Sustainability Issues in the Nigerian Secondary Education System

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Abstract – The idea of sustainability is encapsulated by the fact that it is not enough to start a programme, an activity or something without thinking of its continuity. This paper, therefore, discussed the issue of sustainability in the Nigerian Secondary Education System. It defined secondary education as that which children receive after primary education and before tertiary education. It is seen as the education for children between the ages of eleven plus/twelve and seventeen plus/eighteen. The paper identified and went further to discuss six sustainable issues which are relevant in the Nigerian Secondary System. These are Access and Equity; Standard and Quality Assurance; Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET); Infrastructure; Funding; Resource Mobilization and Utilization; and Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs). Each of these issues was discussed, problems identified and turn-around activities suggested or identified as having been taken.

Keywords – Sustainability, Secondary Education, Access, Equity, Quality Assurance.

I. INTRODUCTION

The issue of sustainability is a very important one. This is because it is not enough to begin something, its continuity is as important as its beginning. The dictionary (Robinson: 1425) defines 'sustain', the root word from which sustainability was derived, as "to keep going; to withstand, tolerate or endure; to bolster, strengthen or encourage; to maintain or provide something; to maintain or prolong; to bear the weight of or support something". According to Wikipedia (2013) sustainability implies 'to endure and to improve within the capacity of the supporting system'. It also implies that the capacity can be expanded while ensuring the integration of all aspects of the supporting system. This aptly demonstrates the meaning of the Latin word – sustenere – from which 'to sustain' or 'sustainability' is derived. Sustenere means to hold up (tenere - to hold ; sus-up).

The Nigerian education (Formal) system has three levels or subsystems

(a) Pre-primary and Primary. In official circles, the Pre-primary level is referred to as Early Childhood Care and Development Education (ECCDE). The Primary which is a part of the Basic Education is referred to as the Lower and Middle Basic Education

(b) Secondary – Upper basic which is the Junior Secondary level and Post-Basic (Senior Secondary) Education;

(c) Tertiary Education which is the terminal level of formal education. This follows after secondary education in such institutions as Universities, Polytechnics/Monotechnics. Colleges of Education and Innovative Enterprises Institutions (IEIs). These institutions are under the supervision of the National Universities Commission (NUC), National Board for Technical Education (NBTE) and National Commission for Colleges of Education (NCCE).

Sustaining the Secondary Education Level (Subsystem)

Secondary education has been described by Igbokwe and Igbokwe (2008) and in line with the National Policy on Education (FME, 2013), as the education that children receive after primary education and before tertiary education level. It is the education for children between ages eleven plus and twelve (11+/12) and seventeen plus and eighteen (17+/18). The duration of study is six years. Secondary education is subdivided into two: namely Junior Secondary (JS) and Senior (SS). The JS is also referred to as the Upper Basic. This implies that it is a part of Nigeria's basic education. The duration of stay at this level is three years.

The Senior Secondary Education is referred to as Post-basic education. It offers education after the completion of the three years of Upper Basic (JS) education and upon passing the Basic Education Certificate Examination (BECE). This examination is intended to replace the Junior Secondary Certificate Examination. Post-basic education comprises of three years of senior second1ary education which can be any of a Comprehensive Senior Secondary School or a Science/Specialized Secondary School or a three-year Technical College. It can also be a Continuing Education provided by Vocational Enterprises Institutions (VEIs) and Innovative Enterprises Institutions (IEIs) to those who have completed basic education as well as those who may have successfully completed senior secondary education but may not be proceeding to tertiary education (institution).

In broad terms, the goals of Nigeria's secondary education are to prepare the individual for

i. Useful living within the society and
ii. Higher education.

The Roadmap for the Nigerian education sector (FME, 2009: 38) gives the goals as 'producing a community of Nigerians well prepared for higher education, sustainable national development and global competiveness'. In more specific terms, the National Policy on Education (FRN, 2004: 18) listed the eight objectives of secondary education in Nigeria as: To

1. Provide all primary school leavers with the opportunity for education at a higher level , irrespective of sex, social status, religious or ethnic background;

2. Offer diversified curriculum to cater for differences in talent, opportunities and future roles;

3. Provide trained manpower in the applied sciences, technology, and commerce at sub-professional ;

4. Develop and promote Nigerian languages, art, and cul-

-ture in the context of world's heritage;

5. Inspire students with a desire for self-employment and achievement of excellence;
6. Foster national unity with emphasis on the common ties that unite us in our diversity;
7. Raise a generation of people who can think for themselves, respect the dignity of labour, appreciate those values specified under broad national goals and live as good citizens;
8. Provide technical knowledge and vocational skills necessary for agricultural, industrial and commercial development.

The revised National Policy on Education (FRN, 2013: 29) modified these objectives of secondary school education and stated the objectives of Post-Basic Education and Career Development to be: To

I. Provide holders of Basic Education Certificate and Junior Arabic and Islamic Studies Certificate with opportunities for education of a higher level irrespective of gender, social status, religious or ethnic background;
II. Offer diversified curriculum to cater for differences in talents, disposition, opportunities and future roles;
III. Provide trained manpower in the applied science, technology and commerce at sub-professional grades;
IV. Provide entrepreneurial technical and vocational job-specific skills for self-reliance and for agricultural, industrial, commercial and economic development;
V. Develop and promote Nigerian languages, art and culture in the context of world's cultural heritage;
VI. Inspire students with a desire for self-improvement and achievement of excellence;
VII. Forster patriotism, national unity and security education with an emphasis on the common ties in spite of our diversity; and
VIII. Raise morally upright and well-adjusted individuals who think independently and rationally respect the views feelings of others and appreciate the dignity of labour.

II. Sustainability Issues in the Nigerian Secondary School Education

Arising from the foregoing, six sustainability issues have been identified. These include Access and Equity; Standard and Quality Assurance – teacher quality, motivation and retention, curriculum relevance and review, learner support services; Technical and Vocational Education and Training; Funding; Resource mobilization and utilization; and Information and Communication Technologies. These shall be discussed.

1. Access and Equity

Statistics show that there about 7,129 public Junior Secondary Schools (JSS) in Nigeria (FME, 2009). They further show an enrolment figure of 3,266,780. Furthermore, there is also a gender disparity in male and female enrolment figures at the JSS level, with 55 percent being male while 45 percent is female. This disparity shows as well in the statistics of attendance to school with 56 percent male attendance and 49 percent female attendance

(UNICEF database, 2016). There is also a disparity between expected and actual enrolment, while the expected enrolment in the JSS nation-wide is about 9,270,000, the actual enrolment is 3, 270,000. This shows a shortfall of about 6,000,000 not enrolled. On the whole, UNESCO in 2012 estimated that there were 10,542,000 out of school children at the compulsory basic education level (Rufa' I, 2013). Data from UNICEF database shows that overall 27 percent of JSS children of school age are out of school. This, however, is lower than the 30 percent for West and Central Africa, but the same for sub-Saharan Africa. The challenge here is how to get these out-of-school children back to school in order to be able to achieve the sustainable development goal of inclusive and equitable quality education and the promotion of lifelong learning opportunities for all. The Federal Government has initiated a number of reforms to address the issue of out-of-school children. These include the articulation of a policy which makes a one year pre-primary schooling part of compulsory universal basic education; campaign for girls education in the north and boys education in the south; mostly in the south-east where there was a national campaign for to return boys to school and/or establish schools close to markets or business places. This campaign was tagged 'Back to School: Mmuta bu ihe'. (Mmuta bu ihe means: Knowledge is light) There is also the recently approved National Policy on Albinism which has sought to encourage parents to keep albinos in schools. All these and more are aimed at mopping up of out-of-school children into the school system.

At the Post-Basic level, the report of the 2005 Education Sector Analysis (ESA) study shows that there are 2, 773,418 young persons enrolled in senior secondary schools. This shows a Gross Enrolment Ratio of 31.4 percent. 7,210,378 persons of senior secondary school age were not enrolled. The low transition rate of sixteen percent from junior secondary to the senior is also indicative of the low access. In Technical and Vocational Education and Training, the low access is shown by the high enrolment shortfall of 80 percent.

In terms of equity, the Gender Parity Index (GPI) has increased. FME (2009) indicates that the GPI in 2006 was 0.86. This means that for every 100 males in school at this level, there are 86 females. The Nigerian Education Data Survey (2010) showed an increase in GPI to 0.88. In spite of this, regional imbalances exist. For example, in the North-West the GPI is 0.62. In the North-East it is 0.83; 0.84 in the North-Central; 0.97 in the South-South; 0.99 in the South-East; and 1.02 in the South-West.

2. Standards and Quality Assurance

In order to ensure the bolstering and strengthening of secondary education, the issue of standards and quality assurance must be emphasizes. It has been reported that standards and quality of our schools and products the schools are low (FME, 2009). There is a need, therefore, to strengthen the quality assurance mechanism, which are at present generally weak and inadequate. The reason for this weakness include inadequate legal backing and the absence of quality organs; low learning outcomes in literacy, numeracy and life skills; inadequate equipment and facilities for teaching and learning; non-conducive teaching

and learning environment due to dilapidated structures; and weak management structure of secondary schools.

The manifestation of low standards include the poor performance of students in national and international examinations and poor identification of special needs students as well as the inadequate services provided to this group. Thus, for standards and quality to improve, attention must be paid to:

A. *Teacher Quality, Teacher Development, Teacher Motivation and Retention.*

The National Policy on Education (FRN, 2004) states that no educational system may rise above the quality of its teachers. This has been reiterated by the 4-year Strategic Plan for the Development of Education Sector: 2011-1015 FME, 2012: 61) which states that "the educational system is only as good as the quality of its teachers". This is because "the quality of any educational system is determined by the quality of the teaching-learning process". It has, however, been noted that Nigerian secondary schools are characterized by

i.   Lack of adequate staff in terms of quality and quantity. Statistics shows that 39,023 teachers out of a total of 180,540 teachers are unqualified nationwide.

ii. Absence of or poor staff development schemes at all levels. This is in spite of the annual capacity workshops organized by the Universal Basic Education Commission (UBEC) through the State Universal Basic Education Boards (SUBEBs). The National Teachers' Institute (NTI) organizes retraining workshops for teachers in collaboration with the Federal Ministry of Education and the then Millennium Development Goals (now Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)). Office at the Presidency. The UBEC workshops target teachers at the Upper Basic (Junior Secondary School) level while the NTI workshops target teachers at the Lower and Middle Basic (Primary School) level. Teachers at the Post Basic level hardly have opportunities to attend professional conferences or any conference related to teaching, for that matter.

iii. Difficulty in attracting to and retaining high fliers in the teaching profession. It may have been noticed that the teaching profession more often than not attracts those who are not able to find some other form of work. This, however, may not be true of universities where only the best are encouraged to remain after graduation.

iv. Teachers, majority of who have little or no relevant Information and Communication Technology (ICT) skills. The teaching of ICT skills has not been integrated into the teacher training curricular and so many teachers do not appreciate how these technologies can aid teaching and learning. Even when computer appreciation is made part of the retraining exercises of the various bodies in charge of teachers or teacher training, the teachers being retrained are not taught how to use ICT for teaching. As noted earlier, these bodies include the Universal Basic Education Commission (UBEC) and the National Teachers' Institute (NTI).

v.   Poorly motivated teachers who oftentimes would prefer to be engaged in their private undertakings during office hours and who do not see any reason why they should be bothered about school and the students.

vi. Low utilization of modern educational technology for instructional purposes.

In concluding this section, it should be pointed out that governments have identified and activated turnaround strategies for each of the situations or challenges above (FME, 2009; 2012).

B. *Curriculum Relevance and Review.*

The curricular provides contents taught in the school system and as well provide the how of teaching them. The curricular should be relevant to the people and since the society is dynamic, there is the need to keep pace with societal changes. Thus, the Nigerian Educational Research and Development Council (NERDC) has completed the review and upgrading of all existing Senior Secondary School curricular. It has also, in line with the decision and directive of the National Council on Education developed 34 Trade/Entrepreneurship curricular. Other relevant bodies like National Board for Technical Education (NBTE) and the National Business and Technical Examinations Board (NABTEB) have developed the curricular for Technical Colleges and examination syllabi for the conduct of the National Technical Certificate (NTC) and National Business Certificate (NBC) respectively. Another problem associated with the curriculum is the dearth of relevant textbooks and other instructional materials. In an effort to ameliorate this problem, the NERDC has produced /written or sponsored the writing of a number of textbooks in as many varied areas as there are curricular.

C. *Learner Support Services (Educational Services).*

The Roadmap for Nigerian Education Sector (FME, 2009) as well as the National Policy on Education (FME, 2013) recognizes the importance of learner support services. These services are provided in schools to enhance teaching and learning. They ensure that academic excellence is complemented with sound character, emotional stability, good health and respect for fellow men (FME, 2009). The areas of support include Guidance and Counselling which is made up of psychological support, academic guidance and so on; Health Care, made up of hygiene, sports and recreational activities, nutrition, HIV/AIDS/STDs and other health issues; Appreciation and Protection of the environment; Appreciation of Arts and Culture, made up of Visual and Communication Arts, Music, Drama, Crafts and so on.

What has been noticed, however, is that our schools have inadequate or sometimes no Guidance officers/Counsellors or Counselling Units. Parents, teachers and learners also lack the awareness of the importance of proper nutrition in the overall mental and physical development and motivation of learners. This leads to undesirable levels of achievement. There is also, inadequate or even, no provision of sports and recreational facilities/equipment; thus, depriving learners of the opportunity for exercise, dissipation of abundant energy, body building and healthy living.

In order to ameliorate the situation and thus, ensure the sustainability of our secondary school education, a number

of actions have been initiated. These include the provision of adequate number of Guidance Officers and Counsellors in schools such that the ratio of 1:500 is attained; the establishment and equipment of Guidance and Counselling units in schools as well as the development of National Guidance and Counselling Policy; the encouragement of intra and inter school sports competitions; the training and recruitment of more Health and Physical Education teachers; creating awareness/sensitization about the environment and the need to care for it; the teaching of culture, music, dance and so on; encouraging competitions among schools/states in Music, Drama, Dance, Poetry, Crafts and so on.

3. Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET)

The National Policy on Education (FME, 2013:36) defines TVET as

A comprehensive term referring to those aspects of the educational process involving, in addition to general education, the study of technologies and related sciences and the acquisition of practical skills, attitudes understanding and knowledge relating to occupations in various sectors of economic and social life.

TVETs are designed to produce craftsmen, technicians, and technologists who will be enterprising and self-reliant. It, therefore, has the potential to generate employment and reduce poverty.

Formal vocational education commences after Basic Education and lasts for three years in Technical Colleges or Vocational Enterprise Institutions (VEI) and Innovative Enterprise Institutions (IEI). The non-formal sector, however, provides quite a number of these institutions in the form of vocational schools, skills acquisition centres and open apprenticeship workshops. There are at present about 159 recognized technical colleges. 19 of these are owned and run by the Federal Government, 137 by States and 3 by Private institutions. These institutions have a total enrolment of 92,216 with 86.1 percent of this being male and 13.9 percent being female. There are in addition, 18 approved VEIs, 214 Vocational Schools owned by States and Local Governments as well as Non-governmental Organizations (NGOs). There also 1850 registered Open Apprenticeship Centres (NBS, 2008).

A number of challenges face TVET. Among these are

I. Lack of standardization and lack of development of non-formal TVET. In order to overcome this, the Federal Government intends to establish the National Council of Vocational Education (NCVE). This will facilitate the development of the National Vocational Qualification Framework (NVQF) as well as the growth of skill-based vocational institutions.

II. Dearth of qualified and competent teachers. The governments intend to enhance the capacity of teacher education programmes to produce more qualified technical staff. The governments also intend to re-establish the Technical Teachers Training Scheme. It should also be emphasis that the technical colleges of education need to be empowered to admit many more students-teachers.

III. Low estimation of vocational education which has led to an overwhelming preference for general secondary education. Government and relevant agencies should embark on aggressive publicity and branding of VEIs. The decision to ensure parity in remuneration and progression of TVET graduates should be fully implemented by employers. This, however, has remained a sore point and difficult to implement.

IV. Low enrolment generally and of females in particular is a major problem in TVET. Though specific technical schools for females exist, males make up the bulk of the studentship of the technical schools. Thus, there is a noticeable disparity in TVET especially in relation to gender enrolment. Gender parity could be enhanced through the provision of incentives for females. The Federal Ministry of Education is also embarking on an advocacy campaign to encourage private sector increased participation in the provision of VEIs and IEIs.

4. Infrastructure and Facilities.

Studies and observations have shown that many secondary schools lack the essential infrastructure to make them function as safe, efficient and effective schools. The overwhelming majority, no matter the location, has no water, sanitation and electricity. The physical state of the classrooms is nothing to write about. The walls of the classrooms and offices are cracked, the floors have gaping holes. The schools generally lack security with windows and doors which cannot be locked and there are no perimeter fences; where there are they are often never completed with the rear part of the compounds left open. Thus, the schools can be entered into by hoodlums and robbers who sometimes cart away valuable property of the schools.

To improve the infrastructural situation in schools, governments with respect to public schools, have taken inventory of the infrastructural needs of schools. This is with a view to establishing a baseline of the state of the schools. This has led to the development of an action plan for the rehabilitation of schools, provision of appropriate furniture, provision of toilet facilities, provision and maintenance of functional laboratories, well equipped libraries, recreational and sports facilities and school farms. Finally, school beautification projects were to be instituted by the authorities. The funds for all of these were to be provided by the State governments, the Federal government through the Universal Basic Education Commission (UBEC) and the Federal Ministry of Education and the Education Trust Fund (ETF). This has since been renamed Tertiary Education Trust Fund (TET Fund) and its funding activities restricted to tertiary institutions only. In spite of the paucity of funds to carry out the rehabilitation at the scale that would have been more meaningful, some public secondary schools have, indeed, had their compounds fenced and classroom blocks rehabilitated.

5. Funding, Resource Mobilization and Utilization

Funds for the running of secondary schools are provided by the Federal and States governments through their Ministries of Education as well as specialized agencies. Intervention funds are also provided by such organizations

as the ETF until it became the TET Fund and restricted to interventions in only tertiary institutions, Petroleum Trust Development Fund (PTDF), Industrial Training Fund (ITF), National Science Technical Fund, UNICEF, the World Bank and other International Donor Agencies. In spite of these, there has been a steady decline in funding relative to the growth in school population; this has led to some form of distortion in all the indicators of standard and quality assurance. Thus, the funding challenges posed include but not limited to; inadequate budgetary allocation, bureaucratic bottlenecks in accessing budgeted funds, poor management of accessed funds, non-implementation of the public-private partnership (PPP) guidelines on funding, resource mobilization and utilization, and inadequate funding of schools.

According to the Roadmap for the Nigerian Education Sector (FME, 2009) and reaffirmed by the Rufa'I (2012) steps have been and are being taken to turn around these challenges. For example:

i. The implementation of the PPP Initiative in the funding of secondary schools and TVET has now been started by the Federal and State governments. These include the support-a-school programme and VEI initiative as well as the Free Lunch Programme in Primary Schools.

ii. Ministries, Departments and Agencies (MDAs) at all levels of government, have now started to train officers involved in budget planning and implementation in the use of Strategic Plans, Medium-Term Sector Strategy (MTSS) and Quarterly Plans.

iii. There is also the universal acceptance that the budgetary allocation to allocation to education should steadily be increased to a minimum of 25 percent of the budget at all levels of government.

iv. In order to improve on budgetary implementation, the Public Procurement Act (PPA) is now being enforced by the Federal and State governments as well as MDAs.

v. The MTSS is now the bases for fund utilization.

vi. Funds should now be released direct to schools that have approved School Development Plan and authorization from School-based Management Committees (SBMCs).

6. Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs)

Wikibooks (2012) define ICTs as "a diverse set of technological tools and resources used to communicate and to create, disseminate, store and manage information". These technologies include computers, the internet, broadcasting technologies (radios and television) and telephony (Wikibooks). Igbokwe (2013) noted that the increasing use of technology in all aspects of the society makes use of ICTs an essential skill in life. This is referred to as 'technological literacy'. According to him, this ability includes not only the mastery of ICT skills and technologies, but also the understanding to apply these skills purposefully and responsibly in learning, everyday life and employment. Thus, ICT capability is fundamental to participation and engagement in modern society.

If ICTs are that important, then they ought to be part of formal and non-formal education. Indeed, the new upper basic curriculum makes it a compulsory subject at that level and the Federal Ministry of Education has developed a National Policy on ICT in Education. In spite of this, computer education is still faced with a number of daunting challenges. Amongst these are lack of requisite ICT Infrastructure, dearth of qualified ICT teachers and other personnel, low capacity of ICT teachers, low commitment to the delivery of computer education, lack of the political will to implement computer education, phobia for technology by teachers and the problem of power and energy.

III. CONCLUSION

In concluding this paper, it is suggested that MDAs at all levels of government should set up evaluation units, whose function should be to monitor all aspects of secondary education and provide information (data) which would continually lead to the improvement of the system and assist administrators in their day to day running of the system as well as to policy modification and formulation.

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