

CHAPTER SEVEN

EDUCATION AND SUSTAINABLE NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA: AN INTERROGATION

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Abstract

The importance and linkage of education to the development of any society cannot be overemphasized. It is posited that for Nigeria to make any serious in-road for sustainable national development, the country must promote development policies that give priority attention to the educational sector, particularly technological education. To this end, at the tertiary level, universities, polytechnics, and monotechnics, among others, with programs for research on technology should enjoy some special grants. This paper interrogates the correlation between education and sustainable development in Nigeria. This is intended to provide an African perspective on the global discourse on education and sustainable national development. The study relied on secondary sources of data and adopted the theory of political development as its analytical framework. The study revealed that education remains one of the most veritable tools in our drive towards achieving sustainable national development in Nigeria. In light of this, the paper recommended the integration of the principles, values, and practices of sustainable development into all aspects of education from the primary, post primary, and university levels in Nigeria. The paper further contends that in keeping with Nigeria's leadership role in Africa, the country has the opportunity and responsibility to encourage and support African partnerships in developing a progressive regional position on education and sustainable national development.

Keywords: Correlation, education, in-road, sustainable development, technology

1. Introduction

The issue of sustainable development has generated much global concern in recent years and is seen as one of the major problems affecting humanity. According to Odo (2015), if governments, societies and individuals do not, as a matter of urgency, commit political, economic and material resources into pursuing the goal of sustainable development to a logical conclusion, mankind will face immense proportions of economic and ecological disasters in the very near future. The drive for sustainable development must therefore be total and comprehensive, with a focus on the regenerative capacity of the present global resources for the future. This demands serious commitments on the part of all concerned with tailoring their development policies and programs in ways and manners that do not put at a disadvantage both the present and future generations. It is not in doubt that people make a society and a nation. As Eburajolo (2018) noted, no nation can ever advance beyond the level of governance of its people, including the management of its resources. Thus, in striving to achieve sustainable national development, Nigeria must prioritize the education of its citizens.

The Nigerian political leaders must appreciate this fact and assiduously work toward building high-quality manpower for sustainable national development. Too often, when we speak of infrastructure, ostensibly for the benefits of the people, we forget that the people must be educated, at least to appreciate the infrastructure provided and put them into proper and beneficial use. A nation that attracts and develops the most competent and productive segments of its population is likely to enjoy a real competitive advantage over others that are not in a globalized world.

In today's globalized world, we are constantly faced with intricate and complex problems that often surpass capacities and capabilities to address them. The building of high-quality manpower for successfully addressing these types of problems is an ever-present challenge. According to Eburajolo (2018), science and technological education provide an enabling environment for the development of intellectual abilities and academic capabilities, which, coupled with

positive attitudes of civic responsibility and professional conduct, foster the creation of strategic manpower development. However, it is necessary to emphasize the attitudes and values of the education provided for sustainable development. As Lewis, quoted in Eburajolo (2018), aptly stated, “Education without values, as useful as it is, seems rather to make man a cleverer devil”. An educational system, which places human beings at the center of development and at the core of all social and economic policies, will have to be put in place in Nigeria for sustainable national development.

This paper interrogates the correlation between education and sustainable national development in Nigeria. As noted earlier, the importance and linkage of education to the development of any society cannot be overemphasized. This underscores the importance and importance of education at all levels for achieving sustainable national development in Nigeria. Indeed, governments around the world have, in recent years, drawn worldwide attention to the strategic issues of sustainable development. In the 21st century, given the expected role of education in development, universities and other tertiary institutions should transform their students into technological and entrepreneurial giants capable of providing solutions to the issues and challenges of sustainable development in the country through research and collaboration with industries.

2. Review of Related Literature

Conceptual clarifications

For a proper understanding of the paper, the following key concepts used in the work need to be clarified. These are education and sustainable development.

(a) Education: A nation develops in relation to its achievement in education. This underscores the contemporary global focus on education as an instrument for launching nations into the world of science and technology, resulting in human advancement in terms of living conditions and development of the environment. According to Ogbonnaya (2020), education is the life-wire of a nation that leads to

great growth and development, as no nation rises above its standard of education. Nigeria, therefore, needs to appraise its present educational system with a view to introducing innovations that would ensure that it competes favorably with global standards. Education has been defined by various educationists, philosophers and scholars from different fields. Fafunwa (2004) defined education as what each generation gives to its younger generations, which makes them develop attitudes, skills, abilities and other behaviors, which are positive values to the society in which they live. Education is a tool that provides people with knowledge, skills, techniques and information, which empower them to know their rights and duties toward their family, society, and nation in general (Ogbonnaya, 2020). Additionally, Adam (2016) sees education as a means for improving the standard of living and assisting individuals in contributing to the development of society/nation. When a nation understands the imperative of education as a catalyst for development, it experiences astronomic socioeconomic growth and development within a short period of time. Additionally, Amaele (2011) considers education as the total development of the individual child through acceptable methods and techniques according to his abilities and interest to meet the needs of society and for the individual to take his rightful place and contribute equally to the enhancement of society. Indeed, education is the social institution through which society provides its members with important knowledge, including basic facts, job skills, cultural norms and values. According to Onwuka (2014), intelligence plus character is the goal of education.

In the context of this paper, education is the process of acquiring knowledge or training in every aspect of life—physically, mentally, academically, socially, spiritually, etc.—to enable one to become self-reliant, self-sufficient and a prominent member of society that contributes to the achievement of sustainable national development in Nigeria.

(b) Sustainable development: Different definitions of sustainable development emanating from various disciplines and with different assumptions about the basic relationship between society and nature

exist. The World Commission on Environment and Development (NCED) defines sustainable development as development that meets the needs of the present generation without jeopardizing the ability of future generations to meet their own needs (Odo, 2015). The body called for a restructuring of contemporary economic relations to guarantee an equitable distribution of national and international wealth. According to Lele (1991), sustainable development is a way of life and approach to social and economic activities for all societies, rich and poor, which is compatible with the preservation of the environment. Pearce (1993) sees sustainable development as a process in which the national resource base is not allowed to deteriorate.

Sustainable development also implies social justice, in which the basic material needs of citizens are fulfilled. Citizens must be guaranteed access to sustainable and adequate food, shelter, water, health care, electricity, and education, among other services. Social justice is thus an integral part of sustainable development. Development programs must be measured by their impact on people's lives. The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) (2001), as quoted by Ahenkan (2014), defined sustainable development as the development path along which the maximization of human well-being for today's generation does not lead to a decline in the well-being of future generations. In other words, sustainable development considers the needs of future and current generations in tandem. It is rooted in the pursuit of the well-being and welfare of people. The objectives of sustainable development will therefore include the protection of natural resources upon which future development depends.

Sustainable development is a dynamic concept, and for the purpose of this paper, we adopt the definition of the World Commission on Environment and Development (NCED), which states that "sustainable development is a development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" (Odo, 2015). Ordinarily, this philosophy of development should command popular acceptance among nations of the world, as no human society would want to engage in activities that

would jeopardize the interest of its future generations. However, many countries of the world today, especially developing countries such as Nigeria, have, by arts of omission or commission in their economic development outlooks, compromised the interest of their future generations. This can be seen in the unbridled exploitation and depletion of nonrenewable resources, unmitigated degradation of the environment, dislocation of community life, and impaired quality of life of large populations resulting from economic development programs such as oil exploration activities and gas flaring in the Niger–Delta region of Nigeria. Indeed, sustainable development is about ensuring a better quality of life for every one now and for future generations. This means a more inclusive society in which the benefits of increased economic prosperity are widely distributed. It is essentially about reconciling development and the environmental resources on which society depends.

Theoretical framework

There are several ways of studying a phenomenon in any scholarly enquiry to ensure a systematic and objective analysis. In this study, the theory of political development was adopted and applied. However, the theories of modernization and human capital theory were briefly discussed to further broaden the theoretical exposition of the study. All the theories have led credence to education as a *sine quan non* for sustainable development.

(a) Modernization Theory: Modernization theory is viewed as a template that is generally followed by societies that have achieved modernity. Hence, modernization theory is used to identify the dynamics of social change in societies from agrarian modes to industrial modes or from traditional to modern modes (Igwe, 2010). It further attempts to identify the social and economic variables that contribute to social evolution, progress and development of societies, taking into consideration the historical, socioeconomic and political thrust of the society in question. In other words, the role of states, their effectiveness or otherwise, is integral to either economic development or the absence of it. On yet another note, the theory simply speaks of

progress from one given stage to another; hence, it may be averred that all inventions and paradigms of human development all gear toward modernization. Like living organisms, society progresses through stages that generally start at a simplistic level and then develop into a more complex stage. Societies adapt to their surrounding environment, but they interact with each other for progress and development.

Modernization theorists advocate the effective adaptation of Western economic paradigms as key to unlocking the gate of development to third-world countries whose underdevelopment results from internal contradictions within their societies. These contradictions are evident from the way and manner in which resources are allocated in these societies and the parochial beliefs, attitudes and values of the people, which, together with the character of the governance policies, are incongruent with development (Igwe, 2010). In summary, modernization theory underlines the necessity of developing countries borrowing the experiences of the Western world as requisites for obtaining equal development with the West and even advancing more than they already have. This could be an appropriate and analytical tool for this paper, but the researcher has opted to ignore the theory of political development, which X-rayed the elitist nature of national development in Nigeria in terms of the functionality and dysfunctional nature of the political leadership. In other words, the theory posits that leadership is cause; everything else is effect. Sustainable national development in Nigeria and, consequently, improvement in the quality of life of average Nigerian citizens is not a matter of chance, luck or even magic. It is the direct function of the competence of the leadership to direct and lead appropriately toward improving individual and national prosperity or development on a sustainable basis.

(b) **Human Capital Theory:** Human capital theory focuses on strategic human resource management for optimum performance. This implies building an appropriate balance of competence, which includes the skills, knowledge and attitudes required for any business concerned with fulfilling the essence of existence (Azeez, 2011). This

is tenable only in a conducive environment that encourages full engagement and tapping of the potentials of individuals to the fullest. Recently, development experts have come to terms with the centrality and indispensability of man in organizational settings. This realization of the value creation of man's versatility in the workplace and superior service delivery in society has placed much premium on him to be reclassified as capital that generates returns. Hence, the transformation from man, personnel, workforce, employees, human resources, etc., to human capital (Azeez, 2011).

Consequent upon this reorientation, man's perception has tremendously assumed a higher dimension when calibrated against other resources and is now seen to possess almost (if not all) attributes of critical organizational variables such as financial capital indicators such as the bottom line, break-even point, credit and debit sides, multiplier effect, trial balance, and return on investment, among others. Many valued resources are available to an organization, of which man, referred to differently as employees, workforce, labor, etc., is not only central but also critical in value creation for superior outcomes and ultimate success.

For an organization to succeed, deliver superior value and achieve competitive advantage, it is essential to obtain its priority right. Human capital should be accorded appropriate recognition and support as a critical resource required for immediate success and future sustainability. This approach is applicable to nations, e.g., Nigeria desiring to achieve sustainable national development must pay attention to the education of its population, as Peter Drucker, quoted in Azeez (2011), aptly summarized it: "knowledge has become the key to economic resources and the dominant, if not the only, source of competitive advantage".

(c) *The Theory of Political Development:* The theory of political development was propounded by political scientists in the United States of America during the cold war period. The concept of political development was linked with the normative view then prevalent in the USA that communism would lose its appeal in the Third World once the people there were able to achieve minimum economic

development (Varma, 1975). However, the process of economic growth and modernization did not seem to have moved in the expected direction. Along with economic development, there have been widening gaps between the rich and the poor. Industrialization and urbanization, mostly brought about by economic aid from the western world and North America, led to the devastation of rural areas and the enlargement of urban slums in cities.

More importantly, one can clearly see the ethnocentric notion behind the works of Western scholars. They seemed to believe that the political values, institutions and processes that were good for the United States or parts of western Europe were good for the rest of the world and that if the United States has strong government today after having successfully gone through certain processes of history, it was also in the primary interest of developing countries, irrespective of a lack of political participation, to have strong governments.

However, these writers seem to forget that the United States has built up its present impressive superstructure of power on the basis of liberty, whereas in many developing countries, including Nigeria, where the political order is sometimes fragile, values of liberty and freedom do not exist. The theory is premised on the assumption that the nature and role of elites play a crucial role in the entire process of development (Varma, 1975). Societies, which have functional elites, are able to achieve a great deal of progress, whereas other societies that are not so fortunate find it difficult to move far in the direction of development. Elites can therefore be considered functional or dysfunctional throughout the entire process of development.

The thesis that leaders make their societies is well grounded in the facts of history. The overall progress of any society depends largely on the quality of leadership that is exercised at different levels of leadership, with each leader fulfilling their leadership roles effectively. However, Nigeria is bereft of leaders who can reinvent the government to solve everyday problems that confront the average Nigerian. In sum, Nigeria is a country with failed political leadership. The functional elites, as envisaged by the theory of political development, are lacking in the country. Hence, the cynical

performance of Nigerian dysfunctional elites has kept the country in poverty, hunger and underdevelopment despite the vast endowment of human and natural resources. All these problems are a result of the inability of the leadership to plan successfully for development via appropriate educational tools.

3. Education and sustainable national development in Nigeria

It is now generally recognized by most, if not all, nations worldwide that the prime requirement for sustainable development is education (Alabi, 1999). Nigeria must therefore come to terms with the reality that education is so key, so central, and germane to the realization of sustainable national development in the country. This stark reality should prompt the prioritization of the provision of quality public education at all levels, with the gradual tilt toward technology in the country's educational system. There is a strong correlation between education and sustainable national development. For this reason, Nigeria must set in motion machinery to transform the country's schools, colleges, and universities to lay a new foundation for sustainable national development. Consequently, as Yew (2000) noted, "...the wonders of technology will be wielded to raise the quality and standards of living of the people". Lee Kuan Yew, former Prime Minister of Singapore, is one of the world leaders in contemporary history who recognized the importance of education as a veritable tool for accelerated national development and accorded it the rightful place in his administration. Within the past three decades, Lee Kuan Yew transformed Singapore from an underdeveloped country to the prestigious club of developed countries by effectively harnessing the gains of education (Akpan, 2010). Over the years, Singapore has developed a strong public education system with high standards of teaching, learning, and research (Yew, 2000).

This is what education can do in countries where leaders or political elites recognize the values and roles of functional education. The most developed countries in the world today are those that have invested the most in education. Indeed, education plays a unique role in sustainable national development. Unfortunately, successive

Nigerian political leaders have failed to understand the correlation between education and sustainable national development. The only exception was Chief Obafemi Awolowo, who was the former Premier of the defunct Western Region of Nigeria and leader of the Action Group (AG), a political party that was formed and led by him. As Premier of the Western Region, Chief Awolowo had introduced free universal primary education but denied the opportunity to replicate this program at the national level three times through the inability of his political party to win presidential elections. Accordingly, Nigeria has lost three opportunities for accelerated sustainable national development. The success of the free primary education programme of the western Nigerian regional government led to the emergence of highly trained Nigerians from the western part of the country. According to Akpan (2010), the first set of professionals, be it in law, medicine, teaching, nursing, accountancy, surveying, and architecture emerged mostly from the Western Region, where Chief Awolowo and his party (Action Group) were in control of the government from the 1950s to the early 1960s.

To date, no Nigerian leader, whether in “Khaki or Agbada”, has been able to put education on its right track through adequate budgetary provisions and facilities. The education sector did not rank high in the policies of successive governments in the country. For example, in Nigeria’s Second Republic, even though the National Party of Nigeria (NPN) derogatorily referred to free education, the Unity Party of Nigeria (UPN) (formerly the Action Group) promised Nigerians in 1979 as quantitative or inferior and promised qualitative education instead, which was merely a political rhetoric (Akpan, 2010). Overall, the education sector in Nigeria has experienced many ups and downs. Most disturbingly, physical infrastructures in educational institutions have progressively deteriorated, with a negative impact on the quality of graduates produced. However, for the intervention of TETFund in the provision of physical infrastructures, some of our universities would have been conducting lectures under the trees or making shifts.

Successive governments in Nigeria have never been able to commit meaningful proportions of their annual budgets to education, not to mention the UNESCO percentage of 26% as the minimum benchmark of countries' annual budgets to fund education. Most of the graduates produced by universities and other tertiary institutions today are barely literate. This is a reflection of the rot in primary and secondary schools, which provide inputs to tertiary institutions. With this development, many Nigerians can afford to send their children and wards abroad, including neighboring countries such as Ghana, for quality education. Thus, governance has not had any meaningful impact on education. For example, poor funding and decayed infrastructures have been major reasons for the serial strikes often embarked upon by Nigerian universities under the umbrella of the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU).

From the 1970s to the early 1980s, public universities in Nigeria had excellent academic environments. They are comparable to any other university in the world in terms of both teaching and research (Aminu, 2008). This was evident from the manner in which their graduates have excelled in their chosen fields of endeavor both in the public and private sectors of the economy. However, it is sad to note that public universities have today become ghosts of themselves, living in their past glory. The level of decay and rot in public universities is unimaginable. Academic facilities are insufficient for the ever-growing population of students, coupled with poor conditions of service for lecturers. Rather than addressing the near-crumbling situation of public universities, the government has continued to establish more universities regardless of quality. Nigeria currently has 144 universities, 54 of which are federal universities, 40 of which are state universities and 50 of which are private universities. Part of the contending issue between the ASUU and the federal government has been the strong objection of the ASUU to the unhealthy proliferation of universities at the expense of internationally acclaimed standards. The failure of successive governments to address the poor conditions of universities has also led to the problem of brain drain, which has severely affected the Nigerian university system over the years. The

receding influence of academia has severe implications for the realization of sustainable national development in the country. This is because poorly staffed universities are currently producing half-baked graduates who are supposedly the prime movers of development as future leaders of the country. As Akpan (2010) noted, the standard and quality of education have progressively fallen over the years in Nigeria, particularly at the tertiary level. Some of the problems confronting tertiary institutions include poor funding and a dearth of academic staff resulting from the exodus of lecturers in search of greener pastures abroad. Thus, while the population of students has been on a geometrical increase, that of the lecturers is on a steady decline, leading to a situation where a lecturer now teaches a class of between 200 and 1,000 students at one level compared with what was obtained in the past, which was in the range of 25--30 students.

The decline in the education sector now reflects the quality of education in many of the country's educational centers. Most Nigerian universities are no more than glorified secondary schools. Education in Nigeria has not been managed in a way that gives anyone hope for the future. The role and value of education as a veritable tool for sustainable national development in the country has therefore been seriously compromised.

4. Conclusion

Nigeria, like other developing countries, needs education for sustainable development to be internalized and properly rooted. This is informed by the strong positive correlation between education and sustainable development. However, all over Nigeria, there is evidence of failed leadership characterized by dwindling educational, economic, social and political fortunes. It is therefore evident that while the world is undergoing rapid changes, which are driven by education, especially technological education, Nigeria remains backward, exploited and suffers a high level of illiteracy. After over 60 years of political independence, sustainable development in all areas of our national life has been very elusive. All efforts seem to suggest that sustainable development, especially in the areas of

economic, social, environmental and political dimensions, may never be possible because for every gained step forward, two are lost. Thus, despite its size and wealth, Nigeria lingers in the doldrums, perpetually being a country of the future.

5. The way forward

The truism that education is the surest way to achieve sustainable development in any society or country needs no contention. In recognition of this, the United Nations' General Assembly in December 2002 adopted resolution 57/254 to put in place a United Nations' Decade of Education for sustainable development, spanning the years 2005--2014 (Edet, 2018). The overall goal of the decade for sustainable development is the integration of the principles, values, and practices of sustainable development into all aspects of education.

Nigeria's sustainable national development cannot be divorced from her educational system and the structures that have been put in place. Sustainable development requires changes in values and attitudes toward development and the protection and conservation of the environment. Education plays a central role in achieving those changes in values and attitudes. Education also helps people make informed decisions about sustainable development for the benefit of themselves and others now and in the future and to act upon such decisions.

The various levels and types of education prepare citizens and confer on them certain abilities and competences that have profound effects on their future roles and contributions to society. Indeed, the level and type of education acquired by an individual generally determine the nature of his job and place in society. Thus, the structures of primary schools, secondary and technical colleges down to universities and polytechnics education in Nigeria need to be modified to prioritize technology. This would seriously inspire sustainable national development because of the nexus between education and development. Given its correlation with Nigeria's desire for sustainable development, the country must transform its educational system as a necessary step toward achieving meaningful

national growth and development on a sustainable basis. In summary, education remains the most veritable tool for sustainable development and should receive prioritized attention, especially the public education system, which has high standards of teaching, learning, and research. The unique role and value of education in sustainable national development is unparalleled.

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