

THE IMPACT OF SOCIAL SCIENCE EDUCATION IN ADDRESSING THE PROBLEMS OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

Despite the projections of the United Nations Sustainable Development goals (2015), Nigeria still lags behind when assessed from different developmental parameters. It is not just appalling but very shameful that today the majority of Nigerian citizens are still impoverished and lacking the basic needs of life. Today in the wake of the terrible inflation the country is currently undergoing, access to food, housing, good education, accessible roads, electricity and security among others are issues the average Nigerian citizens have to contend with. When measured in strict human, technological and economic parameters, Nigeria seems to be retarding rather than improving. The increasing number of school drop-outs and the declining interest in education by Nigerian children and youths provoke another level of concern. The situation is so bad that one wonders if the country will meet 50% of the criteria before the target time-frame 2030 if the trend continues unchecked. In this piece, the authors explore the role of social science education in enhancing the process of sustainable development in Nigeria. This position is furnished by the belief in education as being a most important driving force of development. The purpose of this paper is to explore what ways Social Studies and Social Science Education can enhance the course of development, its various areas of application and what implications the logic of inquiry has for the stakeholders in the development agenda of the country. To achieve this aim, therefore, the work adopts the methods of textual and descriptive analyses to unravel the entailment as well as the *praxis* orientations of Social studies and Social Science Education. It is equally prescriptive as it addresses the roles of the social actors and agencies required to make the course of development achievable via robust Social Science Education in the country. The results of the study indicate clear connections between robust science education programme and sustainable development in organized social setting.

Key Words: Sustainability, Development, Education, Social Studies and Social-Science.

1. Introduction

The specific concerns of this paper addresses the potentials of enhancing the process of sustainable development in Nigeria through the joint mentorship of social studies and social science education in the various school levels in the country. This position is informed by the fact that the contemporary clamour for sustainable development appears more realistic and engaging than older models of development assessments which hitherto revolved around mere economic objectives (GDP) and to a narrower stance, the emphasis on attendant Human Development Index (HDI). Having explored the adverse effects on radical pursuit of socioeconomic development through linear production and traditional industrial models which

neglects the health and preservation of the global natural environments, the United Nations now projects the idea of environmental sustainability vis-a-vis sustainable development. It appears that given this trending concept of development, responsibility is no longer left in the hands of government and state institutions alone, but engages every other member of the society who naturally and morally has the duty to protect the environment and preserve its scarce resources so that generations yet unborn will not suffer lack. With this notion of development then, the idea of “responsible environmental citizenship” arises and with it notable consequences for the educational system of each country. One major responsibility of the education system of every nation is the foremost task of grooming and mentoring children and youths towards becoming responsible citizens. Obviously, this task falls within the purview of the Social Science Education (social studies and civic education inclusive). It is believed that when the objectives of these educational disciplines are adequately enforced through the system, schools, and teachers (incorporating the environmental, sustainability and development studies in their wake), then students will actually acquire the requisite skills and attitude to actively participate and move the society to achieve sustainable development.

2. Conceptual Framework

It is important to understand in elaborate terms the underlying meaning of the key concepts of use in this paper. This is because, the meaning and projections of Sustainable Development has several features that distinguish it from the ordinary use and understanding of the word “development”. The same also applies in delineating the concept “social science education” as a field of study distinct in its approach and methods to knowledge and application. Firstly, sustainable development according to the 1987 report of the UN Commission on Environment and Development, *Brundtland Commission*, is development that “meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs”. (UNCED, 1987). From its earliest developmental concerns in 1983, and later 1987, the *Brundtland Commission* contributed in popularizing the concept of sustainable development as distinct from the erstwhile understanding of development. Before this and during the period under mention, the world has underscored the fact that continuous industrialization and development strides without considering the effects on the environment and rich bank of natural resources spread across the globe. However, with the persistent global depletion of natural resources, degradation of natural habitats and ecosystems, environmental pollution, etc., there arose the need to review the concept of development along more sustainability channels such that tenable developmental strides will be attained without jeopardizing the future. Apart from providing clarity on the concept of sustainable development, the commission emphasized the three interconnected pillars of Sustainable development which are: Environmental, economic and social dimensions of development. (WCED, 1987)

In alignment therefore with the more coordinated efforts of the United nations to carve out clear objectives to attaining sustainability in the different spheres of application, the Sustainable Development Goal, number 4 categorically outlined Quality Education as an important Sustainable development Goal. (UN, 2015) This requirement specifically draws the attention of education systems in each country to raising such questions as to what is the specific role of education in facilitating sustainable development and what specific role can Social Science education within the entire educational framework or system in Nigeria play towards

making this project realistic? It also emphasizes the main social actors in the sustainable development project and what tasks are expected of them in their individual capacities.

On its own part, Social Science is the study of how society works, taking to cognizance the “relationships between individuals and societies, rather than focusing on the physical world”. (Liberto, 2024) They are specifically applied in such fields as economics, psychology, education, social work, sociology to mention but a few. Subsequently, Social Science Education, becomes that field of education which provides “learners with an awareness of possible situations and their possible roles in shaping the future.” (Testbook, 2024) At this point in time, it is important to link the connection between Social Science and Social Studies, both of which are integral to the topic under discourse. While social science education focuses on systematic study of society, its institutions, agencies and goals, via such subjects as political science, economics, anthropology, sociology; social studies provides students with the basic understanding of various aspects of society, culture, history, economics, politics and geography. (FCT-EMIS, 2024) To the student of social studies, therefore, the education system sets out such objectives as : civic and citizenship education, cultural awareness and appreciation, historical understanding, geographical knowledge, political awareness and economic literacy. Others are: fostering awareness of issues on social justice and equity, media literacy, critical thinking, problem-solving, effective communication and global awareness. (FCT-EMIS, 2024). In a broader scope, therefore, Social Studies integrates the combined study of social sciences, humanities and the arts to capture essential knowledge on the society and man’s immediate social and physical environments.

3. The Imperative of Sustainable Development in Africa

The course of sustainable development in the global setting is being championed by different institutional fronts and by the various social agencies at both national and international levels. Given the slow rate of development in most countries of the world especially the “less developed” countries, amidst the continued depletion of the environment and increased environmental pollution, the need to redefine the developmental parameters became source of concern to the world leaders thereby informing the United Nations’ Sustainable Development Goals in 2015. Since then the individual countries have made their specific efforts to attain the target Sustainable Development Goals through social policy, affirmative action and other institutional platforms. In a brief survey of the progress so far with some West African Countries towards the ideal set by the UN one finds relative slow progress when compared with the strides achieved since 2015 in other developing nations in the West. In a study conducted by Ilesanmi (2007) on the rather unfortunate situation in West Africa in terms of development,

The region has hitherto maintained a significantly low Human Development Index (HDI=0.33). Baseline data on ECOWAS Member States lowly compared with those of many developed economies: West Africa has rural majority (76%); high poverty level (42%); low life expectancy (50 years); high fertility rate (6.4); high infant mortality (92/1000); very low GDP and GNP (\$330/year and \$310/year); low school enrolment (37.5%); very low literacy level (27.29%); very low population: medical personnel and lowly developed agricultural, economic and infrastructure sectors. The study reveals that the current level of development in each member State of ECOWAS is much of the efforts of

the nation in question and not necessarily owing to any significant developmental effort of ECOWAS. The resultant development indexes are rather low.

In a more streamlined and recent survey, the African Development Bank characterizes Nigeria's progress towards development as slow and tepid with a projected rise from 0.4 points to 2.9 % in 2024 to a slight expected improvement at 3.7 % in 2025. It goes on to note that the country's slow pace is caused by the effects of domestic economic reforms put up to address the country's persistent economic imbalances and structural distortions. (ADB, 2024) Due to the complex nature of factors affecting the slow developmental pace of West African countries, Nigeria inclusive, Ilesanmi therefore suggests that there is "need for each country to deliberately determine to improve its development situation by addressing the indicators contributory to the overall development index". In agreement with Ilesanmi, it is the position and conviction of this paper that the conventional global standards for measuring development do not apply evenly for African countries as it does for the Western world due to their diverse historical and sociopolitical factors. It is to this end therefore that beyond the routine analysis of development via GDP and HDI assessment models, one adopts the Sustainable Development Model which encompasses more modest, relative, localized and pragmatic principles that can actual drive development in pursuance of the UN Sustainable Development ideals. In more realistic terms, the environmental challenges within most African countries like oil spillage, pollution of most natural water sources, global warming, carbon emission, and continuous exploration of crude oil and other solid minerals within the Africa soil without coordinated efforts to institute national and continental programmes for environmental sustainability challenge the very notions of development projected in Africa by the Western Global economic and human development assessment standards. Put in more critical terms, without efforts to address the issues of environmental sustainability alongside projected efforts to attain national and continental development in Africa, the resulting state of affairs will be a mockery to existing social and public policies on development.

4. Assessing the Developmental Challenges in Nigeria

On the Nigerian particular scenario, before now assessment of national developments have been based on Gross GDPs calculated over stipulated time, but also placed on par with the developmental pedigrees of the advanced Western nations, thereby being subject to International Economics, Trade and politics. According to Ezeanyika & Oruebor (2001), "the use of GDP has long dominated, and greatly influenced the discussion on economic growth and development". This measuring standard in the contention of the authors have been criticized as not being most appropriate standard for measuring a country's rate of development. To fill in the required gap, other alternative measures were adopted and fundamental to them is the Human Development Index (HDI) which was developed by the United nations development Programme. (Ezeanyika & Oruebor, 2019). As the HDI's appraisal of development suggests, the important parameters of education, income and life expectancy stand premium to the concerns of national development. For Ezeanyika & Oruebor, (2001, 178), while human development is perceived as a process of increasing people's choices and income seen as having inevitable impact on human development targeting escape from poverty and living above assumed expectancy, life expectancy and education remain central to the improvement of human capabilities. In the wake of all these yardsticks for measurement, one imagines the actual instrument with which to measure

development in Nigeria. There is also the current accusations to the Western world and Europe of strategically undermining true development in Africa, especially through the various neocolonialist modes. This brings back the suspicions on acclaimed globalization agenda, foreign loans disbursement through the United Nations Financial organs (World Bank, IMF), internationally-influenced social and public economic policies over time, and the perceived exploitation of the country's natural resources (Crude Oil theft, bunkery and other corrupt sponsored state-economic practices. A very recent African-based developmental assessment reports that,

The depreciation of African currencies persisted in 2023, albeit to a lesser extent than in 2022. Under pressure from sustained high global interest rates and continued global uncertainty fueled by geopolitical and trade tensions, most African currencies depreciated further against a stronger US dollar in 2023. For instance, Nigeria's exchange rates depreciated by 95.6 percent in 2023. This depreciation largely reflected a correction following reforms in the foreign exchange market in June 2023, which led to the floating of the Naira. (ADB, 2024)

An attempt to integrate these separate assessment tools alongside the claims of neocolonialist impact on African's slow-walk to development, defining the right parameters for assessing development in all its major facets become confusing, complex and relative. In modest terms, however, a critical look into the demands of sustainable development takes us into wider and more integrating measures of development.

5. Social Science Education in Nigeria and its Role in Enhancing Sustainable Development

The education system in Nigeria has not remained passive towards incorporating Social Science subjects and courses within its school system comprising primary, secondary and tertiary educational levels of teaching and learning. This can be seen in the Nigerian Social Science curriculum which flaunts such subjects like geography, economics, political science, sociology, history, psychology and business studies at both the secondary school and tertiary schools spread across the country. (Federal Ministry of Education, 2017)

While the focus of Social Science is the study of human beings in their various aspects of social lives to enable them pursue functional careers (professionalism) and contribute to the growth of society, social studies inculcates local knowledge of the immediate environmental terrains where every citizen is born and develops to adulthood. The point here is on development of the person as a responsible social entity who is expected to have developed capacity to act and represent oneself well in the different spheres of social interaction. As can be seen in the *Encyclopedia Britannica*, social science education comprises several disciplines that study human societies, social interactions and day-to-day social processes that are key to preserving the social entity and or effect desired change where necessary. While economics carries out analysis on the production, distribution and consumption of goods and services within a country, political science deals with examining the structures of governments, policies and political processes that shape public behavior within states. Geography as a discipline takes into consideration the study of man's overall physical environments especially those features typical to the country under study and what measures the citizens have to effectively manage them. It also explores relationships between people, places and environments. There is also anthropology which

explores human societies, cultures and behaviour across time and space. In these and other social science education courses and subjects, the focus is on helping individuals understand complex issues, acquire critical thinking skills and develop problem-solving attitudes in order to prepare them for social work, career, education and research and more over to take charge of the society which among them is the society's development needs.

In line with the unassuming role of social studies which particularizes understanding of one's social and physical environments to his or her immediate environment, social science education prepares the student for responsible life ahead and instill in him or her adequate local knowledge to foster genuine community and society-based development and not just some developmental ideals imposed by foreign or alien sources and educational systems. It is within the integrating and localized educational terrain of social science education that the thrust of this study is directed to. This is because, the expectations of sustainable development are options that are best explored from "within" the system rather than "adopting foreign assessment standards". In as much as the parameters that define sustainable development are universal and rather spelt out in the UN SDGs (2015), attaining such developmental goals as required from the particularized social and geographical settings would be best pursued from within with the citizens actually getting involved, albeit under the supervision of government structures and social policies that reflect local developmental demands. Of course producing citizens with adequate local knowledge, problem-solving attitude and requisite technical skills to enhance actual developmental needs of the country remain the chief goals of social studies and social science education. The clamour for producing environmental citizens points specifically at the function of education directed towards inculcation of right values, attitudes and skills for life in the society. Efforts to foster sustainable development go beyond the functions of governments to include the individual and collective activities of people at micro-social levels. The obligations to defend the natural habitats, ecosystems, natural waters, forests, atmosphere and unique natural resources from continuous depletion in the hands of selfish industrialists and greedy political actors (local and foreign) begin with environmentally responsible citizens. To attain the requisite economic and technological developments deserving of a nation, the government and citizens should principally be bonafide actors and agencies through which robust sustainable development is championed. How else can these actors and agencies of change and development be tutored, nurtured and mentored to become environmental citizens and harbingers of development if not through effective educational system, and functional social science education in particular? One therefore in this paper holds stakeholders of the education system in Nigeria accountable for building a healthy and pragmatic social science education geared towards improving the human developmental needs of the country. At this point in time, we make allusion to the remarkable motto of the Man O' War Order which states thus: "Build the man, build the Community". Typical to the order's objectives is an overwhelming curriculum on leadership development. These range from goals of training people for "good citizenship and responsible leadership". If we agree with the corporate objectives of the Man O' War, Nigeria, then there should not be much ado about incorporating human development as a special principle that works hand-in-glove with the demands of sustainable development. Such practices should be replicated at the various levels of education in the country. Development and environmental studies are important aspects of social science education which should be inculcated into Social Science Education curriculum and well taught in Nigerian schools. This piece indisputably sees an intrinsic connection between human development and the obligation towards environmental

sustainability and sustainable development. Citizens should be environmentally responsible to foster genuine sustainable development in their various communities, states and nations. The true agency to a nation's sustainable development project should be the citizen himself or herself who already is assumed to have been tutored in the social science education courses which are supposed to be compulsorily taught in the primary and lower secondary schools. These days, the emphasis on environmental milestones are not just social responsibilities of state actors but have at its basic unit of application individual environmental actions defined in daily, monthly and annual action plans thereby making each citizen a key player in attaining the UN sustainable development goals. (UNEP, 2022; CBSNews, 2007) With regard to preservation of the environment, and perceived benefits in cyclic production and industrial models, economic models are now championed along cyclic arrangements like is obtainable in the Circular economy model. (Ellen MacArthur Foundation, 2013). This environmental-friendly economic strategy fosters growth and development under the economic development goals without depleting the scarce natural resources but also ensures that less capital is used to attain maximum production and as such improves the GDP of the state from both the private and public sectors. In light of the above arguments, one sees the unique positions accorded to human development and sustainable development. One is intrinsically tied to the other. It is from a robust culture of human development that sustainable development is conceived. Subsequently, with established sustainable economic development strategies, other aspects of development build and grow: technological and others. At the base of all developmental ideals is the premium on human development and this is where Social Science Education serves as basic mentorship guide, but also instrumental to acquiring the essential skills to drive the course of development in any nation. In confirmation of this remarkable role of social science education in preparing eligible statesmen and responsible citizens, social science education "aims at providing learners with an awareness of possible situations and their possible roles in shaping the future." In furtherance, it is acknowledged that social science education inculcates the right personal and social values, democratic and constitutional values necessary for responsible citizenship. (Testbook, 2024) To corroborate this line of argument, one finds reason to accept Ogunbiyi's opinion that the inclusion of social studies education into the Nigerian school curriculum was because of the belief that the subject has the capacity to positively influence, improve and change students' behaviour towards acceptable norms, beliefs, values and attitudes of society. (Ogunbiyi, 2011). Social studies is essentially acknowledged for its task of inculcating the requisite social values and attitudes that make one a functional member of the society. In corroboration of this fact, Dukanwojo (2023) maintains strongly that social studies education lays enabling foundations for active global citizenship, as the student achieves the right skills and capacity to driving sustainable development forward. In a more emphatic way, Umoh (2003) expresses the role of education on fostering sustainable development as a contextual phenomenon. In his opinion, "for social science education to be relevant in ensuring sustainable development, it must focus on the identification of contextualized patterns that can guide action and serve as models for analysis-guided policies. It must derive from the context of our own societal realities that is crucial for greater analytical efficacy and more effective social action and socio-economic development of the developing nations'. This implies that teachers of social studies and other social science subjects engage their students in learning programmes that capture the immediate time-space exigencies affecting the society. Bringing up immediate developmental and environmental issues typical to students' geo-political learning environments can facilitate genuine understanding of

specific problems and knowledge on the best ways to address the challenges. Knowledge in this context should be localized, pragmatic and evolutionary.

It is important to note that, as an educational discipline, the focus of science education is first of all empowering teachers with the desired skills to make impact on students thereby continuing already established mentorship function for the progress of society. It is no wonder then the Imo State University Science Education Department spells out clearly, that the mission statement of its social science education department is

to acquaint her undergraduate student-teachers with the cumulative trends of past events that are relevant to current problems, needs and aspirations of the immediate and wider world, as well as the acquisition of the pedagogical skills and strategies to contribute positively and remarkably in the improvement of Nigerian educational system, and also become teachers without borders.

Following from the above therefore, the objectives of the Department stems from training Social science teachers with academic and professional competence to inculcate knowledge within the various levels of the education system. Apart from ensuring that these teachers are knowledgeable and reliable in their respective areas of specialization, they should be skillful in classroom and man management.

Conclusion

In sum, the projections of this paper is that traditional economic models of assessing development have not really worked for the African continent and Nigeria in particular. This phenomenon is attributed to the pervasive influences of international politics, exploitative global parameters for international trade with Africa over the years, and neocolonialism. The actual challenges confronting African's real development came to limelight with the visible environmental challenges caused by adopted western industrial and commercial practices as seen in the continuous depletion of natural resources' reserves within African soil. With the wake of sustainable development and environmental sustainability projections therefore, a more accommodating and genuine conception of development for Africa was born. This paper adopts this concept of development and situates the place of education in it. It is the contention of the the authors that there is necessary connection between the field of social studies and social science education and sustainable development. For sustainable development to be attainable, everyone must be involved, government and citizens alike. To ensure that environmentally responsible citizens who would drive the wheels of the desired sustainable development are produced, the mentorship and tutelage programmes of social studies and social science education remain fundamental requirements.

Recommendations

- * There is need to declare affirmative action on the natural environments and rich natural reserves in Nigeria against the continued economic and industrial explorations.
- * Environmental and development studies should be made compulsory in all cadres of the education system in Nigeria.

- * There is need for training and retraining of social science teachers on sustainability and environmental skills especially those affecting the Nigerian environments so as to have the technical know-how to inculcate the right skills in their students.
- * At this point in time, the services of environmental experts and social science academics should be jointly employed and sponsored by the Government (Federal, State and Local Governments) to review and improve the curriculum to suite the actual sustainability and developmental needs of the various catchment areas.
- * The authors recommend that the Federal Ministries of Education and Environment, and the National Emergency Management Agency work in synergy to forestall further damage and possible rehabilitation to the already endangered Nigerian natural ecosystems.
- * Pragmatic social policies on sustainable development relative and original to the Nigerian particular needs should be sponsored and placed as key economic drivers to development over and above full adoption of alien models if genuine development is to be attained in the country.

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