

UNIVERSAL BASIC EDUCATION AS A BASIS FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

This study adopted literature review to evaluate Universal Basic education as a basis for sustainable development in Nigeria. The review revealed that education for national development should not be construed as merely the acquisition of literacy or other skills or the preparation of individuals for employment market but for Universal Basic Education to be relevant to sustainable development, it must be seen as a vision that seeks to balance human and economic well-being with cultural traditions and respect for available natural and human resources. Based on this, it was recommended among others that the entire education programme and practice be re-oriented to address sustainability.

Keywords: UBE, sustainable development, acquisition, literacy

INTRODUCTION

Basic Education which teaches literacy, innumeracy and encourages cognitive, affective and social development is a pedagogic experience shared in one form or another by majority of human beings. No matter what other educational experiences that may follow, Basic Education is generally formative and lasting. It is at this point that the students have the greatest power to effect powerful and positive life altering change. The basic goals of UBE therefore, remain the laying of a foundation for life-long learning for all sections of the population, whatever be their conditions in life. The National antecedents to Universal Basic Education are part and parcel of Nigeria's educational history. The anti-colonial struggles which stressed the liberation of the people with a strong emphasis on educational opportunities must be mentioned and the post-colonial educational policy of the three regional governments which has different approaches but which pursued the common goal of widening Nigerian's educational base and re-shaping the educational pyramid.

The first Nation-wide tuition free Primary Education scheme in Nigeria was launched in September 8th, 1979. The provision for the scheme is contained in the third Sustainable Development plan 1975-80. The rationale for the introduction of the scheme according to Ukeje, (1991) is the recognition that Universal Primary Education "is a pre-requisite for the equalization of educational opportunities across the country" and according to him this was perhaps:

"An attempt to implement Article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights which states that everyone has the right to education and that this shall be free at least in the elementary and primary stages. It is also in keeping with the provisions of the Addis Ababa conference on African education at which one of the agreements was that by the year 1980 all African states should provide free Universal and compulsory education to its citizens".

Universal Basic Education in Nigeria has its International as well as its National antecedents. At the International level Obanya (2000) draws attention to the following:

- The 1948 Universal Declaration on Human Rights which emphasized the right of everyone to education with special reference to basic education.
- The concern for a world educational crisis leading to an International Conference on the same theme in Paris in 1968 and the publication of a book on the subject by Philips Coombs, and the establishment of the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO).
- The Universal search for a precised definition on the concept of Basic Education, which led to Jomtien (1990) World Conference on Education.
- Ouagadougou (1992) Declaration on the Education of women and Girls.
- OAU Decade of Education (1997 - 2006).
- Recife (Brazil) Declaration on the pursuit of the New Delhi (1991) goals on massive reduction of illiteracy.
- The Dakar (2000) recommendation on the pursuit of Jomtien Goals.
- Social Development Summit Copenhagen (1996).
- The Beijing conference on women and Development (1997). However, the most important lesson from the international context has to do with what has become popularly known as the Jomtien Goals. The Jomtien (1990) Declaration and framework of Action on Education for All (EFA) detailed basic education as follows:
 - Basic Education is not a package but a process.
 - Basic Education is not a question of years of formal education but a question of acquisition of skills.
 - Basic Education is that foundation level that emphasizes

literacy, innumeracy, basic life skills and most importantly learning-to-learn skills.

- Basic Education emphasis learning, de-emphasizing repetition and dropouts.

- Basic Education as an essential part of broad-based policy on inclusive education. Nationally, the Universal Basic Education Programme was formally launched in Sokoto on 30th September, 1999, by President Olusegun Obasanjo. The objectives of the programme include the following:

- Developing in the entire citizenry a strong consciousness for education and a strong commitment to its vigorous promotion.

- The provision of free, universal basic education to every Nigeria child of school going-age.

- Reducing drastically the incidence of dropout from the formal school system (through improved relevance, quality and efficiency).

- Catering for the learning needs of the young person who, for one reason or another has had to interrupt their schooling through appropriate forms of complementary approaches to the provision and promotion of basic education.

- Ensuring the acquisition of the appropriate level of literacy innumeracy, manipulative, communicative and life skills as well as the ethical, moral and civic values needed for laying a solid foundation for life-long learning.

UNIVERSAL BASIC EDUCATION (UBE) ACT 2004

The Universal Basic Education bill was an executive sponsored Bill sent to the National Assembly to give a legal backing to the Universal Basic Education. The 1st and 2nd reading of the Bill were on 26th and 27th August, 2003 respectively and the 3rd reading was on 28th August, 2003, the Bill was passed into law by both houses of the National Assembly on 28th August, 2003. The president Olusegun Obasanjo, signed the Bill into law on 12th

may, 2004 the Bill according to the Federal Republic of Nigeria, (2003) seeks:

- To provide a compulsory, free Universal Basic Education (UBE) for all Children of primary and Junior Secondary School age, it further seeks to provide punishment for parents for failing to comply with its provisions".

The new legal status of the scheme according to Iheonunekwu, and Nkemakolam, (2006) has the following far reaching implications.

- Its policy objectives aim to provide universal free and compulsory education at the primary and the first three years of secondary school and to provide functional literacy for adult illiterates.

- Universal Basic Education (UBE) has now become everybody's obligation including governments, civil society, and organized private sector, the formal and informal sector, Parents Teachers Association, students and parliamentarians.

- The problem of poverty being an impediment to schooling has been eliminated.

- There are sanctions for parents who failed to send their children and wards to school.

- UBE is inclusive education since it embraces both the formal and the non-formal settings.

EDUCATION FOR SUSTAINABILITY AND NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Sustainability is a complex and an evolving concept. Many scholars and practitioners have invested years trying to define it and envisioning how to achieve it on national and local levels. But Sustainability is hard to define and implement and it is also difficult to teach. More challenging is the task of totally re-orienting the entire education system in order to achieve Sustainability. However, the concept of Sustainability gained its first widespread

attention with the publication of the Brundtland Commission Report, Our Common Future by World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED) (1987).

The commission defined Sustainable Development as "Development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs". The Sustainable Development Commission (SDC) (2004) offers an alternative definition that:

"Sustainable Development provides a frame work for redefining progress and redirecting our economies to enable people to meet their basic needs and improve their quality of life, while ensuring that the natural systems, resources and diversity upon which they depend are maintained and enhanced both for their benefit and for that of future generations".

National Development has meant different things to different writers. Some have tended to focus on production and thus narrowly viewed it as a process of achieving a buoyant economy (Stepanov, 2004, Adesanya, 2004). For those who focus on the natural environment. (Taranets & Alyona, 2004, Raheem, Hanninem & Ogunyemi, (2004), sustainable development is all about achieving an ecological balance. And yet for others, Newman (2004) and Scoullos (2004) opined that' "Sustainable Development is a process that goes beyond what is expressed in these two narrow perspectives, to include all what humanity and nature require for their existence both at the present moment as well as in the future". This last perspective is particularly evident in the popular report of the World Commission on Environment and Development (1987) which asserts that Sustainable Development is:

"a process in which the exploitation of resources, the direction of investments, the orientation of technological development, and institutional change are all in harmony and enhance both current and future potential to meet human needs and aspirations".

The definition of Sustainable Development has been amplified to integrate issues of economic growth, social development and environmental protection following the Rio Earth Summit of 1992 and the Johannesburg World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) of 2002. Documents emanating from these conferences suggest that Sustainable Development is anchored on three pillars of sustainability; economy environment and society. In the words of Newman (2004) the emerging consensus shows that sustainability principles emphasis that the pursuit of economic viability as an end in itself, driven by a neo-classical model of economics, does not maintain or enhance ecological health and human well-being. Rio de Janeiro underscores the importance of education in sustainable development. The Rio conference specifically identified four major thrusts of education for sustainable development as:

- Promotion and improvement of Basic Education.
- Reorienting Existing Education at all levels to address National Development.
- Developing public understanding and awareness of sustainability
- Training.

The core objective of education for Sustainable Development according to UNESCO (2003) is the promotion of values and ethics through education at different levels, in order to make an impact on people's life styles and behaviour and help to build a sustainable future. Tilbury (2003) is of the opinion that it is designed to motivate, equip and involve individuals and social groups in reflecting on how they currently live and work, in making informed decisions and creating ways to work towards a more sustainable world. Indeed, it is about learning for change among adults and youths in order to achieve sustainable living (IUCH, 2003).

With the above objectives in mind, for Universal Basic Education to be relevant to Sustainable Development, it must be seen as a vision of education that seeks to balance human and economic well-being with cultural traditions and respect for the earth's resources. According to Iheonunekwu (2004) education for National development should not be construed as merely the acquisition of literacy or other skills or the preparation of individuals for employment market. The Objectives of Sustainable Development are that:

- It must train the individual for a better appreciation of his own cultural traditions while at the same time equipping him/her with the ability to absorb new ideas, new information and new data for resolving the constantly changing problems of his environment
- It must train the individual to relate to and interact meaningfully with other individuals in the society and to appreciate the importance of human organization.
- It must develop the creative ability of individuals especially in cultural and technological realms.
- It must foster in the individuals those values, which make good citizenship such as honesty, selflessness, tolerance, dedication, hard work and personal integrity.
- It must provide the culture of productivity by enabling every individual to discover the creative genius in him and apply it to the improvement of the existing skills and techniques of performing specific tasks thereby increasing the efficiency of his personal and societal efforts.

CURRICULUM IMPERATIVES OF UNIVERSAL BASIC EDUCATION

A major curriculum imperative of Universal Basic Education for the attainment of Sustainable development demands of the teacher that schooling should be geared to preparing the

young learner for living a successful life both for his own good and for the good of his community as a whole. According to Okam and Bozimo (2002) this line of thought implies that the curricular of the school must endorse and propagate the following ideals:

- Reflecting community realities.
- Providing opportunities for individuals for active and meaningful participation in schoolwork.
- Generating creative activity among children
- Stressing among learners and individuals respect for the dignity of labour, national loyalty and consciousness.

The foregoing ideals have lots of implication for the teachers who are indispensable partners in the successful implementation of Universal Basic Education for Sustainable Development (Kaivola & Kaasinen, 2004). Their empowerment in the knowledge, skills, values and methodology of Sustainability principles is bound to have a multiplier effect on the learners in both the formal and informal education sectors. However recent assessments of the state of pre-service and in-service teacher education in Nigeria point to feelings of neglect, alienation and disenchantment (Iwovi, 1998, Ajayi, Ogunyemi & Sotonade, 2004). When teachers are poorly paid and/or irregularly paid, they cannot put in their best in implementing the curricula and will not act in manners capable of fostering Sustainable Development. Another related implication for the teacher is the poor funding of education. In Nigeria for instance, most schools are in sorry state characterized by dilapidated structures, overcrowded classrooms, poor staffing, and unavailability of basic teaching and learning materials. Teacher Education Institutions such as Colleges of Education, Universities Institutes of Education and Faculties of Education are given second rate treatment as against other profession like medicine and law. This has adverse effect on the self-image and occupational prestige of teachers in training as well

as those who train them. Under such circumstances it becomes pretty difficult if not impossible for teacher educators to undertake meaningful research that would equip them as the reservoir of human resources of trainers in Sustainable Development strategies (Ogunyemi, 2005).

Another likely difficulty in this context of implementation is matching word with action. Sustainability demands that theory is matched with practice. Governments in Nigeria both at National, State and Local levels are supposed to demonstrate leadership by mainstreaming education for Sustainability into all sectors and activities - agriculture, sports, recreation, health and industrialization (Okidi, 2003). According to Yaqub, (2003) a critical assessment of Nigerian's national goals vis-à-vis daily activities of those in government does not support the acclaimed desire for a "land full of bright opportunities for all citizens" given the wasteful use of resources by those in government.

In addition to the above issues is political instability, this makes policy continuity almost an exception rather than the norm. Policies seem to come and go with governments that enunciate them, according to Okidi (2003) unless a country stabilizes its democratic infrastructure, it might lose out in the efforts to use education for promoting sustainable development.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Education at various levels can shape the world of tomorrow, equipping individuals and societies with the skills, perspectives, knowledge and values to live and work in a Sustainable manner. Universal Basic Education for Sustainability is a vision of education that seeks to balance human and economic well-being with cultural traditions and respect for the earth's natural resources. Pursing sustainability through Universal Basic Education requires educator and learners to reflect critically on their own communities, identify

non-viable elements in their lives, and explore tension among conflicting values and goals. It brings a new motivation to learning as pupils become empowered to develop and evaluate alternative visions of a sustainable future and to work collectively to fulfill these visions.

It is therefore, imperative that to ensure that Universal Basic Education achieves the goals of Sustainability, it requires quality education as a prerequisite and requires the following:

- * **Recognition of the challenge**
 - Collective responsibility and constructive partnership
 - Acting with determination
 - The indivisibility of human dignity.
- * **Learning to be**
 - Learning to live together
 - Learning to do

The reason for this is that education not only provides scientific and technical skills, it also provides the motivation, justification, social support for pursuing and applying them. There is great need to reorient the entire education programme and practices to address sustainability. Nations need to clarify whether their educators are being asked to teach about Sustainability or to change the goals and methods of development. The answer to this question will profoundly affect each nation's course of action. Education will need to catch the wave of educational reform. The proponents of education for Sustainability need to identify and illustrate the linkages between the principles of Sustainability and long-term economic well-being of the nation. If education for Sustainability can be linked to the current global education reform movement, educating for Sustainability will be swept along with the energy of the reform effort.

Government should work out a model to follow, without

models to adapt and adopt, it becomes difficult for implementations. Governments and schools should create a process to define what education for Sustainability is with respect to local context. Such a process is challenging. It calls for a public participation process in which all of the stakeholders in a community carefully examine what they want their children to know, do, and value, when they leave the formal education system. This means that the community must try to predict the political, economical and social conditions of the near and distant future.

It should be apparent to Ministries of Education and School Administrators that developing locally relevant education for Sustainability curriculum will be facilitated by creating public participation processes that allow communities to shape the major ideas underpinning their own curriculum rather than spending time searching for curricular models to adopt, it would be better to invest time and resources in developing processes by which communities of different sizes and tradition can define their own education for sustainable development programme.

The successful implementations of education for Sustainability will require responsible, accountable leadership and expertise in systematic education change. Realistic strategies must be developed to create knowledgeable and capable leadership. The teacher has to seize every opportunity classroom-wise in making the content of education functional and relevant to the needs of the learner. The processes involved must be geared to relating all lessons to the dilemmas of the times in terms of the learners and within the frame work of his community.

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