RE-PROFILING EDUCATION TOWARDS PROVISION OF QUALITY EDUCATION FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

The fact that there can be no meaningful socio –political and economic development without the right type and appropriate quality education is the major reason why education is Nigeria is now recognized as an instrument "par excellence" for national development. This paper recognized quality education as an essential tool for achieving sustainable development of a nation. Quality education entails that the output of the institutions are acceptable, desirable, beneficial, efficient or effective. It was revealed that sustainable development is built on three independent and naturally reinforcing pillars namely; economic development, social development and environmental protection. Some of the principles identified as the basis for Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) comprised; transformation for change, education for all and envisioning a better future. Part of the recommendations stated that Nigeria universities should have collective responsibilities to lead education reforms, where the link between social and economic dimensions of life is given special attention. Also, Nigeria higher institutions must forge a close relationship with the private sector in order to make their research efforts relevant to the need of the industry.

Keywords: *Re-profiling, Quality, Education, Policy, sustainable Development*

Introduction

Education creates the future. Education including formal education, public awareness and training should be recognized as a process by which human beings and societies can reach their fullest potential. The ultimate objectives of United Nations Decade of Education for Sustainable Development is to promote and improve the integration of education for sustainable development into the education strategies and action plans at all levels of education in all Countries. Moreover, that there can be no meaningful socio-economic development without the right type and appropriate quality education is a dictum that has been accepted by various governments in Nigeria over the years. This is why education in Nigeria is recognized as an instrument "par excellence" for effecting national development.

Education has been linked with several other related concepts such as literacy, reform, knowledge, schooling, achievement, growth among others, it has been argued that each of this only tells a small part of the story. No wonder education has been described as a polymorphous concept (Babarinde, 2003; Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2004). The product of education is abundance of knowledge. When creatively and innovatively managed it results in wealth but when mismanaged it results in poverty, environmental degradation, unemployment, human rights abuse, corruption and lack of sustainable development. This could be the reason why every society from the indigenous to the contemporary exhibit great concern for the education of its citizens. The major educational institutions in our time (as far as western education is concerned) are represented by schools, colleges and universities.

Quality education is an essential tool for achieving sustainability. People around the world recognize that current economic development trends are not sustainable and that public awareness, education, and training are key to moving society toward sustainability. In fact, a national sustainability plan can be enhanced or limited by the level of education attained by the nation's citizens. It is curious to note that while we have difficulty envisioning a sustainable world, we have no difficulty in identifying what is unsustainable in our society; on this we can

create a laundry list of problems – inefficient use of energy, lack of water conservation, increased pollution, abuses of human rights, etc.

Today in Nigeria the educational system continues to witness enormous quantitative growth at the expense of qualitative development. Enrolment continues to soar at very frightening rates. By contrast funds for education has reduced drastically, school buildings has become dilapidated, teaching and learning materials are absolute and inadequate. There is a desperate craze for certificates that push the pursuit of qualitative process of education and skill acquisition to the background. Studies (Bertelsman, 2006; Obanya, 2003) have shown that, Nigeria has continuously ranked low (falling in bottom percentile) in several facets of social-economic development: life expectancy, infantile mortality, primary school enrolment, civil liberties, human poverty index, gender equity, per-capital income, and so on.

Obanya (2003), commenting on the state of education in Nigeria, observed that, Nigeria's performance in education is the poorest even by African standards. For instance, according to him, Nigeria ranked 18th among the 42 countries surveyed in Africa and falls far short of the level of educational development recorded by such countries as South Africa, Gabon, Namibia, Ghana, Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania. The relative underdevelopment of our educational system at all levels therefore contributes to the relative bottlenecks and strains experienced in Nigeria as opposed to a better performance in neighboring African countries, to say nothing of the developed countries.

The educational system in Nigeria, at the twenty-first century, can therefore not play the role of prime mover of political and social-economic development. Something drastic therefore has to be done, and urgently too, to remedy the situation; and to reposition the education sector to play its prime role as a positive tool for genuine human development. Education planners now have a collective responsibility to lead education reforms that will create a more sustainable future in terms of environmental integrity, economic viability and a just society for present and future generations.

Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) and International Education Priorities
In the last half of the twentieth century, four key themes emerge from the collective concerns and aspirations of the world's peoples, namely; peace, freedom, development and environment (Kates, Parris & Leiserowitz, 2005). Since then, there have been major conferences that were geared towards highlighting how the pursuit of one great value required the other. One of such global conferences is sustainable development, with its dual emphasis on the most recent concern, namely; development and environment.

The most widely known international definition of sustainable development is that which meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs; it enables, improving and maintaining the well being of people and ecosystems. It involves thinking differently about how we live and work and itself sustained by the skill, knowledge, innovation and creativity of citizens. This is probably why the topic has assumed a renewed force and is given top priority by societal organizations such as United Nations, World Bank, United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and so on (Fikret, Carl & John, 2011; Kathis & Alexander, 2002).

A more fully developed paradigm of sustainable development was endorsed at the highest political level at the World summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg, in 2002. The Political declaration states that "Sustainable development is built on three interdependent and mutually reinforcing pillars – economic development, social development and environmental protection". The new paradigm of sustainable development establishes linkage across poverty alleviation, human rights, peace and security, cultural diversity, biodiversity, food security, clean water and sanitation, preservation of the environment and the sustainable use of natural resources (UNESCO, 2002). This view of sustainable development according to Akinboye (2003)

empowers the poor and generates growth which is equitably distributed. Such development preserves the environment rather than degrades it, and advances women instead of discriminating against them. The concept of ESD is very difficult to define. Even UNESCO that is responsible for the global decade of ESD from 2005-2014 has not provided a definition. It has however identified the following principles as the basis for ESD, namely; transformation for change, Education for All and lifelong learning, systems thinking, envisioning a better future, critical thinking and reflection, participation and partnership for change (International Alliance of Leading Education Institute, 2009).

The plan of Implementation from the World summit on sustainable development establishes the linkage between the Millennium Development Goals in universal primary education for both boys and girls, but especially girls, and the Dakar Framework for action on Education for All. The creation of gender-sensitive educational system at all level and all types of formal, non-formal to reach the disadvantaged is underscored as a crucial component of Education for sustainable development (Obanya, 2003; Akinjide, 2011). There are currently two major world initiatives in education; Education for All (EFA) and The United Nations Literacy Decade, (UNLD) 2003-2012 , other educational priorities such as education for rural people, education for peace, human rights and gender equality; are also integral to the United Nations Decade of Education for Sustainable development (Ahunaya, Osakwe & Uche, 2010; Ivbijaru, 2012).

The ultimate purpose of EFA is human development, personal and collective. ESD addresses important issues that can impede the future development of human beings, including the issues of growing poverty, security, renewable energy, preservation of environment, HIV/AIDS, etc. which are not yet fully or consistently addressed in EFA activities. ESD encompasses EFA, which must be understood as the foundation and catalyst for the achievement of sustainable development. The approach to EFA is human rights based. Sustainable development can be seen not so much as a technical concept but as an educational one. The goal of the UN Decade of Education for Sustainable Development is to have this vision of education integrated into education plans at all levels and all sectors of education in all countries (Toolkit, 2013).

Quality Education in the 21st Century in Nigeria

Quality of education refers to the worth of education (with reference to its input, the teaching – learning process and the output/outcome). Quality of inputs refers to the worth of teachers, trainees, textbooks technology of delivery, and task or curriculum. Quality of the process deals with the worth of the teaching – learning process that involves lesson plan, delivery methods, student - teacher interactions, makings, etc. Quality of outcome and output involves the academic achievement and attainment, value added through education, etc. Babalola (2007) The conventional definition remains important to understand quality education. It includes literacy, numeracy, and life skills, and is linked directly to such critical components as teachers, content, methodologies, curriculum, policy, planning and administration, (Arikewuyo, 2004; Dugumarti, 2004) and later extends to the "expanded vision" of education as articulated at the Jomitien Conference on Education for All in 1990 and re-affirmed at the Dakar World Education forum in 2000.

There is wide spread shortage of qualified teachers, shortage of classrooms, teaching materials and textbooks. All these gaps have combined with frequent teachers' strikes in recent years to weaken the capacity of institutions to delivers quality education in Nigeria. Not only that, classes in the public schools, particularly those in the urban centre, are so bloated that teachers are no longer able to teach effectively (Durosaro, 2004; Fagbamiye, 2004). The Deteriorating quality of education which has continued unabated impinges heavy traumatic effect on Nigeria citizens and the nation as a whole. Indicators of declining quality and wastages include high dropout, failure rates, rampant examination malpractices and low performance in national survey of achievement (Adewuya, 2002; Alumode, 2006; Ezenuwafor, 2006 and Gidado, 2003). According to Igwe (2004) quality education entails that the output of institutions are acceptable, desirable, beneficial, efficient or effective.

Quality education according to Ajayi (2011) refers to the suitability of the educational system in relation to the educational objectives. It has to do with issues of relevance, validity, functionalism and efficiency in the accomplishment of education goals and priorities. The view of Fadokun (2005) was corroborative. Quality is to be characterized by efficiency, relevance to the human and environmental needs and pursuit of excellence. Studies (Akinboye, 2003; Malhotra, 2008) have established that education must ensure a safer, healthier, more prosperous and economically viable world and contribute to social, cultural and innovative progress. Quality education must ensure that the learning needs of all young people and adults are met, eliminate gender disparities in primary and secondary education, improve all aspects of the quality of education and ensuring excellence of all so that measurable learning outcomes are achieved by all, especially in literacy, numeracy and essential life skills.

Today, education is expected to make a contribution to addressing sustainable human development, peace and security, HIV/AIDS pandemic, and the quality of life at individual, family, societal, and global levels. To be factual, with the situation on the ground, Nigerian system of education is not rising to these modern or post modern challenges.

Issues in Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) in Nigeria
The major goal of the United Nations Decade of Education for sustainable Development (2005 – 2014), for which UNESCO is the lead agency is to integrate the principles, values and practices of sustainable development into all aspects of education and learning (United Nations 1992). Thus, there is need to discuss issues in ESD in order to sensitize educational institutions in Nigeria on their contributions towards ESD, in an attempt to reposition them for the 21st century.

Sustainable development should be looked at as a system. System theory implies that there is a strong interrelatedness and independency among the component parts that forms a whole. This means human beings and world resources interacting together harmoniously for the common goal. Economic development cannot be separated from social development and a concern for the environment. Further on related issues, there is need for envisioning a better future. The relevance of academic programme offered by universities has been identified as not ideal for technological advancement of the nation. NUC (2005) noted that Nigerians are dissatisfied with the output from the universities based on the 2004 "need assessment" in the labour market.

Knowledge has been identified as the most important factor for economic development in the 21st century. According to Akinboye (2003) Nomura institute of Japan recently declared that global economic activities have shifted from agricultural and industrial to knowledge and information. The essence of this transition is that knowledge must be seen as resources and other fundamental assets. However, Saint, Hartnett and Strassner (2004) observed that many developing countries have not articulated a development strategy in linking knowledge to economic growth and that Nigeria is a typical example. This implies that Nigeria universities and other higher educational institutions are not doing well in the areas of production of experts mostly needed for economic development of the country. Clark (2001) observed that in today global competitive knowledge economy, updating curricular needs to be an almost permanent undertaking.

Implication for Policy Formulation
A core principle behind sustainable development is the idea that economic, social and environmental conditions play a major role. It is evident that appropriate policy to stimulate and guide actions on the roles of quality education as a prime mover of sustainable socio-political and economic development is unavailable in the National policy on education (NPE). The absence of deliberate policy has created some problems for educational managers and the system in general. Therefore, there is need for developing a supporting policy context aimed at integrating development as a cross-cutting issue into education at all levels and should set our

policies and activities, identify needs, cost, means and schedule for their implementation, evaluation and review.

This also means that at the national and local levels, public and scholastic fora should discuss environmental and development issues and suggest sustainable alternative to policy makers. This will be an attempt in developing a supporting policy context to redress existing economic, social and gender disparities which interfere with sustainable national development.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Education for Sustainable Development requires the reorientation of many existing education policies, programmes and practices to address the social, environmental and economic knowledge, skills, perspectives and value inherent to sustainability. This implies a review of existing curricula in terms of their objectives and context to develop transdisciplinary understanding of social, economic and environmental sustainability. These also require the following recommendations.

Nigerian Universities should have collective responsibility to lead education reforms where the links between social and economic dimensions of life are given special attention and where democracy equity is mainstreamed throughout the education system. Even if the government does not have a sustainable development action plan for education and skills as a policy for its institutions of higher learning, practitioners who operate within the community of higher education ought to bear the concept of sustainability as a local content of their various curricula.

At the local level, schools, universities and colleges, cultural association and industry should work cooperatively to identify local sustainable development challenges, integrate local knowledge and skills into Education for Sustainable Development. The corporate sectors could include sustainable development in their education and training programmes. Therefore, programmes at postgraduate levels should include specific courses aimed at sustainability compliance.

Government should prepare strategies aimed at integrating environment and development as a cross-cutting issue into education at all levels. The strategies should set our policies and activities, and identify needs, cost, means and scheduled for their implementation, evaluation and review.

Relevant authorities should ensure that every school is assisted in designing environmental activity work plans. Schools should involve school children in local and regional studies environmental health, including safe drinking water, sanitation and ecosystems and in relevant activities.

Nigerian higher institutions (especially the universities) must forge a close relationship with the private sector in order to make their research efforts relevant to the need of the industry.

The issue of funding in Nigeria educational system needs an urgent attention. Because of the assumption that with more money other inputs will be readily available. Therefore United Nation recommendation of 26% budgetary allocation must be recognized.

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