

TERTIARY EDUCATION FOR SUSTAINABLE GROWTH AND SELF-RELIANCE: CHALLENGES FOR NIGERIA.

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Abstract

This paper examines the role of tertiary education in enhancing sustainable growth, self-reliance and the challenges it imposes on Nigeria as a developing country. It examined the goals and objectives of tertiary institution in Nigeria as enshrined in the National policy on education. It emphasized mainly the main focus of tertiary institutions in Nigeria. The paper used the SEE model as a guide to highlight the consonance among social, economic and environmental dimensions of development. The paper in conclusion suggested that students in tertiary institutions should be given sound academic training that will make them relevant to the socio-economic and political needs of the 21st Century. Finally it recommended the inculcation of special skills and abilities that geared towards the attainment of national values.

Keywords; Tertiary, Sustainable, Growth, Self-Reliance.

Everyone wants education to make a difference in the lives of the citizens of the country. This difference should affect their skills, knowledge, dispositions and habits. According to Webb (1986), education must not only be compatible with human nature, but it must fit the conditions of the society it serves. It must be flexible so that it can change when conditions change. Since education in its widest sense is 'learning to live', it is obvious that the nature of man and the purpose of life must be vital to a true understanding of the purpose of education. Well, the stakeholders in education consider only immediate aims and fail to ponder the long term aims that alone make their efforts worthwhile. By ignoring the long term aims government and other stakeholders sacrifice the ultimate value of all their efforts, but by giving thought to them they can enrich the lives of the citizenry and make purposeful all the investment in the sector, particularly at the tertiary level of our education.

Tertiary educations are institutions established either by the federal, state or private individuals to produce intermediate and high level manpower to man the various sectors of the economy of the country.

These include the universities, colleges of education, polytechnics and monotechnics, FRN (2004). In this country since the fifties, economist, educationist, politicians, planners etc all over the world have accepted education as a productive investment. Tertiary education institutions being the height of the educational systems and the main source of the training of highly skilled manpower have been allocated considerable part of such investment. Therefore with a view to achieving broad objectives of economic development for sustainable growth and self-reliance, Nigeria has made efforts to develop high level manpower, and the country's manpower planning has come to the fore since early sixties.

Furthermore, trend of events have shown that tertiary institutions in Nigeria have lost focus in terms of their constitutional functions due to poor implementation of long and short term objectives that lead to sustainable growth and development, which in turn, has further undermined the drive to self-reliance and productivity. Sustainable growth or development however, has been largely stripped of whatever radicalism might have inhered originally in its concept and practice, in as much as the political implications of implementing true sustainability have proved too much for the world as it is today. Sustainable growth has moved from the realm of idealization to that of essentially contested concepts and has become the football of competing ideologies (Agunwa 2009). In this case, will must define the term carefully before will try to apply it to real world situation.

Sustainable growth as used in the context of this paper has been defined as improvement in knowledge economy which determines the standing of nations in the global space of social and economic competitiveness which is inextricably linked to the deliberate development of critical mass human capacity. This means sustainable growth is an indices to measure the rate of development in the life of any nation. Similarly, self-reliance as used in the context of the paper refer to an independent individual who has been empowered socially, economically and politically to contribute meaningfully to the development of the society. (Dare, 2009).

Tertiary education however, which is expected to produce an independent individual empowered economically, socially and politically, is saddled with certain national problems which shall be discussed and is the major focus of this paper.

National Goals/Objectives of Tertiary Education in Nigeria.

Since the achievement of her independence the Nigerian government has become more aware of the need to oriented her education to meet the needs of Nigerians and the Nigerian society. Some of the efforts aimed at achieving functional and relevant education for Nigerians are outlined in the National Policy on Education (FRN 2004). Government for instance, is emphatic about relating the country's educational goals and objectives to the needs of the individuals and the society. Consequently, the quality of instruction as emphasized in the policy document is expected to be oriented towards inculcating or is capable of promoting sustainable growth and self-reliance in Nigeria.

The National Policy on Education Published by NERDC (2004) in section 8 No. 5 State the goals of tertiary institutions in Nigeria as: -

- (a) Contribute to national development through high level relevant manpower training.
- (b) Develop and inculcate proper values for the survival of the individual and society.
- (c) Develop the intellectual capability of individual to understand and appreciate their local and external environments.
- (d) Acquire both physical and intellectual skills which will enable individuals to be self-reliant and useful members of the society.
- (e) Promote and encourage scholarship and community service.
- (f) Forge and cement national unity.
- (g) Promote national and international understanding and interactions.

Subsequently in No 60 of the same section, the policy states methods through which tertiary institutions can achieve the above goals to include:

- (1) Teaching
- (2) Research and development
- (3) Articulate staff development programmes
- (4) Generation and dissemination of knowledge.
- (5) A variety of modes of programmes including full-time, part-time, block-release, day release, sandwich etc.
- (6) Access to training funds such as those provided by the Industrial Training Fund (ITF).
- (7) Students Industrial Work Experience Scheme (SIWES)
- (8) Maintain Minimum educational standard through appropriate agencies.
- (9) Inter-institutional co-operation.
- (10) Dedicated services to the community through extra moral and extension services.

The above policy desires depict the amount of hope that Nigeria heaps on her institutions of higher learning as agent of change and development. In the face of the falling standard of Education in Nigeria, this paper seeks to enunciate the roles which the institutions of higher learning need to play to ensure achievement of goals and objectives of tertiary institutions and engineer national development through that level of education.

Tertiary Education in Nigeria for Sustainable Development

Development is concerned with the transformation of the individuals, household, communities, private as well as public institutions through human beings, who will ensure that available resources are properly managed and directed towards societal improvement (Babalola and Atinmo, 2009). According to Stightz (1998), "Development represents a transformation of society, a movement from traditional relations, traditional ways of thinking, traditional ways of dealing with health and education, traditional methods of production, to more modern ways...The changes that are associated with development provide individuals and societies with more control over their own destiny... enriches the lives of individuals..."

Nigeria is blessed with abundant human and mineral resources. Which if properly harnessed through the virtue of self-reliance and productivity, can promote sustainable socio-economic and political development. Sustainable development connotes the ability to keep going and keep up the progress made in various segments of the society. According to Brundtland commission (World Bank, 2003), development is sustainable if it "meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs". Also according to Soubbptona (2004), for development to continue indefinitely, it should balance the interests of different groups of people, within the same generation and among generations, and do so simultaneously in the economic, social and the environmental dimensions of life.

The "SEE Model" depicting the consonance among Social, Economic and Environmental dimensions of development, shows some specific areas of human life that must be developed to be sustainable. Thus, sustainable development is not only concerned with economic growth, but also with equitable distribution of the national wealth through provision of employment, security, education and health. It also involves the provision of an environment that is conducive for productive life, rational use of renewable resources, conservation of the non-renewable ones, fair and free participation as well as the recognition that the prosperity of individual persons is in the wealth of the nation. See table below SEE Model.

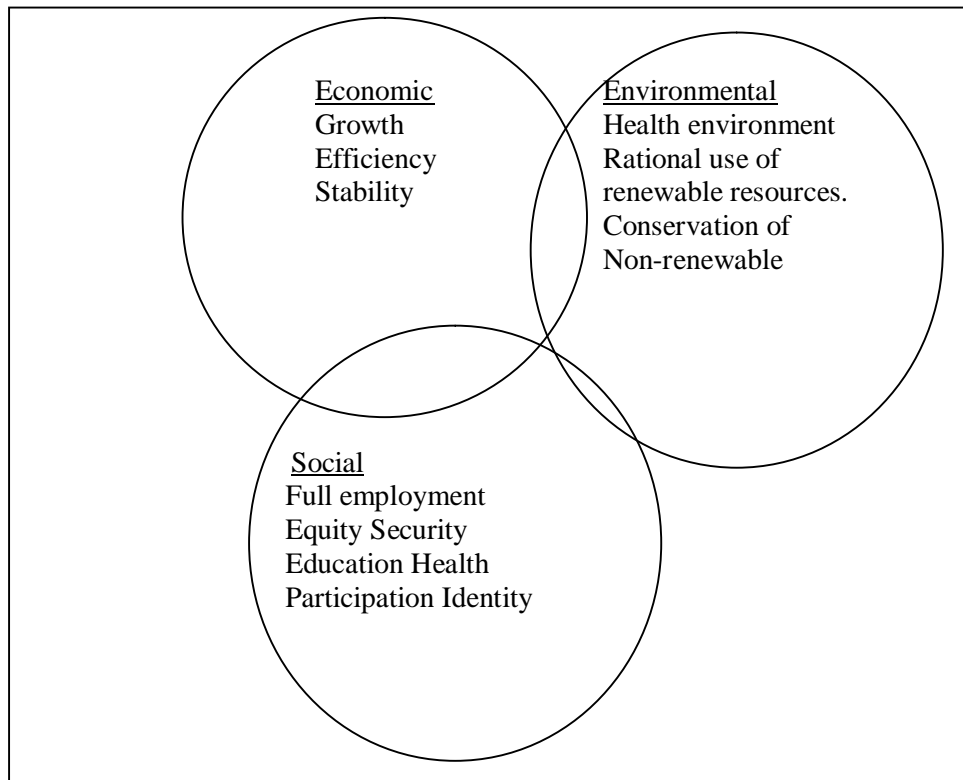


FIG. 1 Soubbptona's. "SEE Model" of sustainable development, adopted from Babalola and Atinmo, 2009.

However, looking at the objectives and goals of tertiary education in Nigeria vis-a-vis the SEE Model, tertiary institutions need to look inward to actualize the laudable

objectives. Tertiary education in Nigeria is deliberately established to produce intermediate and high level manpower to cater for the various sectors of the economy. The training of the recipients of this education should focus on; the inculcation of special skills abilities and orientation that gear towards the attainment of National values such as self-reliance and productivity. The following frantic efforts can be intensified with sincerity of purpose.

- (1) The training of the students should be sound and qualitative.
- (2) Emphasises should be placed on skill acquisition and not on mere possession of academic certificate.

Students in tertiary education should be given sound academic training that will make them relevant to the socio-economic and political needs of the 21st century. Student's preparation in tertiary institution should focus more on practical knowledge and experience rather than the theoretical value orientation that cannot stand the test of time. The training should encompass a wide range of experience and knowledge and not only in the classroom expectations.

Similarly, promotion of self-reliance and sustainable growth can be enhanced if only the training of students in tertiary institutions is focus on science and science related disciplines more than the humanities. A focus on the sciences will open an avenue for the development of science and technology which provides a channel for job opportunities and self-reliance. Therefore, the training of the tertiary education students should focus on developing the individual to acquire scientific skills that will make him productive and self-reliant. Ojo (2001) opined that the teaching of science in higher education is a spring board to technological development, self-reliance and productivity.

Secondly, emphasis on skill acquisition is an urgent call. Teaching in tertiary education should focus on skill acquisition rather than the acquisition of academic certificate. This means that, for students in tertiary institutions to be productive and self-reliance they must acquire basic skills that will enable them to function effectively in the society. The type of experience which students acquired now in the tertiary institutions is the type that gives them a wide range of theoretical background without any relevance to the actual practice. This means that students have vast knowledge of theoretical experience but are often found wanting when it comes to the actual practice, (Dare 2009). Therefore, for tertiary education to be able to train students for self-reliance and productivity for sustainable growth, students' preparation should focus attention on skill acquisition more than acquisition of academic certificate. This means that individuals should be able to defend the academic certificate they hold through task performance (Fafunwa 1974).

Constraints to Inculcation of Sustainable Development and Self –Reliance in Tertiary Education.

This aspect of the paper reviewed some empirical studies by some scholars on constraints on value orientation in tertiary institutions in Nigeria. A study by Musazzi (2000) on constraints on value orientation in Africa revealed poverty as the cause of problems in higher institutions. His finding shows that most Africans live below one U.S. dollar per day. The relevance of his study to Nigeria is that most students in tertiary institutions are so poor that they cannot eat three square meals daily. The implication of the situation is that a poor student can easily be tempted to steal and not to return lost but found items.

Moreover, poverty can also cripple the efforts of students in the purchase of relevant textbooks required for the attainment of academic excellence. Worst still, those students who have graduated for many years without any gainful employment will always assume that Nigeria is not worth dying for. All these nasty experiences caused by poverty could hinder the development of the value orientation in the aspect of sustainable development and self-reliance in tertiary institutions.

Another study by Balu (2000) also revealed evil acts of cult activities in the tertiary institutions in Nigeria. According to his research findings cultism is a secret society and its major objective is vengeance on non-members. Cult activities have become a threat to non-members including lecturers in the tertiary institutions.

Balu (2000) asserted that cult members vent their anger on lecturers whose course they failed and harass girls sexually, both students property and sometimes constitute themselves into a group of robbers. In most cases they hire brilliant students to write their examinations. They often create confusion and a state of uncertainty in tertiary institutions. The activities of cultists negate the value of self-reliance and sustainable growth in tertiary institutions in Nigeria.

Moreover, Dare (2004) indentified examination malpractice as constraints to improved development in tertiary institutions. He asserted that examination malpractice has become so rampant in the tertiary institutions that the value of the certificates issued by Nigeria universities is questionable by the international communities. Worst still, some Nigeria graduates cannot defend the certificate they claim to have in terms of actual practice. The cumulative effects of these are that some of the graduates from these institutions are not sound and efficient to be self-reliant and productive.

Another study by Ojo, (2002) revealed incessant strike actions by the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU). According to this study, ASUU often claims to be fighting for better infrastructures for effective teaching and learning in the universities. Their demands often lead to the closure of the universities for several months and even sometimes for a whole year as the situation in 1981 and 1985. ASUU strikes and whatever their demands might be, often paralyzed academic activities. The lamentable aspect of it is that students are often rushed when they resume, and the actual period of time meant for lectures is not usually exhausted before examinations are conducted. This situation may not create a favourable ground for the development of value orientation capable of promoting self-reliance and sustainable growth in the tertiary institutions in particular and the nation in general.

Conclusions

Students in tertiary education should be given sound academic training that will make them relevant to the socio-economic and political needs of the 21st century. In any case, student's preparation should focus attention on the shrinking labour market and the astronomical rise of unemployment in Nigeria that preparation should focus more on practical knowledge and experience rather than the theoretical value orientation that cannot stand the test of time.

The training however, should encompass a wide range of experience and knowledge and not only in the classroom expectations. Tertiary education is established to produce both intermediate and high level manpower to cater for the various sectors of the economy in the country. For these individuals to be efficient they must be properly trained to acquire skills and knowledge that will enable them inculcate values that will promote self-reliance and sustainable growth in Nigeria.

Recommendations:

Nigeria is blessed with abundant human and mineral resources. These valuable resources, if properly harnessed through the value of self-reliance and productivity can promote sustainable growth in socio-economic, political and cultural development of Nigeria. The inculcation of special skills abilities and orientation that are geared towards the attainment of national values such as self-reliance and productivity for sustainable growth is highly needed. The following frantic efforts can be intensified with sincerity of purpose.

- (1) The training of students should be sound and qualitative.
- (2) Emphasis should be placed on skill acquisition and not mere possession of academic certificate.
- (3) One of the effective ways of developing the virtue of self-reliance and productivity of the recipients of tertiary education is the inclusion of general education courses in the curriculum of tertiary education. These courses apart from exposing the students to moral values, to have respect and dignity for labour, they are also expose to the evils of dishonesty, cheating, corruption, stealing, drug abuse, wickedness, selfishness as well as other anti-social behaviour (Ilori, 1985).
- (4) Nigeria should involve a practical approach to sustainable development. A practical approach to sustainable development demands direct and constant engagement with both the materials conditions of a community's existence and the relationship of that community to the wider world.

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