

Working with Sustainable Development Educational Goal for the Well Being of Children with Special Needs in Nigeria

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Abstract

This paper seeks to map out the place of educating children with special needs in the Sustainable Development Goals (MDGS). In doing this, the author provides the following outlines-conceptual issues in SDGs, SDGs as a global agenda, integrating sustainable development educational goal with special need, education, sustainable development goals and inclusion agenda for children with special needs, challenges faced by children with special needs in Nigeria. The paper then closes, with some recommendations on attempt to reposition SDGs on special needs education moving it from a focus of quantity (enrollment figures) to quality inclusion for all.

Keywords: Sustainable development educational goal, special needs education, children with special needs, wellbeing.

Introduction

As gains continue to be counted on Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and Education for All Goals (EFAGs); a lot is still according to Dickens and Denzinwe (2004) needs to be done on Special Needs Education. This means special needs education cannot reach its peak simply by doing more of what we are already doing. Closing in on (EFAGs) and (MDGs) will require new strategies to improve special needs education, sustainable development goals is one such strategy. Special education can be defined from academic and professional perfectives. From academic perspective special education refers to specialized teaching, learning, psycho-educational services, training and research meant to enable individuals with disabilities or exceptional conditions to maximize their capacities for life endeavours to the fullest (Obani, 2006). From professional practice perspectives. Special education can be defined as specialized educational and training services meant to enable people with disabilities or potentials to achieve their educational and rehabilitative capabilities in life endeavours (Kolo, 2005).

Sustainable Development Goals (MDGs) has become a universal goal and a basis for investment. It is in this context that necessitated to map out the place of special needs education in the SDGs as they are officially known as transforming our world; the 2030 Agenda for sustainable development is set of 17 “Global Goals” with 169 target between them. In this paper issues related to Sustainable Development Goals as a global agenda, the 17 goals of Sustainable Development integrating special needs education with education for sustainable development, SDG as a base to Education for All and the critique of SDGs on special needs education practice in Nigeria will be discussed

Conceptual Issues in Sustainable Development Goals

The history of the SDGs can be traced to 1972 when governments met in Stockholm, Sweden, for the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment, to consider the rights of the human family to a healthy and productive environment. It was not until 1983 that the United Nations decided to create the World Commission on Environment and Development which defined sustainable development as “meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs”. In 1992 the first United Nations Conference on Environment and Development was held in Rio. The first agenda for Environment and Development, also known as Agenda 21, was developed and adopted in Rio. In preparation for the Rio+20 conference, Indonesia held a July 2011 government retreat in Solo, Indonesia. At this event, Colombia proposed the idea of the SDGs. This was picked up by the United Nations Department of Public Information 64th NGO Conference in September 2011 in Bonn where the outcome document proposed 17 sustainable development goals and associated targets. In the run-up to Rio+20 there was much discussion about the idea of SDGs. At the Rio+20 Conference, a resolution, known as the future we want was reached by members states. Among the key themes agreed on were poverty eradication, energy, water and sanitation, health and human settlement.

Paragraph 246 of the future we want outcome document forms the link between the Rio-20 agreement and the Millennium Development Goals: ‘We recognize that the development of goals could also be useful for pursuing focused and coherent action on sustainable development. The goals should address and incorporate in a balanced way all three dimensions of sustainable development (environment, economics, and society) and their interlinkages. The development of these goals should not divert focus or effort from the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals’. Paragraph 249 states that “the process needs to be coordinated and coherent with the processes to consider the post 2015 development agenda”.

Taken together, paragraph 246 and 249 paved the way for the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). The MDGs were officially established following the Millennium Summit of the United Nations in 2000 and the agreement in the future we want outcome document. The Rio+20 summit also agreed that the process of designing sustainable development goals, should be “action-oriented, concise and easy to communicate, limited in number, aspirational, global in nature and universally applicable to all countries while taking into account different national realities, capacities and levels of development and respecting national policies and priorities (UN General assembly, 2016).

Because the MDGs were to be achieved by 2015, a further process was needed. Discussion of the post-2015 framework for international development began well in advance, with the United Nations System Task Team on post 2015 Development Agenda releasing the first report known as Realizing the Future we want. The report was the first attempt to achieve the requirements under paragraph 246 and 249 of the future we want document. It identified four dimensions as part of a global vision for sustainable development: Inclusive Social Development, Environmental Sustainability, Inclusive Economic Development, and Peace and Security. Other processes included the UN Secretary General’s High Level Panel on the post 2015 Development Agenda, whose report was submitted to the Secretary General in 2013. (UN DESA, 2016).

Sustainable Development Goals as a Global Agenda

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), officially known as Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is a set of 17 “Global Goals” with 169 targets between them. Spearheaded by the United Nations through a deliberative process involving its 193 member states, as well as global civil society, the goals are contained in paragraph 54 United Nations Resolution is a broader intergovernmental agreement that acts as the post 2015. Development Agenda (successors to the Millennium Development Goals). The SDGs build on the principles agreed upon under Resolution A/RES/66/288, popularly known as the future we want.

The SDGs were in large measure informed by the often quoted assertion by United Nations Secretary-General Ban-Ki-moon that “we don’t have plan B because there is no planet B”. On 19 July 2014, the UN General Assembly’s open working group (OWG) on Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) forwarded a proposal for the SDGs to the Assembly. The proposal contained 17 goals with 169 targets covering a broad range of sustainable development issues. These included ending poverty and hunger, improving health and education, making cities more sustainable, combating climate change, and protecting oceans and forests. On 5 December 2014, the UN General Assembly accepted the Secretary –General’s Synthesis Report which stated that the agenda for the post-2015 SDG process would be based on the OWG proposals.

The intergovernmental Negotiations on the post 2015 Development Agenda (IGN) began in January 2015 and ended in August 2015. Following the negotiations, a final document was adopted at the UN Sustainable Development Summit September 25-27, 2015 in New York, USA. The title of the agenda is transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Goals of Sustainable Development

Further information: Post-2015 Development Agenda on 25 September 2015, the 194 countries of the UN General Assembly adopted the 2030 Development Agenda titled Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Following the adoption, UN agencies under the umbrella of the United Nations Development Group, decided to support an independent campaign to help communicate the agreed Sustainable Development Goals to a wider constituency. Known as project everyone, the independent campaign introduced the term Global Goals and was supported by corporate institutions and other international organizations. Because this decision was made without the approval of the member states, it met resistance. In addition, several sections of civil society and governments felt the UNDG ignored “sustainability”, even though it was the most important aspect of the agreement. That the term “Global Goals” also refers to several other processes not related to the United Nations was another concern. (Public SDGs, 2016).

The Official Agenda for sustainable development adopted on 25 September 2015 has 92 paragraphs. Paragraph 51 outlines the 17 sustainable development goals and the associated 169 targets.

Goal 1: No Poverty: End poverty in all its forms everywhere

Goal 2: Zero Hunger: End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture.

Goal 3: Good Health and Well-being: Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages.

Goal 4: Quality Education: Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all.

- Major progress has been made for education access, specifically at the primary school level, for both boys and girls. However, access does not always mean quality of education, or completion of primary school. Currently, 103 million youth worldwide still lack basic literacy skills, and more than 60 percent of them are women.
- Target 1 “By 2030, ensure that all girls and boys complete free, equitable and quality primary and secondary education leading to relevant and Goal 4 effective learning outcomes”. Shows the commitment to nondiscriminatory education outcomes.

Goal 5 Gender Equality: Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls.

Goal 6; Clean water and sanitation: Ensure availability and sustainability management of water and sanitation for all.

Goal 7: Affordable and clean Energy: Affordable and clean energy- Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all.

Goal 8: Decent Work and Economic Growth: Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all. World Pensions Council (WPC) development economists have argued that the twin considerations of long-term economic growth and infrastructure investment weren’t prioritized enough: “ More worryingly, ‘Work and Economic Growth’ and ‘Technological Innovation and Infrastructure investment’ joined the (SDGs) priority list at number 8 and number 9 respectively, a rather mediocre ranking which defies economic common sense”. (Firzli and Nicolas, 2016).

Goal 9: Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure: Build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization and foster innovation.

Goal 10: Reduced Inequalities: Reduced income inequality within and among countries

Goal 11; Sustainable Cities and communities: Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable.

Goal 12: Responsible Consumption and production: Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns.

Goal 13: Climate Action: Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts by regulating emissions and promoting developments in renewable energy.

Goal 14: Life Below Water: Conserve and sustainable use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development.

Goal 15: Life on Land: Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss.

Goal 16: Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions: Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels.

Goal 17: Partnerships for the Goals: Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the global partnership for sustainable development.

Special Needs Educations and Sustainable Development Goals.

Education for sustainable development (ESD) is explicitly recognized in the SDGs as part of target 4.7 of the SDG on education, together with Global Citizenship Education (GCED), which UNESCO promotes as a complementary approach. At the sametime, it is important to emphasis ESD's crucial importance for all the other 16 SDGs. With its overall aim to develop cross-cutting sustainability competencies in learners, ESD is an essential contribution to all efforts to achieve the SDGs, enabling individuals to contribute to sustainale development by promoting societal, economic and political changes as well as by transforming their own behaviour. (Tagger, 2017).

According to UNESCO (2017), the place of special needs education in the sustainable development goals can be trace in the SDGs goals four (4) which ensure inclusive education and equitable quality education and promote life long learning opportunities for all.

A dominant problem in the disability field is the lack of access to education for both children and adults with disabilities. As education is a fundamental right for all, enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and protected through various international conventions, this is a very serious problem. In a majority of countries, there is a dramatic difference in the educational opportunities provided for disabled children and those provided for non-disabled children. It will simply not be possible to realize the goal of Education for All if we do not achieve a complete change in the situation (Bengt Lindqvist, 1999).

SDGs as a Base to Education for All

Education for All means ensuring that all children have access to basic education of good quality. Disability may be the single most important factor excluding children from schooling, this means that the goal of EFA cannot be achieved simply by doing more of what we are already doing. Closing in on EFA will require new strategies to reach these children SDG 4 implies is one such strategy. It is based on the principle that all children should have the opportunity to learn, and that children learn best when they learn together.

SDG 4 implies creating an environment in schools and in basic education programmes in which children are both able and enabled to learn. Such an environment must be inclusive of children, effective with children, friendly and welcoming to children, healthy and protective for children and gender sensitive. The development of such child friendly learning environments is an essential part of the overall efforts by countries around the world to increase access to, and improve the quality of their schools.

Iregbu and Longkam (2008) is on the opinion that the SDG justified the right of every child to equal educational opportunities regardless of their status of disabilities or abilities by

the fact that education is meant to foster the worth and development of an individual both for his sake and the society. The special needs education and regular education are complementary to one another in the sense that special needs education accomplishes for exceptional persons what regular education does for others. With this educational provision, person with special needs, are integrated to achieve higher educational objectives with their counterparts who are without disabilities. Special needs education plays a key role in the transformation of exceptional person by making them independent.

The policy and practice of the education of the children with special needs have taken international dimension with the Sustainable Development Goals sponsored declaration Education for All by the year 2030. Osakwe (2010) opined that the school system now face increasing pressure to raise standards, develop social and personal skills, broaden curricula, pay greater attention to equal educational opportunities and prepare young people for rapidly changing world. Invariably, there is paradigm shift toward addressing the educational plights of students with one form of disabilities or the other in order to improve their life, since they have invaluable roles to play in the international development and to do this effectively; their education needs to be given adequate attention.

For instance The philosophy of Nigeria Education believes that every Nigerian child shall have a right to equal education opportunities of any real or imagined disabilities each according to his/her ability and this is based on the provision of equal opportunities for all citizens of the country at the primary, secondary and tertiary levels both inside and outside the formal school system. Despite the section (8) of the National Policy, Obiakor (1991) observed that there are still problems in implementing the policy brought about by the large population in the country. Most citizens in Nigeria live in the rural areas, therefore not receiving public awareness on disability policies put forth by the government. Another major problem is the transition of government in Nigeria, which has made it difficult to solidify education policies and programmes that are not extensively politicized. Other setbacks include poor organization, poor financing, and less emphasis on rural education.

The commitment is made to equalize educational opportunities for all children, irrespective of their physical, sensory, mental, psychological or emotional disabilities, these are lofty goals intended to improve the quality of special education services, but much more is needed to translate the goals into concrete action.

Critique of SDGs on Special Needs Education Practices in Nigeria

Nigeria is a signatory to United Nations edict on human Rights and Child Right. The child has a right to be free and protected from harmful practices; also Nigeria Government promulgated a decree in 1993 for the provision of comprehensive legal protections and security for Nigerians with disabilities. People with disabilities are guaranteed equal treatment, integration, education and their eventual mainstreaming into the society.

Within Nigeria society, there is little appreciation that disability is fundamentally an issue inexorably linked to human rights. The common perceptions held by policy makers are that disability issue are viewed in terms of charity and welfare (Lang & Upah, 2008). This is manifested in a number of ways, firstly at the national level; there is no disability discrimination legislation that has been enacted in the country despite the fact that two bills have been introduced into the National Assembly. Secondly, there is no form of social protection for people with disabilities in Nigeria. Thirdly, the Ministry of Women Affairs and

Social Development is government lead department for disability issues in Nigeria, however the services that they provide are based on charity/welfare approach.

Consequently for the vast majority of people living with disabilities in Nigeria, there is no access to disability services and this compounds the level of social exclusion they experience. Eskay, Onu & Igbo (2012) noted that the education policy and programmes are mainly structured and not accommodating for children with special need. How are children on wheelchairs expected to participate in classroom upstairs? How will the child with speech and language defect be taught by a teacher who lacks the skill to communicate? There is a need to improve the policies from paper and allow for its implementations in its classrooms. The policy document did not classify any criteria for personnel training.

Current strategies and programmes have not been sufficiently meeting the needs of children and youth who are vulnerable to marginalization or exclusion. In the past, efforts have consisted of specialized programs, institutions and specialist educators. The unfortunate consequence of such differentiation, although well intended has often been further exclusion. Achieving the Sustainable Development Goals by their assigned time lines will require unprecedented intersectoral and interagency collaboration among partners. Education must be viewed as a facilitator in everyone's human development and functionality, regardless of barriers of any kind, physical or otherwise. Therefore, disability of any kind (physical, social and/or emotional) cannot be a disqualifier. Inclusion, thus, involves adopting a broad vision of SDGs addressing the spectrum of needs of all learners, including those who are vulnerable to marginalization and exclusion. The following challenges facing special needs service delivery in Nigeria were identified by the Nigeria Educational Research Council (NERDC).

1. Shortage of manpower of the field of special education
2. Lack of necessary and adequate equipment.
3. Non-payment of special allowances to teachers of special needs persons.
4. Denial of employment of qualified special needs persons in some of the state.
5. Inappropriate deployment of professionally qualified personnel in the field of special education.
6. Non-establishment of special needs education units in some states.
7. Non-allocation of funds specifically assigned for the education of the special needs children.
8. Non-admission of qualified special needs person in the post primary institution.
9. Lack of maintenance of services for the students with visual disabilities.
10. Lack of maintenance of available equipment.
11. Lack of desirable cooperation among the Ministries and Departments responsible for the education and welfare of the special needs persons, medical and social welfare.
12. Lack of counseling programmes for the parents of the special needs children.

Based on all this discussion on inclusive education one can say it is directly reflected in SDGs.

Conclusion

Education is fundamental human right and is widely recognized as a mean to develop human capital, to improve economic performance and to enhance people capabilities and choices in a Nigerian educational situation, we need a change towards a more inclusive system as SDG implies on inclusive and equitable quality education which shows that every child has a fundamental right to education and must be given opportunity to achieve and maintain an acceptable level of learning and inclusion should be used to respond to the diversity needs of

all children. The Sustainable Development Goal on education cannot be attained until meaningful become universal. That means removing the barriers universal that have created exclusion and ensure that all children successfully completed the different cycles of basic education by successfully learning.

Recommendations

The discussion of this paper comes with the following recommendations

1. Inclusive education needs to be understood as presence participation and achievement.
2. There needs to be a never ending search for better ways of responding to diversity.
3. The identification and removal of barriers to learning and participation is needed.
4. There needs to be a prioritization of policies and programmes towards learners who are at risk of marginalization, exclusion or under achievement.

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