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Sustainable Development Goal in Africa.**



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SPECIAL EDUCATION AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS IN AFRICA

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Abstract

In Africa, as in many continents of the world, education as one of the social institutions has been a subject of constant debate and discussion among stakeholders. It has continued to attract the attention of everybody and its importance to any nation in the world cannot be overemphasized. Special education which is an aspect of education has always been viewed as a tool for sustainable development in Africa. For this reason, this paper examined special education and sustainable development goals in Africa. Special education is the education of special needs person who have some forms of disabilities that are capable of frustrating them in benefitting fully from the regular physical education programme meant for those children without disabilities. Individual with special needs include those with one or more of the following; learning disabilities, mental retardation, emotional disturbance, auditory impairment, speech impairment, orthopedic and visual impairment. In this paper, it was stressed that in spite of the limitations identified with such special needs persons, they still possess the ability to acquire education and this will go a long way in making them globally useful and give them a better chance to contribute their own quota to the growth of Africa's economy. This paper further discussed the fact that for special education to continue to be a tool for reaching sustainable development goal in Africa it has to be repositioned. Finally, it must be noted that disability is referenced in various parts of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and specifically in parts related to education, growth and development, inequality, accessibility of human settlements, as well as data collection and monitoring of the Sustainable Development Goals. It is recommended that as persons with special needs are increasing in our society education should be made accessible to them so that they can give back to the society their own contributions for sustainable development. It is also recommended that persons with special needs should be involved in making decisions on issues that concern them.

Key Words: Special Education, Sustainable development, Goals, Africa.

Introduction

Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) can be described as a plan of action for people, planet and prosperity. It also seeks to strengthen universal peace in larger freedom. It is recognized that eradicating poverty in all its forms and dimensions, including extreme poverty, is the greatest global challenge and an indispensable requirement for sustainable development. All countries and all stakeholders, acting in collaborative partnership, will implement this plan. A resolution has been made to free the human race from the tyranny of poverty and to heal and secure our planet. A determination has been made to take the bold and transformative steps which are urgently needed to shift the world onto a sustainable and resilient path. As this collective journey is embarked upon, a pledge has been made that no one will be left behind. The 17 Sustainable Development Goals and 169 targets demonstrate the scale and ambition of the new Universal Agenda. They seek to build on the Millennium Development Goals and complete what these did not achieve. They seek to realize the human rights of all and to achieve gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls. They are integrated and indivisible and balance the three dimensions of sustainable development: the economic, social and environmental.

Converse to the traditional way of teaching, Education for Sustainable Development means adopting a more holistic approach to education with the aim of creating a better world for this generation and future generations of all living things on planet earth. This allows every child to acquire the knowledge, skills, attitudes and values necessary to shape a sustainable future. Humans tend to look at development as a needed and normal process, but when this process becomes increasingly dependent on over-exploitation of our natural resources, the replenishment of these reserves and supplies is affected; and managing this imbalance demands assuming a slightly different school of thought. One way to cultivate this mindset in our youngsters is by encouraging sustainable lifestyles through Education for Sustainable Development. Living sustainably is about changing our attitudes in a way that helps transform our lives into something that does not impact too heavily on our current routines, while using the planet's resources in moderation.

Education for Sustainable Development incorporates key environmental challenges like climate change into core subjects like mathematics, science and Art and involves modifying the teaching-learning process to a more all-encompassing approach. Students are thus able to relate what they learn in the classroom to their real life actions, and will increasingly be in a better position to take the lead in changing behaviours and adopting sustainable lifestyles. As schools no longer function in isolation, their integration with the world outside has exposed students to different people and cultures', giving them the opportunity to appreciate what the planet offers, while respecting the need to use resources efficiently and responsibly. Education for Sustainable development is not only about being environmentally-friendly; it also involves developing life-skills including leadership, communication and management; all of which are extremely important for personal development. By equipping young people with these relevant capabilities in addition to their environmental knowledge, they can excel at living lives which not only further humanity, but that care for and respect our planet's resources too.

Special Education and Sustainable Development Goals

In Africa today and elsewhere in the world, there are large number of children who differ so markedly in mental, physical or behavioural characteristics from their normal peers as to require special help in realizing their optimum potentials (Lere, 2017). Education in general is

widely used as a means to develop human capacity and capital, to improve economic potentials, and to build up people's idiosyncrasies. The topic "Special Education and Sustainable Development Goals in Africa" could not have come at a better time than now. This is because the global advocacy for educating children with special needs is very strong and compelling.

The importance of education to any government in power cannot be overemphasized, that is why many nations of the world have embraced it. It is a well known fact that many nations of the world have embraced education in all its totality. Africa as a continent has come to appreciate the focal position of education as an instrument per excellence for achieving individual and societal development (Ogundare, 2016). Kirk and Gallagher (2006) stressed that for many years ago, the goodness of fit and efficacy of any education system is in the extent to which it is able to meet the needs of learners on the two extremes (high flyers and learners with disabilities) as much as it is designed to meet the needs of those clustering at the middle of the continuum (all average learners) is still extremely valid today. The sad story about the educational system in Africa is that it is not meeting the needs of learners at the extreme ends, neither is it sufficiently educating the average ones (Kolo, 2018). In other words, special education in Africa has been shackled in chains reduced to the token approach in terms of funding, provision of infrastructure and facilities, as well as capacity building and appropriate welfare for professional teachers and the target students. It is also note worthy that this group of individuals are most underserved in the educational provision. This has greatly contributed to potential waste and has retarded the national growth (Yewchukwu, 2009).

It is against this background and considering the enormous challenges for the special education subsector in Africa today that it has become desirable to reposition it in order to meet the needs of persons living with disabilities so that they can equally make their contributions to the continent's building. The national Policy on Education (FRN, 2004) defined special education as the education of children and adults who have learning difficulty because of different sorts of handicaps such as blindness, partial sightedness, deafness, hardness of hearing, mental retardation, social maladjustment, physical handicaps etc. due to circumstances of birth, inheritance, social position, mental and physical health pattern or accident in later life. Also included are children who are intellectually precocious and find themselves insufficiently challenged by the programme of the regular school. Roger, Schroeder and Unschooled in Adeniyi (2015) defined special education as an area within the framework of general education that provides appropriate facilities, specialized materials and methods and teachers with specialized training for children and adults considered to be handicapped.

Disability and Sustainable Development Goals in Africa

It will be recalled that the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are a collection of 17 global goals set by the United Nations in 2015. The fact that Special Education plays a vital role in Sustainable Development Goals in Africa is revealed in the fact that disability is referenced in various parts of the SDGs and specifically in parts related to education, growth and employment, inequality, accessibility of human settlements, as well as data collection and monitoring of the SDGs. For example disability is referenced in numerous parts of the following 5 goals out of the 17 global goals mentioned above.

Goal 4:- This is based on inclusive and equitable quality education and promotion of life-long learning opportunities for all focuses on eliminating gender disparities in education and ensuring equal access to all levels of education and vocational training for the vulnerable,

including persons with disabilities. In addition, the proposal calls for building and upgrading education facilities that are child, disability and gender sensitive and also provide safe, non-violent, inclusive and effective learning environments for all.

Goal 8:- This is to promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all, the international community aims to achieve full and productive employment and decent work for all, the international community aims to achieve full and productive employment and decent work for all women and men including for persons with disabilities, and equal pay for all women and men including for persons with disabilities, and equal pay for work of equal value.

Closely linked is Goal 10, which strives to reduce inequality within and among countries by empowering and promoting the social, economic and political inclusion of all, including persons with disabilities.

Goal 11:- This would work to make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe and sustainable. To realize this goal, member states are called upon to provide access to safe, affordable, accessible and sustainable transport systems for all, improving road safety, notably by expanding public transport, with special attention to the needs of those in vulnerable situations, such as persons with disabilities. In addition, the proposal calls for providing universal access to safe, inclusive and accessible, green and public spaces, particularly for persons with disabilities.

Goal 17:- This goal stresses that in order to strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the global partnership for sustainable development, the collection of data and monitoring and accountability of the SDGs are crucial. Member states are called upon to enhance capacity-building support to developing countries, including least developed countries (LDGs) and small island developing states (SIDs), which would significantly increase the availability of high-quality, timely and reliable data that is also disaggregated by disability.

The Special Needs Persons

The special needs are the segment of people with diverse disabilities, which set limitations in performing certain task in a given society. For instance, individuals with visual impairment are faced with the challenge of vision. Also, individuals with hearing impairment cannot understand the use of language except through some modes such as sign language, finger spelling, etc. Eze (2017) defined special need persons as those who have some forms of disabilities that are capable of frustrating them in benefiting fully from the regular physical education programme meant for those children without disabilities.

Similarly, Ogbonna (2014) reported that individuals with disabilities are found in every community and school system and they include those with one or more of the following: learning disabilities, mental retardation, emotional disturbance, auditory impairment, speech impairment, orthopedic and visual impairment. Some persons are born with the problems while a great number of them are affected from the environment they live in. In spite of the limitations identified with such special needs persons, they still possess the ability to acquire education and this will go a long way in making them globally useful and give them a better chance to contribute their own quota to the growth of the continent's economy.

Current Challenges to Special Education in Africa

Challenges to special education in Africa include: fund, dearth of personnel and inability to identify the population size of persons with disabilities.

Fund

Huge sum of money is required to implement any educational programme. In this era, the funding responsibility in the entire education sector has been grossly inadequate thus, this has made special education subsector in Africa to suffer neglect. Many schools are overcrowded and poorly equipped, unattractive and not conducive to learning. Furthermore, many buildings are dilapidated and they are in deplorable condition, all these and some other factors have made special education subsector to suffer neglect and this calls for repositioning.

Dearth of Personnel

Teachers are in the forefront of the execution of any educational programme. In many African countries today like Nigeria, South Africa, Ghana and Botswana, there is a dearth of special education personnel, the reason for this is that there are few tertiary institutions in the whole continent that are committed solely for the production of personnel for special education. However, they are not enough to cater for teeming learners with disabilities that are in school to acquire knowledge and skills with which they can improve themselves as individuals and prepare themselves for self-sustenance.

Inability to Identify the Population Size of Persons with Disabilities

In Africa, the Nation Population Commission (NPC) of every country in the continent has not been able to come up with accurate figure of persons with disabilities, age of the onset of disabilities, male and female with disabilities, and type of disabilities. Undoubtedly, this has greatly contributed to the problems of special education in Africa and it requires repositioning.

Conclusion

Disability is referenced in various parts of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and specifically in parts related to education, growth and employment, inequality, accessibility of human settlements, as well as data collection and monitoring of the Sustainable Development Goals. This implies that the role special education could play in the realization of Sustainable development Goals in Africa cannot be overemphasized. Therefore, it stands to reason that as persons with special needs are increasing in our society, the need to make education accessible to them so that they can give back to the society their own contributions for sustainable development should be paramount in the agenda of the government of all nations in Africa. Lastly, persons with special needs should be involved in making decisions on issues that concern and affect them.

Recommendations

Recommendations are made that the following key areas must be revitalized in order to reposition special education for sustainable development in Africa.

Funding: Financing of special needs education is one of the most critical factors on the inclusion-segregation continuum. The government must always make adequate fund available for the running of special schools in every nation in Africa. By so doing, people with special needs will in turn give back to the society their own contributions for the sustainable development.

Personnel: It is hereby recommended that only professional special educators must be posted to teach in the schools of children with special needs. This is because these personnel will be in the best position to meet the children with special needs at the point of their needs because they have

been trained how to do so.

Infrastructure: To provide children with special needs with comfortable, safe, and controlled learning, it is important to create continuity in the environment so that they would have equal access to education like typical students. Therefore, the specific infrastructure, such as barrier-free facilities, wheelchair access, a comfortable classroom, and safety aspects, should be taken into account for purposes of teaching and learning.

Curriculum: A well-planned, modified, and articulated curriculum that would provide students with disabilities appropriate access to the general curriculum and effective instructional support is also recommended in every special school.

Regular assessment of teachers: Putting into consideration the enormity of the duties of teachers handling the special needs children in schools, it is highly important to subject them to regular assessment. This will enhance their productivity since they will be compelled to always get themselves prepared for assessment which could come any time.

Favourable government policy: It is recommended that government must always formulate policies that will be to the best interest of children with special needs. Government should assist them with scholarships while in school and those who have graduated should be given employment opportunities as soon as they graduate. This will always motivate them to go to school instead of turning themselves to beggars on the street.

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