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## AFRICAN'S EDUCATION AND THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS (2030): WHERE IS THE NEXUS?

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### **Abstract**

*The goals and targets of the United Nations (UN) Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) are supposed to stimulate action from 2015 to 2030 in areas of critical importance for humanity and the planet. The goals are about welfare of people and the planet Earth. This agenda is to be achieved by mobilizing the means required through a revitalized Global Partnership for Sustainable Development, based on a spirit of strengthened global solidarity. This agenda is, particularly focused on the needs of the poorest and most vulnerable and with the participation of all countries, all stakeholders and all people. The 17 SDG cover various aspects of human welfare, prosperity and climate change and sustainable industrialization. For Africa (or Africans) to achieve these goals, there must be a paradigm shift in the educational enterprise with clear focus on the curriculum for early childhood, basic, secondary and tertiary education. All stakeholders therefore must be adequately consulted to develop an educational agenda that would stand the test of time. With this done, we should be able to tackle poverty, hunger, environmental degradation and corruption, and develop sustainably.*

Africa is one of the most endowed continents with natural resources yet the poorest in the world. We have forests, rivers, arable lands, minerals and oil and gas reserves. We have the human resource with good educational backgrounds. However, when it comes to harnessing the resources for our development then we are lagging behind everyone else.

The sustainable development goals were adopted at the Sustainable Development Summit on 25 September, 2015 by UN member states. It is also referred to as the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which includes a set of 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to end poverty, fight inequality and injustice, and tackle climate change by 2030

(<http://www.gh.undp.org/content/ghana/en/home/post-2015/sdg-overview.html>, retrieved 3/10/2016).

The SDGs are also known as the Global Goals, which build on the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) - eight anti-poverty targets that the world committed to achieving by 2015. The MDGs, adopted in 2000, aimed at reducing poverty, hunger, disease, gender inequality, and improving access to water and sanitation. The enormous progress made on the MDGs, shows the value of a unifying agenda underpinned by goals and targets. Despite this success, the indignity of poverty has not been ended for all, particularly in Africa. The MDGs drove progress in several important areas, such as income, poverty reduction, access to improved sources of water, primary school enrollment, and child mortality among others.

(<http://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/librarypage/mdg/the-millennium-development-goals-report-2015.html>, retrieved 4/10/2016).

The new Global Goals, and the broader sustainability agenda, go much further than the MDGs, addressing the root causes of poverty and the universal need for development that works for all people (<http://www.gh.undp.org/content/ghana/en/home/post-2015/sdg-overview.html>, retrieved 3/10/2016). These Global Goals will complete, supposedly, the job of the MDGs so as to ensure that no nation is left behind.

As Helen Clark, the UNDP Administrator notes: "*This agreement marks an important milestone in putting our world on an inclusive and sustainable course. If we all work together, we have a chance of meeting citizens' aspirations for peace, prosperity, and wellbeing, and to preserve our planet.*"

The SDGs for the 2030 Agenda are given below:

1. End poverty in all its forms everywhere;
2. End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture;
3. Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages;
4. Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all;
5. Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls;
6. Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all;
7. Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all;
8. Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all;
9. Build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization and foster innovation;
10. Reduce inequality within and among countries;
11. Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable;
12. Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns;
13. Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts;

14. Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development;
15. Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss;
16. Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels; and
17. Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the global partnership for sustainable development.

The SDGs are aimed to:

- End poverty and hunger, in all their forms and dimensions, and to ensure that all human beings can fulfill their potential in dignity and equality and in a healthy environment.
- Protect the planet from degradation, including through sustainable consumption and production, sustainably managing its natural resources and taking urgent action on climate change, so that it can support the needs of the present and future generations.
- Ensure that all human beings can enjoy prosperous and fulfilling lives and that economic, social and technological progress occurs in harmony with nature.
- Foster peaceful, just and inclusive societies, which are free from fear and violence. There can be no sustainable development without peace and no peace without sustainable development.
- Mobilize the means required to implement this Agenda 2030 through a revitalized Global Partnership for Sustainable Development, based on a spirit of strengthened global solidarity, focused in particular on the needs of the poorest and most vulnerable and with the participation of all countries, all stakeholders and all people.

All these goals have issues that affect Africa's growth and development. We have

1. Hunger and malnutrition in Africa.
2. Majority of the poor in Africa.
3. Degraded environments with unsustainable use of natural resources.
4. Wars in Africa.

Therefore, we need each other as Africans to be able to achieve the SDGs. We need to harness all human and natural resources to develop Africa. To do this we need to look at education from the curriculum to pedagogy/andragogy. The curriculum for Early Childhood Education, Basic Education, Secondary Education and Tertiary Education must be looked at to situate our curricula in the African cultural context.

With such a broad theme and many sub-themes I have decided to comment on a few issues that could impact our ability to achieve the SDGs, which I believe have connection with the others not directly discussed here. These include the following:

- Africa Agenda 2063;
- Educational reforms in Africa;
- Educational infrastructure;
- Agriculture;
- Science and Technology;
- The Environment;
- Economics;
- Corruption;
- Higher Educational Institutions and Harmonization; and
- The Role of Government.

After discussing these, I shall draw some conclusions.

### **Africa Agenda 2063 and the Sustainable Development Goals**

This agenda is also referred to as “*The Africa We Want*”. Its goals are described as “*Our Aspirations for the Africa We Want*”. The specific goals are indicated below:

1. A prosperous Africa based on inclusive growth and sustainable development;
2. An integrated continent, politically united and based on the ideals of Pan Africanism and the vision of Africa’s Renaissance;
3. An Africa of good governance, democracy, respect for human rights, justice and the rule of law;
4. A peaceful and secure Africa;
5. An Africa with a strong cultural identity, common heritage, values and ethics;
6. An Africa where development is people-driven, unleashing the potential of its women and youth;
7. Africa as a strong, united and influential global player and partner.

These aspirations are in congruence or agreement with the SDGs, except that Agenda 2063 has a longer duration. Furthermore, Agenda 2063 seems to tell us that while the nations could stop at 2030, we Africans have a 33-year journey of sustained hard work to be at par with the rest of the world. This I believe is possible, if we lay the right foundation for those coming after us to build on.

### **African Education and Reforms**

Educational reforms are a must for Africa. However, this should not be left to politicians alone. In Ghana, for instances, 7 years of secondary education was reduced to 3 years, raised to 4 years and back to 3 years by politicians just because it was in

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their manifesto. One wonders whether manifestos have become national policies. Technocrats must be the drivers of reforms not politicians and their manifestos!

Educational reforms should reflect our aspirations, our identity and our culture. Technocrats should be able to stand up for their rightful place and not sell their birthright for pottage.

**Infrastructure for Effective Teaching Learning**

Infrastructure development or provision has not matched expansion. No laboratories and workshops for many JHS's to date since the reforms in the 1990's. Even universities do not have adequate up-to-date laboratory facilities for teaching and research. Hence, everything is taught as theory.

Similarly, the classroom environment also affects teaching-learning activities. Adequate and conducive learning environments must be provided for effective learning to take place. ICT must be integrated into the teaching-learning environment to enhance effective learning.

**Education and Agriculture**

Goals 1 and 2 can easily be discussed together since poverty and hunger are bedfellows. As stated earlier Africa has enough arable land to feed its populace and export some to earn foreign exchange for other activities. In Ghana and in many African countries, more than half the population is involved in agricultural production, yet productivity is low. Indeed some countries have recorded negative growth in agricultural production. Many reasons or factors account for this. Some of these include land tenure system, low technical knowhow, poor investment, and poor extension services. Those who have the knowhow are not interested; maybe because of the risks involved with our dependence on rain-fed agriculture and land tenure system in many countries. Until we mechanize agriculture and go into commercial agricultural production, we would never be able to feed ourselves and export. To achieve these goals there must therefore be some re-orientation of our educational systems within the African cultural context.

I am not sure whether students are still punished to weed these days. When we show students that agricultural activities are a form of punishment, then we cannot develop agriculture to produce food sustainably for consumer and export. We must innovate in all that we do. When all our rice comes from Vietnam, Tilapia from China and corn from USA, then we are not doing something right in the classroom. We still depend on rain-fed agriculture to produce food and rear animals instead of irrigation. In Ghana these days, the provision of dams has become a big political debate! We all know that any nation that does control where its food comes from is not truly independent.

### **Africa Education and Science and Technology**

Many African countries believe that science and technology are the bedrock for development, yet funding science and technology research is negligible. Science and technology must be given their rightful place. African Scientists must also be given their rightful place. The development of science and technology should enable Africans harness our resources to compete with China, the Asian Tigers, Europe and America. Oil and gas, minerals, forest products, rivers and other water bodies abound in Africa, but science and technology are so poorly developed that we get pittance for our own God-given resources. We pray that all African nations implement the Agenda 2063 faithfully. Africa Agenda 2063 hinges on the battle cry *-If we have lost the last 50 years, we cannot lose out in the next 50 years.* We can only achieve this vision if the mission is right and strategic. We need quality educational institutions, developed science and technology, good politics, effective and sustainable utilization of natural resources for the benefit of Africans. We should be able to manipulate energy, have efficient and sustainable industries and goods in all fields to effectively compete in the world.

### **Education and the Environment**

Those from outside Ghana might have seen the heaps of rubbish of all kinds and sizes along our main roads. Indeed, if you go by water bodies in the cities and towns, rubbish is dumped into the water bodies. Similarly, we are busy destroying vegetation through uncontrolled small-scale gold mining we call *Galamsey* in Ghana. I dare say politicians and some big people have stakes in these activities. Else, how can we allow natural resources jealously protected in other nations to be destroyed wantonly without anyone caring? We have annual bush burning all over Ghana. The menace has spread from the dry season to the rainy season because of the indiscriminate use of Glyphoxate (round-up) and related weedicides. We need an educational system that should train the African graduate to care for the environment and natural resources.

### **Education and Economics**

Africa has four or more economic blocks. Our forebears founded these blocks for good reasons. Yet, these days, we hear more of G8 and African Leaders, China and African Leaders summit, IMF and African Leaders summit. It is not a bad idea to collaborate with Europeans, Americans or Chinese, since we are in a globalized village. However, we should not be seen begging all the time and even make it a competition between African nations. ECOWAS, SADCC, and the other economic blocks fight each other or individually for pecks from China, Europe and USA. Africa produces what it does not consume and consumes what it does not produce.

Africa must move in unison in order to compete globally. It is much easier for African countries to have collaborations with Europeans or Americans than with other Africans in Africa. Africa has more currencies than any other continent. African education should therefore make it possible for us to have a common currency or common currencies and travel in Africa without the need for visas or change of currencies.

### **Education and Corruption**

Prof. Patrick Loch Otieno Lumumba, who recently delivered the Kwame Nkrumah Memorial Lectures at the University of Cape Coast, describes Africa as a continent where the corrupt is canonized and the saints demonized. Many Africans go into politics to acquire ill-gotten wealth without caring how they get it and who they hurt on their way to becoming rich. We have some of the longest fresh water rivers in the world, yet we cannot feed our people and cannot generate electricity enough for our industries and our own development. An educated African should be trained to use the knowledge and skills acquired to serve humanity, and, for that matter, Africans after being elected into office. The educational system should train graduates to abhor ill-gotten wealth and resist the temptation of getting rich by any corrupt means necessary.

### **Collaboration between Higher Educational Institutions (HEIs) and Harmonization**

Africans travel to each other's countries to have education, yet very little collaboration exists among African HEIs. Harmonization of programmes has been talked about for a long time. For instance, this was highlighted in Senegal 2012 at the DAAD/UNESCO Conference on Strengthening Regional Cooperation in Quality Assurance in Central and West Africa, 15<sup>th</sup> -17<sup>th</sup> November 2012, Novotel, Dakar, Senegal and the 2<sup>nd</sup> Annual Conference and Workshop of the Association of West African Universities (AWAU) on the theme "Harmonization of Academic Programmes and Qualifications in Africa (Arusha Convention): Implication for West Africa" at the University of Cape Coast, Ghana, from 11<sup>th</sup> to 15<sup>th</sup> January, 2015. These are just but a few of the forums at which harmonization has been mentioned. Yet very little has been done within countries, or sub-continental blocks let alone at the continental level. African education should make it possible to transfer grades among HEIs in Africa. Africa education should enable us to conduct collaborative researches since we face common problems.

### **Role of Governments**

Governments of African nations should play an effective facilitating role for the true unity of the African people. Colonial barriers should be broken as stated in the Agenda 2063.

Funding of education should improve to enable the provision of teaching-learning materials at the basic and secondary levels. At the tertiary levels, funding for development and maintenance of infrastructure, research and teaching should also be enhanced. Indeed, HEIs should be challenged to solve Africa's problems by funding specific research activities in Universities based on the capacities and capabilities of each institution. Education at the tertiary level is informed by research. Hence, adequate funding by African governments for research activities in HEIs should solve the problems associated with science and technology, agricultural productivity, economics and poverty reduction as well as environmental degradation. By so doing, Africans should be solving their own problems, holding their destinies in their own hands and, thus, be competitive in the globalized world.

### **Conclusions**

We need an educational re-orientation situated in African culture. Educational re-orientation leads to economic re-orientation, scientific and technological re-orientation, and sustainable management of natural resources and the environment.

Any education that makes us run outside Africa at the least opportunity to gain citizenship is not good for Africa. Africa education should enable Africans to stay home and fight to develop Africa for Africans and the rest of the world. Patriotism should be instilled or inculcated in our graduates so that they love and show some love to Africa. With patriotic citizens, corruption should be uprooted for the African economy to boom and be competitive in the globalized world. We should do everything together a one people.

Let me leave you with this quotation from the Africa Agenda 2063:

We are confident that Africa has the capability to realize her full potential in development, culture and peace and to establish flourishing, inclusive and prosperous societies.

Thank you.

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