

## Education for Sustainable Development

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### I. 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 the development of the human person and the society at large by acquiring relevant education and skills. This will ensure the promotion of developmental efforts that do not pollute good ideas and wasting scarce resources or 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 paper on “Education for Sustainable Development” (an issue that has global dimension) is appropriate in times like this and meaningful for a community like ours. While a range of approaches is needed to cope with developmental problems, it is argued that education has a special role and responsibility in contributing to the challenges of sustainability of development. In this paper, while other approaches remain the doors to sustainable development, education is fundamentally considered as the key to unlock the doors of sustainable development. Let us quickly and briefly too, look at the key issues that collectively form the main idea of this paper.

### 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 overt or covert, implicit or explicit, which education is expected to bring about”. As a discipline ‘it equips the human faculties to apprehend the truth and induces positive behaviour pattern’. Also for Ejikeme (2011) Education is an indispensable tool for economic, social, cultural and moral development. Any individual or nation that does not recognize this obvious fact will definitely meet a dead end. 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 human 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 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. 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 innovative society prepares its people not only to embrace and adapt to change but also to manage and influence it.*

It follows then from the above that education enriches cultures, creates mutual understanding that underpins peaceful societies. It is in this understanding that 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. In this case education should be regarded and/or be treated as one of the fundamental human rights. Indeed, there are a lot of international human rights instruments that provide for education as a fundamental human right. These include the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (1966) and the African Charter on Human and Peoples’ Rights (1981).

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 in this context raises income levels and improves standards of living. Ukeje (1986) noted 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.

In the words of Osundare (2009), “Education is to the society what the eye is to the body as well as what the rain is to the land in a fit of drought. It is the supreme light-giver, the breezy down after a night of suffocating darkness. It is what clears a path through the jungle, the compass that takes us ashore from the rough and clueless waters”. Genuine education is the surest antidotes to ignorance and glorying in vain things. Just as Ejikeme (2011) noted that authentic and true education encapsulates the power of liberation, power of development, power to construct and to reconstruct, power to form and to reform, power of integration and disintegration; as well as power to say “NO” to greed and avarice that incubate corruption. The contrary is equally true: false and inauthentic education has the power to deform, to alienate, to regress, to enslave, to confuse, to immobilize and destabilize, to exploit and to oppress.

### **Sustainable Development**

Sustainable development refers to a mode of human development in which resource use aims to meet human needs while preserving the environment so that these needs can be met not only in the present, but also for generations to come (Wikipedia, 2012). 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 their own needs. Nevertheless, this ability to meet the needs is determined by human capital (through education, technological advancement) 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 in any society.

Sustainable development has also been defined 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.

### **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 future. In this sense of being the foundation to sustainable development, *Education should be recognized 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.*

Education therefore has both functional and terminal values. Hence, education not only provides knowledge and skill to enable human beings foster and upgrade their welfare and ensures their survival but also is a source of satisfaction derived from the mere feeling that one is educated. In this part of the world, both the functional and the terminal values of education is not recognized only what matters for many is the amount of money and what money can buy that is around them. Educated people are seen as the wretched of the earth because they cannot exhibit affluence in the community and as such can only speak long grammar without producing the needed ‘cash’. They have nothing to offer in terms of money and what money can buy. This perception must change if we must match toward development; and I think it is changing and the concrete evidence to this is this occasion. That this type of gathering could be held in Agbako to discuss education is a sign of good things that are coming to this community soonest.

It is important that we stress the terminal value of education to our youths and encourage them to pursue education with zeal, as knowledge and ignorance are incomparable. Just look at the sense of fulfillment usually expressed by lawyers when they address themselves as *“learned gentlemen”*. This aptly demonstrates the terminal value of education. A person derives joy in being seen as an educated member of the society irrespective of whether the education enables the person to get a job or not. In other words, education can and is often pursued not because of its functionality but because it is considered good and satisfying in itself to be educated. The behaviour and attitude of a truly educated person can be seen to be quite different from those of uneducated person. His perception of life, his interpretation of reality, his comportment, his manner of speech,

his taste and life goals, all go to reflect the terminal value of education. These are what education induces in a person and the more you have educated people, the more development spreads and progresses faster.

### **Literacy level and Development**

There is no doubt that the level of development in a country is directly proportional to their literacy level. Though there is no exact statistics yet as regards the literacy level of our community, but one can make a good guess and place it at 30%. This implies that the illiteracy rate in our community is 70 percent. It also means that the level of our development will be proportionate (that is 30%) to our literacy level. Most of the problems we have in this community are traceable to the high rate /level of illiteracy. Oftentimes most of these problems are avoidable, where there is understanding. When the literacy level is low, the community is exposed to all sorts of problems and even the leaders of such a community are unnecessarily kept busy with settling endless cases. Meetings also last longer than expected. Social vices will be free for all.

Look at the issue of vandalization for instance. Anyone who is knowledgeable enough should know that when he cuts an electricity wire or removes some parts from the community transformer he also suffers the consequences of lack of electricity along with others. If that person is knowledgeable enough he will think twice before he embarks on such a destructive and retrogressive mission. The same thing goes for being healthy. If a person can read and write, he will most certainly be able to avoid certain things that can harm him. He will be able to get information from different sources on what to do to be healthy. He will know how to take care of himself to stay healthy. The community benefits from this because it is only those who are healthy that can contribute to the development of the community.

The fact remains that unless a solution is found to the literacy level of the community, the community will continue to battle with underdevelopment. There is an urgent need to improve the literacy level of this community because literacy (*mutatis mutandi* - Education) is the forerunner of development. That is why Osundare (2009) emphatically remarks that a country's level of development is a function of its level of mental and cultural evolution as well as the state of its educational advancement, which is embedded on building a high level of literacy in all facets of the population.

### **Women Education and Development**

It is often said that when you educate a woman you educate a nation. When women are given responsibilities in public offices, they do better than their male counterparts because of their sympathetic nature. Offering girls basic education is one sure way of giving them much greater power of enabling them to make genuine choices over the kinds of lives they wish to live. Girls' education does not only bring the immediate benefit of empowering girls, but is seen as the best investment in a family's and/or community's development. Educated girls develop essential life skills, including: self confidence, the ability to participate effectively in society, and protect themselves from sexual exploitation. Girl's education also helps cutting children and maternal mortality rates, contributing to national wealth and controlling disease and health status. Children of educated women are more likely to go to school and, consequently, this has exponential positive effects on education and poverty reduction for generations to come.

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 and whom to marry and have bargaining power in the 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 fulfillment. They will not be easily lured into prostitution and human trafficking – two avenues of 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 most families.

That women might have the chance of a healthier and happier life should be enough reason for promoting girls education. The benefits of women's education go beyond higher productivity. Educated women also tend to be healthier, participate more in the formal labour market, earn more income, have fewer children and provide better health care to their children all of which eventually improve the well being of all individuals and lift

households out of poverty. These benefits also transmit across generations as well as to their communities at large.

### Peace as Panacea to Sustainable Development

Our people must know that there cannot be a meaningful development in an atmosphere of rancour and acrimony. One of the greatest assets of education is the liberation and broadening of the mind. This equips the individual to be receptive to new ideas and be tolerant to people. What our people need more than any other thing is: Peace Education. Peace Education is the type of education that inculcates in learners the right type of tenets that would make them live peacefully in the society. It essentially infuses in the learners values that would bring about peaceful social integration. Such values include the maintenance of discipline, respect, recognition of the principles of cultural relativity and the effect of cultural ethnocentrism; and above all respect for other people's rights. The non recognition and inability of people to maintain these values meant the occurrence and re-occurrence of rancour, political turbulence, acrimonies, frustration and other social vices.

Finally, it must be stressed again, that violent activities are deterrent to development. Investment is only possible when peace and tranquility reign and when other social vices are little known (Asodike, 2008). We must pursue peace with all persons irrespective of their religion or status in the community. This extends to the strangers who live in our midst. If we need development we must receive them and live peacefully with them. This is the only way to sustainable development.

### Concluding Reflections

Why on earth would a country like Nigeria that is outstandingly equipped with intellectuals and academia of world class standard in all fields of knowledge, that is scattered all over the globe would close its eyes on issue that can destroy its future hope, promote illiteracy and impede development – Education? It is a known fact that no nation can develop without massive investment in the educational system. This is because a country's development is tied to the quality of its human resources. In the words of Osundare (2009), "Education is to society what the eye is to the body as well as what the rain is to the land in a fit of drought. It is the supreme light-giver, the breezy down after a night of suffocating darkness. It is what clears a path through the jungle, the compass that takes us ashore from the rough and clueless waters". Genuine education is the surest antidotes to ignorance. In general terms, education is the main author of the spectacular difference between the advanced, developed parts of the world and their backward, underdeveloped counterparts. If Nigeria as a nation must develop and consistently sustain such development, education must be the pivotal point of such dream.

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