifelong learning to help them find new solutions on their environment, economic and social issues.

2.1.1 Formal Education Sector

One result (of formal education) is that students graduate without knowing how to think in whole system, how to find connection, how to ask question, and how to separate the trivial from important. Now more than ever we need people who think creatively and who understand systems, connections, patterns, and events root causes (Orr, n.d.) It behoves educators to ensure that the interconnection between the environment, economy and social structures become an integral part of formal education, starting with the pre-primary and continuing through primary and secondary school and through training at the tertiary institution and at the professional level.

It must be emphasized here that for a nation to have the ability to develop and achieve sustainable target, education must come to play. This has been the propelling force behind the clamour for the Universal Primary Education (UPE) declared by the Federal Government of Nigeria in 1976 and the recently Universal Basic Education (UBE), an innovation of UPE declared in 1999. The essence of basic education is to increase basic literacy and numeracy level of the citizen, as they are indeed fundamental tools needed for development and its sustainability. Sound basic education is also fundamental to the strengthening of higher levels of education of scientific and technological literacy and thus to self-reliant, sustainable development.

Speaking through the Universal Declaration of Human Right more than 50 years ago, nations of the world had asserted that everyone has a right to education. Albeit, the current provision of education in Nigeria remains seriously deficient. Incessant strikes by the Academic Staff Union of the Nigerian Universities as a result of poor condition of service have also worsened the situation. Therefore, there is need for a more decisive and better action to be taken if education and schooling are to be made relevant to improve qualitatively and be available to all.

The school stands as the most important tool that education can use to achieve sustainable development. It is expected that it should facilitate economic, social, and political upward mobility. Ibia in Okorosaye-Orubite (2005) summaries the functions of the school thus

➢ The school provides training in basic skills as reading, writing and counting (arithmetic)
➢ It attempts to provide the young ones with social and civil competencies to make them useful adults in the society.
➢ The school teaches the young one scientific method with sharpened intellect, they are curious and enabled to satisfy their curiosity.

➤ The school also plays a conservative role. This conservative role refer to preservation of the community's socio-cultural practices

➤ The school is also an agent for cultural change. Progressive education accepts that nothing is static. The school must be aware of this and anticipate change, since these changes might occur, it would be better if the schools were prepared for them when the changes then occur; the school serves as institution for fostering and disseminating the ideas.

➤ The school also provides children the opportunity for participation i n healthy games and exercise. It also affords them the opportunity to develop virtue and discourages all evil tendencies.

In addition, education can achieve these by teaching the three "e's" – environment, economy and equity along with the traditional three "r's" – reading, writing and 'rithmetic. The teaching of the "r's" in the Nigerian educational system has been associated with the Western Education introduced by the early missionaries. The question then is - *Have past educational efforts produced an informed citizenry, an environmentally and scientific literate citizenry, and cadre of technical (policy and or managerial professionals proficient in guiding our nation's industries, communities, and government?* The emphasis on "3r's" taught skills necessary to reproduce surpluses needed by the colonial administrators as they propagated their colonial interest. It failed to make learning relevant to life after school.

The present issue on sustainable development clearly portrays that we need to bring our educational programmes a new ethic via the teaching of skills embedded in the three "e's". Such skills that must fall into one or more of the three realms of sustainable development – environment, economic, and equity, which according to McClaren (in McKeown, 2002, p.20) include

➤ *the ability to communicate effectively (both orally and in writing).*

➤ *the ability to think about system (both natural and social   sciences).*

➤ *the ability to think in time- forecast, to think ahead, and to plan.*

➤ *the ability to think critically about values issues.*

➤ *the ability to separate number, quantity, quality and value.*

➤ *the capacity to move from awareness to knowledge to action.*

➤ *the ability to work co-operatively with other people.*

o *the capacity to use these processes: knowing, inquiring, acting, judging, imagining, connection, valuing, and choosing.*

> *the capacity to develop an aesthetic response to the environment.*

The school curriculum can be utilised and is indeed being used to direct attention of school personnel to issues of development, particularly post-secondary levels of education. Currently, in Nigeria the issue of sustainable development is being addressed through curriculum innovations and curriculum offerings. School curriculum has been diversified to include courses that are predisposing to development issues (Osuji, 2004). This development he notes includes international relations, civic education, and promotion of government economic programmes and environmental issues of protection, preservation, and management. Some innovative curricula have been developed and infused or integrated into existing school subject curricula for general implementation, such innovative curricula include:

> Environmental Education
> Population Education
> Family Life/HIV-AIDS Education
> Women (in Development) Education
> Capital Market Studies

There is need to empower teachers to create opportunity that will enable all learners to be educated for sustainability. In-service training and other opportunities for professional growth must respond to real need faced by teachers' everyday as they try to achieve the objectives for which they are recruited and function for which the school is noted.

3.   Skill Development:

Vocational Education and Training

As we seek to achieve sustainable development, attention should be paid to strengthening the bridge between education and schooling and preparation for the world of work, with attention paid to improving vocational education and training. In Nigeria, vocational education and training have thus far been unsuccessful in preparing graduates to meet market needs, particularly because of lack of interaction with the industries. To align the systems with market needs, it require private participation in the management of institutions, curriculum development, system financing; upgrading infrastructure and instructor capabilities. There is also the need to allow training institutions greater autonomy to change course offerings, charge and retain fees. Curricula should

be updated to reflect modern technologies and improve flexibility by mapping and supplying of demand for skills and by ensuring private sector participation in curriculum design.

Work based learning, coupled with related academic training, in formal education sector can provide young people with knowledge and skills they need to make effective transition from school to a first career job. This can be done through incorporating skills acquisition in the formal school programme. For instance, students in secondary schools could be made to engage in apprenticeships in local industries. They should learn about environmental regulations that insure high standard during product design and manufacture. They should also acquire technical and social skills necessary to join the already existing workforce. Asodike (2007) advocates that students in secondary schools who incidentally form the bulk of the unemployed and easily lured into activities that impede developments such as youth restiveness should be made to acquire income generating skill while at school. Confirming this view, Maclean (2008, p.15) opined that

> *Effective skills development for employability and sustainable livelihoods is essential if sustainable development is to be achieved, and this also provides a foundation for peace building through contributing to poverty alleviation and rising levels of income.*

The reason is that work is a major feature in most people's lives. Not only does it provide them with means of survival in terms of food, clothing, and shelter, but also the type of work undertaken by individuals and groups has a major impact on their self-identity, social status, and standard of living.

For every community achieving development and sustaining it is a huge task Formal education cannot carry this responsibility alone. McKeown (2002) is of the view that non-formal and informal sectors of the educational communities must work co-operatively with the formal sector. This brings us to the roles of non-formal and informal education in sustainable development.

3.1 Non-formal and Informal Education Sector

Non-formal and informal education sectors offer hand-on experiences as well as traditional modes of learning. Knowledge and information about sustainable development can be gained through the media, workplaces, and community activities. These educational agencies are needed to expand access to opportunities to learn about sustainability issues. The assumption here is that

the collective power of the people to shape the future is greater now than ever before, and the need to exercise it is more compelling. Mobilizing that power to make life in the 21st century more democratic, more secure, and more sustainable is the foremost challenge of this generation. Citing Bhola, Mbagwu and Nwakire (2005, p.184) define non-formal education functionally as:

> *Any organized educational activity or training activity for school dropout, for illiterate rural and urban adults, for youths, women, or individual workers aimed at improving their employment and income earning potentials, or giving them general education, which in some cases, as desired may help them re-enter the formal system.*

The goal of non-formal education is therefore to improve living conditions for beneficiaries and alleviate poverty in the community. The mass media should support a campaign to raise public awareness of sustainability, convey information on indicators of sustainable development (peace, equity, and justice), and encourage individuals to adopt practices that will promote development in their daily lives. This information could be provided through radio, television, films, and print media like newspaper, magazines, and periodicals. Programmes should be designed to achieve specific result on the citizen at specific times. In addition, be persuasive. If successful, the people will understand that changes are worthwhile and have the potential to raise the quality of their lives.

The changing world in which we live requires that learners of all ages should constantly upgrade themselves through education. This calls for adult education for individuals who no longer attend schools. The fact that adults must obtain skills outside classroom is very necessary for development and its sustainability. Lifelong learning opportunities to improve earning capabilities and invariably social status, and knowledge needed to function in a democratic changing environment where peace and justice should be allowed to reign, should be provided through the non-formal and informal sectors.

Education for sustainable development should pay attention to other segments of the population. Farmers, for instance need basic literacy and numeracy to effectively adapt to new agricultural methods, gain entitlement to their land, apply for credit facilities from lending institutions to enhance their living. Improving education for the world of work can help improve the income of poverty-stricken farmers and so help alleviate poverty, provide citizens with more choices in their lives, and help empower individuals who would otherwise be marginalized because of ignorance.

Furthermore, education has a stake in enhancing the status of women in society. Women gain higher status in life and enhanced sense of efficiency when educated. They can make decision on when to marry and have bargaining power in household after marriage. Educated women create more equitable lives for their families, increase their participation in community decision making and work towards achieving local development and its sustainability.

Ezekiel-Hart in Asodike (2005) notes that women who have acquired education, and those who have skills through which they generate fund feel satisfied because, largely, they do not depend on others for most of their need... having acquired relevant education or employable skills, and are subsequently employed or self-employed. There is a sense of self- actualization, higher order need according to Abraham Maslow that gives the person a fulfilment. They will not be easily lured into prostitution and human trafficking – two avenues of promoting the spread of HIV/AIDs and retrogression to development. Moreover, the incidents of illegitimate children will be reduced. The products of such unholy coition are responsible for a greater part of the present day general unrest in the country.

Finally, it must be stressed again, that violent activities are deterrent to development. Investment is only possible when peace and tranquillity reign and when other social vices are little known (Asodike, 2008). That can be true where education is appropriately oriented to include moral principles, skills, perspectives, and values related to sustainable development than are currently included in most education systems. Education must guide and motivate people to pursue sustainable livelihoods, to participate in a democratic society and live in a sustainable manner. Education must therefore, be properly tailored to the needs of the people and properly acquired. This is the only way to sustainable development.

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