



Sustainable future: A panacea for young peoples restiveness

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Abstract

Sustainable future or development is a conscious effort by humans to secure the future and existence of coming generations especially against threats like global warming and climate change without jeopardizing their current existence. It involves the massive undertaking of figuring out how to meet present needs while simultaneously considering the uncharted territory of such a large future population. It is an agglomeration of individual, community, national and global efforts in all spheres/sectors so as to secure and make mother earth a conducive haven for the present generation as well as generations to come. This paper tries to look at the instrument of social psychology as well as education as tools geared at helping people develop the right attitude and behaviour in the effort to a sustainable future. It is believed that individuals could be encouraged to inculcate the 7Rs: reduce, reuse, repair, recycle, respect, reflect and refuse towards sustainability. Finally, it was recommended that a holistic approach that focus on helping individuals imbibe the appropriate attitudes, values and knowledge on issues that will help in contributing towards securing a sustainable future should be adopted.

Keywords: sustainable future, panacea, young people restiveness

Introduction

The world as we know it today is not what it used to be some decades ago. A lot of changes have taken place in almost all spheres ranging from social, economic, technological, and religious to educational, political and environmental. Therefore, we can safely say with some level of certainty that because of life's dynamism, we shall experience changes in the future. This brings us to the question of "To what extent are humans ready to cope with the changing world?" "How prepared are we in creating a sustainable future?" This paper shall attempt to look at the instrument of social psychology vis-a-vis as tools towards helping to provide a sustainable future for humanity.

The concept of sustainable future

What is a Sustainable Future?

The term sustainable future operates under a myriad of aliases e.g. resilience, sustainable entrepreneurship, triple bottom line, corporate social responsibility etc. Also, some know it as sustainable development while others simply refer to it as sustainability among other related nomenclatures. The concept of a sustainable future is difficult to define. Samuelsson and Kaga (eds.) (2008) [9] correctly observed that Sustainability is discussed mostly in vague declarations. It's like peace and hope. Everyone wants it, but no one really knows what it looks like. The Chalmers Annual Report (2006, p. 31) therefore see sustainable development as "a perspective or a vision rather than a definition and provides room for many different starting points".

One of the more well-known and widely used definitions of sustainable development comes from the Brundtland Commission report, Our Common Future, 1987, in which it defines sustainable development as 'development that meets

the need of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs'. Also, the United Nations Millennium Declaration observed that we must ensure that basic human needs may be satisfied for all human beings without damaging the life-sustaining system of our planet (Samuelsson & Kaga, 2008) [9].

It is equally important to note that the concept of sustainable future is multi-faceted and multi-sectored. Sustainable development as an ever-evolving concept; should not be defined in one single way. It comprises of issues cutting across the economy, transportation, education, agriculture etc. That is why a discussion on sustainable future requires that one breaks the issue into smaller, more manageable chunks than to speak of sustainability in ground pronouncements. For example, when throwing around phrases such as "building a sustainable future," it's critical to identify the sector you are talking about. The sustainability of the transportation sector obviously presents a different range of challenges and opportunities than, say, the sustainability of global agriculture. And if one becomes more sustainable while the other becomes less sustainable, are we truly moving toward a more sustainable future overall? Even within sectors there are challenges... once again, details matter greatly. Therefore, it is suggested that sustainability discourse should be in specifics, clearly identify who benefits from the sustainability efforts, and paint a picture of what sustainability looks like in practice. A clear common message in the perspectives and definitions gathered from different contexts is that the time line encompasses several generations, and that there is always a global perspective. Individual involvement and responsibility are also integral parts of the concept of sustainable development. The key principle is that economic, social and environmental conditions and processes are integrated into a

whole, and also includes opportunities to approach this whole from different directions.

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation, UNESCO, buttress that Sustainable development is now central to the programmes of many governments, businesses, educational institutions and non-governmental organizations around the world. Therefore, sustainable development concerns a process of change and is heavily reliant upon local contents, needs and interests. It is an 'emerging concept' because it is relatively new and evolves as we learn to grasp its wide implications for all aspects of our lives and because its meanings emerge and evolve according to local contexts. (Samuelsson & Kaga, 2008)^[9].

Sustainable future or development can therefore be looked 1: 25 a conscious effort by humans to secure the future and existence of coming generation without jeopardizing their current existence. It involves the massive undertaking of figuring out how to meet our needs (present) while simultaneously considering the uncharted territory of such a large future population. It is an agglomeration of individual, community, national and global efforts in all spheres/sectors so as to secure and make mother earth a conducive haven for the present generation as well as generations to come.

Social psychology and a sustainable future

What is the place and role of social psychology in building a sustainable future? How can psychology in general and social psychology in particular help create a sustainable future for humanity? These are just a few among the many questions that readily come to mind. Answering these questions require that ml briefly highlight some basic issues in the field of psychology.

Aronson, Wilson and Akert (2010)^[2] stated that since its inception, social psychology has been interested in applying what it knows to solving real real-world problems. According to them, Kurt Lewin made three points on this issue

1. Social psychology questions are best tested with the experimental method
2. Such studies can be used to understand basic processes and develop theories
3. Theories and methods can be used to address social problem.

Going by the above premise, social psychologists have adopted a variety of approaches to get people to act, behave and develop the appropriate desired attitude as well as to behave in more responsible ways. These tactics share the feature of being inspired by social psychological theories and using experimental methods to test efficacy.

Consequently, because psychological knowledge is not external to the society as evidenced by the daily activities of people, social psychology can partner with political and economic sciences to solve national or even global problems by focusing on attitudes, values and knowledge (Medi, 2016)^[5]. Myers (2013)^[6] succinctly observed that throughout history, social psychology has responded to human events. Once global crisis is identified, social psychology works on the individual. Without programmes for favourable individual development, there can be little hope of societal development. With regard to a sustainable future, social psychology tries to

identify current global challenges and or crisis and see what can be done about it. It proffers empirical contributions to help create a sustainable future. The sustainability of human life on earth is in danger. Human actions are producing many harmful and possibly irreversible changes to the environmental conditions that support life on earth. (Stuart, 2000)^[7]. This brings social psychology into the equation of contributing solutions towards providing a sustainable future.

Issues in the march to a sustainable future

There are major threats to earth's environment which include but not limited to global warming, ozone layer depletion, exhaustion of fisheries and agricultural land, and large scale exposure to toxic chemicals. Unless they are overcome, these changes will make human life increasingly miserable and eventually may make earth nearly uninhabitable for future generations (Stuart, 2000)^[7]. We shall attempt to direct our focus on the challenge of global warming and climate change.

Global warming and climate change

According to Wikipedia (2015)^[10, 11, 12], Global warming and climate change are terms for the observed century-scale rise in the average temperature of the earth's climate system and its related effects. Multiple lines of scientific evidence show that the climate system is warming. Scientific understanding of global warming is increasing. In its 2014 report, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) reported that scientists were more than 95% certain that most global warming is caused by increasing concentrations of greenhouse gases and other human (anthropogenic) activities.

Consequences of global warming and climate change

Global warming has adverse effects on humanity. Some of the anticipated effects include warming global temperature, rising sea levels, changing precipitation, and expansion of deserts. Other likely changes include more frequent extreme weather, heat waves, droughts, heavy rainfall and snowfall, ocean acidification and species extinction. Effects significant to humans include the threat to food security from decreasing crop yields and the abandonment of populated areas due to flooding (Wikipedia, 2015)^[10, 11, 12].

Psychologically, the relevant human consequences of climate change as observed by Myers (2013)^[6] include:

- a. **Displacement and Trauma:** When natural disasters like drought or floods force people to leave their land, shelter, and work, as when sub-Saharan African farming and grazing lands become desert, the frequent result is increased poverty and hunger, earlier death, and loss of cultural identity. When an extreme weather event or climate change disrupts ties to one's place and its people, the frequent result is grief, anxiety and a sense of loss. For social and mental health, climate matters.
- b. **Climate and Conflict:** There seem to be a correlation between climate and conflict! The deadly carnage in Darfur, for example, had its roots in drought and the competition for water, and so it has happened across history. Many human maladies from economic downturns to wars have been traced to climate fluctuations. When climate changes, agriculture often suffers, leading to increased famine, epidemics, and overall misery. Poorer

countries, with fewer resources, are especially vulnerable to climate-produced misery and when miserable, people become more prone to anger with their governments and with each other, leading to war. For social stability, climate matters. Social psychological studies reveal that heat also amplifies short-term aggression. Violence is also more common in hotter seasons of the year, hotter summers, hotter years, hotter cities, and hotter regions.

Causes of global warming

Anderegg, Prall, Harold and Schneider (2010) [1] directly accused humans as responsible for global warming. They stated that 97% of published climate scientists agree that climate change is occurring and is human caused. As one report in Science explained, "Almost all climate scientists are of one mind about the threat of global warming: It's real, it's dangerous, and the world needs to take action immediately" (Kerr, 2009) [4].

How are humans responsible for making our planet earth warmer and uninhabitable? Stuart (2000) [7] posits that it is through patterns of human behaviour, particularly overpopulation and overconsumption. World population is daily increasing, while economic growth is equally increasing consumption. According to United States' Census Bureau, the World's population as at 1970 was 3.712 and by 2014 it was estimated at 7.176 billion (that's almost double in 44years!) and is projected to reach 8.054 by 2026! Here in Nigeria, the National Bureau of Statistics reports our population as at 2014 to be 178.5 million from 45.2 million in 1960 (Wikipedia, 2015) [10, 11, 12]. This is overshooting the earth's carrying capacity as this population is said to be almost three times the sustainable level!

Way Forward

Is the earth getting warmer? Are humans responsible? Will it matter to our grandchildren? According to Myers (2013) [6], the answers to these questions are yes, yes, and yes! If it be so, it is safe to state that if man be the cause, man could be the solution. What can we do then? On what could be done for a sustainable future with regard to the global environmental threats to humanity, a lot of suggestions have been provided as to ways humans can mitigate the effects of global warming and secure a sustainable future for the upcoming generations.

A popular quote by Czech poet-president Vaclav Havel says that, "If the world is to change for the better it must have a change in human consciousness". This means that we must discover a deeper sense of responsibility toward the world, which means responsibility toward something higher than self. On this note, Speth (2008) [8] called for an enlarged identity—a "new consciousness"—in which people

- see humanity as part of nature,
- see nature as having intrinsic value that we must steward,
- value the future and its inhabitants as well as our present,
- appreciate our human interdependence by thinking "we" and not just "me,"
- define quality of life in relational and spiritual rather than materialistic terms, and
- Value equity, justice, and the human community.

Social psychology's contribution to a sustainable, flourishing

future will come partly through its consciousness-transforming insights into adaptation and comparison.

For those who are more optimistic about the future, Myers (2013) [6] provided two routes to sustainable lifestyles and future:

- a. increasing technological efficiency and agricultural productivity, and
- b. Moderating/reducing consumption and population. Social psychology's contribution is to the latter. More so, social psychology according to Samuelsson and Kaga (2008) [9] also contributes to a sustainable and survivable future through its explorations of the good life. They clearly assert that materialism does not enhance life quality but provided the following:
 - Close, supportive relationships: Our deep "need to belong" is satisfied by close, supportive relationships. People who are supported by intimate friendships or a committed marriage are much more likely to declare themselves "very happy."
 - Faith communities and voluntary organizations are often a source of such connections, as well as of meaning and hope.
 - Positive thinking habits. Optimism, self-esteem, perceived control, and extraversion also mark happy experiences and happy lives.
 - Experiencing nature. Japanese researchers report that "forest bathing"-walks in the woods-also helps lower stress hormones and blood pressure.
 - Flow. Work and leisure experiences that engage one's skills mark happy lives. Flow is an optimal state in which, absorbed in an activity, we lose consciousness of self and time. In fact, the less expensive (and generally more involving) a leisure activity, the happier people are while doing it. Most people are happier gardening than power boating, or talking to friends than watching TV. Low-consumption recreations prove most satisfying.

Education and a Sustainable Future

If you are thinking a year ahead, plant a seed.

If you are thinking a decade ahead, plant a tree.

If you are thinking a century ahead, educate the people.

(Chinese proverb)

No nation can rise above its/her level of education is almost an everyday statement. Education is believed to be humanity's best hope and most effective means in the quest to achieve Sustainable development. This powerful statement was made in 1997 in the UNESCO report, Educating for a Sustainable Future. Five years later, it was brought to the attention of the world leaders at the Johannesburg World Summit on Sustainable Development, paving the way to the establishment of the United Nations Decade for Education for Sustainable Development (2005-2014). UNESCO was designated as the lead agency for implementing the Decade. (Samuelsson & Kaga, 2008) [9].

The aim of the United Nations Decade of Education for Sustainable Development is promote and improve the integration of education for sustainable development into the

educational strategies and action plans at all levels and sectors of education in all countries. Teaching and Learning for a sustainable future is a UNESCO programme for the United Nations Decade of Education for Sustainable Development. It provides professional development for student teachers, teachers, curriculum developers, education policy makers, and authors of educational materials. UNESCO established a vision of education as a force for the future in developing knowledge, commitment and skills needed to address the downward spiral of unsustainable development. It builds on the ideas for reorienting education towards a sustainable future. (Samuelsson & Kaga, 2008)^[9].

Early Childhood Education and a Sustainable Future

The issue of educating people on the issue of sustainable future is not for adults alone, it is a concept that children should be introduced to at an early age. In an international workshop on 'The Role of Early Childhood Education for a Sustainable Society', organized in Sweden, in May 2007 and attended by sixteen different countries which sought to discuss promoters and barriers related to learning for sustainability, and to propose recommendations. The workshop observed the following:

First, our societies urgently require new kinds of education that can help prevent further degradation of our planet, and that foster caring and responsible citizens genuinely concerned with and capable of contributing to a just and peaceful world. Second, these new kinds of education must be available to all - not only a handful of people - and take place in various settings, including families and communities. Third, they must begin in early childhood, as the values, attitudes, behaviours and skills acquired in this period may have a long-lasting impact in later life. Thus, early childhood education clearly has an important place in the efforts to bring about sustainable development. The concept of sustainable development as an ever-evolving concept; it could and should not be defined in one single way. Education for sustainable development is a learning process and not a product.

There is a strong consensus that educating for sustainability involves the development of basic values, attitudes, skills, behaviours and habits, which may be long lasting. For example, studies have shown that racial stereotypes are learned early and that young children are able to pick up cultural messages about wealth and inequality. Therefore, early childhood education is about laying a sound intellectual, psychological, emotional, social and physical foundation for Development and lifelong learning, it has an enormous potential in fostering values, attitudes, skills and behaviours that support sustainable development - e.g. wise use of resources, cultural diversity, gender equality and democracy. What kind of early childhood education is appropriate for a sustainable society? There has been an extensive discussion on what kinds of early childhood education would emerge if it were to contribute to sustainable development. The insights gained on this issue can provide guidance for reorientation and strengthening of curriculum and pedagogical guidelines, a necessary exercise and an important policy issue.

First, it is strongly agreed that the notion of the child embedded in the vision of sustainable development is that as portrayed in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of

the Child - the child as a right holder, who is an active participant and has his or her contribution to make to society's present and future, and not an invisible, marginal worthless being. In education for sustainable development, young children's perspectives and meanings are listened to, considered and shape the content and approaches of learning. Second, early childhood education for sustainability is much more than environmental education. It should be broader than simply taking children outdoors to discover the beauty of nature and speaking about the natural environment. It must include opportunities for children to engage in intellectual dialogue regarding sustainability, and in concrete actions in favour of the environment. In addition it should incorporate learning to be compassionate and respect differences, equality and fairness as the world is increasingly interdependent and inter-connected. It was suggested that, instead of talking about the 3Rs (reading, writing and arithmetic one should refer to the 7Rs for education for sustainable development reduce, reuse, recycle, respect, repair, reflect and refuse). Encouraging scientific and technological literacy was also pointed out as a component to be included.

Third, diversity was considered a key issue in thinking about early childhood education that contributes to sustainability and was discussed extensively by the participants. In the globalizing world where different nationalities and ethnicities increasingly live side by side, learning to respect and appreciate diversity should begin early -through parents, community members, and early childhood programmes. Early education should help children acquire an identity firmly grounded in a culture closest to them, while developing a sense of themselves as world citizens. One way to promote this is intercultural education.

Nurturing respect for, and appreciation of diversity cannot be realized without adhering to democratic values and practices. Democracy is one fundamental value embedded in sustainable development, and a requisite for a; society where everyone's participation in the social, cultural, economic and political life is valued and counted. Learning about democratic values and practices can and should start in the smallest unit of society - the family - at birth, and should also be part and parcel of an early childhood education programme.

Fourth, sustainable development requires people to be able to think critically about things taken for granted, and to find creative solutions and alternatives to unsustainable habits and practices, which tend to dominate at present. The work in the early years should not be about teaching how to read and write early and formally. Young children can be encouraged to question over-consumption through discussions about familiar food products, clothes, toys and advertisements. Such discussions could be expanded to incorporate considerations about their counterparts in less materially rich circumstances, and stimulate conversations about solidarity and co-operation. Include in early childhood education curriculum:

- a. Context sensitive and culturally relevant content;
- b. Content that fosters caring attitudes and empathy vis-a-vis the natural environment, and people living in other parts of the world;
- c. Learning about respect for diversity;
- d. Learning about gender issues and equal rights, opportunities and responsibilities of boys and girls;

- e. Learning of basic life skills,
- f. The concept of learning for life, i.e. learning for sustainability; and
- g. Activities built around the 7Rs: reduce, reuse, repair, recycle, respect, reflect and refuse; etc.

Conclusion

A sustainable future is greatly facilitated when all groups of people—regardless of their age, gender, ethnicity, socio-economic status, places of residence or capacities imbibe the right attitudes, values, knowledge and behaviour and participate in finding solutions and constructing a sustainable future for our common habitat. Sustainability challenges us to go beyond segregated societies, which exist in many parts of the world today, and to transform them to ones that are more inclusive. What will emerge is an image of a sustainable society as an inclusive society: where all people are united through their common humanity and where differences are respected and valued.

Recommendations

Following the above discussion on attaining a sustainable future, the following recommendations are hereby provided:

1. A holistic approach that focus on helping individuals imbibe the appropriate attitudes, values and knowledge on issues that will help in contributing towards securing a sustainable future should be adopted.
2. Strengthen teacher training as a basis for learning and teaching about education for sustainable development. Pre-service and in-service training of teachers/educators must be revisited and reinforced from the perspectives of learning for sustainability, and must be provided regularly.
3. The provisions of the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) should be strictly adhered especially as it relate to the mounting of telecommunication masts. The electromagnetic wave it emits is believed to have serious long term effect on people living within the vicinity.
4. Setting up poultry farms in residential areas should be checkmated.
5. Increase support and funding for research on education for sustainable development.
6. Establishment of earth/environment friendly clubs and societies in schools, and pupils/students encouraged to join so as to brainstorm and share ideas on issues relating to environmental protection strategies.
7. Undertake, promote and strengthen advocacy and networking at the local, national, regional and international levels in order to achieve a better understanding of sustainable development, to share good practices and research, and to mobilize different stakeholders for the causes of sustainability.
8. Disseminate and communicate issues about sustainable development through advertisements and various means of communication, including ICTs, so that informal learning about sustainable development occurs outside schools and official educational programmes.
9. There is the need for population control measures so as to reduce overshooting the earth's carrying capacity.
10. Urge parents, teachers and all older ones alike to be role

models for young children with regards to concerns about education for sustainable development, and to meet with them regularly. Leaders and heroes in schools and communities can be interviewed by children about their lifestyles to find out whether these are in accordance with the principles of sustainable development.

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