SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT: THE ROLE OF SCHOOL LIBRARIES

Abiola Bukola ELATUROTI

Lead City University, Ibadan, Oyo State Lead City University Library, biolatreasure@yahoo.com

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By

Mrs. Abiola Bukola ELATUROTI

biolatreasure@yahoo.com   Phone No.: 08034983186.
Lead City University, Ibadan, Oyo State
Lead City University Library

ABSTRACT

Over the past few years, sustainable development has emerged the latest development slogan. Sustainable development has been defined as the development that meets the social, economic and technological needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. A good well-equipped library is a prerequisite for the intellectual, moral, and spiritual advancement and elevation of an individual right from childhood; it is an indispensable element of the absolute well-being of the citizens and that of the nation at large. To attain sustainable development, the role of libraries, and particularly school libraries, cannot be ignored hence the need to discuss this topic at this time.

Keywords: School library, Sustainable Development, Development, Information.

INTRODUCTION

For any nation to develop, it needs to have and provide relevant, up to date and adequate information on food, security, democracy, health, education, gender equality etc (Onoyeyan & Adesina, 2014). Information is power, it gives knowledge, no wonder it is viewed as a valuable national resource useful for personal, community, economic, educational, cultural, social and technological development (Tyonu and Ezeogu, 2015). Information, which is the only preoccupation of libraries, is a necessary ingredient in life. In this information age, one must be

attuned with reliable and up-to-date information for rational decision-making, enlightenment and all round development from very early in life.

Libraries, whether school, academic, public or special, have great responsibilities in achieving sustainable development by acquiring, packaging, organizing and disseminating knowledge and experience to the citizenry. Libraries can further influence the actualization of sustainable development by enabling access to information in all formats across geographical, cultural, linguistic and political frontiers (Ubale and Yahaya, 2016).

Furthermore, Dada (2016) expressed that the success of any institution, country or society rests squarely on the adequacy of its library collections because the library is seen as an agency for findings, discovery, innovation, vocational skills' repository, scholarship and research. Promotion of sustainable development in the 21st century demands access to information: pupils/students need information for their school work, information professionals require information for research and discovery, farmers need information to connect to new markets, entrepreneurs need information to find capital to start business, girls and women require information for their vocational skills acquisition, and health workers need to research and provide current data to be up to date about healthcare for patients in their areas of specialty.

School libraries have a critical role to play in the attainment of sustainable development as individuals should be given access to information (without discrimination) right from the early stages of their lives. One must not forget that the discourse on life-long learning hinges on the fact that learning is throughout one's lifetime and begins right from childhood/primary school age; individuals, irrespective of their age, sex, educational and economic status will always require information for development and upliftment at one point or the other throughout their lifetime. Usoro and Usanga (2007) pointed out that the mission of education for children and

youths is the development of skills for self-directed enquiry rather than the mere inculcation of subject matter and this can only be achieved through a well-equipped library hence the need for users to be educated on how to retrieve and use the available library resources to meet their information needs.

School Library: An Overview

Education and library are two (2) inseparable concepts, both being fundamentally related to and co-existent with each other. None of them is an end in itself; rather both of them together are a means to an ultimate end. Shukla, Singh and Mishra (2013) opine that education is an eye-opener for a human being; it gives him/her a perfect, adequate knowledge, creates civic and rational sense, withdraws him from the subjection of low habits, selfish passions, and ignoble pursuits, and thus reduces him from abysmal darkness to lucid enlightenment, while library is an instrument of self-education, a means of knowledge and factual information, a centre of intellectual recreation, and a beacon of enlightenment that provides accumulated and preserved knowledge which consequently enriches one's mental vision, and dignifies his/her habits, behavior, character, taste, attitude, conduct, and outlook on life.

School library is one of the different types of library that have been identified. Others are: academic library, public library, and special library. All play spectacular roles in achieving sustainable development because libraries are the bedrock of information which is a vital tool for development. International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (2015) defines a school library as the school's physical and digital learning space where reading, inquiry, research, thinking, imagination, and creativity are central to students' information-to-knowledge journey and to their personal, social, and cultural growth. This physical and digital place is known by several terms (such as school media centre, centre for documentation and information,

library resource centre, library learning commons) but school library is the term most commonly used and applied to the facility and functions.

In the views of the International Association of School Libraries (IASL), an appropriate definition of a school library should be relatively simple, and clearly understood, encompassing various school libraries across the globe, and should be used as a benchmark so that school libraries that fall below the standard will strive to reach the ideal. Images and concepts of the function of a school library vary from place to place and from country to country. School libraries throughout the world come in many different shapes and sizes. Some school library collections are inadequate with insufficient books for all the students in the school; books are often outdated, old and dirty (IASL, 2012).

Additionally, some schools do not have a room or special space for the school library. There is no central accommodation which provides access to books, information, audio-visual materials, other media, and reliable Internet access. Some have no electric power. It has been shown that in many countries, a school librarian/teacher librarian is actually a teacher who has been put in charge of the school library, often on top of a full teaching load. The term "school librarian" or "teacher librarian" can be used for qualified personnel, but can also be used to refer to anyone manning the school library, even a clerk (IASL, 2012).

School libraries have a number of critical functions/central roles, which include the following:

1. promoting the love of learning;
2. supporting the school curriculum; expanding resources to support teaching and learning;
3. offering advice, professional development and knowledge of appropriate learning and teaching material, digital and non-digital, in traditional and emerging forms;

4. teaching learners media and information literacy skills, while at the same time thoughtfully introducing and integrating available information and communication technologies. This function includes: supporting inquiry and ensuring that all learners are effective and ethical users and producers of information;

5. promoting literacy. The school library assists with literacy development and promotes the concept of reading as a pleasurable, voluntary activity, which contributes to an individual's quality of life.

The goal of all school libraries is to develop information literate students who are responsible and ethical participants in society. Information literate students are competent self-directed learners who are aware of their information needs and actively engage in the world of ideas. They display confidence in their ability to solve problems and know how to locate relevant and reliable information. They are able to manage technology tools to access information and to communicate what they have learned. They are able to operate comfortably in situations where there are multiple answers or no answers. They hold high standards for their work and create quality products. Information literate students are flexible, able to adapt to change, and able to function both individually and in groups (IFLA, 2015).

What is Sustainable Development?

Since the 1980s, the concept of sustainable development has been widely used; the term gained popularity when it became fashionable for experts to use it as a way of responding to global economic concerns, equity and distribution. The term 'sustainable development' has to do with the requirement to harmonise the needs of humanity and nature (Albert, Eselebor and Danjibo, 2012). It is based on the assumptions that human beings, not necessarily economic indicators, are at the centre of development. Perhaps, the most well-known and often quoted

definition of sustainable development comes from the Brundtland Report: 'development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs' (cited in Medarova–Bergstromet et al. 2010, p.10).

In the views of Todaro and Smith (2011), development traditionally means the process of improving the quality of all human lives and capabilities by raising people's levels of living, self-esteem and freedom; achieving sustained rates of growth of income per capita to enable a nation to expand its output at a rate faster than the growth rate of its population. They, therefore, concluded that development in its essence must represent the whole gamut of change by which an entire social system, tuned to the diverse basic needs and evolving aspirations of individuals and social groups within the system, moves away from a condition of life widely perceived as unsatisfactory toward a situation or condition of life regarded as materially and spiritually better.

This conclusion led to the assertion in their classic definition that a development path is sustainable "if and only if the stock of overall capital assets remains constant or rises over time" (Todaro and Smith, 2011, p.67). To them, sustainable development is a pattern of development that permits future generations to live at least as well as the current generation, generally requiring at least a minimum environmental protection. Implicit in this statement is the fact that future growth and overall quality of life are critically dependent on the quality of the environment. The natural resource base of a country and the quality of its air, water and land represent a common heritage for all generations.

Adejumo and Adejumo, (2014) defined sustainable development as the efficient management of resources for human survival, taking into consideration both the present and future generations. To Jhingan (2011), it means that development should keep going. It emphasizes the creation of sustainable improvements in education, health and general quality of

life and improvements in quality of natural environmental resources. He opines that sustainable development is development that is everlasting and contributes to the quality of life through improvements in natural environments, which in turn, supply utility to individuals, inputs to the economic process and services that support life.

Agreement on the importance of the concept of sustainable development can be found across the political spectrum and the core ideals, embedded in it are central to the requirements that must be met in managing the shift to a more sustainable economy. Jhingan (2011) enumerated the objectives of sustainable development as thus:

1. creation of sustainable improvements in the quality of life for all people;
2. lifting living standards, which is inclusive of bettering people's health and educational opportunities, giving everyone a chance to participate in public life, helping to ensure a clean environment, promoting intergenerational equity;
3. maximizing the net benefits of economic development subject to maintaining the stock of all environmental and natural resource assets (physical, human and natural) over time;
4. accelerating economic development in order to conserve and enhance the stock of human, environmental and physical capital without making future generations worse off.

In essence, sustainable development is a process of change in which the exploitation of resources, the direction of investments, the orientation of technological development; the institutional change are all in harmony and enhance both current and future potential to meet human needs and aspirations. It involves more than growth and it requires a change in the content of growth, to make it less material- and energy-intensive and more equitable in its impact. These changes are required in all countries as part of a package of measures to maintain

the stock of ecological capital, improve the distribution of income, and reduce the degree of vulnerability to economic crises.

Oladeji (2014) opines that a long term requirement for sustainable development is to foster a development process that will not sacrifice interests and well-being of the future generations. If future generations must live at least as well as the current generation, sustainability will require a careful balance between economic growth and environmental preservation. He opines further, that of utmost importance to sustainability, is the pursuit of human capital development through education and health which will deliver on greater productivity, employment, income equality and environmental protection. By reason of the spillover benefits of investment on education and health, future generations become better off as they are bequeathed with not just high quality standard of living, but also environmentally and socially sustainable living conditions.

Why are School Libraries important for the achievement of Sustainable Development?

Students, right from primary school level need to imbibe the culture of being confident information interpreters and creators as well as critical, creative and collaborative thinkers if they are to meet the demands of a 21st century life and also contribute meaningfully to sustainable development as they grow in age and experience. The school library provides information and ideas that are fundamental to preparing children to function successfully in contemporary information and knowledge-based society when they become adults. It (that is, school library) also equips pupils with life-long learning skills and develops the imagination, enabling them to live as responsible citizens (IFLA, 2015).

School libraries exist throughout the world as learning environments that provide space (physical and digital), access to resources, and access to activities and services to encourage and

support student, teacher, and community learning. The growth of school libraries parallels the growth in education that seeks to equip students with knowledge to operate within and contribute to the betterment of society. While the range of school library facilities and operations varies throughout the world, school libraries everywhere are focused on supporting and advancing student learning. A school library provides a variety of learning opportunities for individuals, small groups, and large groups with a focus on intellectual content, information literacy, and cultural and social development. The learner-oriented focus of a school library supports, extends, and individualizes a school's curriculum.

The goal of all school libraries is to develop information literate students who are responsible and ethical participants in society. Information literate students are competent self-directed learners who are aware of their information needs and actively engage in the world of ideas. They display confidence in their ability to solve problems and know how to locate relevant and reliable information. They are able to manage technology tools to access information and to communicate what they have learned. They are able to operate comfortably in situations where there are multiple answers or no answers. They hold high standards for their work and create quality products. Information literate students are flexible, able to adapt to change, and able to function both individually and in groups (IFLA, 2015).

Amusan et al (2012) posit that libraries (school, academic, public or special) provide resources for knowledge acquisition, recreation, personal interests and interpersonal relationships of users. Library information resources that can be found in any type of library are in both print and electronic formats such as textbooks, journals, indexes, abstracts, newspapers, magazines, reports, CD-Rom databases, Internet, tapes, diskettes, computers, microforms etc. These information materials are the 'raw materials' that libraries acquire, catalogue, stock and make

available to their patrons to assist them in making better and informed decisions to further development in the society (Popoola and Haliso, 2009).

The fourth of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) seeks to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote life-long learning opportunities for all. With regards to this, Ubale and Yahaya (2016) expressed that education equips learners of all ages with the skills and values needed to be responsible global citizens, such as respect for human rights, gender equality and environmental sustainability. Investing in and strengthening a country's education sector is key to the development of that country and its people. It is also worthy to mention here that achieving qualitative education at all levels without the support of libraries and information professionals would be very difficult. Many schools, both primary and secondary schools in Africa generally and Nigeria specifically, do not have functional school libraries or do not even have libraries at all, which slows down the pace of development in the continent.

Onoyeyan and Adesina (2014) citing Forsyth (2005) noted that various researches have shown that a strong library program can lead to higher student achievement. To achieve universal primary education without school libraries being involved would be very difficult, and so governments have to look into and become more involved in the provision of school libraries in all schools and invest in such so as to be able to provide adequate library services and information materials in all formats for pupils, teachers, and other categories of patrons.

No nation can be developed without relevant information to drive its developmental sustainability (Onoyeyan and Adesina, 2014). The business of libraries is the acquisition, organization, dissemination and preservation of information for development. In the concept of education, school libraries are the starting point for instilling the need to acquire information literacy and value for development (sustainable one at that) in individuals.

.   According to the IFLA/UNESCO School Library Manifesto (cited in IFLA, 2015), the school library offers learning services, books and resources that enable all members of the school community to become critical thinkers and effective users of information in all formats and media. The library staff provides support to patrons in the use of books and other information sources, ranging from the fictional to the documentary, from print to electronic, both on-site and remote. The materials complement textbooks, teaching materials and methodologies.

The school library is integral to the educational process (IFLA, 2015). The following are essential to the development of literacy, information literacy, teaching, learning and culture and are core school library services:

- supporting and enhancing educational goals as outlined in the school's mission and curriculum;
- developing and sustaining in children the habit and enjoyment of reading and learning, and the use of libraries throughout their lives;
- offering opportunities for experiences in creating and using information for knowledge, understanding, imagination and enjoyment;
- supporting all students in learning and practicing skills for evaluating and using information, regardless of form, format or medium, including sensitivity to the modes of communication within the community;
- providing access to local, regional, national and global resources and opportunities that expose learners to diverse ideas, experiences and opinions;
- organizing activities that encourage cultural and social awareness and sensitivity;
- working with students, teachers, administrators and parents to achieve the mission of the school;

- proclaiming the concept that intellectual freedom and access to information are essential to effective and responsible citizenship and participation in a democracy;

- promoting reading and the resources and services of the school library to the whole school community and beyond.

Stressing the importance of school libraries to development, Usoro and Usanga (2007) maintain that libraries are as important for children as education itself. To them, library services imply both availability and accessibility of library facilities and services to the user and the willingness and ability of readers to use the facilities and services. Information is power and access to information is indispensable to individual advancement as well as corporate educational development. Children need the library for effective learning for lifelong education.

In many developing countries, Nigeria inclusive, most children (especially those from rural areas or economically disadvantaged backgrounds) first meet books and reading materials in school, and have limited access to them in the home and in the community. The school library encourages its users to fully accept the responsibility for education and development.

Conclusion

Libraries (including school libraries) are important avenue to participation in society through lifelong learning and information which starts right from childhood and continues throughout life. Information made available by libraries plays a vital role in educational planning; for education to be effective and efficient, it is essential to have well equipped libraries. Sharing the views of Ezekwe and Muokebe (2012), well stocked libraries with adequate information resources: print and non-print are the best legacies that the human race can claim to have. Library and education cannot be isolated from each other. Hence, the impact of library

services needs to be greatly felt in schools, colleges and universities since libraries pervade the entire fabric of the educational system right from childhood level.

Education is recognized as one of the most fundamental building blocks for human development (Tyonum and Ezeogu, 2015). Its importance in nation building cannot be over emphasized. A major outcome of education is sustainable development. No nation can grow beyond its educational system. Education is the bedrock for growth, the key to development, the greatest investment and asset and enhances sustainable development in a nation and the school library has a great role to play towards the realization of the broad goals of education. This is why there is the need to ensure that school libraries form a part of the necessary requirements for the existence of schools (primary and secondary, public or private) and that services are made available for the pupils.

Recommendations

From the foregoing and in order to enhance the achievement of sustainable development, this paper recommends that:

1. governments should pass a law to ensure that all primary and secondary schools within their domains, both private and public, primary and secondary, have standard and well-stocked school libraries;

2. qualified school librarians with formal education in school librarianship and classroom teaching be recruited to man or take charge of such school libraries to guarantee the exercise of the professional expertise required for the complex roles of instruction, reading and literacy development, school library management, collaboration with teaching staff, and engagement with the educational community;

3. high-quality diverse collections (print, multimedia, digital) that support schools' formal and informal curriculum, including individual projects and personal development be provided in the school libraries;

4. school libraries should give individualized service, making sure that every library user gets information that meets his or her particular need. It should also serve as a laboratory for it users to practice the skills of using information resources in different kinds of format;

5. explicit policy and plan for ongoing growth and development should be made available to ensure sustainability.

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