

Research Paper

The Place of Higher Education in the Attainment of Sustainable Development in Nigeria

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Higher Education institutions in Nigeria are the supposed hub for sustainable development. Development is termed to be multi-faceted, which can be in areas such as technological development, structural development and human resource and socio-economic development. In Nigeria the quest for such a sustainable development has led to the establishment and to an extent the proliferation of federal, states and privately owned universities across the Nigerian nation. Higher education is uniquely placed to play the leading role in the attainment of these sustainable developments. This paper will however argue that in Nigeria certain factors such as politics, social and cultural affiliations and religious bigotry has to a larger extent hampered the attainment of the expected sustainable development attainable from the acquisition of higher education. The paper maintains that it requires going beyond the integration of key ideas in the existing curricular, the commissioning of new sustainable building or supporting the sustainability action projects which often occur at the fringes of the institutions. Instead, the sustainability journey engages Universities and Colleges in a quest for interdisciplinary, participatory pedagogies, research and the opening of institutions boundaries in its entity so that the notion of sustainable communities is extended beyond university and college walls.

Keywords: Sustainable development, Catalyst, Higher education, Sustainability, Political Jingoism, and Religious Bigotry

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BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

When we go down the paths of history, it will be brought to light the clamour for sustainable development in Nigeria started a little over two decades ago. There was the quest for sustainable national development in the Sub-Saharan Africa. The African nations as of then and to an extent the present day are epitomized with disgraceful misery index, a state largely defined by tragic failure of leadership, poor governance system, venal

political elites, rent seeking economy, resource curse, malaise, institutionalized corruption, religious bigotry as is the case with Nigeria and tribal and cultural affiliations.

Economic development is considered by the Nigerian government to be its central task and this has led to vested interest and unparalleled enthusiasm for growing the Nigerian economy. The pattern of development pursued so far has created a series of social and

environmental problems. Severe damage is done to the Nigerian environment as well as natural resources as a result of the efforts to transform the natural environment to achieve rapid economic development. Environmental quality in Nigeria has continued to decline. Resource depletion and environmental pollution have become serious problems requiring a rethinking of governmental policies. Robertson (2005) argues that modern society is going through a fundamental transformation, reflected in many signs of institutional and cultural breakdown and in myriad constructive social innovations and experiments and this is a symptom of an underlying disorder. According to Bartle and Vas (2006), the need for modern industrial society to be made sustainable is recognized worldwide. There is a growing demand worldwide for a new policy shift in the direction of economic development and progress that will be people and earth centered.

Taking the above facts into cognizance, this research is taking the bold step to the fact if a concretized Higher Education put in place in Nigeria, then sustainable national development will be achieved in no distant time. Different paradigms of development are being given consideration globally and one of such paradigms is sustainable development. Sustainable development is the process of judicious use and conservation of natural resources for the overall improvement in the quality of life for the present and future generations on long term basis. The path of development adopted which should be taken must one which is always within such limit that nature allows, beyond which, a threat to survive is inevitable. Until Nigeria begins to take this path, sustainable economic development will be a mirage. The approach of this paper is to seek a sustainable approach to economic development in Nigeria.

LITERATURE REVIEW

History of Higher Education in Nigeria.

The history of University Education in Nigeria can be traced to the year 1948. However, the first higher institution in Nigeria dates back to 1934 when the Yaba Higher College was established in the country. Its establishment was prompted by Mr. E. R. J. Hussey who was then the country's Colonial Director of Education. The establishment of Yaba Higher College was necessitated by the fact that large numbers of whites were still performing the duties that blacks in other African countries were efficient at.

In 1943, the British colonial government set up an Asquit Commission to consider the principles which should guide the promotion of higher education, learning and research and development of universities in Nigeria. Ejiogu (1986) posits that the outcome of the commission's report was recommendation for the

creation of a University College on the outskirts Ibadan. Consequently, in May 1974, Dr. Kenneth Mellanby of Cambridge University England was appointed principal of the University College Ibadan (U.C.I). Mellanby (1952) states that on arrival of the principal in July, 1947, he saw no college, no building, no student body and no staff, by January, 1948, staff and students numbering 13 and 104 respectively were absorbed into the college. (Mellanby 1952)

Ejiogu (1986) explains that the University College grew in success. The Nigerian elites clamored for a full-fledged African University, and the opportunity came in 1954 when Azikwe as the premier of the Eastern region led an economic mission to Europe to among other things make arrangements for facilitating vocational higher education in Eastern Nigeria. They got the permission for the establishment of a University which should take off with six faculties (Arts, Science, Law, Theology, Engineering and Medicine. (Ejiogu 1986). This University was initially known as University of West Africa and was later renamed University of Nigeria Nsuka on 5th October, 1960.

In an anticipation to broaden the spectrum of the university education in Nigeria, the Ashby Commission was established in 1959 under the chairmanship of Sir Eric Ashby of Cambridge University U.K to look into Nigeria's needs in the field of post school certificate education for the next 20 years. The resultant effect was the creation of in 1962, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria (North) University of Lagos (Capital), University of Ife (West) and the University of Benin was established in 1970. In the third National Development Plan (1975-1980), the government by fiat established seven Universities, which are University of Calabar, Ilorin, Jos, Sokoto, Maiduguri, Port-Harcourt and Ado Bayero University Kano. The third generation universities were established between 1980 and 1990. They are the Federal Universities of Technology: Owerri, Markudi, Yola, Akure and Bauchi. Since then we have seen the proliferation of universities in Nigeria both privately and government owned. As of 19th July, 2018, the total number of universities in Nigeria stands at 153 and a student's population of over a 150 million.

The Nigerian Universities as Catalysts for Sustainable Development in Nigeria

Sustainable development is an all-round development of a nation and its resources depends on the quality that the country offers to transform a greater number of unskilled persons in a given country into skilled and professionals in their fields of endeavor. The positions of the university as a catalyst for sustainable development have been recognized since the inception of the enterprise during the medieval era (Bilogun 2008).

Meanwhile, sustainable development has been criticized as the contraction of the developed countries that use about 80 percent of world's resources to striven and control the population of the developing nations with the emphasis of the Bruntland report (1987) on inter-linkages between economic development, environmental degradation and population. Irrespective of whether market economy or De-growth are better ways of agreeing with nature, it still appears necessary that concerted efforts be made to manage resources especially the other side of technology which tend to threaten the existence of man. The university aids in the development of professionals through the generation of advanced knowledge for the improvement of the socio-economic and physical environment of the nation through intellectual investigations and discourses. Therefore, the wealth or poverty of nations depend on the quality of higher education and the knowledge generated within the given country (World Bank 2000).

The realization of universities as agents of sustainable development has led to the formation of research and study centers in most universities across the Nigerian nation. In the same light Du Viver (2008) opines that African universities must be committed to active participation in social transformation, economic modernization and the training and upgrading of total human resources not just for a small elites but the whole society. However, in Nigeria today qualitative education can only be afforded by elites in the society, while the children of the poor attend public schools that lack the infrastructure for learning. The learning environments in public schools are not conducive at all. A university as a catalyst for sustainable development should be involved in the advocacy and dissemination of results of research efforts and patency of issues that promote sustainable development. It could also be trainer of trainers in areas of human endeavor that advance sustainable development apart from citations. The university can also champion its education discovery, explorations, teaching, changing and sharing of ideas, experiences and lessons learned and learning about others towards capacity building. It has long been established that education can develop the human capacities hence the integration of research findings into useable knowledge for stakeholders nationally and internationally.

Empirical studies carried out by Habison (1973) on the relationship between investments in human resources and national growths have led to emphasis on qualitative aspects of labour force than quantitative aspects. Human capital deficiency is a major constraint to scientific and technological development of Nigeria. According to Nwokolo (1998) a country is said to be technically advanced when it has acquired the scientific, technological, and industrial infrastructure to manufacture and sell enough goods and expertise to sustain economic growth and is able to feed her people.

Access to Higher Education in Nigeria: Challenges for Sustainable development.

Education is the basic catalyst that will bring about development of an individual and the society. Globally, it is accepted that education is a process which facilitates development of human being, physically, intellectually, morally, politically, socially and technologically so as to equip him/her to function in any environment he/she finds himself (Ikediugu, 2015).

The essence of education is to indicate in the learners the knowledge, skills, attitudes and values that would empower them to solve the problems of their country. This would lead to sustainable livelihood for the citizens to attain the goals of education they need to have access to education. Access to education means the opportunities in institutions of learning created for citizens to gain knowledge, skills, attitudes and values that will empower them to live a sustainable life. It simply means the right to education. It deals with the availability, convenience and the ability to be educated (Offorma, 2010). Developing economies, especially Africa should focus on internalization of tertiary education on its attendant impact to be able to attain sustainable development. Access to higher education in Nigeria involves admitting qualified students who have satisfied the necessary conditions as specified by Joint Admission Matriculation Board (JAMB) which has now been renamed as Unified Tertiary Matriculation Examination (UTME). This examination body has specified eligibility conditions such as age, areas of discipline, school types and subjects to be written during the examination, centers and processing fees. However, not all students meet the criteria. The students chances of being admitted are further reduced due to logistics such as lack of examination numbers, or/and centers and distances of examination venues are among others.

Political Jingoism and Religious Bigotry: A Bane to the Attainment of Sustainable Development in Nigeria.

The term jingoism is defined as an unwarranted bias, favouritism, or devotion one's own group, cause or idea. The facts stated are in the affirmative a bane to the attainment of a sustainable national development in Nigeria. The university and other institutions in Nigeria are a supposed for academic excellence but have been overtaken by greedy politicians. They use indiscriminate appointments/employments of their political thugs, supporters and cohorts as compensation and favour for services rendered during political campaigns and rallies. It is a common scene to see such people being employed to lecture in institutions of higher learning which is the supposed bedrock for sustainable development without

being interviewed to ascertain their suitability for the work. Some of those employed to lecture hardly go to class, this is because they will not be able to impart any knowledge. They become a generational curse to national development.

The issues of nepotism and religious bigotry are not farfetched, discriminatory appointments/employments are done based on religious, cultural and social background of whoever must be employed/ appointed. It an obvious fact that merit has been thrown to dogs. A fellow who graduates from the university with third class degree or degree pass is employed to lecture in a university to the detriment of those who graduate with a first class or a second class degree, this so because of religious and political affiliations. It is often said "no country can develop beyond the education standard of its citizen, the higher institution of learning in Nigeria have been downgraded even to the fact that there is a clamour for the reduction of cut-off marks of UTME to 120 points. This signals that when a candidate scores across board in the four subjects being written in the UTME such a candidate has passed the examination. It is an indication that 30 marks will now become the pass mark in the country.

In another show of the depreciation being witnessed in the higher institutions of learning is the attestation to the fact that schools advice lecturers to take it easy on student while marking their scripts after the examination. They encourage that students should pass at all cost. The schools are seen as money making venture and so the fear of losing students when they fail their exams. In addition to the aforementioned, some of under listed contribute immensely to the deteriorating educational standard in Nigeria.

- Bribery and corruption
- Obstructions of justice in the education sector, people don't get the penalty for offences committed
- Suppression and oppression of the less privileged, that is those who don't have godfather can always be done away with
- Begging of marks by fellow colleagues in respect to students who are their relatives or students who offer gratifications for marks. A monster in the education sector in Nigeria today
- Drug abuse and other social ills in the society that goes with little no efforts to checkmate such
- Truancy by both students and lecturers
- Sexual harassment
- Large classes and shortage of learning facilities and qualified teachers
- Poor staff training modalities
- Unconditional acceptance and pardoning of examination malpractices and misconduct cases

- Aiding and abetting examination malpractice and misconduct

When a serious administration is put in place to tackle with all sincerity the issue mentioned above, then we can without doubt deduce that the Nigerian is ready attain a sustainable national from its educational sector. However, reverse will be the case when we cling to our old habits. We cannot boast of any breakthrough in the fields of science, medicine and engineering, because Nigeria still imports even tiniest of things a matches and toothpicks from China.

RESEARCH METHOD

The design of this study is ex-post facto. In a situation whereby the researcher in a systematic empirical inquiry, has no direct control on independent variables due to their inherent nature that cannot be manipulated, this design can be applied. There are no direct manipulations of the independent variables, rather inferences are made about the causal relationships among the variables. This type of research according to Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2011), asks 'what factors seem to be associated with certain occurrences or conditions, or aspects of behavior'. In this study application and admission data were collected from JAMB to identify access to higher education and two Executive Secretaries of NCCE and NBTE were interviewed to identify the challenges and the possible solutions to the setbacks.

DISCUSSION

The place of education in the sustainable development of any country cannot be overemphasized. Most of the developed and the developing countries that we have in world today took the issue of education seriously to achieve the feats they have achieved. In addition, the background for national development and the essential catalyst for national development is the University education. In Nigeria, we cannot conclude that the feat for a sustainable national development has been achieved. The assertion that no country can rise beyond the academic standard of its citizens is categorically true. The standard of education in Nigeria has fallen to very low ebb. Several discussions and interviews with managers of education and scholars have shown that the standard of education in Nigeria is on the downward trend. Lots of reasons are attributable for the down trend. Firstly, it is the issue of the politicization of the education sector. The politicians in Nigeria have turned the tertiary institutions in Nigeria into a hub for political maneuvers. It is common knowledge in Nigeria for politicians to send

their wards, friends and or political thugs to the tertiary institutions for employments without being interviewed. The issuance fake result is on the increase and with those fake results teachers are employed. Those employed cannot perform because there was no interaction with the intended lecturer before his appointment. Such persons would not have any knowledge to pass unto others and the quest for a sustainable national development is thwarted. The second is what I term in Hausa as “the A TAIMAKA SYNDROME” meaning please help syndrome. In most tertiary institutions in Nigeria today, most students graduate through the syndrome. Relations, friends and even colleagues of the lecturer whose examination has just been written call the lecturer to help pass their relation or friend who wrote the examination. The student must not fail because he or she has a godfather. The school management also go to the extent of querying lecturers because they refused to adhere to the syndrome. Thirdly, the issue of religious jingoism and bigotry plays a vital role in downward trend that is being experienced in the tertiary institutions of learning in Nigeria today. Lecturers are not employed based on merits and qualifications but based on religious, regional, tribal, social or class status. The appointments in addition also go to the highest bidder. Looking at the issues raised it deduceable that the attainment of a sustainable national development Nigeria through the tertiary institutions is a feat that has not yet been achieved and may remain only but a mirage.

CONCLUSION

This paper examined the role of Nigerian universities as the big drive for the need for a sustainable national development. However, perusing through the paper, lots of issues have been raised, from the aspirations of those who made projections for a better Nigeria, to the proliferations of universities in the country and the moral and academic decadence inherent in the sector today, we can conclude that even though the universities are veritable tools for sustainable development in a country, Nigeria is yet to see that breakthrough. The unchecked corrupt practices, irregular employment of teaching staff, truancy and excessive malpractices are what we witness in most Nigerian universities. Other major issues that affect the university education in Nigeria include poor funding, brain drain, poor staff development modalities, lack of viable research centers, instability of the academic calendar, liberalization of universities and its resultant effect and the politicization of the appointments of head of institutions and other principal officers.

SUGGESTIONS ON HOW TO TACKLE THE PROBLEMS

- Heads of institutions should be appointed based on merit
- Adequate funding should be maintained in the universities
- Staff and students who engage in examination malpractice should be dealt with accordingly
- Viable research and study centers should be established in all universities
- Positive opinion of all stakeholders in the education sector should be given due attention.

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