

ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION PRACTICES FOR THE ADULT IN THE COMMUNITY

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Abstract

All over the world the natural environment has been degraded at a rate that was unimaginable after just one hundred years. Many people want to do something about it. In focusing on basic considerations for successful environmental education, this paper attempts to highlight areas adults in the community can help make the vision of sustainable development education a reality. It advocates a change of attitude and pragmatic contributions from adults; a critical cornerstone in achieving sustainable development education.

Introduction

Environmental education today, more than any other time in human history has become an integral part of general education programs because of the global quest for sustainable development. Education in general terms has been regarded as a continuous process or a life long human development exercise; it is an integral part of man's life span. Grace Alele Williams (1999) quoted Robert Which to have described education as an exercise involved in the drama of human history.

The thrust of this paper; environmental education practices for the adult in the community is no other than a way of emphasizing a vital aspect of adult education. According to UNESCO - Nairobi conference of 1976, adult education is the term used to describe the entire body of organized educational process, whatever the content, level and method, whether formal or otherwise, whether they prolong or replace initial education in schools, colleges and universities as well as in apprenticeship, where by persons regarded as adult by the society to which they belong, develop their abilities, enrich their knowledge, improve their technical or professional qualification and bring about changes in their attitude or behavior in the two fold perspective of full personal development and participation in balanced, independent social, economic and cultural development. From this universal definition, adult education becomes an exercise in education in its widest sense because it is not only an Idea, it is a goal and a body of knowledge organized by man for man in the society. Environmental education is an important aspect of this exercise.

Education in whatever form, level and method according to Nyerere (1967) arouses curiosity and provokes Questioning it tend to challenge old assumptions and established practices. Thus, environmental education practices is an off-shoot of man's created problems in his own environment. It is primarily directed at helping people to know how man's activities have degraded the natural environment and what man can do to minimize these problems.

Today's heightened environmental awareness all over the world has brought with it an understanding of the need for informed environmental management and for conservation policies at all levels. The key word here is "informed" for, before, we can manage our environment we need to understand that in nature everything is connected. Our interaction with the natural environment can only be understood with reference to our perception of it and behavioral response to it, both of which are conditioned by our complex cultural environment. Indeed, we all have an important role to play; the solution to the world's environmental problems does not lie with the Scientists, Engineers and Technicians. It is the development of appropriate political, social and economic structures, and the will of the people of the world.

Meeting the Targets

In the background papers of the sixth session of the (UNO) commission on sustainable development education, the organizers of the conference had two starting point in mind;

The crucial importance of education and awareness raising in achieving sustainable development, and

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The particular role of major groups in sustainable development in general, and in sustainable development education in particular. (UNO.org.web in print series 1998:1) Sustainable development education was broadly defined; “forms of learning for a sustainable future, whether concerned with knowledge, skills, awareness or attitude including learning in all contexts; formal and informal, as well as learning for all stages of life”. In the same way, the United Nations Conference on environment and Development (UNCED, Rio de Janeiro, June 1992) also emphasizes the participation of economic and social actors from outside the government and inter-governmental foray as crucial in achieving the goals of Agenda 21 to promote partnership. The major groups identified in section 111 were; Women, Children, Youths, Indigenous People, non-Governmental Organizations (NGO’S), local authorities, workers and trade unions, business and industry, the scientific and technological community and farmers. Chapters 23-32 of Agenda 21 clearly spelt out the roles and responsibilities of each group as well as the kind of support they would need from government and united Nations agencies to be able to fulfill their tasks as partners in sustainable development.

Nevertheless, on the global scale concerted efforts have been made and still being made by all stakeholders on how to make the environment sustainable. In Nigeria, the national policy on environment has long been drafted and along the dictates of the policy, the federal environmental protection agency (FEPA) was established in 1989. Many more of such agencies have been set-up by the 36 states and the 774 local government areas in the Country.

All over the world man’s activities as in construction, farming, transportation, manufacturing, health, exercise and recreation, in war and in peace times, in poverty and in riches have created a number of environmental problems such as; soil erosion, oil spillage, flooding, deforestation, and pollution of water and air. The result of these are scarcity of clean water, loss of marine species, and ozone layer depletion, smog filled air, acid rain, green house effects; resulting into global warming, indiscriminate dumping of domestic and industrial wastes, noise pollution, desertification, loss of biodiversity and endangered species, nuclear test fall outs, and so on. No doubt, the natural world of land, water, air, plants and animals has been so degraded since industrial revolution and it is now a source of concern for all because the wholesale destruction of the natural environment affects the vast majority of people and our lives. For this simple reason, all should be concerned about the health and preservation of our home (environment) after all where else would we live? All told, but if mankind must live on the planet earth environmental problems are inevitable, although there are considerable variation in magnitude and geographical distribution of these problems. What we need therefore are strategies that can minimize environmental problems sooner than later. One of such strategy is environmental education practice that involves participation, vigilance and monitoring by all and sundry.

Environmental Problems in our Community

In man’s quest for survival he engages in a number of activities without really knowing the consequence of such actions on the natural environment. In Nigeria environmental problems include; among others:

Soil erosion, Land Pollution, Deforestation, Oil spillage and gas flaring, Streets flooding, Bush burning, Fishing with chemicals,, Indiscriminate dumping of both domestic and industrial wastes, Deliberate burning of refuse and tyres, Linking of household wastes on public drains, Inefficient use of water, Dumping of domestic and industrial wastes into water bodies, Fumes from out-dated engines, generators and automobiles.

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The aforementioned environmental problems in our community shows that natural ecosystem have been endangered. According to the world wide fund for nature (1998) the natural ecosystem have been running a deficit since 1980 because the rate at which mankind consumes natural resources is faster than the earth ability to replenish them. It takes 60 to 100 years for a hardwood tree to reach full maturity but only minutes for it to be felled (Awake January 8, 2005 p.6) but this is just one resource of the natural environment, the same is applicable to others. What is more, in nature everything is connected and we are now being held accountable for our past blunders, (African wildlife magazine cited in Awake January 8th p.4). It becomes imperative therefore for adults in the community to engage in environmental education practices to minimize environmental cost for a hopeful future. The following environmental practices are therefore recommended for adults in the community. Adults should;

Engage in enlightenment campaigns using the local medium of

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communication on the need for farmers and lumbermen to be involved in afforestation.

Educate people on the need to imbibe the culture of family planning because uncontrolled birth rate means additional demand on the available air, water, land, plants and animals.

Engage in wastes sorting and recycling activities.

Educate people on acceptable sanitary measures, the current periodic days slated for sanitation is rather cosmetic in nature.

Engage in story telling and letter writing to people, emphasizing the need for environmental friendly activities. Like the efficient use of energy, water and disposing domestic wastes properly Make available to others the environmental problems prevalent in their areas.

Make others environmental steward by their action and deeds.

Educate people on the need to avoid bush burning, tyres, and domestic/industrial wastes.

Other strategies should include,

Examining environmental impact assessment(EIA) of companies in their locality to know the associated environmental hazards and act accordingly.

Projects animal at environmental Management should be given priority by Financial institutions in loan disbursement.

Conclusion

Environmental problems today are of global concern because of the deterministic nature of environmental problems. It involves all stakeholders both at national and international levels. Environmental education practices center on how best to manage the earth's natural resources so that the benefit are widely shared and the costs kept to a minimum.

Sustainable development education is a global priority because it provides the surest path to greater global security and world peace.

This understanding should attract support for work needed to address environmental problems head -on. It is against this backdrop that this paper sees environmental education practice as the responsibility of the adults in the community through change of attitudes and deeds for others to emulate towards a sustainable future.

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