



## **Full Length Review Article**

### **TERTIARY INSTITUTIONS AS VERITABLE INSTRUMENT FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA**

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#### **ABSTRACT**

Refocusing tertiary institutions for sustainable development in Nigeria seems timely. For no society can grow beyond its educational capabilities. Education at tertiary level occupies a key and central position in sustainable development in Nigeria. Despite this truism, this level of education is perennially faced with problems that impede its efficacy and its very existence in the Nigerian Federation. This paper examines how tertiary institutions can be stimulated for sustainable development through proper funding and grant of autonomy. The paper recommends among others, that Federal and State governments should allocate a minimum of 35 percent of their annual budget to education, and that government should limit their frequent interference in the internal administration of tertiary institutions.

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#### **INTRODUCTION**

Sustainable development is the process of “meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generation to meet their own needs”. It involves enhancing the socio-economic and political well being of the present and future generations without destroying the environment. It also entails development that goes beyond the present (Machael, 2007: 6 World Commission on Environment and Development, 1987). Sustainable development is a concept that has generated a lot of scholarly debates in developed and developing nations. Various governments all over the world are also concerned on how to stimulate and accelerate sustainable development at all levels of economic, political and social activities. Consequently, some approaches such as privatization, commercialization, globalization, environmental protection policies, Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP), Education Reforms etc were adopted by some of these governments. Education especially at tertiary level is gaining unparalleled grounds as inevitable tool for sustainable development. Tertiary education is seen as a vehicle for advancing the frontier of knowledge. They are centre for excellence, dedicated to research, teaching and learning

(Abdukareem, 2001 and Fadipe, 2000). They are people processing institutions (Ochuba, 2001), providing functional education for meeting the economic, political, social and cultural aspiration of a nation (Dahin, Rolff and Kleekamp, 1993). They are instrument par excellence, that promotes development and ameliorates poverty (Akpama, 2001). Tertiary institutions produce the human capital necessary for economic growth and development (FRN, 1981 and 2004; Ojogho and Ogunu, 2003). They are also tools for fostering educational development at all levels (Ade-Ajayi, 2001). Higher institutions are bedrock of national development (Jaja, 2007:1). No serious endeavour in development and human resource training can be carried out without tertiary institutions (Okoye, 2000). Abiding hope for lasting solutions to the political, economic and social problems in Nigeria lies in the development of education, especially at tertiary level (Agbodike, 1999). Despite the indisputable fact, that higher education is one of the most potent forces for sustainable development, this level of education is perennially faced with problems that impede its goal attainment. Notably, they are faced with the problem of inadequate funding, incessant strike action and lack of autonomy (Onyeonoru and Bankole, 2001). Different approaches have been adopted by successive governments in Nigeria to enhance the contributions of tertiary institutions to sustainable development. One of such is the mega merger of polytechnics and Colleges of education to

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existing universities. The implication of this policy on middle manpower development as well as sustainable development is a controversial issue that, have raised much dust in Nigeria. This paper therefore looks at means of enhancing the contribution of higher institutions to sustainable development through proper funding and grant of full autonomy and not the merger option adopted by the Federal and some state governments. The paper also examines the implication of the merger policy on middle manpower development, and sustainable development especially in areas of agriculture, technology, petroleum and construction.

### **The Place of Tertiary Institutions in Sustainable Development in Nigeria**

Sustainable development is a well conceived, planned and executed socio-political and economic change that does not jeopardize the future. This positive change required well trained personnel, skilled labour and research institutions among others. These needs are tied to the number and quality of higher institutions available. Tertiary institutions are therefore established to stimulate and accelerate sustainable development through human capital training, public service and research. Higher institutions are grouped based on their specific objectives or goals into universities, colleges of education, and polytechnics. Each of these institutions has its own function to play in enhancing sustainable development in Nigeria. Polytechnics for instance, are established to provide public service, teach and enhance the frontier of research. They are to produce high and middle manpower, necessary for agricultural, industrial, commercial and economic development. They are to identify and proffer solution to technical and industrial problems. Polytechnics produce technicians and technologists needed for direct employment in industries (FGN, 2000). The centrality of this institution (polytechnics) to sustainable development in Nigeria cannot be undertoned. They are the engine of industrial growth and development. Key technicians and technologists we have in most industries are product of polytechnics.

Significantly, polytechnics also provide the needed high and middle manpower in the agriculture sector (Agbodike, 1999). No country or nation can develop effectively without a vibrant agriculture sector. In Nigeria more than 60 percent of its population works in the agricultural sector (Fashoyi, 1999). The development of this key sector of sustainable change is considerably tied to the output of polytechnics. Colleges of education specific goals and objects include teaching, and production of highly motivated, conscientiousness and efficient classroom teachers needed in our primary and junior secondary schools (FGN, 2000). Primary schools are the basic foundation of the educational pyramid in Nigeria (Fafunwa, 2001), meaning any serious endeavour for sustainable development in the educational sector as well as manpower training, must start with the primary education. Efficient and well motivated teachers must be trained via colleges of education. Universities on the other hand, are established to advance learning in diverse disciplines; promote the development of high level manpower to meet the needs of the Nigerian economy. They are also to generate information through research and disseminate such knowledge. Universities are also established to maintain and transform

cultural heritage of the country (FGN, 2000). The centrality of tertiary institutions to national growth, and sustainable development cannot be over emphasized. They indeed play significant role in training and developing human talents. They are involved in research and dissemination of knowledge. They also proffer solutions to problems facing the Nigerian nation.

### **Impediments to Tertiary Institutions as Instrument of Sustainable Development**

Incessant industrial disputes in tertiary institutions occasioned by underfunding, inadequate school physical facilities, lack of autonomy, non-implementation of union-government agreement, suppressive leadership style etc. (Onyeonuru and Bankole, 2001; Jega, 2007; Buker, 1999); have jointly impede their contribution to sustainable development. Of all these impediments, the most potent is inadequate funding and lack of autonomy of tertiary institutions. Higher institutions in Nigeria except some private few, are characterized by chronic underfunding (Jega, 2007). Inadequate funding of tertiary institution is evidence in the decline of annual budgetary allocation to education from 1994-2004. Federal government yearly expenditure on education in percentage include – 1994-7.83%, 1995 -12.26%, 1996-12.32%, 1997-11.59%, 1998-10-27%, 1999-11.12%, 2000-8.36%, 2001-7.00%, 2002-6.1%, 2003-4.75%, 2004-4.54% (ASUU- National Executive Council, 2005). The effect of inadequate funding to education is the shrink in average allocations per tertiary institutions (Jibril, 2000). For instance, in 2004, the total recurrent grant required by universities in Nigeria was N138 billion, out of which N14 billion was for overhead cost. Government only provided N1.457, 751,042.80 for direct teaching and laboratory cost, to satisfy the system that requires N14 billion (ASUU – National Executive Council, 2005). Similarly, Chukwuma (2001), observed that, financial records in Federal Colleges of Education from 1993-1998 revealed that, there is a great variance between the amount needed to run these colleges effectively and what is actually disbursed to them. Consequently, these institutions cannot adequately provide for school physical facilities, good working environment, and research facilities, (Buker, 1997 and Buker, 1999).

Knowledge is a prerequisite for sustainable development. Knowledge cannot be created in the absence of proper funding of tertiary institutions. According to ASUU – National Executive Council (2005: 38-39):

Knowledge is crucial for development and because everything we do depends on knowledge... And if we want a better tomorrow than today, if we want to raise our living standard as a household or as a country and improve our health, better educate our children, and preserve our common environment, that takes knowledge... Universities cannot develop research facilities to meet challenges of knowledge creation through tokens. Significant progress in research cannot be made on the basis of token funding.

Similarly, Buker (1999), observed that decline in funding affects adversely the quality of teaching and research; and the quest for proper funding by academic and non academic staff of tertiary institutions occasioned by frequent strikes in these

institutions. Lack of full autonomy is another impediment to the potent of tertiary institutions as instrument for sustainable development in Nigeria. According to Ruwa (1997), lack of autonomy in tertiary institutions is one of the sources of perennial disputes between academic staff unions and the federal government. Autonomy here refers to non-interference and independence in the decisions and activities of tertiary institutions. It is the ability of individual tertiary institutions to decide what to do without political or government interference. Higher institutions are by the philosophy of autonomy expected to administer its affairs in all ramification, regardless of whether they derived their support from public subsidies (Brubachers, 1978). The truth in Nigeria is that, no tertiary institution can boast of full autonomy. For instance, in July 10, 2004, the President signed University Autonomy Act. The Law stipulated that, each Council shall select one among the three candidates recommended to it by the joint Senate – Council Committee, then report its choice to the Visitor. Regrettably, all the Vice Chancellors chosen after July 10, 2004, were chosen by the Visitor and not the Council (ASUU – National Executive Council, 2005).

Government is also using National University Commission (NUC) in “usurping the functions of universities, senates, appointments and promotion committee and other internal university organs” (ASUU – National Executive Council, 2005: 39). The implications of government act, is that, wrong vice chancellors are appointed, who carried out suppressive leadership style that contributes to incessant strike actions by academic and non academic staff and is detrimental to the existence of tertiary institutions and their contributions to societal development.

### The Way Forward

In conclusion, this paper highlights measures, necessary for stimulating and enhancing the capacity of tertiary institutions as instrument par excellence for sustainable development in Nigeria.

- The Federal and state governments should allocate a minimum of 35% of their annual budget to education. Of this amount, 20% should be kept aside to run tertiary institutions.
- Government, both state and federal, should as a matter of national urgency, provide adequate funds for the rehabilitation of students’ hostels, classrooms, laboratories, studios, engineering workshops, water and electricity supply, teaching facilities; and funds for building of new classrooms, teaching and research facilities in tertiary institutions.
- The federal and state governments should provide stabilization funds to make up for shortfalls in budgetary allocation to tertiary institutions. This money should be given directly to respective schools, under the supervision of visitors of various institutions and ministry of education.
- The federal government through project funding and other forms of financial intervention should assist state owned tertiary institutions to enhance their efficiency.
- Moreso, owners of private universities, polytechnics and colleges of education should be properly monitored

by government to ensure that adequate funds are made available for the running of these schools, this government can do by mandating these institutions via act of Parliament to submit their annual budget to Ministry of Education for assessment before they are implemented.

- Free hands should be given to heads of tertiary institutions to administer their schools base on laws establishing them.
- Appointment of heads of tertiary institutions should be Senate/Academic Board and Governing Councils affairs, based on democratic principles. Government should confirm these appointments. Heads of tertiary institutions should not be appointed based on the isolated option of government.
- National Universities Commission (NUC), National Commission for Colleges of Education (NCCE) and National Commission for Polytechnics (NCP) should limit their operations within the boundaries of the law establishing them. They should not interfere in the internal administration of their respective schools.

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