

UNIVERSITY EDUCATION & SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

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Chapter Eleven

SOCIAL SCIENCE EDUCATION AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN DEVELOPING NATIONS

BY

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INTRODUCTION

Human resources development has long been recognised as a crucial factor in the overall development of nations. Smith (1937, pp.265, 266) maintains that the acquired and useful abilities of members of the society constitute important aspects in the concept of fixed capital. Marshall (1930, pp.216, 264) also emphasised that education is important as a national investment and maintains that the most valuable of all capital is that invested in people. The development of human resources, a veritable input in the development calculus, is, therefore achieved through investment in education.

Education and national product are closely related. Ekpo (1987) maintains that the educational process produces experts at various levels and specializations. The inter-relationship between education and national output must be both dynamic and dialectical. This implies that good educational system engenders economic growth and development while the latter also engenders

quality education. (Ekpo and Umoh, 2004).

As we have earlier noted, human resources constitute the basis for national wealth. The other factors of production remain passive and require human effort as active agents of production to mobilize, accumulate and exploit them for sustainable national development. Todaro (1981) alludes to this fact by maintaining that a nation that is unable to develop the knowledge and skills of its citizens and utilize them effectively may find it difficult to develop other resources.

From the above stated perspective, social science education can be regarded as an organised programme of study in the social sciences (Economics, Sociology, Political Science, Public administration, Geography, Psychology, Mass Communication etc.) with clear aims, curricula and duration of study. These studies are undertaken at the secondary and tertiary levels with aims to equip the recipients with skills, abilities, attitudes and knowledge that would enable them to live useful lives to themselves and the society (Uwatt, 1999).

This paper seeks to bring to the fore the place of social science education in the sustainable development of developing nations. Specifically, we shall concentrate on social science education at the tertiary level. Following this introduction is the statement of the problem. Section two explores conceptual issues like social science education and sustainable development. Section three focuses on social science education and sustainable development in Developing Nations while section four proffers recommendations and concludes the paper.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Our 21st Century world is in the jet age--the age of high precision technology. The world has since become a global village with her economies being knowledge of science and technology driven and with possibilities of technology transfer and diffusion. Despite all these, the Developing Nations have remained developing, most of them for decades. What could be wrong? Could this imply that beyond science and technology, there is a missing variable? Could it also imply that science and technology

could lead to development which need further knowledge to sustain? It points to the fact that sustainable development is multidimensional, requiring science and technology but also requiring the social sciences and even strategic arts to achieve. Have not the developing nations imported, transferred and diffused technology and science from abroad for a long time to no avail?

2. Conceptual Issues

(i) Social Science Education:

Social science education is very important in quickening the development process of developing nations. It constitutes a veritable weapon with which to fight ignorance, poverty, disease, squalor, bad governance, injustice, conflict as well as other socio-economic problems. It also helps in raising enlightened, industrious, socially and politically stable and economically viable citizens and societies, thereby producing a prosperous nation. Social Science education provides high level manpower for the private and public sectors of an economy as well as the basis for continuous research on political, sociological, geospatial and economic problems of a nation. Social science education is dynamic, keeping track of global and national socio-political, environmental and economic changes and thus having positive implications for capacity building.

According to Robinson (1970) economics education, and this is also true of social science education, at all levels must seek to:

- (a) develop a knowledge and understanding of socio-political and economic dimension of the environment in terms of the basic concept of the discipline.
- (b) develop the capacity to think clearly and as objectively as possible about social, political, geospatial and economic problems, drawing conclusions logically from an informed analysis of the factual and descriptive materials of the subjects.
- (c) achieve economic, sociological, political, and geospatial literacy and numeracy of the subjects with some precisions and clarity for the purpose of effective communication of ideas pertaining thereto.

Borrowing from Dunning (1980,p.53), the essential purpose of social science education should be to instill into those studying the subjects three essential elements:

- (a) the capacity to understand both in theory and application the principles upon which the society and the economy work;
- (b) a general understanding of the important political, social and economic institutions within which the national economy works; and
- (c) a capacity to handle, interpret and present the statistical evidence on which socio-political, geospatial and economic decisions are reached. These are achievable through training and research. Formal training equips the recipient of the relevant knowledge with basic skills and tools of social, political, geospatial and economic analysis while research (theoretical, applied and policy) provides the leeway for the expansion of the frontiers of the knowledge of the social science, the application of such knowledge to the solution of specific problems and the examination of policy relevance and impact of various policy prescriptions.

(ii) **Sustainable Development**

Sustainable development has been variously defined according to the perspective from which one looks at the concept. UNESCO (2001) generally defines sustainable development to mean:

“the will to follow a rational approach to economic administration and the creation of economic policies; to manage public matters efficiently and predictably; to show respect for future generations by integrating a concern for environmental protection into decision-making and progressively to evolve towards democracy the full participation of all concerned

actors, while taking into account specific local circumstances”.

The World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED), however, defined sustainable development as:

“the development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs”.

Accordingly, sustainable development stands on three pillars social development, economic development and environmental protection (Kufoniyi and Akinyede, 2004). Moreover, the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) held in 2002 focused on ten strategies for the successful achievement of sustainable development as follows:

- Making globalization work for sustainable development
- Poverty eradication and sustainable livelihoods
- Changing unsustainable patterns of consumption and production
- Promoting health through sustainable development
- Access to energy and energy efficiency
- Sustainable management of ecosystems and biodiversity
- Managing the World's freshwater resources
- Finance and Technology transfer
- Sustainable development initiatives for Africa
- Strengthening the System of International Governance for Sustainable Development.

However, Taylor (1998) condemns the fundamental premise of the idea that economic growth, if left unconstrained and unmanaged by the state, threatens unnecessary harm to the environment and may prove economically ephemeral and dubious. He maintains that the policy prescriptions that are generally endorsed by those concerned about sustainable development are

inimical to our best environmental and economic interest for three reasons:

- If economic growth were to be slowed or stopped, it would be impossible to improve environmental conditions.
- The bias for command-and-control regulations on the part of those endorsing the concept of sustainable development will only serve to make environmental protection more expensive, hence, less to be purchased.
- Strict pursuit of sustainable development, as meant by many environmentalists would rather do violence to the welfare of future generations.

Such criticism is also based on the fact that we may not be able to know reasonably what the needs of people might be in the far future. Moreover, one way that people meet their needs is by spending money on food, shelter, education etc. If sustainable development is about wealth creation, then wealth has always been handed down to future generations. Advocates of sustainable development seldom dwell on such nonmaterial, non-resource-based and psychological needs as peace, freedom and individual contentment that cannot be met simply by material means. The UNCED definition of sustainable development, is, therefore described as a call for society to maximize human welfare over time, a concept to which 'optimality' in economics has done justice.

There is, also the definition given by Pearce and Watford (1993) who define sustainable development as a process in which the natural resource base is not allowed to deteriorate. This definition generally known as strong definition of sustainability is distinguished from the weak definition which allows the natural resource base to deteriorate as long as biological resources are maintained, at a minimum critical level and the wealth generated by the exploitation of natural resources is preserved for future generations, otherwise "robbed" of their rightful inheritance.

Unfortunately, both the strong and weak definitions of sustainable development also pose problems. Hahn (1993,p.1750) maintains that the narrower the definition, the easier to pin it down, but the less satisfactory the concept becomes. However, Sheehan

(1996,p.1) is of the view that the concept of sustainable development is an overarching political philosophy merging the twin goals of conservation and controlled economic development.

3. Social Science Education And Sustainable Development In Developing Nations.

Generally, the following have been observed as being the attributes of developing countries.

- (i) There is the prevalence of unemployment, especially of labour. Self-employment and the informal economic sector therefore thrive.
- (ii) They are more agrarian than industrial. Therefore a reasonable portion of the national income is derived from agriculture.
- (iii) The citizens are separated by racial, ethnic and religious differences, which further inhibit development.
- (iv) Concentration in ownership marks the distribution of income and wealth. Therefore a lower proportion of the citizens are rich while the masses remain poor.
- (v) Institutional channels to link potential savers with productive investment are limited and not well developed.
- (vi) Developing Countries depend mostly on few primary exports rather than diversified range of products.
- (vii) A large proportion of government revenue is generated from export of primary products which prices fluctuate from time to time.
- (viii) Industries are very rudimentary. Therefore most manufactured goods are imported. Since the demand for imports grow more rapidly than income, balance of payment problems accompany development.
- (ix) There is rapid population growth, which in the face of agricultural slow growth brings additional pressures on balance of payments; and
- (x) Limited freedom from external dependence and dominance.

Moreover there exist in these nations several obstacles to development. The economic obstacles include lack of industrial raw materials, the vicious circle of poverty and low rate of capital formation. There are also environmental factors, socio-cultural factors, psychological factors, lack of entrepreneurship, political obstacles as well as the repercussions of international forces (Umoh, 2000).

Sustainable development in developing nations must, therefore, imply sustainable improvement in incomes and output, radical changes in institutional social and administrative structure as well as in popular attitudes, values, customs and beliefs.

From the context of the foregoing discussions, it is obvious that social science education is crucial in ensuring sustainable development in developing nations. First, Kufoniyi and Akinyede (2004) have aptly alluded to the fact that the fuel driving the engine of growth and sustainable development of any nation is that nation's access to reliable and adequate geospatial information. Given that over 80 per cent of socio-economic and environmental management decisions are based on the quality and accuracy of information on natural resources and other geospatial data, geography education as well as the specialised study in Geographical Information System (GIS) is a veritable tool in sustainable development. They constitute a prerequisite for the effective management of development by ensuring ability to monitor the environmental status and its variations in time and space.

Social science education is designed to produce graduates who are imbued with the zeal to contribute positively and meaningfully to national, African and the global community. This is achievable as social science education equips them with broad based knowledge in the field of social sciences together with specializations in individual courses within the field. The main objectives of social science education (economics, geography, mass communication, political science, psychology and sociology/anthropology) is the study of man and his behaviour in a dynamic world, while the specific objectives (NUC, 1989,p.2) include:

- (i) to develop and improve student's understanding of

the social problems at various stages of development and that of a given nation (e.g. Nigeria) in particular;

- (ii) to develop the critical judgement of students, their ability to observe, understand, analyse and synthesize data on socio-economic problems using social science research methods and techniques, to enable them contribute objectively to national objectives;
- (iii) to provide appropriate and conducive environment which enables the students to enhance their level of innovation and creativity and thereby inculcate in them the spirit and attitude of self reliance; and
- (iv) to create an atmosphere for desirable behavioural changes that would motivate the students to develop values that are in consonance with national objectives such as discipline, hard work, probity, honesty, commitment, patriotism and transparency. (See Uwatt, 1999).

Third, social science education has a crucial role to play in the revision of environmental education policies to incorporate the broad, social, economic and political, as well as conservation aspects of sustainable development. It also provides the answer to the question of good governance and political stability as a necessary condition for sustainable development.

Fourth, social science education has contributed immensely to the development of national productive capacities in developing nations. It has enriched the abilities of these developing nations to implement programmes targeting such important grassroots problems as poverty reduction and eradication, preservation of ecological equilibrium, diseconomies of environmental degradation, improvement of the status and position of women, increased access to education, and community involvement in decision making as well as demographic management.

Social science education also provides the framework (through economics education) for sustainable development by providing a rational approach to economic administration, creation of economic policies, management of public matters efficiently and

predictably and democratic governance.

Moreover, social science education contributes to various dimensions of management and how they could be applied to learning for sustainability as alluded to by UNESCO (2001), as follows:

- **Marketing:** This involves the management of the perceptions of target groups in order to induce behavioural change which is compatible with sustainable development based on individual calculation of costs and benefits. Here communication plays a crucial role in influencing the perception of consumers and the public at large.
- **Dialogue:** Social science education curriculum is replete with content pertaining to the exploration of common understanding among people, which can lead to bottom-up policies for sustainable development and the management of their implementation.
- **Conflict Resolution:** Sociology, psychology, political science and public administration as well as mass communication provide veritable tools and techniques for efficient leadership and conflict prevention/resolution. These go a long way in ensuring sustainable development in developing nations.

4. Recommendations and Conclusion

We have made efforts to outline the role of social science education in sustainable development of developing nations. However, for such contributions to be optimal, meaningful and far reaching, we make the following recommendations:

- (i) Social science education must draw inspiration and nourishment from the society, taking cognisance of global developments in the field and ultimately contributing to growth, renewal and development of the given society. This implies that social science education should be dynamic and adapted to societal needs.

- (ii) To ensure the quality of social science education, the current dearth of basic learning facilities especially good libraries with recent books, journals, and equipments must be tackled immediately. Moreover government must take action to halt the ongoing brain drain from the field to the more lucrative banking and other service sectors as well as other countries due to poor conditions of service.
- (iii) If developing nation's must benefit from the role of social science education in sustainable development, then they must institute national policies and/or guidelines for environmental education, and revise same to incorporate the broad social, economic and political, as well as geospatial and conservation aspects of sustainable development.
- (iv) Sustainable development issues in developing nation's must encompass conflict resolution between social groups and create a link between social inequality and ecological disequilibrium.
- (v) For social science education to be sustainable and to contribute to sustainable development, it must be responsive to the needs and overcome the difficulties in its own social and natural environment. Moreover the gap between the world of social science learning and the world of work must be bridged.
- (vi) Social science education must increasingly address the issues of enhancement of national productive capacities, poverty reduction, improvement of the position of women, community involvement in

decision-making and the management of population growth.

- (Vii) For social science education to be relevant in ensuring sustainable development, it must focus on the identification of contextualised patterns that can guide action and serve as models for analysis and analysis-guided policies. It must derive from the context of our own societal realities that is critical for greater analytical efficacy and more effective social action and socio-economic development of the developing nations (Peattie 1995, Mabogunje 1999).

In conclusion, for social science education to achieve sustainable development in developing nations, it must impart the knowledge of rural economics, engender solidarity among nations and societies to achieve preservation of bio-diversity, connect present and future generations, and ensure higher quality of life for all over time.

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