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In Pursuit of 2030 Global Agenda; Awareness, Perception and Involvement of Nigerian youths in Achieving Sustainable Development Goals and the role of libraries

Bayor Joseph Odelami
University of Ibadan, bayoodelami@gmail.com

Ruth Ibukunoluwa Fasakin
University of Ibadan, fasakinruth@gmail.com

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Introduction

Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) came into existence on 25th of September 2015 at the United Nations general assembly summit held at its headquarters in Geneva, Switzerland where 193 head of states were witnesses with the common aim of ensuring positive transformation of our world into a place that will be conducive for everyone to live without compromising the hope and ability of future generation to meet their needs. Although there was Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) before SDGs, however, the former was faulted on the basis that it was too narrow and failed to consider the root causes of poverty and overlooked gender inequality as well as the holistic nature of development (Igbinovia and Akinbade, 2017). Hence, SDGs was robustly designed to cover every area of human and environmental development. It was also designed as mechanism that will help proffer pragmatic solutions to prevailing challenges of famine, drought, wars, plagues, inequalities, and poverty ravaging the world.

SDGs, as unanimously agreed by 193 head of nations were anchored on 17 goals and 169 targets.

The goals are to;

1. No Poverty
2. Zero Hunger
3. Good Health and Well-being
4. Quality Education
5. Gender Equality
6. Clean Water and Sanitation
- 7 Affordable and Clean Energy
- 8 Decent Work and Economic Growth
9. Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure
- 10 Reduced Inequality
11. Sustainable Cities and Communities
12. Responsible Consumption and Production
13. Climate Action
14. Life Below Water

15. Life on Land

16. Peace and Justice Strong Institutions

17. Partnerships to achieve the Goal (United Nations, 2018).

In view of the importance of this agenda, credence has been given to it in Nigeria and successive government and non-governmental organizations have continued to work towards the achievement of SDGs in Nigeria. However, the current level of awareness, perception and involvement of Nigerian youths remains questionable considering the fact that SDGs is now four years old and many Nigerian youths still do not have in-depth knowledge of SDGs and involvement of the populace seems not to be encouraging. This is worth addressing because awareness, perception and involvement of people are germane to the achievement of any developmental agenda as no agenda can be achieved without adequate awareness, right perception and active involvement of the society.

Awareness is one of the strategies mapped out by the United Nations in order to achieve SDGs. This is because awareness can lead to formation of perception and perception could impact on involvement. While positive perception will propel active involvement negative perception on the other hand will instigate inert involvement. The aim of this study is to address the level of awareness, perception and involvement of Nigerians in achieving Sustainable Development Goals and gives suggestions on what the government and other core stakeholders in Nigeria need to do in order to foster awareness, perception and involvement of Nigerians towards the achievement of SDGs and not forgetting the role of libraries in this quest.

Awareness, Perception, Involvement and Sustainable Development Goals

Gafur (2012) defined awareness as the state or ability to be conscious of events, objects or sensory patterns. Awareness is also related to public understanding about social, scientific or political issues. Awareness in relation to SDGs implies peoples or public understanding about SDGs. The people or public in this context includes everyone in the country regardless of their demographic differences, political, social or religious affiliations. Awareness of society about SDGs is crucial as SDGs itself is for everyone and has the mandate of not leaving anyone behind. This is why United Nations averred that stakeholders including governments,

organisations , ministries, professions, corporate bodies, and individuals must be made aware of SDGs as well as providing them the necessary information for the achievement of the SDGs. This shows that nexus exists between awareness and achievement of goals.

Awareness, Perception and Involvement of Nigerian youths in SDGs

The question at this juncture is; are Nigerian youths really aware of SDGs? Nigeria is the most populous country in Africa having an estimated population of more than 180 million people. Unfortunately, majority of this population lives in the rural areas where access to quality education, current information and basic amenities remains challenging. As a result of this, majority of Nigerian citizens in the rural areas do not have adequate information about SDGs. The level of awareness of SDGs among people in the urban centers is also poor as revealed in previous studies. A recent study by Shehu and Shehu (2018) indicate that significant numbers of undergraduates of University of Jos were not aware of SDGs in terms of meaning, the numbers of goals it comprises, the year it was launched, the number of targets it contains and strategic plans in place in order for its realization. The implication of this would be that significant population of the youths in the study area has not been participating in the achievement of SDGs.

Youths are very important if sustainable development goals must be achieved in Nigeria. Youths are regarded as great thinkers, innovative and drivers of change. Then, they are important in SDGs because SDGs requires innovative thinking, ideas and actions that will translate into transformation of the society. Therefore, youths must be well informed and empowered with necessary tools required to achieve each of the objective of SDGs.

The motto of SDGs is that “no one must be left behind”. This implies that awareness is highly essential. Even though study like Omisore, Babarinde, Bakare, and Olarinmoye (2017) shows high level of awareness of Nigerian youths about SDGs, the awareness has not translated into effective participation of most youths in SDGs and this is because the awareness is not yet at the level where action could be ignited.

The reasons for low level of awareness and participation of Nigerian Youths in SDGs

- 1. Low level of SDGs education:** The current level of SDGs education in Nigeria is one of the reasons why knowledge of SDGs remains limited among Nigerian youths, hence, limited participation. Even though SDGs has been in existence for more than three years many youths have not heard about it. Unlike in many Asian, European and American countries where primary, secondary and tertiary school students have been informed about Sustainable Development Goals, SDGs education in Nigeria seems not to have gain necessary credence at all levels of education.
- 2. Failure of MDGs:** When MDGs started, the expectation of many youth was that the goals would be achieved by the year 2015. Youths at different levels in Nigeria gave in their best and pursued the agenda, however, the hope of many youth was dashed as a result of the failure of the MDGs and many are not ready to participate in SDGs because of the failure of the previous agenda- MDGs. It was believed that huge resources deployed to MDGs were not used appropriately for the purposes intended and various projects embarked upon in MDGs were not monitored, maintained and sustained. As a result of this, many have come to the perception that SDGs is another means through which resources meant for societal development would be syphoned.
- 3. Most SDGs information materials are not available in indigenous languages:** For the past three years since inception of SDGs, information materials required for sensitization and education of the public pertaining to details, importance and approaches to SDGs are not available in most Nigerian indigenous language as more than 90% of the information materials are written or communicated in English language. This remains a challenge to awareness and involvement of youths in SDGs because there is still high level of youth illiteracy in the country which results in the inability of many youth not assimilating SDGs information since they find difficult or unable to speak, read or understand English language in which major SDGs information materials are written or communicated. In view of this, Alamu (2017) in his article titled "sustainable development goals in Nigeria, what roles for Nigeria's indigenous language" submitted that indigenous languages should be largely used to promote the SDGs to make meaningful impact.
- 4. The belief that SDGs is meant for Economics students:** The belief that SDGs is only meant for economics students is another reason for low level of awareness and

participation of youths in SDGs. Observation from colleagues reveals that students who are not in the field of economics believe that SDGs is a topic peculiar to economics students alone. This perception is only common among tertiary institutions students in Nigeria. Because of this perception, very many youths in Nigeria have not discovered the reason to participate in the achievement of SDGs.

5. **Lack of social media leverage:** Social media has become powerful tools for information generation and dissemination in ICT driven 21st century and youths are major users of social media. In Nigeria, eight of ten youths have access to one form of social media or the other. Social media are used by them for information exchange, business purpose, academic and nonacademic purposes. In spite of myriads of opportunities provided by social media, SDGs stakeholders in Nigeria are yet to effectively leverage on this opportunities. Coming across SDGs information on social networking sites such Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, WhatsApp and other social media is very rare and this is because stakeholders have not done enough to engage youths on social media, hence; low level of awareness and participation of Nigerian youths in SDGs.
6. **Socioeconomic problems:** Insecurity, unemployment, corruption, kidnapping, inflation, deficit infrastructure, business failure etc are problems being faced by significant population of Nigerian youths on daily basis and even though SDGs encompasses all that is required to create a tranquil society characterized by prosperity and development, many Nigerian youths are angry and are not ready to participate because of the belief that it will provide them immediate financial income and livelihood.

The Role of Libraries in raising the level of awareness, perception and involvement of Nigerian youths in achieving SDGs.

Libraries and librarians are major stakeholders in the drive towards the achievement of SDGs. Krolak (2005) identifies the role of librarianship when he posits that libraries and librarians have evolved to become facilitators of information and lifelong learning opportunities with an emphasis on service, identifying user needs and communicating solutions. The role of the libraries in the provision of information for development is vital as no nation can attain sustainable development without generation, organization and provision of relevant information

to drive its developmental sustainability. The business of libraries is the acquisition, organization, dissemination and preservation of information for sustainable development.

Libraries can facilitate youth awareness, perception and involvement in SDGs through the following ways;

1. Publication of SDGs information materials.
2. Production of SDGs information materials in indigenous languages.
3. Exhibitions and display of SDGs materials in and outside the library.
4. Consistent user education on SDGs
5. Current awareness services on SDGs
6. Continuous SDGs information literacy programs.

Also, Ubale, Kabiru, Yahaya and Abdullahi (2016) opine that libraries and Librarians are expected to be in the forefront in contributing to the actualization of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by the target date of 2030. Some of the ways they suggested includes:

1. Raising awareness on the various development issues spelt out in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)
2. Providing a place where information on developmental issues can be accessed
3. Establishment of a strong library campaign programmes
4. Selecting resources taking into account the development indicators raised in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).
5. Hosting local forum from time to time where people can talk through problems, such as HIV/AIDS, community health, education, civil and human rights etc.
6. Engage in partnership with other agencies in promoting changes needed to meet the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)
7. Promote the establishment of libraries especially at the rural areas to enhance information dissemination at local level
8. Provide network of service delivery for government programmes and services
9. Advancing access to ICT and help people to acquire and develop new digital skill.

In the opinion of Igbinovia and Akinbade (2017) on what libraries can do in achieving sustainable development goals through early childhood education, the following were their recommendations to help amplify these roles;

1. Libraries in their structures, collections and services should accommodate all categories of people inclusive of children, physically challenged, the aged, providing them with life-support skills, employment information and resources for self-development.
2. Utilise emerging digital technologies for inclusive learning especially for children and people with disabilities, making the library attractive to them.
3. Spare head pledges and petitions to instigate government and development stakeholders to take actions towards ensuring free/affordable education at all levels.
4. Help children build critical thinking skills, inquiry and alpha-numeric abilities by providing them with access to videos, games and puzzles capable of doing such.
5. Serve as maker space where children and other community members are provided with tools they need to develop vocational skills, create their own content and promote innovation hereby promoting local knowledge.
6. Ensure the total well-being of the early child by offering pregnant women/nursing mothers health information required for the proper upbringing of children.
7. Setup sensitization programme for preschool centres, focusing on ensuring that they operate in an environment that allows children explore and stimulate rapid cognitive growth during their formative years.

Recommendations

In order for Nigeria to achieve sustainable development Goals in 2030, the following recommendations were made;

1. There should be holistic approach towards raising the level of awareness of SDGs among youths o Nigeria.
2. SDGs should be taught at all levels of education in Nigeria starting from primary to secondary and tertiary level. In fact, SDGs should become part of topics in all taught subjects across all levels of Nigerian educational system.

3. SDGs information materials designed, written, documented and communicated in indigenous languages of Nigeria should be made available and accessible for use in order to encourage active participation of Nigerian youths in SDGs.
4. SDGs stakeholders comprising of government (local, state and federal), international bodies, nongovernmental organizations, traditional and religious leaders as well as students and parents should leverage on the use of social media for sharing SDGs information.
5. New media such as radio, television newspaper and Internet should be effectively utilized for dissemination and sharing of SDGs information.
6. There's need for government to show political will at addressing the problems of insecurity, illiteracy, unemployment, infrastructure deficit etc presently affecting youth development in Nigeria.
7. Youths across nooks and crannies of Nigeria should understand that SDGs is not meant for some special people but for everyone and its achievement is imperative for sustainable development of self and the society at large.

Summary and Conclusion

The study has examined the level of awareness, perception and involvement of Nigerian youths in SDGs as well the roles of librarians. The study identifies the importance of awareness in sustaining active participation of youths in developmental agenda. Although it is now four years that SDGs was flagged off after the expiration of MDGs in 2015, there is still low level of awareness and involvement of Nigerian youths in SDGs. Various reasons responsible for low level of awareness and passive involvement of Nigerian youths were identified. The study holds that librarians are SDGs stakeholders and therefore have significant roles in order to facilitate awareness and involvement of Nigerian youths towards attainment of SDGs come year 2030. Recommendations to help achieve the implementation of the SDG's were also given.

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