HUMAN CAPITAL DEVELOPMENT: AN IMPERATIVE FOR ACHIEVING SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS (SDGS) IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

A nagging concern on the mind of all developing countries, Nigeria inclusive, is that of development. The countries so referred to as developing, are in a hurry to "catch up" with the more developed western countries of Europe, the U.S.A, Japan ,Russia, China, among others. To ensure sustainable economic growth and development in an economy, investment in human capital is therefore essential. This paper attempts to assess Nigeria's effort at human capital development for the achievement of Sustainable Development Goals(SDGs).Other specific objectives are to examine the role of the university in intellectual capital development; to examine Nigeria's skill acquisition programmes and unemployment reduction. Nigeria's development challenges were identified to include in-adequate financing, economic, socio-political, environmental, regional, science and technology, and corruption challenges were x-rayed. The methodology adopted was that of the content analysis as sources of data were all secondary from publications of the UN, the National Bureau of Statistics, Nigeria's report to the Rio+2 summit, a review of publications in reputable international journals. The paper recommended massive sensitization and awareness campaign by Government, the establishment of a Sustainable development Fund (SDF) among other initiatives.

1.1 Introduction

A nagging concern on the minds of all developing countries, Nigeria inclusive, is that of development. The countries so referred to as developing, are all in a hurry to "catch up" with the more developed western countries of Europe, the U.S.A, Japan, Russia, China and a few others. Indeed both the developed and the developing countries have both demonstrated a unity of purpose in seeing a more secured, healthier and less dependent but interdependent world order. It was therefore imperative that developmental goals were fashioned out as encapsulated in the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and was followed up by the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The critical question then is how these goals are to be pursued and achieved.

Investment in human capital is a pre-requisite for Human capital development. Human Capital Development refers to the investment that an organization, society or country make in their citizens to increase their productive capacity and their quality of life. Human capital formation is achieved essentially through formal education, a system of practical training relating to a particular trade or enterprise, and other activities that lead to the acquisition of relevant skills and knowledge that ultimately lead to enhanced productivity. Therefore, human capital development refers to the process of acquiring the number of people who have the skills, education and experience that are essential for socio-economic development of a country (Harbison, 1962; in Amsalu, 2011). It is necessary to have a snap shot of some of the developmental indices in Nigeria in order to appreciate what needs to be vigorously pursued. Nigeria has the largest population in Africa with over 200 million people comprising of over 250 ethnic groups.

However, about 70 million people live on less than US $1 per day. (World Bank and DFID, 2015).It is regrettable that Nigeria is a major exporter of oil, but this has not translated to significant increase in the living standards of her people (Adeyemi, et al, 2018).

In the last quarter of 2016, youth unemployment was 45.6%. However, current NBS report put the unemployment rate of youths at 23%.

Nigeria's poverty level is aggravated by several factors including thirty years of military rule that was not accountable to anybody, and recently made worse by civilian governance which more or less institutionalized corruption, misappropriation, and mismanagement of revenues from a mono-cultural economic base.

The over dependence on oil has made the country a mono-product economy and this led to total neglect of other viable areas of the economy (Adeyemi, et al, 2018). However, there has been a deliberate attempt by government to encourage non-oil productive sectors of agriculture (particularly rice production), solid minerals production, small and medium scale enterprises, and general entrepreneurship and skills acquisition, particularly among the youths. Poverty in Nigeria is further perpetuated by neglect of agriculture, mass rural-urban movement by the prouctive youths, high maternal mortality, health and natural epidemic (Bird, 2015).

The purpose of this paper therefore, is to assess Nigeria's efforts at human capital development for achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Other specific objectives include to:

(i) examine the role of the University as a catalyst in intellectual capital development.

(ii) examine Nigeria's skills acquisition programmes and reduction of unemployment.

(iii) examine Nigeria's efforts at poverty alleviation.

(iv) identify Nigeria's development challenges.

1.3 Methodology

A content analysis was done on secondary data from publications of the United Nations and other international organizations, publication of the National bureau of statistics, Nigeria's report to the Rio+20 summit.

The paper is discussed in five sections as follows:

Section one contains the introduction, the paper objectives and methodology adopted – section two discusses conceptual issues in sustainable development and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) – Section three discusses Human Capital Building for sustainable development (The role of the University). SDGs challenges in Nigeria are outlined in section four; conclusion, policy implications and recommendations close the discussions in section five.

2.0 Literature Review

2.1 Conceptual Framework

Human Capital are attributes and capabilities that reside in individuals in the society that needs to be harnessed and developed for the benefit of the organization and therefore the society at large.

To ensure sustainable economic growth and development in an economy, investment in human capital is therefore essential. Human capital development can be expressed as investment that organization, society or country make in their citizens to improve their productivity and quality of life. Human capital formation involves some form of formal education, practical training in a particular trade or enterprise, health, and other activities meant to acquire skills and knowledge necessary to increase productivity. Therefore, the term human capital development can be defined as the process of acquiring the number of people who have the skills, education and experience that are essential for socio-economic development of a country (Harbison, 1962; in Amsalu, 2011).

Harry (2010) posits that Human capital development is the quantum of efforts directed at developing and orienting human beings so as to equipt them to be productive to themselves, in particular, and the society in general. To Amsalu (2011), it is called the productive base of a given nation consisting of all forms of capital – physical, human, natural and social which the present generation bequeaths to its descendants.

2.1.2 Sustainable Development

Sustainable development (SD) is now a daily discourse the world over which is being promoted by the United Nations, to manage and conserve our resources in such a way that does not interfere with the prosperity of future generations. Sustainability becomes imperative given the ever rising natural and man-made disasters, such as terrorism, cybercrimes, environmental degradation, climate change, population explosion, economic recessions, diseases, and epidemic, among others (Ekperiware,dd Otalayo, and Elgetokun, 2017).

The word development has come to mean different things to people at different times according to Umo (2007:599). It is a multi-faceted concept that could refer to social, political, economic, legal, administrative, military and technological development, among others.

The most accepted and cited definition of sustainable development is the 1987 Bruntland Commission definition: SD is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generation to meet theirs. SD is therefore anchored on economic development, social equity and environmental protection pillars according to Oladeji (2014).

Human beings are the greatest wealth and resources of a nation that is critical to sustainable development. It is human beings that coordinate all other resources to achieve sustainable development (Oladeji and Adebayo, 2016). Indeed, Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Singapore have become major exporters of a sophisticated range of products that is attributed to the fast growth rate of human capital accumulation and the attainment of new capabilities (Fadi, 2014).

2.1.3 The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGS)

The 2030 agenda for Sustainable Development, adopted by all nation member states in 2015, provides a share blueprint for peace and prosperity for people and the planet, now and into the future. At its heart are the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which are an urgent call for action by all countries, developed and developing – in a global partnership. They recognize that ending poverty and other deprivations must go hand-in-hand with strategies that improve health and education, reduce inequality, and spur economic growth (SDGs). The SDGs therefore represent the most comprehensive of the initiatives, framework and strategies for comprehensive development and poverty alleviation in the poorest countries in the world. The SDGs aim to achieve the cardinal objectives of ending poverty, achieving food security, ensuring healthy lives, ensuring equitable quality education, achieving gender equality among others.

2.2 The Place of Human Capital in Sustainable Development

The basic and most critical success factor necessary for in carrying out sustainable development is the requisite human capital (Ajibade, 2013). The transformation of resource–poor countries like South Korea, Taiwan, and Singapore are clear confirmation of this assertion.

The accelerated human capital development, especially in developing countries, is inevitable if the world is to overcome the global socio-economic and ecological crisis that has the potential to endanger our individual and collective existence as well as deny future generations of their well-being (Ajibade, 2013).

Sustainable development should therefore become a regular part of the programmes and curricula of our educational system at all levels. As noted by Pidlisnyuk (2010), the role of the University in building human capital through high quality education that promotes creativity, innovation and adoption of modern technology for the successful implementation of sustainable development cannot be over emphasized.

2.2.1 Key Issues of Sustainable Development

Sustainable Development has drawn global attention to the urgent need to address issues that have the potential to endanger our individual and collective existence. Future generations are also endangered. Sampson (2013) vividly captured these issues to include:

i) **The Environment:** Environmental concerns would include variables like climate change, degradation, deforestation, global warming, greenhouse gas emissions, natural resource depletion, food security, water preservation, physical infrastructural management, among others.

ii) **Economy:** (growth challenges, cyclical economic crisis, poverty, trade barriers, growing unemployment, financial inequality, grassroots development, and others)

iii) **Social:** (human rights issues, socio-cultural diversity management, religious, racial, gender differences management, stigmatization and discrimination, extrajudicial killings, illiteracy, population management, adequate shelter among others).

iv) **Globalisation:** unequal distribution of global resources, technology and knowledge transfers, cybercrime, migration, terrorism, among others).

v) **Institutional Governance:** (corporate governance, staff welfare, unhealthy competitive practices, working conditions and safety measures, among others).

vi) **Public Governance:** (transparency and accountability, sovereign debts management, savings and external reserves policies, participatory governance, equitable distribution of national resources. From the foregoing, it is clear that sustainable development is a multi-dimensional concept, and the basic idea is meeting the needs, now and in the future.

3.1 Building Human Capital for Sustainable Development

Physical capital alone is not sufficient to bring about long term development. Without human capital, nothing would ever happen. For example, it is known that plants, offices, computers, automated equipments, internets, websites and all other facilities that any organization may install remain unproductive without human efforts and direction (Harbison, 2010).

While education has been duly recognized as a strong instrument for attainment of sustainable development, it must incorporate key themes of sustainable development. These themes include a wide range of issues such as poverty alleviation, peace, ethics, democracy, justice, security, human rights, health, social equity, environmental protection, natural resource management, among other things.

Building human capital for sustainable development will require a reform of the educational system especially at the University level. The University supplies the human capital needs both for the other lower levels of the educational system (Primary and Secondary) and the noneducational organizations. The University therefore has a very critical role to play in the promotion and implementation of sustainable development.

To Torino (2009), for the Universities to effectively play this critical role, the Universities should encourage new thinking within the educational system and introduce new, creative and innovative solutions to problems of sustainability.

Ajibade (2013) suggested some of the roles the Universities in Nigeria can play to include the following:

i) Incorporation of sustainable development aspects into existing University courses and rogrammes. The universities should incorporate relevant key theories of sustainable development which include poverty alleviation, peac, ethics, democracy, justice, human rights, social equity, environmental production, cultural diversity, among others.

ii) Conducting Research on sustainable development: Research, apart from creating and increasing knowledge, also enhances understanding of sustainability issues. To be useful and beneficial for the purpose of promoting sustainability practices, the University, should disseminate, transfer or share its research ideas and knowledge to those who require the input of such research findings.

iii) Execution of community-based programmes and projects: Such programmes and projects that aim at addressing problems and challenges in local communities as well as promote services to the local people. Such projects can be conducted in partnership with other public organizations or with financing from corporate organizations as part of their corporate social responsibility.

iv) Creating awareness on sustainable development issues. Improving awareness of sustainability includes such issues as control of greenhouse gases, land and energy use, pollution and transport and others.

v) Adoption of New Training/Delivery Methods: Lecturers should involve practitioners from business as well as political and governmental leaders to make presentations to students. The goal should be to enable students to engage in an informal conversation and discussion with experts about different aspects of environment and sustainability.

vi) Establishment of partnerships and network: the University in collaboration with other universities and institutions can establish a “network of networks” such networks provide a common platform and meeting space for enhancing inter-disciplinary cooperation among Universities and research centres in different nations through such initiatives as student exchange, faculty of exchange and joint research projects.

viii) Engagement with industry, commerce and the community Universities have a responsibility to articulate and disseminate new sustainability – related scientific knowledge and information. For example, through roundtable discussions, conferences, seminars and dialogue between scientists and other stakeholders.

The roles identified for Universities in helping to build human capital for sustainable development are not exhaustive but only indicative of the kinds of things that the University can do to contribute in promoting sustainable development.

3.2 Challenges of the Universities

Several and daunting challenges impose severe constraints on universities on their ability to build human capital for sustainable development. These challenges according to Ajibade (2013) are faced by universities across the country. Infact, the incessant strikes by University teachers are not unconnected to these challenges.

i) Inadequate Funding
ii) Weak Infrastructure
iii) Inadequate Faculty
iv) Brain Drain

3.3 Nigeria's Skills Acquisition and Reduction of Unemployment

Creating requisite human capital requires a multi-disciplinary approach including providing training to a wide spread group of stakeholders, and must address a wide range of issues such as poverty alleviation, unemployment, social equity and a host of others.

Faced with the nagging problem of unemployment, Nigeria established the National Directorate of Employment (NDE) in March 1986. The main objective of the NDE was the responsibility of job creation to the unemployed in Nigeria. Since its establishment, NDE has adopted various programmes such as employment counseling services and job linkages, vocational skills acquisition training, entrepreneurial training and enterprise creation, training for rural employment promotion, training for labour-based transient works, among others. In order to achieve its mandate, NDE spread its operations to all 36 states of the federation and the federal capital territory, Abuja.

3.4 Nigeria's Efforts at Poverty Alleviation

Before the advent of the introduction of SDGs, the Nigerian government especially at the national level introduced a number of programmes and policies to alleviate poverty, such programmes include the following;

i) The Directorate of Food, Road and Rural Infrastructure (DFRRI): The programme was introduced in 1986 and was targeted at the rural areas. The focus was to open up the rural areas through provision of basic infrastructure.

ii) National Directorate of Employment (NDE): This was also introduced in 1986 directed at the unemployed youths. The objective was to train, finance and guide the youths to acquire skills and acquire skillful employment.

iii) Better Life Programmes: Was introduced in 1987 and directed at rural women to train, finance and guide them.

iv) Peoples Bank of Nigeria (PBN): This was established in 1989 and was targeted at making credit facilities accessible to the underprivileged in the rural areas.

v) Community Banks: Was established in 1990 and targeted at rural resident micro enterprises in rural areas and to make banking facilities available to them.

vi) Family Support Programmes (FSP). Established in 1994, the programme was targeted at families in rural areas with the objectives of health care delivery, child welfare, youth development, among others.

vii) Family Economic Advancement Programme (FEAP): This was established in 1997 and targeted at rural areas with the objective of providing them with credit facilities to support the establishment of cottage industries.

viii) National Poverty Eradication Programme (NAPEP): Was established in 2001 targeted at unemployed youth as well as poor masses. The objective was to ensure employment generation in the rural sector and ensure societal welfare.

ix) Rural Electrification Scheme (RES): Was commenced in 2006, targeted at rural and semi urban areas to provide them steady and reliable power supply at economic rates for residential, commercial, industrial and social activities.

x) Subsidy Re-investment and Empowerment Programme (SURE-P): This was introduced in 2012, targeted at unemployed youths and the poor. The aim was to re-invest the federal government savings from fuel subsidy removal in critical infrastructure projects and social safety net programmes with direct impact on the citizens of Nigeria.

xi) Economic Recovery and Growth Plan (ERGP): Introduced in 2017 to enhance the country s economic recovery to growth and sustainable development.

xii) N-Power and Conditional Cash Transfer Programmes. Introduced in 2018 to empower fresh graduates from our tertiary institutions who have done their compulsory one year National service to enable them start any viable small scale business so they will be self-employed.

4.0 SDGs Challenges in Nigeria

One major challenge to the attainment of the SDGs in many countries is the lack of awareness and inadequate sensitization of the public of the goals. Studies show that 50% or more of the population is unaware of what the sustainable development goals are or how they affect their own development.

According to Jaiyesimi (2016), four challenges that need to be addressed for achieving the SDEs in Africa (Nigeria inclusive) are financial, maintaining peace, measuring progress and accountability. Achieving success in a programme as huge as the SDEs requires a massive amount of financial investments. The rough calculations have put the cost of providing social safety nets to eradicate extreme poverty globally at $66 billion a year, while annual investments to improve infrastructure (water, agriculture, transport, and power) could be to a total of $7 trillion globally. At the international level most developed countries have not met the target of allocating 0.7% of Gross National Income (GNI) to international aid in the last 40 years (UNO, 2016).

Kanayo, Ehigiamusoe and Patrick (2013) in their study found out the challenges of SDEs in Nigeria to include extreme poverty, rapid population growth rate, rapid urbanization, deforestation, environmental impact of extractive industries, rate of economic growth, rural development, climatic variability and natural environmental hazard.

In its comprehensive report to Rio-20 summit in June 2012, Nigeria outlined these challenges and classified them into four broad categories:

Economic On the economic front, the economy is still characterized by declining capacity utilization of major infrastructural facilities, large budget deficit, unacceptable level of employment and inflation. The country has critical problem of dependence on a single commodity - oil, weak industrial base, low level of agricultural production and high debt overhang and inefficient public utilities.

ii) From the socio-political perspective, a situation where democracy is periodically truncated and terminated, the challenge here is to advance democracy in a way that is dynamic, peaceful and sustainable.

iii) Environmental challenges include increasing pressure on natural resources due to population high growth rate, unsustainable agricultural practices, and unplanned and uncontrolled rural-urban migration.

iv) Regional challenges include intermittent religious and ethnic conflicts and environmental degradation. Worthy of note is the ravaging effect of the Boko-Haram insurgency that has devastated the North-Eastern zone of the country.

v) Science and technology. One major factor militating against national development is poor scientific and technological support, and the research and development patronage.

vi) perhaps **corruption** is one of the major impediments of sustainable development in Nigeria. Huge resources that should accrue to government for development purposes are lost to the crimes of corruption and rent seeking.

5.0 Conclusion, Policy Implications and Recommendations

It is evident from this study that Nigeria has long before the proclaimations of the SDEs, introduced various programmes aimed at addressing the key issues like poverty alleviation, reduction of unemployment rate through its various skills acquisitions programmes, and partnering with the international community (championed by the United Nations). Nonetheless, there still exist challenges that stifle Nigeria's efforts at addressing the key issues of SDGs. Such challenges include inadequate awareness of the population of the SDGs, financial constraints (arising from persistent huge budget deficit and debt overhang), economic, socio-political, human capital development, regional challenges, low level of science and technology, environmental degradation, and most worrisome, massive corruption that robs government of huge resources that should accrue to government for sustainable development. But the most worrisome of the challenges facing government now are the twin evils of insurgency in the North-East and Banditry ravaging the North-West and some parts of North-Central. The policy implications for Nigeria in the face of such challenges is that policy makers need to put in place a comprehensive and coordinated policy framework that must address each of the challenges, so identified in line with the following recommendations.

(1) Government must step up its sensitization and awareness activities through all available mass media and with active collaboration and partnership with organized private sector regarding the 17 goals of the SDGs.
(2) A massive financial intervention programme solely for the purpose of achieving the SDEs. In this regard, it is recommended that a "Sustainable Development Fund" (SDF) be established to subsume the ecological fund but with an expanded base to tap from after tax profits of the private sector organizations.
(3) It is recommended that fiscal and monetary policies formulation must be coordinated and utmost discipline must be exercised in implementing same.
(4) The Economic Recovery Programme (ERGP) must be vigorously pursued and sustained.
(5) The anti-corruption campaign must be pursued with more vigor.

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