

Harnessing the Potentials of Human Capital for Sustainable Development in Nigeria

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Abstract

Technology and the development of robots are yet to rule out the need for human capital development in the course of economic growth and development. This study assessed the efforts of the Nigerian federal government in harnessing the potentials of human capital to enhance the nation's quest for sustainable development. Data was obtained from secondary sources such as books, journals, periodicals, newspapers, the internet, etc. The neo-classical theory (Pearce, 1972) of a closed linear system was adopted as the theoretical framework while the mode of analysis is content analysis. The analysis revealed that the federal government has not been sincere and serious in harnessing the potentials of human capital for sustainable development. Rather government has politicized the issue in favor of the North. The result is that not much progress has been recorded in the quest for sustainable development in the country.

Keywords: *Harness, Potentials, Human capital, Sustainable Development, Politicize.*

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Background to the Study

The development of Robots and further innovations in technology notwithstanding, humans remain pivotal in the course of economic growth and development. To this end, humans are considered the greatest resources of any nation. Hence, Oladeji and Adebayo (1996), perceive human beings as, "the epicentre of economic development". Scholars like Harry (2010); Satope (2012), and Ajibade (2013), believe that, "human resources in any system have come to be the most crucial factor that affects the rate of success in other systems, including organizational settings". In consonance with this line of thought, Fadi (2014) underscored the fact that, "countries like Taiwan, Hongkong, and Singapore have turned the major exporters of a sophisticated range of products (value added manufactures) attributed to the fast growth rate of human capital accumulation and the attainment of new capabilities. Furthermore, Oladeji (2014) also view human capital as, "the centre piece for planning long-run economic growth since human capital reflects every intellectual or theoretical input". It is, "the productive base of any given nation which consists of all forms of capital- physical, human, natural and social which the present generation bequeaths to its descendants". This is the justification for the tendency for UNESCO to, "integrate the principles, values, and practices of sustainable development into all aspects of education and learning, as the key to address new global, social, economic, cultural and environmental challenges" (UNESCO, 2014). Thus, human capital potentials and the quality of such human resources are believed to be pivotal in meeting the conditions for sustainable development particularly in developing countries. Ajibade (2013), holds the view that, "human capital development has the potential to offer humanity the recipe for addressing most of the development challenges confronting the contemporary world".

Health field (2011), defined human capital development as, "a framework for helping employees develop their personnel and organizational skills, knowledge and ability". According to her, human capital development includes such opportunities as employee training, employee career development, performance management and development, coaching, monitoring, etc. Human capital development recognizes that the development and growth of the people in organizations and businesses constitute an important and essential asset to an organization's future success. It then stands to reason that manpower planning is vital in the development and sustenance of various sectors of an economy. This has effect of harnessing human capital potentials for purposes of meeting the developmental needs of an economy.

Statement of the Research Problem

It is obvious that, like most other African nations, Nigeria has not been able to attain most of the millennium development goals (MDGs). It is therefore, not surprising that the nation is far from realizing the goals of sustainable development (SDGs). Eze (2017), includes, "the lack of qualified people to develop and implement alternative technologies due to poor educational system and brain drain as a major hindrance to the nation's aspiration to sustainable development". The onus therefore, revolves around this study to investigate this worrisome development by finding ways by which the potentials of the

human resources in the country can be harnessed to enhance her quest for sustainable development.

Objectives of the Study

The broad objective of this study is to examine the means whereby the human capital potentials for Nigeria's sustainable development can be harnessed. Specifically, the study seeks to:

1. Determine ways of harnessing the potential skills in Nigerians for purposes of the nation's sustainable development.
2. Ascertain the extent to which the potential cognitive ability of Nigerians can be harnessed for the nation's sustainable development.

Research Questions

This study will provide answers to the following questions:

1. How can the potential skills of Nigerians be harnessed to enhance the nation's sustainable development?
2. What measures can facilitate the activation of the cognitive potentials of the average Nigerian citizens for purposes of sustainable development in the country.

Literature Review

Concepts

Sustainable development: There is no single definition of sustainable development. In our *Common Future*, also Known as The Brundtland Commission Report, the term sustainable development is defined as, "development that meets the needs of the present without comprising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs". A view from the United Kingdom Government website perceives sustainable development to mean, "a better quality of life now and for generations to come". Eze (2017) observes that, "while there is a diversity of views on the concept of sustainable development as well as specific policy and practice options for achieving it there is agreement on some of its core principles such as:

1. Meeting basic human necessities fairly and efficiently
2. Preserving options for both present and future generations to meet their needs
3. Promoting community well-being based on broad participation and active citizenship
4. Linking various aspects of sustainability (i.e. economic, ecological and social).
5. Managing and utilizing resources with prudence and precaution, maintaining a holistic perspective and fostering cooperation and shared responsibility.

Human Capital: The concept of human capital is associated with intellectual capacity with flows of knowledge in an individual and can be regarded as the tangible and intangible resources associated with people (money and physical assets). According to Anugwom (2012), "the quality of human capital has several aspects; one of those involves improvement of health and longevity of the population". A study on the relationship

between human capital and sustainable development conducted by Ranis and Stewart (2010), shows that, "human capital development was very important and needs to be properly addressed by countries that want to keep abreast with global challenges especially in the education sector because it is the concept that sustains the education system". Mayo (2001) holds that, "human capital represents the human factor in the organization, the combined intelligence, skills and expertise that give the organization its distinctive character". The human elements of the organization are those that are capable of learning, changing, innovating and providing creative thrust which if properly motivated can ensure the long-term survival of the system.

In a discussion paper, Ekperiware, Olatayo and Egbetokun (2017), studied, "Human capital and sustainable development in Nigeria". The paper examined the coordinating roles (as engine) of human capital among the three pillars of sustainable development in Nigeria from 1981 to 2014 using data from the World Development Indicator (WDI), 2014. Descriptive statistics was used to illustrate observed trend in human capital and the pillars of sustainable development (economic development, social development and environment protection). Vector Auto-Regression (VAR) econometric technique was used to measure trade-offs, effects, interrelationships, and scenario analysis of these indicators and the prominent role of increased human capital scenario in achieving sustainable development. The analyses of the interrelationship and scenario effects of increased human capital formation showed that environmental degradation negatively affected human capital formation but increases with economic growth. A scenario of further increase in human capital development reduces environmental degradation and increases economic growth in Nigeria. Hence, human capital formation leads to sustained economic growth with reducing environmental degradation.

Another study by Ogunleye, Owolabi, Sanyaolu and Lawal (2017), investigated the human capital and economic growth in Nigeria. It employed the ordinary least square regression analysis to examine the impact of human capital development on economic growth of Nigeria, using annual time series data from 1981 to 2015. The empirical results showed that human capital development has significant impact on economic growth, as proxied by the gross domestic product. However, life expectancy and primary school enrollment exhibit a negative and statistically insignificant impact on economic growth of Nigeria. The study concluded that the Nigerian government should ensure adequate resource allocation for the development of human capital in order to enhance economic growth in Nigeria.

In a related development, Adegbo and Abiola (2015), carried out a study on, "Human Capital Development as recipe for sustainable growth in Nigeria". The objective of the paper was to investigate the relationship between human capital (through education and effective healthcare services) and economic growth in Nigeria, using annual time series data from 1981 to 2013. The paper employed OLS methodology with BLUE assumptions, wald test, breusch Godfrey and Pairwise granger test was also used to augment the OLS

methodology. The results showed that considering the magnitude of 1% increase in RGDP (proxy economic growth) is brought about by 46% increase in (EXPHLTH) expenditure on health, 107% increase in (GFCF) gross fixed capital formation, 92% increase in (TEXPEDU) total expenditure on education, 0.00091% increase in (TLBF) total labour force. The estimated value of R^2 (goodness of fit) of 0.98 or 98% which shows that the independent variable explain about 80% of the variation in the dependent variable. The findings have a strong implication on education and health policy in Nigeria. The study suggested that a concerted effort should be made by policymakers to enhance educational and health investment in order to accelerate growth which would engender economic growth.

Theoretical Framework

The Human Capital theory (Romer, 1986). This study adopts as its theoretical framework, the "Human Capital theory by Paul Romer (1986). The AK- Model is the simplest endogenous model. It gives a constant-savings-rate of endogenous growth and assumes a constant, exogenous saving rate. Also, it models technological progress with a single parameter (usually A). It uses the assumption that the production function does not exhibit diminishing returns to scale to lead to endogenous growth. A number of rationale for this assumption have been given which include, positive spillover from capital investment to the economy as a whole or improvements in technology leading to further improvements (that is - learning-by-doing). However, the endogenous growth theory is further supported with models which agents optimally determined the assumption and saving, optimizing the resources to research and development leading to technological progress. Romer (1990) and significant contributions by Aghion and Howitt (1992), Grossman and Helman (1991), incorporated imported markets and R&D to the growth model.

Sources of Data/ Analysis

Data obtained from secondary materials are analyzed by content analysis in the following order:

Research Question One (1): How could the potential skills of Nigerians be harnessed to enhance the nation's sustainable development? It has been demonstrated that education has a multitude of benefits. Key findings from research by World Bank economists (Montenegro and Patrinos, 2013, 2014) into the private returns of schooling (where private returns are an estimate of the proportional increase in the labor market earning from each additional year of schooling completed for an individual) suggest that in general the average return for an additional year of schooling is 10 percent. In addition to increasing economic growth and reducing poverty, "quality education provides other numerous human development outcomes, including improved health and well-being, a lower livelihood of conflict and improved socio-economic prospects for future generations" (Montenegro and Patrinos, 2013, 2014: United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) 2015). In the light of the global adoption of the 2030 Agenda, the mandate of the 19th CCEM and the priorities of the commonwealth secretariat's strategic Plan 2013/2014 - 2016/2017, the curriculum framework for the SDGs to support countries in addressing

all 17 SDGs, are their 169 targets through education. This framework reinforces the connections between the SDGs through a holistic life course approach (early childhood care and education (ECCE) primary education, secondary education, technical and vocational education and training (TVET)/skills development, tertiary education and adult education and learning), taking into account the SDG target and the relevant indicators

Outline of the Curriculum for the SDGs

The framework is a tool for orienting towards sustainability through education. It is intended to be a flexible, non-prescriptive tool that follows a competency development model through a combination of knowledge, skills, values and attitudes. It supports a holistic life course approach involving:

1. New paradigm thinking (systems thinking, integrative thinking, critical and creative thinking);
2. New learning and delivery approaches
3. Integration of different types and forms of knowledge including indigenous and traditional knowledge systems;
4. Core competences;
5. The interconnectedness of the challenges and linkages between the SDGs
6. The integrated continuum of the complex interplay of social and environmental factors mixed with biological issues that help to define learning outcomes and skills development across the course of person's life.
7. Enhanced individual and collective responsibility
8. Strengthened equity, tolerance and respect for others
9. Values, attitudes and ethics, including inclusion and democracy, respect for people and all life forms, equity and social justice, quality of life, care and duty, and sustainability.

Quality education fosters creativity and knowledge, ensures the acquisition of the foundational skills of literacy and numeracy as well as analytical, problem solving and other high-level cognitive, interpersonal and social skills. It also develops the skills, values and attitudes that enable citizens to lead healthy and fulfilled lives, make informed decisions and respond to local and global challenges through education for sustainable development, (UNESCO, 2015). This curriculum is designed to enhance the realization of the SDGs in member countries. Being a member, Nigeria stands to benefit from the adoption.

Research Question Two (2): what measures can enhance the activation of the cognitive potentials of the average Nigerian to enhance the nation's sustainable development?

It cannot be argued that children and young people are both shapers of and shaped by the world around them. When a child is not healthy, has compromised brain functionality due to chronic poor nutrition, does not receive a quality education, does not feel safe in his or her home, school or community; such a child will not be able to fulfill his/her

potentials and responsibilities as a parent, an employee or entrepreneur, a consumer, a citizen. "Such a child is not only denied his/her individual rights, but also deprived the entire human family of the intellectual, social and moral benefits that derive from the fulfillment of these rights"(Weiss, 1992). Against this backdrop, the following measures may be taken to enhance the child's intellectual contribution to sustainable development in Nigeria and beyond:

1. Environmental Protection: This has to do with protecting the environment, the individual and organization from harm. Due to the rise in activity and new technological advancement, the springing up of industries continuously degrades our environment (that is the built environment and natural environment); sometimes this degradation is permanent (Medupin and Adedoyin, 2000).

2. Social Responsibility: According to Bassey (2011), social responsibility is the contribution made by organizations to support the development of the environment. Robbins (2011), also stressed that, social responsibility reflects an entity's commitment to do the right thing for the society. The entity here could be an individual, business or an organization.

3. Human Rights, including Child Rights: Sustainable development starts and ends with safe, healthy and well-educated children. Children represent approximately one-third of the world's population and have the right to survive, live and grow up in a decent environment with all that implies: attending school, enjoying good health and nutrition, and living and growing in safety and security. This is a legal commitment assumed by 193 governments through the UN convention on the rights of the child (CRC).

There are some empirical support for the effect of human capital development on sustainable development in Nigeria and beyond. Mba, C., Mba, E., Ogbubor and Ikepegbu (2013,) in their study of Human capital development and Economic growth in Nigeria, examined the relationship between the two variables. They found the existence of a strong positive relationship between Human capital and economic growth in Nigeria. The recommendations drawn from the study centered on revisiting the manpower needs of the various sectors of the economy. In a related development, Erhun (2015) conducted a study titled, "A sustainable approach to Economic Development in Nigeria from a legal perspective". The paper sought how to construct a dynamic equilibrium economy. It discussed the essentials to sustainable economic development in Nigeria. It found that harmony between man and nature is the prerequisite for sustainable development, emphasizing that humanity must not develop at the expense of environmental health.

Findings:

This paper recorded some findings which include:

1. Sustainable development begins and ends with the child who constitutes one third of the world's population.
2. Human capital is a pre-requisite for sustainable development in any society.

3. Both cognitive (intellectual) and skills acquisition and development are vital components in the quest for sustainable development.
4. Education constitutes the epicenter of the development process since it enhances cognitive development and skill acquisition.
5. Agriculture, food, and nutrition are necessary if the child must grow healthy, acquire education (skills and intellect), contribute meaningfully to sustainable development
6. Human security: this is essential for purposes of sustainable development. It encompasses food security, social security, security of lives, good health, etc. It is also a vital component of the sustainable development package.
7. Environmental Protection: there is the need to protect the environment against degradation and other forms of abuses. A good environment guarantees good health for the citizenry.
8. Child Rights: The need to protect the rights of the child is fundamental as this is the only way to ensure access to good education, good health, skill acquisition and contribution to sustainable development.

Conclusion

In the words of Harbison cited in Ajibade (2013), Human resource, not physical capital, not income or material resources constitute the ultimate basis for the wealth of nations. Capital and natural resources are passive factors of production while human beings are the active agents who accumulate capital; exploit natural resources; build social, economic and political organizations; and carry forward national development. Clearly, a nation which is unable to develop the skills and knowledge of its people and to utilize them effectively in the national economy will be unable to develop anything else. In the context of sustainable development, children occupy the centerpiece as they constitute the children of today and hope for the immediate future. Thus, the development of their skills, competences, attitudes, knowledge and beliefs, are strategic for purposes of environmental sustainability and sustainable development in the long-run. It is therefore, imperative that the potential skills and competences of this human generation; need be harnessed for the benefit of this and the future generations. This is the rationale for efforts geared towards human capital development.

Recommendations

On the basis of the findings of this study, the following recommendations suffice:

1. Since sustainable development begins and ends with the child, policies of government in countries like Nigeria should aim at catching them young. This is in consonance with the paradigm which states, 'teach the child the way to follow and when he/she grows, he will not depart from it'
2. Government policies must emphasize the acquisition of skills, competencies, and intellectual/cognitive development. This is the way to ensure an enhanced achievement performance of the present and future human capital.
3. Enhanced cognitive and intellectual development hinge on proper nutrition and food security. Government policies should give agriculture, food security and adequate nutrition its rightful place in the scheme of things.

4. The policies should also give adequate attention to environmental protection as this also plays vital role in good health.
5. Human security should be ensured through effective policies to guarantee protection of lives and fundamental human rights with an emphasis on the rights of the child. This will stem the tide of child adoption while in schools.
6. Education should be qualitative through adequate funding and carefully articulated curriculum for purposes of sustainable development.

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