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# The Role of Education towards Achieving Sustaining Housing and Environmental Development in Nigeria

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**Abstract:** Education constitutes the most effective means that the society needs to confront the challenges of the world. Succinctly put, the sustainable progress of man depends wholly on educated minds in every walk of life. It is the major factor that can be used to create enduring relationships among people and foster greater respect for the needs of human beings in any situation on earth. The paper examines the possible ways of sustaining existing low-cost housing estates in Lagos State, Nigeria. Lessons from experiences of developed nations on low-cost housing estates welfare mechanisms as it relates to the basis of allocation, usage, periodic maintenance, transferability and social cohesion were ascertained from literature and compared with existing situations in Lagos State. Findings showed that there is need for continuous life learning efforts to be embarked upon and sustained by the three tiers of government in Nigeria towards achieving sustainable housing and environmental development. The study recommends that the three arms of government need to embark on educational re-orientation of Nigerians on sustainable home ownership built on equitable, social, economic and political fair play.

**Key words:** Education, Sustainable, Low-cost Housing, Masses, Nigeria

## 1. Introduction

All human activities, no matter the status of those concerned, do take place on land. Before the advent of western

education in Nigeria, indigenous peoples respect and love the land as a mother, treating it as sacred, believing that people, plants, animals, water, the

land and the sky are all part of the same on-going cycles of life. Ethnic societies lived in harmony with the natural world as much as possible and there was relative peace as a result of indigenous systems of education through natural ecology. The traditional beliefs and the knowledge that flows from them has been passed down from the generations through a wide range of cultural practices, including direct instruction, stories, dances, ceremonies and art as well as networks of sacred places. Such indigenous approaches to education linked people to the land through culture. The subsequent disregard for land and culture, since colonization of Nigeria by the British, coupled with western education, meant that knowledge; values and skills for peaceful co-existence were underplayed over the years in contemporary education.

The success of Nigeria in attaining independence in October, 1960 was followed rigidly by a focus on economic development to provide basic necessities of life for the populace in the hope of making higher standards of living attainable for all irrespective of the geo-political base of each person. This focus of time was re-interpreted as achieving peaceful co-existence, freedom of speech, even development across regions and the liveable environment. With the rapid emergence of towns and cities and the creation of more States, the provision of residential housing for the teeming population, especially in the State capitals and their surrounding towns, came up as issues and aspirations, more from the low-income earners within the society.

Since the environment is where we live and its development is what leads to improvement in our abodes, it is

mandatory, on our part, to pursue neighbourhood developments that will not compromise the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. This can only be achieved if social progress, human well-being, social justice, equity, and poverty alleviation are pursued vigorously and collectively by all and sundry. Proper education of the masses can only be achieved through a combination of formal and informal means of transferring knowledge in the world. It is only through these means that certain fundamental values such as the freedom to live where a person desires, equality of opportunities for better men and women, respect for each other's beliefs, culture and language, prudence in managing nature, and collective responsibility in managing the country's economic, social and political variables can be achieved with less stress.

## **2. Literature Review**

Joseph (2006) acknowledged housing as an important sector of a nation's economy because a vigorous and buoyant housing sector is an indicator of a strong program of national investment and is the first step towards achieving future economic growth and social development in a country. In the same vein, ICESCR (1966) inserted Article 11 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights that recognized the right of everyone to adequate standard of living for himself and his family, including adequate housing. Yates and Milligan (2007) identified three core groups of potential household risks. These are, first, trapped renters because of increase in rents ahead of increases in income; second, aspirant purchasers as a result of either increase in rents or house prices ahead of increases in incomes and third,

stretched purchasers caused by both increase in interest rates and house prices. These conditions occur because of the inability of households to save and bridge the deposit gap needed to rent or purchase a home. Such situations frustrate human aspirations. Such an unexpected happening eventually leads to household stress which in turn leads to frustration.

Rescher (1969) noted that sustainability of the built environment relies more on the battle to win heart and mind of man through the appreciation of things of the mind that have to do with the vision people have for themselves and their fellow human beings. This manifests, first, in the ways that people talk and act; second, in the pattern of their expenditure of time and effort and third, in their choices in the marketplace.

Dunn (2006) found that values are central to human daily life because societal values shape psychology and agency and influence human behaviour while Bok (1995) was of the opinion that human values, such as survival and responsibility, are common to all human beings. Milbrath (1989) opined that value is fundamentally about what standards human beings ought to live and enjoy quality life within a built environment. Trainer (1995) posited that pursuing a change in societal value is difficult but crucial for ensuring a peaceful transition into a sustainable society.

### **3. Residential Housing for the Masses**

The concept of shelter differs from individual to individual depending on culture, tradition, profession and way of living. Besides, being a basic necessity, it is also a source of identity that has significant effects on the overall psychological well-being of the inhabitants. It also differs from country

to country depending on their levels of exposure to happenings in other countries, commitment and peaceful co-existence (Nair et al., 2005).

Residential housing progress has also been ideologically linked with economic growth (Guo, Vale and Vale, 2008). Economic growth is synonymous with progress while its end purpose is to increase the quality of life of a country's citizens. However, Meadows et al., (1972) noted that there are limits to growth and, in reality; unlimited residential housing growth cannot be sustained in a finite planet. There are rent and ownership based affordable housing schemes which are mostly owned and managed by local authorities mostly in developed countries such as UK. The rents are set under a national rent regime, usually below market levels and are normally based on relative property values, local earning levels and property size. Such a scheme provides a subsidized/ below market housing rate to the less privilege members of the society with their landlords usually being non-profit organizations (Priemus, 2000). Ownership based affordable housing scheme, according to Watson, Beazley, and Joiner (1995) enables the occupants, after purchase, alter their homes according to their personal needs, culture and socioeconomic backgrounds. Newman (2002) viewed sustainability with respect to housing as ensuring that (i) there is a roof overhead for the housing disadvantaged; (ii) ensuring housing is more eco-efficient and (iii) housing is well located or is part of a project to improve locational amenity. UNDES (2005) sees sustainable development as far from being a burden but as an exceptional economic opportunity to build markets and create jobs; socially, to bring people

in from the margins; and politically, to give every man and woman a voice, and a choice, in deciding their own future. Alao (2009); Barton (2000) and Porter and Platt, (2000) found that sustainability seeks to meet the social needs of affordable housing through equity and choice in terms of access to all social groups; community development; neighbourhood social balance and continuity, as well as, valuing and protecting diversity and local distinctiveness thereby strengthening local community and cultural diversity.

Rescher (1969) further proposes four ways to change values, value change induced by a change of information through persuasion and social learning, value change induced by ideological and political change, value 'erosion' induced by boredom, disillusionment and reaction as too much choice may make people bored with being consumers, and value change induced by changes in the operating environment of a society (lifestyle changes). With better education of the masses, the four ways of influencing human values could be better appreciated by the masses, if and when such a need arises.

Green and Rojas (2008) and Wakely and Riley (2011) found that the poverty levels vary from country to country, often resulting in low-quality and overcrowded housing that lacks various services and infrastructures with, self-help housing, which is mostly practiced incrementally, often as a result of poverty. Urban growth in Nigeria, and in other developing countries, demands high-capacity housing delivery systems for low-income groups occurring through self-help and institutional housing schemes.

Self-help housing is based on individual decisions on building quality, time and construction capacity (Bredenood and Lindert, 2010 and Bredenood and Lindert, 2014). Due to its prominence, self-managed housing in developing countries is a phenomenon of great importance and thus should be facilitated by formal housing policies (Connolly, 2006). Individual housing projects are realized at the local level, through the involvement of residents, municipal organizations, building companies, housing cooperatives and banks. As housing shortage is a problem of great proportions, housing, including self-building, is a promising source of employment generation (Erguden, 2001). With the economic downturn in Nigeria within the past few decades, residential housing provision, through self-help approach, has suffered setbacks in the areas of quality, quantity and poor neighbourhood environmental facilities. Its widespread became a concern both to the various arms of government and residents as such areas had sub-standard layouts, very poor housing designs, no electricity, poor drainage system in addition to lack of open spaces (public market, motor garages). All these lapses are traceable to the level of illiteracy prevailing in such neighbourhoods.

#### **4. The Challenges of Mankind Towards Sustainable Development**

Parekh (2013) re-iterated that in an effort to perform within available potentials, there is always the need to closely examine the four major spheres that make-up peoples' life but if anyone of these is out of balance, there is bound to be frustration, boredom, disenchantment and decrease in peoples' enthusiasm for life.

Continuous life learning efforts need to be embarked upon vigorously by the three tiers of government in Nigeria. This is necessary to ensure citizens operate on the same frequency if sustainable living must be achieved. First, individuals must, as a necessity, be able to analyze the extent to which he has developed his realism, self-awareness, and self-dignity. Inadequate development in these areas of human beings will dampen an individual's enjoyment of life. It takes the combination of being responsible and light hearted to meet a high level of self-dignity. Second, one needs to attain financial success and integrity to attain a strong sense of purpose by working diligently at a job that a man enjoys doing. It is not the quantity of funds but its quality through a fair, honest and equitable manner. Third, it takes respect, mutual benefit, and trust to build healthy relationships and thus avoid stress, unhappiness and even ill-health. Fourth, people need to examine their inner being, using various resources for personal wisdom. With humility, external and internal peace is attained while integral fulfilment would lead to contentment as someone work to improve life for self and those around them. Attainment of fulfillment in life performance comes with the right combination of feeling contentment and empowerment.

In the words of WCED (1987) towards achieving holistically, the importance of protecting the environment through proper education of school children from their first day in school must be given a priority. Through environmental education, the society would appreciate the need to conserve resources while pursuing individual or national economic growth. Seeking such a 'balance' between environmental

conservation, economic growth and social development is the basic thinking underlying the sustainable development concept. In the process of developing sustainably, we need to make people understand and act in accordance with the spirit of sustainable development. Once the thinking and action taken by the people become habitual, in the long run, these habits will turn into a culture of sustainable development (Komiyama and Takeuchi, 2006). Through education, the society will inculcate awareness of development within the environment; slowly cultivate interests and commitments of people to participate in the agenda for sustainable development.

The educational process has five fundamental elements namely conscience, knowledge, attitude, aptitude and involvement. Conscience guides members of the society in making choices as consumers of those choices have multiple implications on the environment. Knowledge will guide people in their relationships with living nature thereby assisting in predicting what problems may come their way later in life. Attitude aids in the selection of personal alternatives in specific environmental situations. Aptitude, which represents the abilities, talents and motivation that an individual have, can be translated in practice as the "efficiency and competency in doing and solving, with success, some specific tasks and activities." (Ages 2010–2013). Involvement would encourage people to apply the knowledge gained.

### **5. Environmental Education**

According to Danger (1983), the term 'environmental education' was first used in Paris in 1948 whereas in Britain, the first recorded use of the term 'environmental education' was traceable

to a conference held in 1965 at Keele University, Staffordshire. The first conference in UK led to the establishment of the Council for Environmental Education (CEE), which first met in July 1968. IUCN/UNESCO International Working Meeting on Environmental Education in the School Curriculum' held in 1970 at the Foresta Institute, Carson City, Nevada, USA and defined the term 'environmental education' as 'the process of recognising values and clarifying concepts in order to develop skills and attitudes necessary to understand and appreciate the inter-relatedness among man, his culture, and his bio-physical surroundings. Environmental education also entails practice in decision-making and self-formulation of a code of behaviour about issues concerning environmental quality'" (IUCN, 1970). Palmer (1985) reported that as a follow up to the 1972 United Nations Conference on the Human Environment which held in Stockholm, Sweden, it was declared that "Education in environmental matters for the younger generation as well as adults is essential and should therefore be given due consideration for the underprivileged".

Palmer (1998) further noted that environmental education, within both formal and non-formal education sectors, should be an integral and essential part of every citizen's upbringing since he found that, in the long run, nothing significant will happen to reduce local and international threats to the environment unless widespread public awareness is aroused concerning the essential links between environmental quality and the continued satisfaction of human needs. Human action depends upon motivation, which depends upon widespread

understanding. That is why it is so important that everyone becomes environmentally conscious through proper environmental education.

## **6. Theoretical Frameworks on Environmental Education**

Around the globe, environmental education has become a popular strategy for promoting the conservation of biological diversity. Across scales, from the grassroots to the international, and across sectors, from non-profits to governmental ministries, education has been embraced as a strategy to reduce environmental destruction.

It is frequently assumed that people are behaving in environmentally unfriendly ways because they lack knowledge about the ecological consequences of their actions. Increasing knowledge would lead to a corresponding change in attitude, which in turn leads to the desired behaviour (Matthews and Riley, 1995). In other words, awareness must precede knowledge, which in turn determines attitudes, which then influences actions.

Research conducted in the 1970s in the United States illustrated that a person's level of education is strongly related to, and can even predict, a person's level of concern for the environment (Buttel and Flinn, 1978).

Attitudes refer to the state of mental or emotional readiness for some form of activity but Bennett (1989) found that attitudes, like values, reflect our feelings toward objects, both tangible and intangible. Outdoor education can improve attitudes (Yerkes and Haras, 1997) and unsurprisingly that the media plays a powerful role in the development of environmental attitudes and values (Shanahan and Katherine, 1999).

Applying the political ecology approach to conservation education highlights the imperative need for environmental education programs to be informed by both the cultural, political, economic and environmental contexts in which they work. Understanding the needs, goals, opportunities and constraints facing the participants in educational programs, and how these factors influence their knowledge, attitudes, and behaviours related to resource use and conservation should strengthen these programs.

Sterling (1996) noted that education for sustainability should nurture, first, a sense of responsibility to the environment and to other people. Second, have the will, knowledge and skills to translate this responsibility into action personally and publicly. Third, it should respond positively to change and uncertainty. Fourth, it must have a capacity to link individual and group actions to external events. Fifth, it must be interdisciplinary and holistic while sixth, it must have the ability and freedom to be creative. Seventh, there must be a balance of rationality with intuition. Finally, education for sustainability must have a sense of self-worth combined with respect for other individuals and cultures. Pursuing increased educational efforts will lead to

more informed attitudes, which in turn will lead to a desired change in behaviour.

## 6. Conclusion and Recommendation

The advancement of any nation is dependent on the ability of those in government to collectively and sincerely pursue and achieve a continuous formal and informal education of her citizens towards ensuring a stable political climate, wise use of the biophysical environment, as well as, a social system that respects human rights and dignity. This study therefore recommends that the three arms of government in Nigeria should embark an educational re-orientation of Nigerians on sustainable home ownership built on equitable social, economic and political fair play. Government should recognise environmental education as a critical factor for achieving environmental and ethical awareness, values and attitudes, skills and behaviour consistent with sustainable development and for effective public participation in decision-making. Both formal and informal educations are indispensable to changing people's attitudes so that they can have the capacity and wherewithal to assess and address their environmental concerns.

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