

Towards Sustainable National Development Through Well Managed Early Childhood Education

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Abstract

This paper discusses issues relating to sustainable development and effective management of early childhood education. The child is the 'owner' of the future. The problems that confront the current generation are complex and serious that cannot be addressed in the same way they were created. But they can be addressed. The concept of sustainable development is an attempt to shape thought in global systemic perspective as well as secure a future. The future is the children heritage who must also understand the demands of this challenge. Early childhood education is the key to unlock the understanding required to inherit this future and requires effective management. The paper therefore recommends the school building, provision of appropriate instructional and infrastructural facilities; curricula reforms in line with future (economic, political, natural, social, etc) demands as well as increased funding to enhance early childhood education.

Keywords: Sustainable national development, Well managed, Early childhood education, Global systemic perspectives

1. Introduction

The concept of sustainable development has engaged the minds of national governments as well as academicians in recent times. Almost all countries of the world are committed, at least theoretically, to the wisdom of conserving rather than consuming every available natural resource today just because the nation must develop along contemporary perspectives. Learning to maintain the benefits of natural resources for posterity is becoming more fashionable.

Human population is rising exponentially by the day (about 158.2 million persons in Nigeria), and so are their demands. Agriculture, politics, economics, as well as technological needs are increasing astronomically. There is a need of natural resources and maybe manufactured products to meet these demands. What has been done till now is to follow political and economic growth patterns that are short-term and bogus. In the process, not only have natural resources become scarce but, they are also misused and exploited without a sense of security for the future. The notion that the earth possesses sufficient resources capable to meet human accelerating demands and replenish thereafter could be mythical. Quite often the imbalance challenges current existence with dire consequences such as climate change (with its attendant effects). The magnitude of impact is capable of rippling into the future generations except a long-term development plan, even if slow, is instituted for a sustainable development.

2. What is Sustainable Development?

Literarily, 'sustainable' means that which 'can continue or be continued for a long time; capable of being maintained at a set level, keep up assumed role competently' (The American Heritage Dictionary, 2000; The 21st Chambers Dictionary, 2001; Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English, 2003; Hornby, 2005; Globalwarming360.net). Development means 'the action or process of growing or cause to gradual growth in economic, political and cultural operations in a specified area over a given time period' (Blaug, 1970; Lipsey, 1989; Begg, Fischer & Dornbusch, 2003; Ebugo, 2004; Todaro & Smith, 2009; Leigha, 2010).

Development is often measured in terms of improvements or refinements in certain parameters (housing conditions, road and railway networks, telecommunication, water, health and hygiene conditions, election and voting patterns, nutritional levels, etc) by which judgment is conferred on the state of affairs of an individual or a country. While the term 'national' means that which is connected or associated to a particular country' (Hornby, 2005).

Therefore, 'sustainable national development' would mean the capability of a particular country to achieve comprehensive improvements or refinement in all ramifications of its existence (economic, political, cultural, religious, etc) and set, maintain and continue affairs at that level for a long time. It implies ability of a particular country to achieve improvements in its social life both in the present and in the future.

In the 1987, the UN released Brundtland Commission report offered the most widely recognized definition of sustainable development as development that "meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of the future generations to meet their own needs" (Wikipedia, 2009). It contains within it two key concepts:

1. The concept of needs, in particular the essential needs of the world poor, to which overriding priority should be given, and
2. The idea of limitation imposed by the state of technology and social organization on the environment's ability to meet present and future needs.

Also, the International Institute for Sustainable Development (IISD) defines sustainable development means environmental, economic and social well-being for today and tomorrow.

Broadly perceived, the sustainable development mantra enjoins current generations to take a systemic approach to growth and development and to manage natural, produced and social capital for the welfare of their own and future generations - a system that connects space; and a system that connects time.

As a system over space, the world is perceived and understood as one big village where air pollution from North America affects air quality in Nigeria, and where pesticide sprayed in Egypt could harm fish stocks off the amazon belt in Brazil. When viewed as a system over time, the world is realized as a community where the grandparents' current decision made about farming and land tenure system continue to affect agricultural practice tomorrow; and the economic policies we endorse today will impact on urban poverty when the children are adults.

Similarly, quality of life is perceived and appreciated as a system. It is good to be physically healthy, but what if an individual is poor and is unable to access education? Also, securing a good income is top priority, but what if the air in your part of the world is unclean? The same is true about having freedom of political and religious expression, but what if an individual cannot feed his family?

The concept of sustainable development is rooted in this sort of system thinking (Craven, 2009). It helps us understand ourselves and our world. The problems we face are complex and serious – and we can't address them in the same way we created them. But they can be addressed. And, it is this fundamental optimism that motivates this researcher to innovate a healthy and meaningful future for this earth planet and its inhabitants.

Sustainable development is an eclectic concept, as a wide array of views fall under its umbrella. The concept has included notions of weak sustainability, strong sustainability and deep ecology. According to Hasna Vancock in Wikipedia, sustainability is a process which tells of how a development of all aspects of human life affects sustenance. It means resolving the conflict between the various competing goals, and involves the simultaneous pursuit of economic property, environmental quality and social equity famously known as three dimensions (triple bottom line) with the resultant vector being technology. Hence, it is a continually evolving process, the 'journey' (the process of achieving sustainability) is of course vitally important, but only as a means of getting to the destination (desired future state). However, the 'destination' of sustainability is not a fixed place in the normal sense that we understand destination.

Different concepts also reveal a strong tension between ecocentrism and anthropocentrism. Many definitions and images (visualizing sustainability) of sustainable development coexist.

Sustainable development ties together concerns of the carrying capacity of national systems with the social challenges confronting humanity. As early as 1970, sustainability was used to describe an economy in equilibrium with basic ecological support systems. The field can be conceptually broken into three component parts: economic sustainability, environmental sustainability, and socio-political sustainability (Basse, Ekpa & Edet, 2008).

Economic sustainability clearly identifies information, integration, and participation as key building blocks to support countries achieve development that recognizes these independent pillars. It emphasizes that in sustainable development everyone is a user and provider of information. It stresses the need for change from old sector-centered ways of doing business to new approaches that involve cross-sectional co-ordination and the integration of empowerment and social concerns into all development processes.

Environmental sustainability is the process of making sure that current processes of interaction with the environment are pursued with the idea of keeping the environment as pristine as naturally possible on ideal-seeking behaviour. An 'unsustainable situation' occurs when natural capital (the sum total of a nation's resources) is consumed faster than it can

be replenished. Sustainability requires that human activity only consumes a nation's resources at a rate at which they can be replenished naturally.

Sustainable agriculture could be defined as environmentally friendly methods of farming that allow the production of crops or livestock without damage to the farm as an ecosystem. Besides, it also prevents the adverse effects on the soil, water supplies, biodiversity, or other surrounding natural resources. The concept of sustainable agriculture is an intergenerational one in which we pass on a conserved or improved natural resource base instead of one which has been depleted or polluted. The elements of sustainable agriculture include agro forestry, mixed farming, multiple cropping, crop-rotation, etc. (Wikipedia, 2009).

To the architect, sustainable development means that builders, architects, designers, community planners, and real estate developers strive to create buildings and communities that will not deplete natural resources (About. com Architecture).

Hence, to the educationist, sustainable development would mean that teachers, non-teaching staff, school administrators, as well as the students themselves strive to produce doctors, engineers, lawyers, architects, politicians, teachers, etc, relevant for current socio-economic advancement without depleting natural resources necessary to meet future needs. The goal is to meet today's needs employing renewable resources in such way that the needs of future generations will also be secured.

Inherently, the concept of sustainable development is intertwined with the concept of carrying capacity. Economists have since focused on viewing the economy and the environment as a single interlinked system with a unified valuation methodology. Future security is guaranteed where current systems produce and consume within the production possibility frontiers of present and necessary natural resources. In other words, future education is guaranteed where school managers are able to produce products for socio-economic development within the limits of present and necessary infrastructure. A damage to schools or its attendees would translate directly to economic, political, agricultural, cultural and indeed, social damage.

3. Ways of Implementing Sustainable Development

In order to meet current needs as well as accommodating the needs of future generation, a proper and need-based, not greed-based consumption pattern is required. According to Wikipedia, the following aspects need to be considered:

3.1 Sustainability

This of course, is a priority and nations should ensure that socio-economic activities are not mortgaging the choices of the future generations.

3.2 Strengthening

There is need to build on human capacities that could develop and conserve simultaneously.

3.3 Sharing

Equitable distribution of wealth and resources is vital for a sustainable development. The need to ensure basic needs for all, without any discrimination.

3.4 Social responsibility

Our consumption patterns should be guided by a sense of social responsibility. People should strive for such a consumption that does not compromise the well-being of others by avoiding all such development patterns that will ignite environmental degradation consequent upon current economic decisions that jeopardize the situation for posterity. The concept of sustainable development is the right way to go.

4. Some Principles of Sustainable Development

1. Equality
Equality is essential for a sustainable development. This concept promotes equality between ages, genders, classes, races, countries and continents.
2. Social development
Concept of sustainable development emphasizes on not only economic development, but also on social development and the need to conserve our environment and natural resources too.
3. Inclusive approach
Sustainable development has to be inclusive. It is based on the improved quality of life for everyone, mainly the deprived and the poverty stricken people of the world.
4. Human-Environment Harmony

It understands that the needs of human beings and the requirements of the environment are interdependent and acknowledges this fact.

5. Co-operation

Sustainable development is possible only if the developed world and the developing countries co-operate and the former supports the latter in their endeavours whenever they can, through subsidies, for instance.

Obviously, sustainable development is not only a future-related concept but also requires a lot of understanding and appreciation which education and particularly an early childhood education offers.

5. Early Childhood Education (ECE) Conceptualized

Broadly perceived, education is an intergenerational transmission of culture (Obanya, 2009). Childhood or early childhood literally means 'the period of somebody's life he/she is a child' (Hornby, 2005). Psychologically, early childhood refers to "a human period of development ranging ... from two to six years" (Nnachi, 2008:257). EFA (2011) defines Early Childhood Education (ECE) as Pre-nursery education which targets children from age 3 up to the official primary school entry age.

The EFA Global Monitoring Report (2011:29) believes that "children's education opportunities are shaped long before they enter primary school". It further notes that children's linguistic, cognitive and social skills develop in early childhood and forms the foundation for lifelong learning. And that "if children fail to develop these foundations because of ... a lack of stimulation ... or other factors, there are significant costs for both individuals and societies, and the effectiveness and equity of education systems are undermined" (p.29). Obviously, ECE is a period "when children expend great amount of energy in exploring, learning about events and mastering their world" (White & Watts, 1973, in Nnachi, 2008:258).

Many countries, according to the EFA (2011:33), have recorded increases in ECE enrolment. "Sub-Saharan Africa also registered gains, with enrolment increasing by 4.6 million". Reports of countries in EFA progress report include Niger, Togo, Eritrea, South Africa, Ghana and a few others. Conspicuously, Nigeria is absent from the list, suggesting underdevelopment of the sector.

5.1 Towards Sustainable National Development through a Well Managed Early Childhood Education

Data on Early Childhood Education throughout the world cannot be accurate down to the last detail. Nevertheless, such data do reflect enormous potentials in levels of sustainable development such countries can achieve that no statistical discrepancies can hide. The potential gap (the discrepancy between the early childhood educated countries at either end of the distribution) is real and large (Blaug, 1970; Lipsey, 1987; Ebong, 2004). Certain actions could be taken towards effective early childhood education management that could improve achievement of sustainable development. Let us consider some of these.

5.2 Provision of Appropriate Infrastructure

Education, designed for whichever programme, actualizes with infrastructure. Ensuring regular and continuous supply of good school buildings, libraries, computer gadgets, etc, are proactive steps that allow learning and appreciation (Ocho, 2001; Achuonye, 2001). Indeed, broken down infrastructure is directly proportional to a broken down system, hence a broken down education. To children, sustainable development concept actually begins with sustained infrastructure (chairs, tables, buildings, etc), not broken and dilapidated ones.

5.3 Provision of Appropriate Instructional Materials

Learning experiences are made concrete enough to permit understanding through the use of instructional materials (Awotua-Efebo, 1999; Ituen, 2004; Achunoye, 2004; Abraham & Leigha, 2007). Every level of education is prosecuted with its enabling instructional material. This is more so when considering specialized education for children. Children cannot learn and understand things about future security where the shape and colour of that future is not replicated in the classroom. To achieve sustainable development the future must be brought through instructional materials (toys that replicate future) in the instructional process.

5.4 Review of the ECE Curriculum

Curriculum is often seen as the totality of experiences designed to achieve learning in the school system. Educational programmes cannot succeed without an enabling curriculum. Since curriculum is programme-specific to actualize desired outcomes, current curriculum must be reviewed and reappraised in tune with realities that allow the understanding and appreciation of sustainable development.

5.5 Training and Retraining of ECE Teachers

It is said and rightly too, that no education system can rise above the quality of its teachers (Igwe, 2002; Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2004; Okeke, 2004). Therefore, teachers need to be trained and retrained in the action and demeanour of sustainable development to enable them impart the same to the children. After all, it is what teachers know and are able to perform that determines the success of the education system (Nwufo,).

5.6 Alignment of Public Private Partnership (PPP) Initiatives

The current massive private sector enterprising into ECE provision is quite commendable but needs to be streamlined for better service delivery. If planned and proposed government intervention is effectively actualized, there is possibility that efforts would be properly coordinated and harnessed. Effective and proactive government regulation would be a vital key to unlock doors of effectiveness and thereby minimize potential wastages.

5.7 Increased Funding

The strength of any educational enterprise often lies in its funding. Level of outcomes achieved in school programmes, and particularly ECE programmes with its attendant requirements, would reflect the level of funds actually expended to meet its execution demands. Thus, if positive results are to be achieved it is expedient that funding be increased to cover the budget. Special funding, like special interventions and donations, could be instituted to effectively cover budget and achieve meaningful results.

6. Conclusion

Sustainable development attempts to minimize greenhouse gases, reduce global warming, preserve environmental resources, and provide communities that allow people to reach their fullest potentials. The world is not going to come to an end with this generation, hence we do not need to consume out all the resources in the name of development just because it is possible. The concept of sustainable development emphasizes on not only economic development, but also on social development and the need to conserve the environment and natural resources.

Early Childhood Education, which is the very foundation of the entire formal education system possesses the wand to achieve an orderly and disciplined society. The increasing waves of violence and crimes of all dimensions and magnitude, including terrorism, could be nipped in the bud quite early by charting decent courses for the young minds using the instrumentality of early childhood education. A popular biblical maxim correctly asserts thus, 'train a child in the way he should go, and when he grows up, he will not depart from it'. Therefore, ECE centres must be designed to instill harmony, love and discipline in the psyche of children. They should not be such that trigger off negative orgies for violence and other anti-social tendencies. Well managed early childhood education programmes are the most secure tool for achieving sustainable national development in Nigeria.

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