ROLE OF UNIVERSITY EDUCATION FOR ACHIEVING SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS IN NIGERIA: PROSPECTS AND PROBLEMS

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Abstract

University education in Nigeria is an important key in achieving a sustainable national development Goals. On the basis of this, this paper attempts to explain the concept of university education, concept of sustainable Development Goals, and the relationship between university education and sustainable national development. The paper

Keywords: Education, Sustainable Development Goals, Problems, Prospects, University.

INTRODUCTION

Education is widely accepted as a major instrument for promoting socio-economic, political and cultural development in Nigeria. Universities educate future leaders and develop the high-level technical capacities that underpin economic growth and development (Ajayi and Ekundayo, 2006). The role of education in human development cannot be over emphasized. It has been described as an important tool in any human society, which makes man to develop faster than other creatures. Education is the bedrock of all human sectors – political, medical, the quality of education, agricultural, security, etc. This perhaps makes true the saying that, no nation can rise above the quality of education its citizens receive. And can be use as a tool for promoting sustainable Development Goals in
provides an insight of various problems confronting university education such as inadequate funding, infrastructural and physical facilities and other instructional materials and equipment. This paper therefore, recommends that Universities should be adequately funded, and finally a committee that will manage and supervise projects design towards achieving sustainable development Goals in Nigerian Universities should be put in place.

Nigeria. The main purpose and relevance of university education in Nigeria is the provision of much needed human resources to accelerate the socio-economic development of the nation. Such specialized education at the higher level is regarded as an instrument of social change and economic development (Ibukun, 1997). Sustainable development in Nigeria requires the availability of competent and committed human resources. Using education as tool, the Government hopes to produce human resources that serve in different capacities and contribute positively to the nation’s socio-economic and political development. Human Resource is basic resource. It is the indispensable means of converting other resources to mankind’s use and belief. How well we develop and employ human skills is fundamentals in deciding how much well we will accomplish as a nation. The manner in which we do so will more profoundly determine the kind of nation we become (Okarafor & Soludo, 1991) cited in (Ukamaka, 2011).

According to the National Policy on Education (2013) University Education shall make contribution to national development by:
   a. Intensifying and diversifying its programmes for the development of high level manpower within the context of the needs of the nation;
   b. making professional course contents reflect our national requirements;
   c. making all students part of a general programme or all round improvement in university education to offer general study contents such as history of ideas, philosophy of knowledge, nationalism and Information Technology (IT); and
   d. Making entrepreneurial skills acquisition a requirement for Nigerian universities.

University Education, therefore, is important to the growth and development of the society because of its power to fashion an individual to be integrated into his society, and to become a promoter of his societal culture, and development. It is a weapon for acquiring skills, knowledge and competence for survival in a changing world (Adepoju & Fabiyi in Ekpo and Ish’ak, 2014). In dynamic and rapidly changing world, University education is essential for an individual to be able to access and apply information as well as to develop specific skills for work towards achieving sustainable development goals. Upon this background, it is
paramount to note that University Education is an important instrument for change and sustainable national development. As such presents a discussion on the problems confronting university as an agent of sustainable development goals.

**Concept of University Education in Nigeria**
According to Aggarwal (2008) "Higher education is defined in the International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED) Handbook as more specialized study normally undertaken after successful completion of a good basic education lasting for at least eleven years. Higher education can take place in a variety of institutions only some of which are called universities". According to NUC (2016) there are 143 Universities (40 federal, 42 States, 61 Private).

The university level first stage offers a bachelor’s degree after a minimum of three years, and a maximum of six years (e.g. In-medicine). The University level second stage offers master degree following one year of post-bachelor’s study. The university level third stage offers the doctorate degree two to three years after the masters. To gain admission into the first level of university education, one has to pass the competitive university matriculation examination (UME) (IAU, 2000). The Nigeria higher education system in spite of being Africa’s largest higher education system with nearly 400,000 students is unable to admit all qualified applicants every year (Association for the Development of Education in Africa, 2000, Ajayi and Alani. 1996)

**Concept of Sustainable Development**
The term sustainable development has been tied down to economic prosperity, environmental quality, social equity and cultural diversity (Ogunyemi, 2005). According to Abdulkarim (2011) a very crucial point of consideration when discussing sustainable development is the World Commission Report, where sustainable development is defined as the process of developing land, cities, business, communities, etc. to meet the needs of the present generation without compromising the ability of future generation to meet their own need (World Commission on Environment and Development, 1987). In the same vein, Lehman, Christensen and Hansen (2007), stated that global sustainable development strategy should focus on satisfaction of people’s basic needs without compromising the quality of life of future generations. The World Health Organization (2005) refers to the interdependent and mutually reinforcing pillars of sustainable development as socio-economic and cultural development, and environmental protection. Furthermore, the World Health Organization (2005), identified information, integration, and participation as the building blocks for countries to achieve development. Thus, sustainable development would involve all citizens of the nation whose knowledge and skills are essential for solving today’s problems and preparing for future challenges. Education is expected to play a central role in the production of
these human resources. Particularly, university education is to intensify and diversify its programmes for development of high level manpower within the context of the needs of the nation (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2004, p.38). In the light of this, for Nigeria to attain a sustainable political, economic, social, educational and technological development, universities' operations must be in line with national goals and aspiration. Moreover, performance of units and departments should be properly managed in order to ensure efficiency and effectiveness. As a result of global challenge, Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) was launched in 2000 to tackle such pressing human needs like poverty reduction, equality of education, etc. However, the goals have not been fully achieved at the end of 2015 as intended which lead to the introduction of Sustainable Development Goals (SGGs) by the United Nations to build on the MDGs and complete what MDGs did not achieve.

**University Education and Sustainable Development Goals: The Relationship**

Having stated above, the various definition of sustainable development and University education in Nigeria, it is imperative to examine the relationship between the two concepts. Nigeria just like all other nations, education remains the instrument for effective national development. According to Umoh (2005), Development is championed through education, which is often to have significant influence. Education entails the enlightenment of people in their ways of in their ways of pursuit in life. Development is associated with a positive change of either individuals’ groups, communities or even a country as whole. Development and Education in general and University Education in particular are inseparable, interconnected and interwoven, while on one hand development is geared towards producing or creating something new or more advanced for the society and its members. On the other hand, University education serves as tool which can enhance the desired sustainable development goals in Nigeria. Therefore, one can refer university education and sustainable development goals as two sides of the same coin.

The fact that university education and sustainable development shows glaring connectivity this no doubt explained why scholars emphasized the need for university education for the purpose of achieving the desired sustainable development goals. Addo (2010) stressed that, the need for higher education institutions in a developing country like Nigeria cannot be over-emphasized. According to him higher education plays a pivotal role in assisting the country in the achievement of her national developmental objectives. Among the other level of education such as primary, secondary and tertiary levels; higher education institutions particularly universities vis-à-vis tertiary education institutions particularly universities contribute immensely in the area of capacity building and development of quality manpower in the various sectors of the country (Olorunleke, 2013). Sustainable Development can be as the target goal since it is meant for the society and its members; university education however remains
the instrument for achieving and attaining the target sustainable development goals. From the above, it can be deduced that university education seems to directly determine whether sustainable development goals is going to be realized or not and therefore, the need for a well structured educational system that will enhance the achievement of the aforementioned Development in order to meet the Sustainable Development Goals.

Problems of University Education in Nigeria
Ibukun (1997) observed that university governance in Nigeria today is nothing but crises management. Nigeria’s university crises, some of which have been identified by the world Bank (1994), and the traces are noticeable as: Decline Public Expenditure; deteriorated infrastructure/facilities/equipment for teaching, research and learning materials are either lacking or very inadequate and in a bad shape to permit the universities the freedom to carry-out the basic functions of academics; the erosion of university autonomy and academic freedom; the increase rate of graduate unemployment; brain-drain; and student unrest and constant strikes by both students and academic staff.

Financial Crises:
Ibukun (1997) lamented that, there is growing shortage of funds and resources in the university system. According to Oyeneye (2006), and Adegbite (2007), the major challenge facing the management of university system in Nigeria is inadequate funding. Meanwhile Ajayi and Ayodele (2001) argued that there was an increase in the proportion of total expenditure devoted to education, but this has been considered to be rather grossly inadequate considering the phenomenon increase in student enrolment and increasing cost, which has been aggravated by inflation. Besides, Ajayi and Ekundayo (2009) remarked that, the Nigerian Government over the years has not been meeting the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) recommendation of 26% of the total budget allocation to education sector. Aina (2007) posited that, government priority to education is still very low. These revelations expose the extent to which the government itself is a contributing factor to the financial imbroglio of the university system.

Table 1: Federal Budget for Education (2011-2015)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Allocation (N Billion)</th>
<th>Allocation as % of Total Budget</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>356.4</td>
<td>1.69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>409.5</td>
<td>10.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013</td>
<td>437</td>
<td>8.70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2014</td>
<td>495.2</td>
<td>10.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2015</td>
<td>392.2</td>
<td>9.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2016</td>
<td>369.6</td>
<td>8.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Bogoro (2015)
The above table shows that the allocation to education in Nigeria from 2011 to 2015 has not exceeded 10% percent of the total budget of the country. This shows that it is grossly inadequate as against the international benchmark of 26 % according UNESCO (1998).

Deteriorated infrastructure:
It is worrisome to note that Nigerian universities are fast decaying. All the resources required for education production process are in short supply, Lecture Halls, Laboratories, students Hostels, library space, books and journals, Offices spaces are all seriously inadequate. (Ochuba, 2001). According to the World Bank (1994) the equipment for teaching, research and learning are either lacking or very inadequate and in a bad shape to permit the universities the freedom to carry-out the basic functions of academics. Still. According to the NUC (2004), Presidential Visitation Panel which locked into the operations of all federal universities were in deplorable condition. Meanwhile this condition of resource inadequacy is what Ajayi and Ayodele (2001) described as an offshoot of the endemic crises in the sector.

Brain Drain syndrome;
Brain-drain, refers to widespread migration of academic staff from the universities in the country to overseas universities or equivalent institutions where their services are better rewarded. Akindutire (2004). Institutional deterioration and salary erosion during the past decade have prompted substantial"brain-drain" of academic staff and impeded new staff recruitment. According to Bangura (1994), between 1988 and 1990, over 1000 Lecturers left the Federal university system in Nigeria. Also, according to Saint, Harnett and Strassner (2003), various factors have combined to cause these staffing difficulties. One has been the relatively low level of academic salaries during the past decade and the declining financial attractions of university employment in comparison to other opportunities. Another has been the rising workloads associated with deteriorating staff/students’ ratios. It must be emphasized that while the best brains are leaving the university system, the broad aim of producing high level manpower from the system for national development cannot be achieved.

Erosion of university autonomy;
Ojedele and Ilusanya (2006) and Babalola, Jayeioba and Okediran (2007) describe university autonomy as protection of the universities from interference by government officials in the day to day running of the institution especially on the issues related to the selection of student, the appointment and removal of academic staff including vice-chancellors, the determination of content of university education and the control of the degree standard and the determination of size and the rate of growth. According to Ajayi and Ayodele
government involvement in university governance has been appoint of strife between the government and the academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) over some time now. University autonomy is essential to the advancement, transmission and application of knowledge and this is the more reason the ASUU has been more vociferous in the demand. According to Babalola et al (2007), University autonomy and academic freedom has over the years been a recurring issue in the ASUU's demand from the federal government.

**Graduate unemployment**;
Akinduture (2004) laments that the problem of graduate unemployment is a reality in Nigeria where graduates had to wait for upwards of five years to get job in the public service. According to Ajayi and Ayodele (2002), it is even common in recent times for university graduates to be subjected to series of competitive examinations for appointments. The lamented further that it is becoming a herculean task for fresh inexperienced graduates to pick a ‘first’ employment in the formal sector.

**Volatile and militant student unionism**;
Ekpo and Ishak (2014) submitted that, the current trend in universities in Nigeria are in a state of decay and rot, according to them the situation has most recently assumed unprecedented, unimaginable and alarming proportions. ASUU in this direction in a bid to force the Nigerian government to revamp these citadels of learning embarked on total and indefinite strike in 2009. According to them this strike have brought ASUU and the Federal Government together and resulted in the signing of agreement in order to address the dispute as it affects the following issues among others:Funding requirements for revitalizing the Nigerian universities;Federal Government Assistance to state universities;Progressive increase of annual budgetary allocation to education to 26% between 2009 and 2020;Payment of Earned Academic Allowances (EAA);Amendment of the pension/retirement age of academic on the professorial cadre from 65 to 70 years;Establishment of Pension Fund Administrator;University Governing Council; Transfer of Federal Government landed property to universities; and Setting up of research and development units by companies operating in Nigeria and teaching and research equipment;

**Conclusion**
University Education is the main instrument of achieving sustainable development goals. There is no doubt that achieving sustainable national development goals is the goal of all developing nations. Nigeria inclusive. As such there are needs to encourage and enlighten people on the importance of education in general and University education in particular. The role of government at all levels are to facilitate the achievement of any development goal. Government should continue to contribute towards achieving these
sustainable development goals. However, the need for monitoring supervising and ensuring that all the financial and other investment on university education for the purpose of achieving sustainable development goals are not diverted.

Suggestions
As we seek to achieve sustainable development goals using University education as a tool the following suggestions for improvement were made:

1. Universities should be adequately funded by giving top priority in the budget (at least a minimum of 30%). At least 50% of the budgeted 30% should be allocated to universities and also sourcing internal revenue and individual contributions, corporate bodies should be encouraged.
2. Two percent (2%) Profit collection from Multi-National Companies operating in Nigeria for TETFund intervention should be increased to four percent (4%) for the development of University Education in Nigeria.
3. A committee should be put in place charged with the responsibility of managing and supervising projects to ensure implementation of project design for a particular developmental programme in Nigerian universities are not diverted for other purposes.
4. For the purpose of achieving sustainable development goals, there are needs for conducive learning atmosphere. As such, the delipidated infrastructural and physical facilities should be improved.
5. Government at all levels should come out with solutions to the menace of graduate unemployment by providing slots and other job vacancies to our teeming youth. This will ensure a speedy achievement of sustainable national development goals.
6. It is recommended that a university/Industry Partnership should be established because it is a hallmark of national development and progress. This would give double benefit to industries by helping universities to produce graduates for their consumption.
7. Nigerian universities should be full autonomy in the selection of students, appointments of academic staff etc, for the purpose of achieving the desired sustainable development goals.
8. Conditions of service as well as welfare of both staff and students in Nigerian universities should be re-visited in order to reduce the enormity of Brain-Drain syndrome that have already dilapidated Universities in the country.

REFERENCES


