

# Promoting Sustainable Development in Nigeria: Via Civic Education

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## Abstract

Nothing in this world is so powerful as an idea whose time has come. In the face of ethical knowledge, skill disposition and sustainable development in Nigeria, civic education assumed central position. Idea of civic education in Nigerian curriculum is so powerful to the extent that each young Nigerian deserves its knowledge. On this basis, this paper describes civic education as an underpinning factor for individual and social development of our nation. The paper analyzes the fabric between civic education and social development towards blending and interfacing local wisdom with global knowledge, values and skills, which will develop the young Nigerian to become a citizen of this country as well as a citizen of the global village. The paper points to the fact that civic education is central to shaping attitudes and social interaction and both are critical to addressing issues surrounding sustainable development. To this end, the paper concludes that sustainable development requires civic knowledge, civic skills and civic disposition. It is therefore recommended that civic education should be seen as an engine for development in which states, individuals, communities, and businesses partake in providing sustainable development.

**Keywords:** Sustainable development, civic education, national development, individual progress.

## Introduction

Civic education remains an important means of teaching the populace about individual rights and what duties and responsibilities the governed and leaders should do. The introduction of Civic Education as a subject to be taught in primary and secondary schools in Nigeria is expected to further deepen democratic culture and encourage qualitative participation of the average Nigerian in the governance process.

The Civic Education curriculum according to Yahya (2013) addresses young Nigerians in the formative educational years. The contents address issues that are important to developing young Nigerian people into responsible citizens. In other words, the curriculum enables our young people imbibe the values, norms, knowledge, actions and activities for sustaining development.

While sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. Sustainable development could also be construed as a global responsibility and solidarity between generations, between women and men and between different cultures and countries. It is about safeguarding and efficient use of existing natural resources. Investment in management of human, social and physiological resources is also crucial parts of sustainable development.

However, civic education is said to be a veritable tool for promoting sustainable development and improving the capacity of the people to address environment and development issues. Civic education is concerned with three different elements: civic knowledge, civic skills and civic disposition. Civic knowledge refers to citizens' understanding of the workings of the political system and of their own political and civic rights and responsibilities (e.g. the rights to freedom of expression and to vote and run for public office, and the responsibilities to respect the rule of law and the rights and interests of others). Civic skills refer to citizens' ability to analyze, evaluate, take and defend positions on public issues, and to use their knowledge to participate in civic and political processes (e.g. to monitor government performance, or mobilize other citizens around particular issues). Civic dispositions are defined as the citizen traits necessary for a democracy (e.g. tolerance, public spiritedness, civility, critical mindedness and willingness to listen, negotiate, and compromise). For Azebanwan (2010) elements of civic education are real because they actually affect peoples' lives. They are topical, current today and relevant. The issues are moral, because they relate to making responsible citizen.

Responsible citizenship is the hallmark of every promising society. Indeed this is a basic requirement for sustainable national development and nationhood. It is on the strength of this that Obama (2009) in his address to American's school children declared thus:

“We will need the insights and critical - thinking skills you gain in history and Social Studies to fight poverty and homelessness, crime and discrimination, and make our nation fairer and freer. You need the creativity and ingenuity you develop in all your classes to build new companies that will create new jobs and boost our economy.”

This speech is established on the assumption that every citizen has got one way or the other to

contribute to national development. That is why for every society, there must be a clearly articulated framework for responsible citizenship and national development. For Nigeria, this, no doubt has been laid down in the National Policy on Education of 2004.

However, there seem to be a strong relationship between civic education and sustainable development. This perhaps justified Enoh's (2009) observation that civic education is a potent factor to sustainable development, and therefore both concepts are seen as monolithic entities placed on a linear relationship with the concept of civic education being stronger. It is therefore, capable of affecting sustainable development.

It is arguable to say sustainable development is interconnected with national development. The concept of national development touches all the aspects of societal development—political, economic, social, cultural, technological and educational. When talking of civic education and sustainable development, it must be clearly stated that civic education is holistic approach to contribute to national development. In this circumstance, civic education is identified as a potent instrument that can engineer national development by helping to produce responsible citizens who will maximally contribute to the building of a useful society. When the citizens' capacities and commitments are well developed through the curriculum, every citizen will become conscious of his or her responsibility to the growth of the nation.

What is the prerequisite to achieve this? There is need for a responsive curriculum that is flexible and dynamic enough to drive the society on the path of growth and development. Such a progressive curriculum must be interdisciplinary in character and so Civic Education as an interdisciplinary study is clearly documented in the National Policy on Education and therefore accorded the status of a core subject.

Oyetade and Oladiran (2012) note that the concept of sustainable development has been an age long discourse in all education matters. For education is a human development process, schools are one of the societal institutions that have an active role in helping children and youths learn to live and work in their nation. Hence, it is of great importance that teachers make their classroom places where children feel that their ideas will be given a respectful hearing, and where they know that learning will be placed upon them. There should be daily occasions to ask pupils what they think, how a proposed problem is to be solved, what features they think should be located on a class-constructed map, and so on. In such a classroom environment, the meaning of involvement is learned, and good will and mutual respect are observed and experienced. Since children learn what they live, and since we want children to learn the satisfactions of participatory approach, we should look for concrete ways in which pupils input have a better-than-even chance of influencing policy. Where civic sensitivity and responsibility are nurtured, thus children tend to develop a feeling of loyalty and protectiveness towards their class. This sometimes expresses itself in surprising, rewarding ways.

The drive towards re-engineering the process of teaching and learning civic education in our primary and secondary schools has become very imperative especially in the face of awakening national consciousness and promoting sustainable development. In the 80s, it became painful evident that lack of civic education and patriotic orientation had led to disorientation in schools and the larger society. The consequences were being felt at all strata of our society. Recent occurrences have indicated that Nigeria is on the brink of losing its national development. The prevalent trend of corruption, indiscipline, disrespect for both elders and the rule of law, non committal to duty and so on are some of the manifestations of negative values in the Nigerian society. This calls for urgent value re-orientation because of their far-reaching impact on sustainable development.

Acquiring knowledge and skills have become essential for an informed, efficient and responsible citizen. Today, more than ever before, young people need to understand how Democracy works and how they can help to keep it and improve it. During the last 10-15 years, civic education has become one of the central objectives in many schools, especially in the context of promoting interdisciplinary and practice-oriented projects, making civic education not merely a school subject but a way of school life. The foregoing assertion therefore clearly suggests that acquisition of the knowledge of civic education is a vital tool for sustainable development in Nigeria.

### **Conceptual Clarification: Sustainable Development**

Sustainability education (ES), Education for Sustainability (EfS), and Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) are interchangeable terms describing the practice of teaching for sustainability. ESD is the term most used internationally and by the United Nations.

Sustainable development has been variously conceived in terms of vision expression (Lee, 1993), value change (Clark, 1989), moral development (Rolston, 1994), social reorganization (Gore, 1992) or transformational process (Viederman, 1994) toward a desired future or better world. The core idea was defined most influentially by The World Commission on Environment and Development (i.e., The Brundtland Commission) as "development which meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" (1987: 8). In its broadest sense, this normative abstraction has been widely accepted and endorsed by thousands of governmental, corporate, and other organizations worldwide (Gladwin & Krause, In press).

The basic principles underlying sustainable can be separated into a social, economic, and ecological dimension. The economic growth is used to be seen as a requirement for development. No country can achieve a sustainable economic growth if the environment is worsened, if the prosperity is not fairly distributed and if growth of the human resources has not taken place. Therefore the economical dimension means that economical growth shall carry on with: first, respect taken to the environment, second, growth of the people's health and education and third, a fair distribution of prosperity. The social dimension points out the importance resources, power and influence are fairly distributed and that people can feel security and can participate. The social dimension is therefore a requirement for economic growth. The environment dimension means that considerations are taken for the social and economical development. These three dimensions are integrated with each other as they are interdependent and mutually reinforcing. The implication of this is that sustainable development to a large extent is about politics (Tilbury & Wortman, 2004).

In 1992 a UN conference, also known as Earth Summit, was held in Rio de Janeiro. The most famous agreement from that meeting is the Agenda 21, a plan of action for sustainable development. Two major differences from earlier conferences were (a) the large number of participating voluntary organizations and (b) the emphasis of the plan of action of the regional, national and local cooperation to reach a sustainable development. Chapter 36 in Agenda 21 brings up educational issues and it emphasizes the importance of orienting the education to achieve sustainable development (see <http://www.wwf.org>).

Groundwork has been laid for sustainability education worldwide. Recent changes in service learning, a focus on literacy and skills, standards that support interdisciplinary thinking and the role of systems thinking have all increased the visibility of the movement (Dernback, 2002). Various approaches to ESD encourage people to understand the complexities of and synergies between the issues threatening planetary sustainability and understand and assess their own values and those of the society in which they live in the context of sustainability. ESD seeks to engage people in negotiating a sustainable future, making decisions and acting on them. While it is generally agreed on that sustainability education must be customized for individual learners (Huckle & Sterling, 2006), according to Tilbury and Wortman (2004), the following skills are essential to ESD:

- Envisioning – being able to imagine a better future. The premise is that if we know where we want to go, we will be better able to work out how to get there.
- Critical thinking and reflection – learning to question our current belief systems and to recognize the assumptions underlying our knowledge, perspective and opinions. Critical thinking skills help people learn to examine economic, environmental, social and cultural structures in the context of sustainable development.
- Systemic thinking – acknowledging complexities and looking for links and synergies when trying to find solutions to problems.
- Building partnerships – promoting dialogue and negotiation, learning to work together.
- Participation in decision-making – empowering people.

### **Civic Education**

Civic education is one of the subjects taught in both primary and secondary schools which inculcates sound moral values in the youths. It is the subject which aims to help people learn how to become active, informed and responsible citizens. Civic education remains an important means of teaching the populace about individual rights and what duties and responsibilities the leaders and the led have (Olaitan, 2007).

According to Federal Ministry of Education (2007), "Civic education is a classroom subject introduced into the Nigerian school curriculum as part of the basic education program for the purpose of developing young Nigerian people into responsible citizens". For Niemi and Junn (1998) "Civic education is to produce and enrich a political knowledgeable citizenry, and educates and inspires individuals to be responsible and devoted to the production of good government and the legitimacy of the democratic regime. Dynneson and Gross believe that citizenship training had long been hankered for and devoted to building a human environment where the new members value and believe in the democratic way of life is based on specific and identifiable moral and ethical behaviours (Dynneson & Gross, 1991). Put differently, civic education creates a meaningful position for the individual within society and provides equal opportunity for them to realize their knowledge, skills and abilities through different specializations and professional channels.

Effective implementation of civic education provides a philosophical and structural framework on which to base the teaching of skills and strategies that reinforce reasoned decision-making skills, evaluation of information, practical application of civic virtue, and an in-depth understanding of citizenship responsibility (Kidwell, 2005). A USAID study in 2002 discovered that civic education programs have an enormous and positive impact on learners in comprehending and practicing key aspects of democratic behaviours and attitudes. The report claims that civic education helps students to know and identify public policy and increases their political participation through exploring and studying local problems. "It also leads to more moderate, but still significant, differences in participants' knowledge about their political system and about democratic structures

and institutions in general, and it also tends to contribute to a greater sense of political efficacy” (USAID, 2002).

### **Theoretical Framework**

Human capital theory can be defined in different ways, all of which primarily acknowledge that investment in acquired education/schooling and other sources of knowledge have a positive impact on productivity and wages (Becker, 1962; Hanushek, 1979, 1996, 2002; Hanushek & Woessmann, 2007; Lucas, 1988; Nafukho, Haritson & Brooks, 2004; Olaniyan & Okemakinde, 2008; Psacharopoulos, 2006; Quiggin, 1999, Sweetland, 1996; Schultz, 1970; Tsang, Rumberger, & Levin, 1991; Zula & Chermack, 2007).

Also, Levin (1989) stated, “The theory was predicated on awareness that a society can increase its national output, or an individual can increase his or her income, by investing in either physical capital (e.g., a plant and equipment, to increase productivity) or in human capital (e.g., education and health, which also increase human productivity)” (p. 14). Furthermore, Weiss (1995), while explaining the use of schooling as a sorting model, in hiring decisions, of unobservable difference in productivity, defined human capital theory as that which “is concerned with the role of learning in determining the returns to schooling” (p. 134).

Blundell, Dearden, Meghir, and Sianesi (1999) perceived education as a formation in human capital from the perspective similar to the decision which business leaders make to build and strengthen their work force. Human capital theory is more of an economic theory, but in regard to education Olaniyan and Okemakinde (2008) maintained that, “The development of skills is an important factor in production activities” (p. 479). Therefore, potentially, the provision of education will help in the acquisition of these skills (Lochner, 2004; Psacharopoulos, 2006) and, thereby, the citizenry and their living standards are improved. Similarly, Sweetland (1996) wrote that “Individuals and societies have some economic benefits from their investments in people” (p. 341).

Based on the views of these authors, one might ask whether human capital theory is appropriate for this study because the purpose of the study is not primarily about or limited to economic yield, but that of a general orientation for individuals to contribute to sustainable development. Scholars like Livingstone (1997), Psacharopoulos (2006), and Psacharopoulos and Patrinos (2004) see this as a limitation in the use of this theory solely to explain measurable wage gains from any increased unit of education.

For example, there is evidence from some developed nations that shows that despite more education there is high unemployment or underemployment, which all things being equal, means lower wages (Livingstone, 1997). Do these factors mean that education is irrelevant? According to Livingstone, as a consequence, some scholars have tried to argue for educational reform or advocate for lifelong job training to keep the theory relevant. Yet, there are relative economic benefits that come from the intangible outcomes of schooling. It is based upon these intangibles, also called externalities, which come with education, especially at the foundational levels in a nation that the theory is used in this study. From this perspective, introduction of civic education is a way of ensuring individual development, which shows an enormous government intervention and commitment to national development.

According to Checchi (2006), Fagerlind and Saha (1983), and Zula and Chermack (2007), human capital theory is one basic condition and justification for large public expenditure on education in any country. In some cases, it is about building a conscientious community that can be mobilized in certain ways to support the public good or, as presented by Meyer, Tyack, Nagel, and Gordon (1979), for nation-building, because education is always cheaper than ignorance.

### **Interconnection between Civic Education and Sustainable Development**

Dahal (2010) observed that civic education consolidates social fabrics and galvanizes relations each other for common cause. Through civic education, an individual becomes sensible and disciplined member of their communities. This ultimately promotes good governance and national development. There is every need to provide moral education in formal course of study at various school levels.

Beyond political reason, the importance of civic education has been recognized in economic status quo of Nigeria. According to Olaitan (2013) economy of the nation is based on three components namely- state, private sector and cooperative. If the economy fails to support politics, there will be a dearth of participation that ultimately affects democracy, human dignity and values. Thus, the country's politics has become more capital-centric. Politics, guide economic activities and economic activities are the fundamental to the politics. Without civic education, people cannot realize the essence of politics. Civic education teaches people to be responsible and dutiful. Civic education teaches citizens to be good citizen. Indeed, this is a catalyst to development.

In a study by Oyetade and Olaniran (2013) titled “Developing knowledge and attitudes of civic education in students for sustainable development in Nigeria” it was discovered that students’ exposure to participatory civic programme leads to some gain or improvement in knowledge and attitudes when compared to those not exposed to participatory civic programme. This indicates that continued implementation of the programme would pave way for the pre-service teachers to develop rational and the right type of attitudes

towards civic issues within and outside the school premises.

Similarly, Obasanjo (2007) in his farewell broadcast presented this challenge: We have set for ourselves ambitious targets that will make us one of the largest economies in the world by the year 2020. It is attainable and achievable but if we divert from the part of economic prudence, reform and realities, we can miss the road. Then the year 2020 will be a mirage. To buttress the above, Nwachukwu (2007) summed it this way:

“Putting Nigeria education in a more responsive shape in order to plant the nation and its continent, Africa, on the map will need a whole lot of initiatives for new realities in paradigm creations. Education is the pivot of expected Millennium national transformation (P. 53-54)

As to the responsiveness of curriculum in order to address the challenges of sustainable development, Emah (2009) observed that such a curriculum takes cognizance of vital changes and challenges in the environment and prepares the learners to meet them. Such a curriculum addresses their learning differences. The author concluded that in today’s world, a responsive curriculum is that which equips the learner for development in information, communications and technology (ICT); local and global challenges of ensuring peace and resolving conflicts, health concerns and myriads of social, economic and political demands that confront individuals and the entire society on a daily basis.

The current trend of Civic Education curriculum is well responsive enough to equip students with requisite skills that will make them function effectively and contribute productively to the growth and development of the society.

### **Recommendations**

Having discussed the nexus between civic education and sustainable development in Nigeria, the paper recommends functional civic education content which trains the individual for a better appreciation of his own cultural traditions whilst at the same time equipping him with the ability to absorb new ideas, new information and new data for resolving the constantly changing problems of his environment. This will lead to individual development and consequently promote national development.

In addendum, civic education should be taught to redefine our national priority in favour of hard-work, diligence, honesty and patriotism. So long as people make it because of their connections, so long as tribe and old school ties are the basis for progress in public service, so long will all the talk about sustainable development be mere talk. Civic education teaches all and sundry to contribute greatly to the success of national economy.

### **Conclusion**

From the foregoing, evidently there is a compelling relationship between civic education and sustainable development. That is why civic education is identified as a potent force in the pursuit of development challenges. This paper argued for the use of Civic Education as a realistic platform for the production of responsible citizens who will contribute positively towards a country’s quest for sustainable development. In meeting the challenges of sustainable development, civic education has the capacity to perform its mission of promoting an education culture that stimulates civic competence, critical thinking skills, articulate, analyze and proffer solutions to complex socio-economic and political issues of state policies.

Civic education therefore represents educators’ pedagogical paradigm shift that enhances thinking about what is expected to mould future citizens who are endowed with self-sustaining skills and talent of engaging in productive activities that will contribute to sustainable development. It could be affirmed that responsible citizenship is the hallmark of any national development efforts. In this wise, the paper emphasizes on the grooming of right citizens for the future as a duty duly claimed by civic education because it is a nation-building course. If the citizens are therefore identified as instruments to pursue development, it is therefore recommended that Civic Education Curriculum contents should be strengthened to be seen as a catalyst for the advancement of individual and national development in order to ensure sustainable development for all.

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