

Rethinking Education for Sustainable Development: The Role of Tertiary Institutions in Nigeria

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Abstract

The paper examines the role of tertiary institutions in sustainable development. The tertiary institutions in Nigeria has the responsibility more than ever before to intergrate sustainable development into their teaching and learning. Sustainable development has been defined as meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs, some of the roles of tertiary institutions in sustainable development includes teaching and learning, sustainable research and community engagement and collaborations. Among the challenges of these roles is lack of adequate staff orientation and exchange programmes in Sustainable development to equip staff on how to mainstream sustainability in their work context. In the light of this it was suggested that staff orientation, awareness and exchange programme should be provided to help equip staff on sustainability issues.

Keywords: Higher education, Sustainable development and Tertiary Institutions

Introduction

Higher education has played an important role in promoting sustainable development during the past decades and continue to do so. The vision of Education for sustainable development is “A world where everyone has the opportunity to benefit from quality education and learn the values, behaviour and life styles required for a sustainable future for positive society transformation (UNESCO 2005). Education for sustainable development enable all individuals to fully develop the knowledge, perspectives, values and skills necessary to take part in decisions to improve the quality of life locally and globally on terms which are most relevant to their daily lives. Tertiary institutions has a role to play in this regard. However, Scott &Gough (2006) stressed

that “it is not the job of the university to promote particular orthodoxy (in the form of sustainable development), it is their job to educate students to examine critical policies, idea, concepts and systems, then to make up their mind in thinking about the direction and nature of sustainable human development.

Therefore, an education that seek to balance human and economic well-being with culture, and respect for earths natural resources should be the focus of tertiary institutions for developing the required behaviour towards sustainability. In a quest for sustainable development through education all the stake holders (educators, learners and the community) need to reflect critically on their communities and be empowered to develop strategies to collaboratively fulfill these visions of sustainable development. UNESCO in Palmer (2013) while considering the roles and functions of the tertiary institutions in promoting sustainable development stated that the following issues should be addressed particularly:

- i. Increasing the relevance of teaching and research for the societal process leading to more sustainable development and discouraging unsustainable patterns.
- ii. Improving the quality and efficiency of teaching and research.
- iii. Bridging the gap between science and education, and traditional knowledge and education.
- iv. Strengthening interactions with actors outside the institutions, in particular local communities and business, and
- v. Introducing decentralized and flexible management concepts.

UNESCO (2005) went on to posits that, societal problems are almost complex problems that ask for multidisciplinary approaches. The challenge for tertiary institutions is therefore to create rich learning environments that prepare learners for their roles in the society. Tertiary institutions in Nigeria have the responsibility more than ever before to integrate sustainable development into their teaching and learning, research, community engagement and other operations. This paper aims to examine the roles of tertiary institutions in sustainable development of education, the challenges of tertiary institutions roles in sustainable development and suggest strategic interventions that can make those challenges less influential.

Conceptual Framework

Sustainable Development

Sustainable development is a concept that is complex and not easy to define. Bruntland report (1987) defined it as “meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of the future generations to meet their own needs, Palmer (2013) sees sustainable development as a dynamic and evolving concept with many dimensions and interpretations. According to her, the concept is so open ended that it can be interpreted in many different ways. She further asserts, the various interpretations often reflect not only contextual, but ideological differences. The main issue is to use the idea of sustainable development to reflect on the nature of our world (including development and environmental issues, vulnerability and risk) on key emerging responses to what is wrong and how we should work towards improvement (sustainability). Tertiary education is the education given after post Basic Education in institutions such as Universities and inter-university centres such as the Nigeria French 1 language village, Nigeria Arabic language village, National Institute of Nigerian language, institution such as Innovation Enterprise Institutions (IEIs), and Colleges of education, Polytechnics, Monotechnics, and other specialized institutions such as colleges of agriculture, schools of Health and Technology and the National Teacher’s Institute (NTI) (FGN, 2013).

The Roles of Tertiary Institutions in Sustainable Development

Tertiary institutions vary considerably in how they approach sustainability: some concentrate on minimizing their ecological impact through changes in campus operations, others emphasizes sustainability in their curricular, yet others concentrate on outreach programmes and or embedded sustainable development principles in their overall development strategy. But the important point here is that tertiary institutions have stepped up their efforts to support sustainable development, they have made significant effort to address sustainability in campus operations (commonly known as campus greening), they have introduced new programmes and courses related to education for sustainable development and are extending the value and inputs of their teaching and research to their respectable communities as well as creation of Networks of all institutions both locally and internationally (Africa Survey Report 2011). The following are some specific roles of Tertiary institutions for sustainable development.

Teaching and learning

Tertiary institutions forms a link between knowledge generation and transfer of knowledge to society for their entry into the labour market. Such preparation include education of teachers (educating the educators) who play the most important role in providing education at all levels. Cortese in Johnston (2007) in collaborating the above stated that; higher education institutions bear a profound moral responsibility to increase the awareness, knowledge, skills and values needed to create a just and sustainable future. Tertiary institutions often plays a critical but often overlooked role in making this vision a reality. They prepares most of the professionals who develop, lead, manage, teach work and influence society's institutions. Thus high education institutions have a critical role in developing the principles, qualities and awareness not only needed to perpetuate the sustainable development philosophy, but to improve upon its delivery (Johnston, 2007).

Curricular

This focus on integration of sustainable development in to teaching and learning. Promotion of sustainable development in higher education curricular is being done in various ways. Some of those ways includes mainstreaming in traditional disciplines and in teacher training and developing interdisciplinary courses on sustainable development. Tertiary institutions are also involved in providing staff development opportunities and encouraging students to choose careers in the sustainable development field. One of the major roles of Tertiary institutions in sustainable development is reorienting the existing curricular to address sustainability (UNESCO, 2005). This entails systematic integration or mainstreaming of key sustainable development principles in educational programmes. The survey report (2011) carried out by Global University Network for Innovation (GUNI). The International Association of Universities (IAU) and Association of African Universities (AAU) observed that, Sustainable development issues are multi-dimensional and interconnected and this should be recognized in mainstreaming sustainable development issues in curricular.

Sustainable Researches

Tertiary institutions play an important role in generating new knowledge that shapes and influence the decisions made by governments, policy makers and other stakeholders. Research in sustainable development is encouraged in tertiary institutions through sustainable declarations were they are expected to get involve in

research that contribute to sustainable development. In Nigeria there are variety of factors which influence researchers to be involved in sustainable development research initiatives. In Tertiary institutions, these includes: the existence of sustainable development partnerships, institutional research environments and funding among others. Research initiatives are taken place at different scales in a variety of disciplines, to encourage this research are presentations taken place at different scales in a variety of disciplines for instance faculty sustainability research is being used for variety of purpose. To encourage this research are presentations taken place at various conference, publications in various journals and documentations in university libraries such as students research projects. All those research results are making an impacts in various ways. For instance improving campus environment management practices (energy saving, landscaping, recycling etc.) up campus impact includes projects focusing on challenges in the local communities and some other social challenges which includes gender and food security among other economic benefits.

Outreach and Services

Tertiary institutions contribute actively to societal development through more direct community engagement work. Public outreach has to do with tertiary institutions situating themselves in the communities in which they reside. The basic idea behind public outreach is that tertiary institutions, beside educating students about sustainable development, have a responsibility to promote sustainable development in the communities in which they are located. In that they actively contribute to social development through providing a service to society and through more direct community engagement work. This community engagement is a very crucial dimension of education for sustainable development as engagement with community raises sustainability questions and help tertiary institutions to situate their contributions and provide a forum for applied research as well as offer opportunities for students to engage in in-service learning programmes which provide them with real life experiences. Community engagement also includes opportunities for working with business and industry to ensure sustainable production and consumption patters and improve cooperate governance and also it encourages tertiary institutions to review their relationships with the broader community and their place and role within that community.

Partnernaring of Tertiary institutions with other organizations in seeking solutions to sustainable development has a great significance in sustainable development

measures. This partnership is encouraged within local, national and international levels. Nigerian tertiary institutions have established partnerships/joint ventures aimed at responding to sustainability development with research centres, international associations, government agencies and non governmental organizations among others and have realized a number of sustainable development outcomes including research projects, promotion of culture, supporting communities in peace, health among others. Tertiary institutions through collaborations with other development partners share knowledge, generate activities collaboratively and develop strategies and methodologies to improve sustainable development.

Among other outreach initiatives conducted by Tertiary institutions are rural development, peace, security and conflict resolution, prevention/training, cultural diversity issues, HIV/AIDS prevention. Tertiary institutions are mostly engaged in those activities through research, internships, campaigns, information and training programme.

Challenges Faced by Tertiary Institutions in Sustainable Development

Tertiary Institutions encounter numerous challenges in their quest of ensuring sustainable development. Those challenges include:

1. Inadequate teacher development opportunities: Lack of adequate staff orientation and exchange programmes in sustainable development to help equip staff on how to mainstream sustainability into their work context, because not all university employees have the knowledge and understanding of sustainable development.
2. Irrelevant curriculum contents: some of the courses in the curricula have outlived their usefulness and thus have little relevance to the needs, aspirations and values of today's Nigeria and sustainable educational development. Also the curricula seem not only to lack quality programmes but also dedicated and high quality teachers.
3. Underfunding: finance is crucial to any organization, the establishment and running of tertiary institutions is capital intensive. Running institutions therefore requires significant investment in providing and maintaining a basic infrastructure, and provision of staff opportunities for development among others. The problem here is that Tertiary institutions in Nigeria are grossly underfunded; There is less money to spend on teachers, research and community services, libraries are not well equipped and the laboratories lack

essential apparatus this appears to put more constraint on sustainability research.

4. Problem of Resistance to change: Tertiary institutions in the course of providing outreach and services to the community are face with problems of resistance to change this problem includes: lack of proper articulation of vision, thus the change may not be fully understood. This can result in uncooperative attitudes, apathy, outright opposition, Sabotage among others, that tertiary institutions tends to experience from the communities and other development partners in their guest to promote sustainable development through service delivery to their communities and collaboration with development partners.

Suggestions

In order to minimized the impact of the above mentioned challenges, the following suggestions were made:

1. Staff orientation: not all staff have knowledge and understanding of sustainable development, therefore staff orientation, awareness and exchanges programmes in sustainable development can help equip tertiary institutions staff in sustainability for example; orientation programmes for new staff, staff awareness and programmes in sustainable development among others.
2. Restructuring of the curriculum content: Designing a curriculum that is responsive to the learners endlessly changing requirements is necessary. This does not only emphasizes upon individualization, but a willingness to restructure the ends and means of instruction and to place a much larger reliance upon both technology and available learning experience in and outside the community.
3. Staff development and incentives for sustainable research: Encouraging and supporting staff (financially or in other ways) who undertake to train in the sustainable development field and supporting students researches in sustainable development field through incentives like research grants can encourage involvement of members of tertiary institutions in sustainability development initiatives.
4. Outreach programmes in Sustainable Development: staff and student need to be encourage to participate in outreach programmes in sustainable development. They should also undertake applied sustainable development research intended to solve local community challenges i.e provision of social

services as part of outreach and community programmes. This will go in a long way in promoting the relevance of the university in the local community in which it is situated.

Conclusion

Tertiary institutions play a prominent role in promoting education for sustainable development. Those institutions have stepped up their efforts to support sustainable development, they have made significant efforts to address sustainability in teaching and learning and are extending the value and inputs of their teaching and research to their respective communities and creating a network of institutions both locally, nationally and internationally in order to build capacity, share experiences and expand the influence of education for sustainable development.

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