

Full Length Research

CONNECTING THE INDIVIDUAL TO LIFELONG AND LIFE-WIDE READING CULTURE IN NIGERIA: THE IMPERATIVES OF THE UNITED NATIONS SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOAL 4

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This is an off-shoot of a paper presented at the National Library of Nigeria Readership Promotion Campaign programme. It highlights the connection between the individual, lifelong learning and lifelong reading culture against the imperatives of the United Nation's Sustainable Development Goal 4. Goal 4 talks about an "Effective Learning in a safe environment" and how that affects the individual's capacity to sustain a lifelong learning and the promotion of a sustained reading culture. The paper is theoretical and reviews the relevant literature on the variables. It concludes that there is a nexus between a reading culture and the characteristics of a safe environment comprising the actions or inactions of the key stakeholders which includes Government, parents, the schools, teachers, authors, publishers and others. It recommends, amongst others, that it is majorly the responsibility of Government to make the environment safe and inclusive for all by providing functional public libraries in all the Local Government Headquarters, support writers, publishers, guarantee security, economic and guarantee empowerment opportunities.

Keywords: individual, lifelong learning and lifelong reading culture, United Nation's Sustainable Development Goal 4, Effective Learning

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INTRODUCTION

The Readership Promotion Campaign was organized by the National Library of Nigeria and held in Rivers State in May 2018. The theme was "Sustaining Lifelong Reading

for Positive Change". Ten (10) Secondary Schools represented by Seventeen (17) students each participated. Parents, teachers, authors, publishers,

government functionaries and Librarians were present. The schools performed drama sketches; songs, poetry, quizzes and reading competition. Prizes were won. Each participating school went home with sets of books for their libraries, donated by authors and publishers. At the end it was a huge success with a Communiqué issued and sent to media houses as well as to the State Government through the Ministry of Education and was aired by the Nigerian Television Authority.

The title of this paper: *Connecting the individual to Lifelong and Life-wide Reading Culture: The imperatives of the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goal 4(SDG)* is a choice premised on the importance of the United Nations SDG 4 in achieving a lifelong learning, life-wide learning and a sustained reading culture.

The key-words are: Sustainability, Lifelong learning, Life-wide learning and sustained Reading Culture. Simple definitions of these key-words were provided to guide and direct the presentation and discussion. This approach was taken because the mixed audience comprised authors, publishers, parents, school children and their teachers. The paper provides insight into what it means to sustain an activity, in this case, a reading culture, and what all the stakeholders in that activity ought to be doing to sustain it as a lifelong and life-wide activity for a positive change.

The Epistemology of the term “Sustainability”

The term “sustainability” originates from the concept of sustainable development of the environment. It became very popular by the end of the 20th Century because of the need to conserve the environment by creating awareness of the future impact of the activities of the present generation on the environment. Thus, from the environment point of view, sustainability means meeting the needs of the present generation without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs (Brundtland Report, 1987). In simple terms and for our purpose here, to ‘sustain’ an activity means to keep up with an action and progressing in that particular direction for a period as long as possible that will affect the individual positively without compromising the comfort and ability of others and future generations to meet their own needs along the same or similar direction. Here, it means the kind of reading habits we want to form today to enable us make a lasting change in our lives and in society as we continue reading good books, learning new things and new ways of doing things without stopping others from carrying on with similar activities now or in future. This is social justice. As the individual embarks on his sustained reading programme, he is not jeopardizing the needs of others to also embark on a similar reading activity either now or in the future. By so doing, the book will help to build the community through

building the individual for positive change.

Lifelong Learning, Life-wide Learning and Lifelong Reading Culture

‘Lifelong learning’ (LL) is a recent terminology used by UNESCO to replace “lifelong education and recurrent education”. This was conceptualized in the 1972 Faure publication entitled *Learning to be*. ‘Lifelong learning’ is a paradigm shift from education that focuses on just attending formal school or college education to “Learning how to continue to learn throughout the life cycle.” This is learning from ‘cradle to grave’ which is lifelong and also life-wide. In 1996, the UNESCO set up a committee headed by Delor to address the concept of lifelong learning. The Delor’s Report entitled: *Learning: the Treasure Within* stressed that lifelong learning must stand on the Four Pillars of education which are: learning to know, to do, to be and to live together. In the wisdom of the Report, the four pillars would enable the acquisition of knowledge, skills and values through life, as a continuous process from ‘cradle to grave’. Similarly, in 2000, the European Commission provided one of the most widely accepted definitions of LL to argue that it is an:

All purposeful learning activity undertaken throughout life helping the individual to develop, acquire language, share information and improve knowledge, communication skills and competencies within a personal, civic, social and / or employment-related perspective.

Although, Wikipedia may not always be a dependable reference source in a standard academic endeavour such as this, definition it provided lends some support to that by the European Commission as:

The ongoing, voluntary and self-motivated pursuit of knowledge for either personal or professional reasons that does not only enhance social inclusion, active citizenship and personal development, but also self sustainability as well as competitiveness and employability.

This perspective also recognizes that learning is not restricted to childhood or the classroom but takes place throughout life and in a spectrum of situations and circumstances. According to Allen Tough (1989), 70% of learning endeavours are self-motivated while only 20% of all learning projects are planned by a professional. In this regard, learning is no longer confined to a place (school), limited to an age-bracket (time) and the knowledge gained with limited application (regular circular employment). No, not at all because this learning takes place all the time. Everything and every experience gained anywhere and from every book read are learning

opportunities that produce positive change and affect general lifestyle modification in the individual. Thus, every book read is a bridge that connects the individual to capacity building and works together for good to them that love reading, especially, reading good books. Again, the UNESCO's Belem Framework for Action (2009) summarizes lifelong learning as "an organizing principle of all forms of education". There is no end to education.

Life-wide Learning

On the other hand, life-wide learning activity is what it is. It is not usually directed at one restricted learning area and aspect of knowledge and skill but attempts to focus and re-focus attention as broadly as the environment permits. It is an environment-based or opportunity-based reading and learning venture. According to Ouane (2009), the learner is able to acquire and integrate various sets of knowledge and skills in order to apprehend, advance or even invent new knowledge and skills because the environment is right and the learner possesses the desire for continuous learning.

Lifelong Reading Culture

Lifelong reading is when the individual continues to read and maintain that reading culture, consistently, throughout life. It is about internalizing a reading habit for the sake of it first and foremost, then as a means of language acquisition, communication, entertainment, education and of sharing information and ideas. As a means of entertainment and education, a regular reader is a regular tourist because the individual, connected to the pages of the book, visits several places, meets great men and women who have affected history and so on. It is a beautiful interaction between the text and the reader. We can safely adapt the European Commission (2000)'s definition of learning to also define a sustained reading culture as an:

*All purposeful reading activity undertaken throughout life helping the individual to develop a **sustained reading culture**, acquire language, share information, improve knowledge, communication skills and competencies within a personal, civic, social and / or employment-related perspective*

In this sense, it is reading to know, to do, to be and to live together. Indeed, reading makes a complete intellectual, empowered and social individual. An individual's reading habit may be shaped by his prior knowledge, experiences and attitude. Unlike most endeavours, reading requires discipline, isolation, creativity and a critical mind.

The UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and Sustainability

The United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, also known as the agenda for "Transforming our world", identified 17 global goals. Goal 4 is on sustaining "Quality Education" which is to: "*Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all*". Goal 4a specifically, deals with "Effective Learning Environments". According to this Goal, countries and institutions (government, schools, etc) should: "*Build and upgrade education facilities that are child, disability and gender sensitive and provide safe, non-violent, inclusive and effective learning environments for all*". Nigeria is a signatory to these declarations. Our interest here is on the provision of a: "*safe, non-violent, inclusive and effective learning environments for all*". The reading process requires continuous practice under the right and effective environment. The Nigerian Government at all levels is expected to provide the educational facilities in a safe, non-violent, inclusive and effective learning environment for all by the year 2030. Some of these facilities should include quality schools with standard school libraries, public and community libraries with good books written by both local and foreign authors, published by both local and foreign publishers, etc, in an environment devoid of violence and poverty. In some States of Nigeria like the Rivers State, efforts are made to build and upgrade educational facilities and provide effective learning environment. The schools are also monitored by the Rivers State Ministry of Education to ensure quality. But in some other States, cultism, kidnapping of school children, rape, insurgencies and similar vices are still taking place. Children are still studying under inhuman environments and some are dropping out of school daily. Today the National Bureau of Statistics has it that about 10 million children are out of school. In other words, the extent to which we can truly say that the social and educational environment in some States is safe for the individual to form a lifelong learning, life-wide learning and a sustainable reading habit is a topic for another discussion.

It is very important to think 'sustainability' in all life positive endeavours. It tells of what, as individuals, groups or communities desire to be now and the legacy they intend to leave behind based on their present actions. Lifelong learning, life-wide learning and the development of a sustained reading culture must be considered together so as to find a collective and individual lifelong prosperity. This is the stance of the United Nations 2030 Agenda. To reiterate, the safe, all inclusive and effective learning environments should include the availability of functional public and school libraries manned by professionals with adequate facilities to cater for all levels of need. Employment opportunities

for economic empowerment, electricity power supply, security, quality early childhood development facilities, parental background, training and re-training of teachers and so on, all form part of the safe and effective lifelong learning and reading environments. An individual who is desirous to take up additional training on a life-changing skill acquisition programme or wants to improve and sustain his existing skill, and improve on his reading habit needs quality books in the market and libraries, the economic power to buy books and pay for tutorials where necessary, electricity power and security of life to enable the individual keep late in the public or school libraries to study without fear of molestation.

Goal 4.1 of the UN on “Universal Primary and Secondary Education” also enjoins that “By 2020, countries are to ensure that all girls and boys have access to quality early childhood development, care and pre-primary education so that they are ready for primary education”. This is relevant to the extent that lifelong learning and the acquisition of a reading culture also requires good early childhood foundation. Year 2020 is here and can we as stakeholders, (teachers, parents, schools, government) say that all girls and boys in Nigeria have equal access to quality early childhood education in the face of insurgencies, poverty and other challenges as identified above? Sustainability starts with the young minds being exposed and taught that they can change themselves and the world from where they are. Most Parents and teachers are grappling with poverty, insecurity and lack of basic amenities. More children are dropping out of school because parents are not able to pay their school fees. Other children are in internally displaced peoples’ camps and are therefore, not in schools. So, the basis for lifelong and life-wide learning and sustainable reading culture is already threatened by these indices.

The Goal 4.7 of the UN on *Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) and Global Citizenship* also provides that:

“By 2030 countries are to ensure that all learners acquire the knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development including among others, through education for sustainable development and sustainable lifestyles, human rights, gender equality, promotion of a culture of peace and non-violence, global citizenship and appreciation of cultural diversity and of cultures’ contribution to sustainable development”.

ESD thus hopes that by 2030, member countries should empower their citizens to change the way they think at all levels and in all social contexts and work towards a sustainable future based on the provision of effective learning environment. The year 2030 is not too far from now, are there indicators to show that Nigeria will achieve

this goal by 2030? Any answer is as good.

Characteristics of Lifelong Learning, life-wide Learning and Sustainable Reading Culture

These are attributes that characterize lifelong learning, life-wide learning and sustained reading culture. According to Leyden (2017) these are: opportunity, skepticism, curiosity, creativity, initiative, perseverance, and capacity, the desire to continue to read and learn and even “perfectionism” and we are quick to add “passion”. The UN SD Goal 4 dwells on providing the right environment.

The Imperatives for Lifelong Reading Culture for Positive Change

Positive change here means the transformation of a non-reader to a reader who has developed a sustained reading culture. Such positively transformed individual should impact his immediate environment. According to Senge et al (1999) “significant change only occurs when it is driven from the top” and for our purposes here, “the top” means the government as it seeks to provide a safe, all inclusive and effective environments for all as the UN Goal 4 stipulates. It requires the “top” addressing the limits that can discourage change from occurring. These are the imperatives. Some of these imperatives revolve round the actions of all the stakeholders involved in the learning and reading process. Every stakeholder has a responsibility: the individual, parents, teachers, the school, authors and writers, publishers, the government and the society at large.

At the individual level, Leyden (2017) recommends some ten ways to achieve a lifelong learning and reading habit. According to him the individual should:

1. Read widely and often. Reading books, newspapers, magazines, journals, etc, in traditional (print) and electronic formats. Also, reading constructively according to the direction of the person’s identified goal. When developing a skill or a particular talent that an individual has, reading books on it will enhance the potential. Look out for newspaper columns that discuss that topic, cut that page to form part of your personal library on it. Collect artifacts on the topic. Discuss with the right people. Ask questions. Search the internet. By the time all these would have been done, you will find that you have not only increased your horizon but have also seen ways of sustaining and sharpening your interest.
2. Maintain relevant friends and contacts: Exchange

books with friends as gifts. "Iron sharpeneth iron" according to the Holy Book. Be sure to delete from your list those friends that will discourage and pull you away from pursuing your dream and those friends that while away your productive time. If possible, avoid some friends and contacts while you focus on what you want to achieve. In that way, they will form part of the instrument for sustaining your lifelong learning for positive change.

3. Teach others: Knowledge, when shared does not diminish; rather it increases the understanding of the bearer. Some people understand better in discussion groups. That is where the test of level of your knowledge of a subject and the direction to seek improvement.
4. Know who is: The reader should read books that relate to his/her talents or interests as a person. Those who are multi-talented must be careful so that they do not become a Jack of all trades and a master of none. Focusing on and developing one talent at a time and being curious about it. Running with the vision until it has been exhausted are key.
5. Be Passionate: When passionate about a subject, it is easier to develop the right learning atmosphere. The learner is eager to learn and know new ways of doing it. He / She is open to suggestion. This is where the school teachers and parents have an important role to play. Teachers are often able to identify talents in their pupils. It is for them to help the pupils develop the talent by giving them individual projects to start and finish. The skill acquired here will start a lifelong learning and reading process in them.
6. Believe he/she is an unstoppable reader: This requires making reading enterprise to become part of a general worldview by dreaming it, talking it, eating it.
7. When to start a reading programme: Start now where you are. The earlier you start the better for it to be sustained over a life time and make the long lasting positive impact in your individual life. Let the desire to read a book or read something be a daily priority.
8. Be like the African proverbial snail: it goes out to look for food (leaves). It does not wait for the leaves to come to it. So, go out and search out good books, people both traditional and electronic, as they appeals to your interest.

At the level of the society, beginning from the parents and guardians, the children should be encouraged to go with their passion. Books should be a regular gift item in the homes. Teachers can only build on the home foundation. It is easier for the teachers when the

foundation is right. For if the foundation is faulty, there is very little that the teachers can do. The teachers need to be motivated by regular payment of salaries, enhanced welfare, and training and retraining to improve on their skills so that they can impart quality knowledge direction and other forms of support. Most teachers, by their training, are very committed to the success of the children. If the teachers are taken good care of by the Government and the erring ones disciplined, they will have little or no attraction for illegal activities. Teachers deserve respect by the parents and guardians. The school environment needs to be right with facilities that encourage curiosity and creativity. There should be a standard school library with a qualified librarian who knows the right materials to acquire process and disseminate to the right children in the right format.

The government and the society at large should provide the right all-inclusive environment for all. Provision of Public and Community Libraries is sine-qua-non for promotion of lifelong reading culture. Such libraries are the universities for the old, young, rich, poor, able, persons and those with special needs, all races and all religions. In some developed countries, there is always a library for all citizens within a walking distance. This is a panacea for lifelong learning, life-wide learning and sustainable reading culture for positive change. Authors should be encouraged to write. Copy right of the authors must be protected and their intellectual property appropriately rewarded. Publishers should be encouraged to publish good books.

Benefits of Lifelong Reading Culture

The benefits of forming a lifelong reading habit cannot be over emphasized. In addition to the benefits already identified above, Winter-Hebert (2014) also adds other benefits to include mental benefits stimulation, stress reduction, knowledge acquisition, vocabulary expansion, memory improvement, stronger analytical thinking skills, improved focus and concentration, free entertainment, better writing skills, tranquility and peace that passes the understanding of the uninitiated.

CHALLENGES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Under the imperatives, some of the challenges were already identified to include, generally, the "unsafe environment" resulting from the actions or in-actions of the stakeholders: individual learner, parents, teachers, the school, authors, writers and publishers, the government and the larger society. Other challenges include the effect of the social media on the reading culture of the present generation. Social Media seem to have taken-over the individual's attention. The children

are worst affected by this phenomenon. School fees are rising. Salaries are no longer taking parents home. So parents are constantly working to make ends meet and no longer have time to guide the children. Some Governments are not taking seriously the issue of the quality of schools that are approved. It is no longer news that the educational standard in Nigeria is greatly challenged. Public and Community Libraries are not enough. The existing libraries are bereft of new and good books. There are no good books in the market and where they are seen, the cost is exorbitant. Children are no longer encouraged and commissioned to read more and widely because the materials are not available. Writers are not encouraged to write books because literary works are not promoted and sponsored. Reading culture is fast eroding if not almost gone. Intellectual culture is gone. Parents do not reward children with books as gifts and reading same to them. Parents take them to fast food joints to reward them. Some teachers no longer discipline children for fear of being reprimanded by parents, yet young people need to be disciplined by their teachers who, most often, know the children better.

The school Curriculum is good enough but strict implementation appears faulty. On the larger society, some religious faith-based organisations no longer see the need to preach good social morals and the value of good virtue as against money-bagging culture. Poor reading culture and poverty do not prioritize the purchase of books. Individuals no longer see the need to engage in private self-study to acquire degrees and certificates to improve themselves. In the past, people who did not have the opportunity of attending formal, regular secondary school and university education attained prominence through private home study, sometimes through correspondence courses. Thanks to the availability of the National Open University in the country where adults can access education as a lifelong and life-wide learning environment to further promote reading culture.

The solution to all these problems is for the stakeholders – writers/authors, publishers, government, parents, teachers, religious bodies and the entire society to create the right environment and promote reading culture that will support lifelong and life-wide learning for all.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, connecting the individual to lifelong learning, life-wide learning and a sustained reading culture for positive change requires the involvement of all stakeholders in providing “a safe, non-violent, inclusive and effective environment for all”. This right environment will promote the desired reading culture and produce a worthy citizen. In this way, the book would have helped to Build Community as the 2018 World Book Day theme rightly declares.

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