
SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT: IMPLICATIONS FOR TEACHER EDUCATION

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Abstract

Three topical issue, community, sustainable development and teacher education are conceptualized to some extent in this paper. The paper advocates that sustainably developed communities are attainable, if teacher education institutions are proactive in the performance of their duties, even though they may still be needing assistance from relevant educational stakeholders.

Keywords: Community, Sustainable Development and Teacher Education.

Introduction

It is a common saying especially by educational practitioners that no nation can rise above her teachers; and education is the business of the teachers. Education itself is often regarded as an instrument par excellence for national development. These two assertions give credible roles to teachers in national development. The teacher that will therefore be involved in national development should be credible in terms of possession of excellent pedagogical skills (excellent mastery of a subject area and a good grasp and command of teaching skills and strategies). By and large, a teacher that will manifest these traits must have been adequately trained in a teacher

education department (College of Education or Faculty of Education in a University).

It suffices to say that for a community to develop adequately overtime, especially for the purpose of enculturation/socialization of the young and old and for the transfer of community value to the incoming generations, the teacher education department is saddled with the responsibility of equipping certain individuals who are called teachers to shoulder these responsibilities. In the opinion of these authors, the human community can only continue to exist and develop at a rate that will contribute to the development of current generations and generations yet unborn when teachers with requisite skills are given sufficient space to participate in the development of their community. This also implies that the department of teacher education should be of high standard in terms of quality of personnel, curriculum content and adequacy of resources for teaching and learning. It is on this note that this paper attempted the:

- i. conceptualization of community,
- ii. (ii) explanation of sustainable development vis-à-vis the community
- iii. description of teacher education; and
- iv. justification of the veritability of teacher education as a tool for sustainable community development.

Premise on these objectives, the following lead questions served to guide the authorship of this essay.

- i. What is a Community?
- ii. What is Sustainable Development?
- iii. What is Teacher Education?
- iv. How is Teacher Education a veritable tool for sustainable community development?

Each of these questions shall be answered in sequence.

What is a Community?

It is a common saying that two good heads are better than one,

because whatever they do will have a common reward. The idea of having more than one person in the performance of a task and the coming into play of the issue of reward, may drop some clues into what a community actually is. The community is however conceived as many things to different people. But the idea of what it does, why it does it, how it does it and who does what and when it is done in relation to the community, all underscore why the community is often contrived in the context of the existence of human beings and things that revolve around its continued existence.

Being open to many interpretations, the sociological issues that underpin the conceptualization of community usually are geographic area, people, common ties and social interactions. Issues of types of relationship, sense of identity and communal spirit are by extension the common words/issues that are found in the dictionary of a community. The opinion of Zamor (2005) agreed with this statement. According to Zamor, a community is a group of individuals connected to each other by one or more attribute(s). Chapel (2021) also described a community as a group of people who live and work together. According to Chapel, people who go to the same schools, shop in the same stores and do the same things; who help each other and solve problems together are members of a community. By extension, people who like or believe in the same thing could also be regarded as members of a bigger community. Examples given by Chapel are members of a family, students who go to the same school, neighbourhood of landlords and tenants, members of a town, city, state or country, region, continent and the global world are a community of people. Birds who flock together and other animals that forage together are a community. All these are pointers to the fact that a common identity, desire and efforts devoted to solving a commonly identified problem or tasks, all define a community.

A community, according to James, Nadarajah, Haive and Stead (2012) is a social unit or a group or network of persons who by relatively durable social relations are connected beyond immediate genealogical ties and who have a feeling of a mutual social identity and social practice; and as remarked by James *et al.*, not only members of a family or home, but work, government, society and

even those interacting on a virtual space could be regarded as a community. To cap it all (amidst so many opinions), the observations of Zamor (ibid), underline the significance of togetherness embedded in the ideas about the community. In Zamor's opinion, the word, community, means "common unity"; and it is a familiar thread used to bring people together to advocate and support each other in the fight to overcome perceived threats. It creates a sense of belonging that creates common sense of relationship; and in it, people help one another to find comfort in difficult times and balance between mental and physical fitness. It may then suffice to say that without the community, humanity might be worse off. The emphasis on gregariousness, communalism and unison as instruments to solve common problems, confronting dilemma and providing comfort, could make people hale and hearty in a geographic area or territory they belong or cooperate with. The question that then comes to mind is, how could the community be assisted, promoted and supported to continue to exist and achieving the laudable roles that it provides as an institution that supports human comforts? The answer may however be a question: what are the schools doing? What are teachers doing? Are teachers adequately prepared to teach for community development? When all these questions are answered holistically, that is when the community may be considered to have been assisted. Or maybe we should also ask, how could a community be made sustainable? A look at what a sustainable community is may shed some light.

What is Sustainable Development?

The phrase, sustainable development is no more a new concept in the global dictionary of issues affecting the community, either of nature or humans; and the most common is the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development – UNCED (1992) definition, as a process that ensures that when people that exist now are planning and acting out development, they must ensure that whatever they do and benefit must not destroy the source(s) of the resources for it and the site of such activity must also not hamper further development activities – so that whosoever wants to enjoy

same benefits like them, will not be denied access to those resources or denied opportunities for survival, especially in the future. To put it in UNCED language, sustainable development is the development that meets the needs of the present generation without compromising the ability of the future generations to meeting their needs.

Reflecting on the definition of the community in the preceding paragraph, it may be observed that a primary focus of the community is to provide succor for the people and prevent them from threats to their existence. In an explanation of development and development paradigms, Bellu (2011), defined development as events that constitute a new stage in a changing situation or the process of change per se. According to Bellu, development usually means improvement either in the general situation of the system or in some of its constituent elements, especially when referring to a society or socioeconomic system. Without much ado, the sustainable development goals identified by the United Nations which are 17 in number, are typically those that the society may need to attend to in order to sustain it. “The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), otherwise known as the Global Goals, are a universal call to action to end poverty, protect the planet and ensure that all people enjoy peace and prosperity.” The 17 goals specifically are, no poverty, zero hunger, good health and well-being, quality education, gender equality, clean water, and sanitation, affordable and clean energy, decent work and economic growth, industry, innovation and infrastructure, reduced inequalities, sustainable cities and communities, responsible consumption and production, climate action, life below water, life on land, peace, justice and strong institutions, and partnerships for all the goals (United Nations, 2022).

The multiplicity and diversity of the SDGs as spelt out by the UN are issues related to development which are multifaceted as Bellu rightly put earlier, that development is multidimensional in nature because any improvement of complex systems can occur in different parts or ways at different speed and driven by different forces. This might probably explain the reason why Bellu had listed sustainable development as part of the four development paradigms that he

itemized as, economic development, human development, territorial development and sustainable development. By and large, of all the sustainable development paradigms of the UN, sustainable cities and communities appear to be of interest to this essay, especially because of its direct relevance. That does not however say that all the others are irrelevant. In fact, they are all relevant because they happen in the human community. For example, the advocacy against poverty or for zero hunger, good health and well-being, gender equality, quality education, affordable and clean energy, decent work and economic growth, industry, innovation and infrastructure, reduced inequalities, responsible consumption and production, climate action, life below water, life on land, peace, justice and strong institutions, and partnerships, are technically for the sustenance of the community.

In their overview of community development, Swisher, Rezola and Sterns (2009), outlined their perceived steps to a more sustainable approach to community development. Swisher *et al.* remarked that sustainable communities, make decisions that focus on reducing the impacts of population growth and development on natural resources and the environment (being environmentally sound); afford community members the opportunity to make local capital investments that will sustain local human and natural resources and yield adequate financial returns to those investments (being economically productive) ; and provide equitable access to resources and decision-making processes that foster the distribution of foods and benefits across all sectors (being socially just). The steps that Swisher and colleagues recommended could help communities to build and implement sustainable vision are, agreements of community stakeholders on implementation of programmes; conducting community assessment; creating a community vision and developing a road map for reaching that vision; developing sustainability indicators to measure progress, identifying sources of help and carrying out projects and monitoring, evaluating and making adjustments as needed.

All these opinions agree with that of the Centre for Sustainable Development of the Simon Fraser University – SFU (2022), which

says that a sustainable community continually adjusts to meet the social and economic needs of its residents while preserving the environments ability to support it. Other things enumerated by the SFU are better quality of life, rich civic life and information sharing among community members; revitalized economy, significant employment opportunities, and sustainable pattern of development; redesigned and improved infrastructure; knowledge-based services; and improved management and use of natural resources. This idea of the SFU apparent is the core message of sustainability which avers that there could only be a viable world when environment, economy and society/culture are working in synergy (Wade, 2013; Ojedokun, 2016). All said and done, a community (human or natural) has to be sustainably developed in order to make it have a living beyond the existence of the current generation. Because this essay endears itself to the human community, it is imperative to state that the community could only be sustained when nature is at peace, and the economy is dynamic and social justice reigns supreme.

Bye and large, the question that comes to mind is, are all these possible in this diverse world that appears to be lacking cohesion (in authors' opinion)? Notwithstanding the global ecological, economic and social injustices, it may still be possible to have a sustainable human community - but it is doubtful how that could be. However, as educational practitioners (the authors), the optimism is that, education is there as an instrument par excellence to achieve equitable living, peacefully healthy human environment, and buoyant economy, if the school operating and thriving under the control of the trained teacher is allowed to do its work. Noticeable from this assertion is the word, trained teacher. The next series of questions that must be answered are: who is a trained teacher? Where was he trained? What was he trained about? How could he/she advocate for sustainable community development? All these are pointing to the need to understand the concept of teacher education.

What is Teacher Education?

The concept, teacher education, enjoys so much presence in literature, and only literature sources could explain why. However,

teaching may be seen as a profession that is known and widely accepted as the backbone of every society. Teaching might have been considered as a profession that is as old as humanity itself. It may be as a result of this that there are records of teacher training institutions that have existed for centuries. An example of such teacher training institution is the St. Andrew's College, Oyo which had graduated into a full-blown College of Education (and currently Emmanuel Alayande College of Education, Oyo) and has been turning out professional teachers since 1896. After the St. Andrew's College, several teacher training institutions have sprung up in addition to several Faculties of Education of Universities in Nigeria, to the point that there are now Universities of Education, which are solely devoted to the training of teachers at several degree levels. The same scenarios played out in other countries of Africa and other places in the world. For academic purposes, let us take a brief look at the concept, Teacher Education.

A brief understanding of the roles of a teacher could help define teacher education. A teacher is said to be an active role-player in nation making/building. A teacher forms, changes and establishes the attitudes and values of other individuals of all ages. A teacher is also seen as the friend, philosopher and guide of the students (Kumar, 2015). A teacher practices thinking, through which he/she helps him/herself and others to find alternative ways of achieving development and living (Jamot, 2022). A teacher delivers classroom instruction that helps students to learn, by preparing effective lessons, grades students work and offer feedback, manages classroom materials, productively navigates the curriculum and collaborate with other staff (Cox, 2020). Added to all these, according to Cox, are serving as surrogate parent, mentor and counsellor and even playing the roles of a politician. Cox further said that the roles of a teacher are so enormous, and by this portraying teaching as a sophisticated profession that regularly extends beyond academics. The idea of being a profession carries home the need to discuss teacher education because a defined period of training is a part of the requirements for any vocation to be regarded as a profession; and this serves as a convenient point to define teacher education.

Teacher education as recounted from Oyekan (2000), by Mmeremikwu–Fiac (2022. Online), could be described as the preparation of individuals who desire to work as professionals that take the responsibility of developing and nurturing younger generations (and the willing-to-learn adults (in authors' opinion), by direct and remote teaching activities, in the form of undergoing professional and specialized teacher training within a specified period. The purpose of their teaching activities are basically to develop their learners into responsible and productive citizens. Teacher education refers to the “policies and procedures designed to equip prospective teachers with the knowledge, attitudes, behaviour and skills they require to perform their tasks effectively in the classroom, school and wider community” (Jamos, 2022).

In the opinion of Brouwer (2010), it is through teacher education that a generation of teachers are prepared to produce (by teaching) generations of pupils and students, who will on their parts carry with them and utilise the knowledge and skills acquired in schools, colleges and universities to secure employments and sustain the rest of their lives. Teacher's education are very much connected to practice as well as to theory. A good teacher training programme should therefore have teachers working continuously with expert masters in traditional and virtual classrooms (Hans & Akhter, 2013). Examined critically (by the authors), expert masters could be regarded as lecturers of general Educational Foundations courses (Sociology of Education, History of Education, Philosophy of Education, Policy of Education, Guidance and Counselling, Measurement and Evaluation and Social Studies); General Education (Curriculum and Instructions, Educational Administration Planning and Management, Educational Technology and Adult Education courses and the teaching subjects of the pre-university schools (Arts – English, History, French, Native Languages – Hausa, Igbo, Yoruba, Efik, Ijaw and others; Sciences – Physics, Chemistry, Biology, Mathematics, Physical and Health Education; Vocational and Technical – Agriculture, Home Economics, Fine and Applied Arts, Electrical and Electronics, Building Technology; Social Sciences – Economics, Geography and Political Science)), which all have their

specialists in the teacher educational institutions. It may be mentioned here that all these listed subjects are taught to prepare the products (graduate of teacher education) to acquire relevant knowledge, attitude and skills which they will also impart on their own tutees to develop and to benefit the community in which they live and have their beings. The authors' submissions here are buttressed by Hans and Akhter (ibid), when they say that Universities and other technical institutions prepare teachers for future generation of students through opportunities provided to teach the pre-service (inexperienced) and in-service teachers (student teachers) to try their hands on teaching in a modern (real life) classroom in order to have practical experiences related to the teaching theories (concepts and methods) acquired in the lecture rooms, so as to take responsibilities of quality teaching. By this, the teacher trainees are mentored and groomed in their fields of specialisation: so that the knowledge-base that grows over time can be shared between new comers and experts.

It is also pertinent to mention (before concluding this section) that teacher education programmes are designed for pre-service teachers who are expected to register into an approved teaching subject as a major and another teaching subject as a minor, if need be. They are to take methods courses and embark on a practical teaching (teaching practice) of twelve weeks or one semester as stipulated in the benchmark of minimum standards for the universities and the colleges of education respectively. All these would qualify them for an initial teaching licensing and certification (Bernhardt & Tedick, 2010). The assertions of Bernhardt and Tedick are very true, and are currently the practice in Nigeria. The issue of in-service training which is also a part of teacher education could not be overlooked. As said by Howey and Wideen (2001), new reforms and approaches to teaching are provided as follow-ups to the common and traditional model of teaching methods and strategies through coursework and practical teaching about coping with emerging issues that require new methodologies. By this, teachers are helped to learn on the job overtime. This is very true of part-time learning – Sandwich and Open/Distance blended learning

programmes, approved for and embarked upon by Universities and Colleges of Education in Nigeria. The skill acquisition programmes in the forms of workshops for school teachers by the Universal Basic Education Commission through its various agencies are also a form of teacher education.

At this juncture, while it may be summed up that teacher education is about sharing of a collective body of knowledge about teaching and learning (Beudert, 2010), by and large, the extent to which teacher education could facilitate sustainable community developments still requires some empirical explanations. A quick look is presented hereunder.

How is Teacher Education a Veritable Tool for Sustainable Community Development?

The opinion of Jamos (2022) says that the knowledge, attitudes, behaviour and skills acquired by trainee teachers become useful in the school and the wider community, could be a convenient point for discussing how teacher education could be a veritable tool for sustainable community development. By way of summary (of available opinions), the teacher training institution should teach sustainable development, with emphasis on the 17 themes of the sustainable development goals. But the major classifications around how environment, economy and society/culture are working in synergy presents itself as a major task for teacher education. In this, attention may be paid to three classifications of sustainability – Environmental Sustainability, Economic Sustainability and Social Sustainability by Tilbury and Wortman. (2004), with each having subthemes that could be taken to the classroom by a trained teacher. Drawing a major inference from Tilbury and Wortman (ibid) teacher education programmes should prepare teachers about environmental sustainability by exposing their student-teachers to the learning contents of concepts such as natural resources, food and farming, ecological systems, waste, water, energy and energy management, biodiversity and climate change. Subjects such as Physics, Chemistry, Biology, Agricultural Science, Home Economics, Mathematics, Electrical Electronics and Building Technology

Education are expected to be properly positioned to teach the contents with appropriate methods and strategies of teaching.

A teacher education programmes should prepare teachers about economic sustainability by exposing their student-teachers to the learning contents of concepts such as alternative futures, leadership and change, corporate social responsibility, consumerism and trade, globalization of economy, accountability and ethics, international development, sustainable and ethical tourism and population. Subjects, such as Social Studies, Economics, Political Science, General Studies, Fine and Applied Arts and any area of study that is interdisciplinary could teach all these concepts at the teacher training lecture rooms.

Training about social sustainability, History, Social Studies, Political Science, General Studies, Fine and Applied Arts, Home Economics, Physical and Health Education and other areas of studies that are interdisciplinary should prepare student-teachers to teach concepts such as sustainable communities, cultural diversity, international understanding, sustainability in the built environment, travel, transport and mobility, health and well-being, peace, security and conflicts, citizenship, governance, democracy and human rights.

It may suffice to state hereto that imparting the knowledge of environmental, economic and social sustainability will promote sustainable community development. This may come into play as skills, attitude, abilities and behaviour developed from teacher training in the practical classrooms (in schools) would help to develop younger generations or other categories of learners to acquire similar knowledge, skills, attitude, abilities and behaviour in real life situations at home, local, national, regional, and global communities, after they have also benefited in the form of acquisition of means of livelihood.

In practical terms, as drawn from the Simon Fraser University's perspectives on sustainable community development, graduates of teacher education would make impact on community and the impacts would be felt when community residents who have gone to school have imbibed the culture of turning "wastes" into resources (e.g., recycling); joining car cooperatives to reduce the cost and

necessity of car ownership; creating jobs, spurring private spending, and reducing pollution through public investment in energy conservation and audits; developing new products that encourage manufacturers to develop environmentally-friendly products through municipal research and development assistance; experimenting with local self-reliance by establishing closed-loop, self-sustaining economic networks; engage in community supported agriculture to preserve farmland and help farmers, while making fresh fruits and vegetables available in city neighborhoods; involving in a local ownership development project with a revolving loan fund to encourage employee-owned businesses, which are considered more stable over the long term and more likely to hire, train and promote local residents; and organizing a community beverage container recycling depot which employs street people – “dumpster divers” – and provides them with skills, training, and self-esteem. All these are pointers to the importance of the school where the teachers work. The success of the teacher’s work is also a reflection of the quality of teacher education received. Thanks to teacher education!

Conclusion

In this essay, emphasis is placed on the fact that community development should not be taken for granted and that education may be a greater tool to achieve sustainable community development. This may be because its thrust is primarily about the future and how not to compromise the existence of the future generations with the present pleasures and enjoyments. This essay has advocated that teaching the content of environmental, economic and social sustainability in teacher education programmes, with training about application of series of teaching strategies would prepare competent teachers who would transmit their learning to build other learners to proceed to develop the human and natural communities where mutual and interdependent relationship of person-to-person, person-to-environment, neighbourhood-to-neighbourhood, state-to-state, nation-to-nation, nation-to-region, region-to-continent, continent-to-globe and nation-to-globe would prevail.

Recommendations

It may therefore be recommended that teacher training institutions should be assisted by the government, private individuals, non-governmental organisations and intergovernmental institutions to operate in a climate that may promote effective training of pre-service and in-service teachers on appropriate educational pedagogy, in lectures and practical classrooms and laboratories that are very compliant with contemporary global change.

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