

ACCOUNTABILITY: A FORMIDABLE BASIS FOR ACHIEVING SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIAN SECONDARY SCHOOLS

Felix Omemu, Ph.D

Department of Educational Foundations, Faculty of Education, Niger Delta University,
Wilberforce Island, Bayelsa State, Nigeria

ABSTRACT: *Sustainable development is a protective device that is future-oriented. Technically, the future is embedded in current activities and could be wasted where present activities are not appropriately planned, structured and controlled. In education, current efforts to build schools, train teachers and engage other related activities should be consummated without compromising future school development. Authorities whose decisions shape current school development must be made answerable, liable and responsible for their actions and inactions in order to instill order, restraint, and caution in the system. The paper therefore recommends accountability by administering transparency, probity, reputable appointment of personnel into positions of trust, supervision and inspection, tough audit, effective policy prioritization, punitive measures for offenders and other related internal control mechanisms to ensure sustainable development of schools in Nigeria.*

KEYWORDS: Accountability, Formidable Basis, Sustainable Development, Nigerian Secondary Schools.

INTRODUCTION

Recent observations by both stakeholders and even the Nigerian government over contemporary school development clearly indicate dissatisfaction. Not only that the system is unable to produce results that justify huge chunk of resources (money, men, materials, time, etc) supplied education, but also that the relationship between performance and goal achievement is unequal.

It could be estimated that lack of systemic accountability costs academic Nigeria tens of billions of naira annually in terms of fund diversion, misappropriation, embezzlement, graduate unemployment, efficiency, labour conflict and misunderstanding and so on (Okeke, 2004; Igwe, 2002).

This in turn, leads to ineffective educational practice, quality control issues and differentials in classroom practices, as well as leadership and supervisory misdemeanours and loss of valuable academic staff because of disillusionment, discouragement and cynicism (Awotua-Efebo, 1999). Billions more in income (fee and levy payments) is lost by schools that lose formerly loyal students because of a lack of accountability that results in substandard to poor service delivery norms, causing student – school experiences that ‘disgust’ the students (Enaohwo & Eferakeya, 1989).

But more than that, systemic gross-misconduct is treated with impunity; exempted from punishment. This is unhealthy and confusing. Because the relationship between fund-consumption and the fund-supply obligatorily requires that the fund-consumer suffers

punishment in cases of eventual misconduct. Yet, almost all violators are seen to exist enjoy freedom without observing the rule. These issues border on accountability.

Although this paper does not promise an exhaustive exploration of accountability issues in the school system, necessary analysis is however made, of some aspects of it, including the concept of accountability, rationale for school system accountability, and who is to be accountable?

The concept of Accountability

Accountability cannot exist without proper accounting practices; in other words, an absence of accounting means an absence of accountability. It is often described as an account-giving relationship between individuals, for instance, X is accountable to Y when X is obliged to inform Y about X's actions and decisions, to justify them, and to suffer punishment in the case of eventual misconduct.

In leadership roles, accountability is the acknowledgement and assumption of responsibility for actions with the scope of a role or position, encompassing the obligation to report, and be answerable for resulting consequences. The obligation of an individual or organization to account for its activities, accept responsibility of them, and to disclose the results in a transparent manner. It also includes the responsibility for money or other entrusted property.

Accountability could be defined as 'to somebody for something' as "responsible for your decisions or actions and expected to explain them when you are asked" (Hornby, 2005, p.10). To Chambers (2000, p.9), accountable means "responsible, having to explain or defend ones actions or conduct". Accountability or being accountable, to the American Heritage Dictionary (2000, p.12) is "able to being called to account (a report relating to one's conduct); answerable".

According to Enaohwo and Eferakeya (1989, p.174), accountability means "ensuring that the level of performance of educational inputs is sufficiently related to the level of educational goal achievement". They further stated that the structure of this relationship involves responsibility, answerability, blamelessness, control, probity, productivity, responsiveness, integrity, appraisal and hence goal achievement.

From this perspective, accountability assumes different definition to mean optimum and efficient utilization of available resources allocated to the schools in order to maximize goal achievement to acceptable levels. Consequently, accountability has significant role in improving the productivity of educational systems. Wikipedia perceive accountability as a 'concept in ethics and governance with several meanings. It is often used synonymously with such concepts as responsibility, answerability, blameworthiness, liability, and other terms associated with the expectation of account-giving. As an aspect of governance, it has been central to problems in the public sector, nonprofit and private (corporate) worlds. In leadership roles, accountability is the acknowledgement and assumption of responsibility for actions, products, decisions, and policies including the administration, governance, and implementation within the scope of the role or employment position and encompassing the obligation to report, explain and by answerable for resulting consequences.

As a term related to governance, accountability has been difficult to define. It is frequently described as an account-giving relationship between individuals, e.g. "A is accountable to B when A is obliged to inform about A's (past or future) actions and decisions, to justify them, and suffer punishment in the case of eventual misconduct".

Accountability cannot exist without proper accounting practices: in other words, an absence of accounting means absence of accountability. It also means an absence of answerability, blameworthiness, liability, etc, and could encourage similar actions, decisions, products and policies to be taken with attendant consequences. Supposing the resources necessary for future productivity have been misused or squandered by few individuals to enrich themselves at the expense of posterity?

Basic requirements for creating accountability

There is the need to ensure that:

1. Understand goals: the teacher must understand what they and their team is trying achieve;
2. Buy in: teachers must believe in the goal and be part of the success;
3. Benchmarks and a quantifiable result: teachers need milestones and results that can be measured;
4. Two-way feedback from the supervisor to the teacher and from the teacher to the supervisor;
5. Evaluation: once the goal is accomplished, celebrate the success. Conversely, do not shy away from criticism if performance falls short of expectation.

To be successful, the principal must also hold himself accountable to following through with accountability. One of the biggest failures is to start the process and not follow through with it. This causes the subordinate to lose respect for the process and to question a supervisor's commitment, which can undermine the entire organization. Once accountability becomes a part of an organization's management style, it improves result and more satisfied employees (<http://trainmetobeaceo.blogspot.com>).

Importance of Accountability

Accountability is becoming an increasingly important issue of the non-profit worlds. Several NGOs signed the "accountability charter" in 2005 (Wikipedia). In the Humanitarian field, initiatives such as the Humanitarian Accountability Partnership International (HAPI) appeared. International NGOs have set their own accountability systems (e.g. the Accountability, Learning and Planning System of Action Aid (ALPS)).

Accountability involves either the expectation or assumption of account-giving behavior. The study of account giving as a sociological act was articulated in a 1968 article on "Accounts" by Marvin Scott and Stanford Lyman and Stephen Soroka although it can be traced as well to J.L. Austin's 1956 essay "A Plea for Excuses" in which he used excuse-making as an example of speech-acts.

Communication scholars have extended this work through the examination of strategic uses of excuses, justifications, rationalizations, apologies, and other forms of account giving behavior by individuals and corporations, and Philip Tetlock and his colleagues have applied experimental design techniques to explore how individuals behave under various scenarios that demand accountability.

Recently, accountability has become an important topic in the discussion about the legitimacy of international institutions. Because there is no global democratically elected body to which

organizations must account, global organizations from all sectors, bodies are often criticized as having large accountability gaps.

Irrespective of differences in thought, it is proper to propose that cross-sector principles of accountability be researched and observed by institutions that affect the wellbeing of people, independent of their legal status. One paradigmatic problem arising in the national context is that of institutions such as NEPA, who are founded and supported by the government. Should these institutions be accountable to their founders and investors or to the persons they serve? In the debate over national justice and its distributional consequences, scholars tend to advocate greater accountability to the disregarded interests of traditionally marginalized populations and developing nations. On the other hand, those in the Nationalism and society of states traditions deny the tenets of moral universalism and argue that beneficiaries of global development initiatives have no substantive entitlement to call international institutions to account.

What is Sustainable Development?

The word ‘Sustainable’ means that which ‘can continue or be continued for a long time; capable of being maintained at a set level; keep up assumed role competently (The American Heritage Dictionary, 2000; The 21st Chambers dictionary, 2001; Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English, 2003; Hornby, 2005; Globalwarming360.net). Development means ‘the action or process of growing or cause to gradual growth in economic, political and cultural operations in a specified area over a given time period’ (Blaug, 1970; Lipsey, 1989; Begg, Fischer & Dornbusch, 2003; Ebong, 2004; Todaro & Smith, 2009; Leigha, 2010). Development is often measured in terms of improvements or refinements in certain parameters (housing conditions, road and railway network, telecommunication, water, health and hygiene conditions, election and voting patterns, nutritional levels, etc) by which judgment is conferred on the state of affairs of an individual or a country.

Thus, ‘sustainable development’ would mean the capability to achieve comprehensive improvements or refinement in all its economic, political, cultural, religious, etc, operations and set, maintain and continue affairs at that level for a long time. It implies ability to achieve improvements in its social life both in the present and in the future.

To the UN Brundtland Commission report (1987) in Wikipedia, sustainable development is development that “meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of the future generations to meet their own needs”. It contains within it two key concepts:

1. The concept of needs, in particular the essential needs of the world poor, to which overriding priority should be given, and
2. The idea of limitation imposed by the state of technology and social organization on the environments ability to meet present and future needs.

Also, the International Institute for Sustainable Development (IISD) perceives sustainable development to mean environmental, economic and social well-being for today and tomorrow.

Broadly perceived, the sustainable development mantra enjoins current generations to take a systemic approach to growth and development and to manage natural, produced and social capital for the welfare of their own and future generations - a system that connects space; and a system that connects time.

The concept of sustainable development is rooted in much wider perspective. The problems society confronts are complex and serious – and redress requires a different approach from their creation. But they can be addressed. It is this fundamental optimism that motivates research to innovate a healthy and meaningful discourse on this issue.

Sustainable development is an eclectic concept, as a wide array of views fall under its umbrella. It now includes notions of weak sustainability, strong sustainability and deep ecology. According to Hasna Vancock in Wikipedia, sustainability is a process which tells of a development of all aspects of human life affect sustenance. It means resolving the conflict between the various competing goals, and involves the simultaneous pursuit of economic property, environmental quality and social equity famously known as three dimensions (triple bottom line) with the resultant vector being technology, hence it is a continually evolving process, the ‘journey’ (the process of achieving sustainability) is of course vitally important, but only as a means of getting to the destination (desired future state). However, the ‘destination’ of sustainability is not a fixed place in the normal sense that we understand destination (Craven, 2008; Carter, 2009).

Sustainable development ties together concerns of the carrying capacity of national systems with the social challenges confronting humanity. As early as 1970, sustainability was used to describe an economy in equilibrium with basic ecological support systems. The field can be conceptually broken into three component parts: economic sustainability, environmental sustainability, and socio-political sustainability (Bassey, Ekpah & Edet, 2008).

Economic sustainability clearly identified information, integration, and participation as key building blocks to support countries achieve development that recognizes these independent pillars. It emphasizes that in sustainable development everyone is a user and provider of information. It stresses the need for change from old sector-centered ways of doing business to new approaches that involve cross-sectional co-ordination and the integration of empowerment and social concerns into all development processes.

Environmental sustainability is the process of making sure that current processes of interaction with the environment are pursued with the idea of keeping the environment as pristine as naturally possible on ideal-seeking behaviour. An ‘unsustainable situation’ occurs when natural capital (the sum total of a nation’s resources) is consumed faster than it can be replenished. Sustainability requires that human activity only consumes a nation’s resources at a rate at which they can be replenished naturally.

Sustainable agriculture could be defined as environmentally friendly methods of farming that allow the production of crops or livestock without damage to the farm as an ecosystem. Besides, it also prevents the adverse effects on the soil, water supplies, biodiversity, or other surrounding natural resources. The concept of sustainable agriculture is an intergenerational one in which we pass on a conserved or improved natural resource base instead of one which has been depleted or polluted. The elements of sustainable agriculture include agro forestry, mixed farming, multiple cropping, crop-rotation, etc. (Wikipedia).

To the Architect, sustainable development means that builders, architects, designers, community planners, and real estate developers strive to create buildings and communities that will not deplete natural resources (About. com Architecture).

Hence, to the educationist, sustainable development would mean that teachers, non-teaching staff, school administrators, as well as the students themselves strive to produce doctors, engineers, lawyers, architects, politicians, teachers, etc, relevant for current socio-economic advancement without depleting natural resources necessary to meet future needs. The goal is to meet today's needs employing renewable resources in such way that the needs of future generations will also be secured.

Ways of implementing Sustainable Development

In order to meet current needs as well as accommodating the needs of future generation, a proper and need-based, not 'greed-based' consumption pattern is required. According to Wikipedia, the following aspects need to be considered:

Sustainability: as a priority, nations should ensure that socio-economic activities are not mortgaging the choices of future generation.

Strengthening: The need to build human capacities that could develop and conserve simultaneously.

Sharing: Equitable distribution of wealth and resources is vital for a sustainable development. The need to ensure basic needs for all, without any discrimination.

Social responsibility: Our consumption patterns should be guided by a sense of social responsibility. People should strive for such a consumption that does not compromise the well-being of others by avoiding all such development patterns that will ignite environmental degradation consequent upon current economic decisions that jeopardizes the situation for posterity. Concept of sustainable development is the right way to go.

Some principles of Sustainable development

1. Equality: Promotion of equality between ages, genders, classes, races, countries and continents.
2. Social development: Not only economic development, but also the need to conserve our environment and natural resources should be emphasized.
3. Inclusive approach: Improved quality of life should be for everyone, especially the deprived and the poverty stricken people of the world.
4. Human-Environment harmony: To acknowledge that human needs and environmental requirements are interdependent.
5. Co-operation: The developed world and the developing countries co-operate and the former support the latter in their endeavours.

Using accountability as a formidable basis for achieving sustainable development in Nigerian secondary schools

From the forgoing analysis, it can be deduced that accountability requires benefits of conservation rather than depleting available resource just to meet contemporary developmental needs of nation building.

Human population increases astronomically by the day (about 158.2 million persons in Nigeria), the question of developing corresponding ability to meet their economic (maybe manufactured products) and, particularly, educational needs increase exponentially.

Knowledge of the structure of this resource expenditure is critical since it has implication for production and consumption in the long-run. What has been done till now is to rely on administrative liberty with impunity both in political and legal parlance. In the process, not only have natural resources become scarce but, future requirements are compromised in current resource misappropriation and misallocation practices.

Again, the concept of equilibrium between natural supply (to meet human accelerating demands) and natural replenishment could be technical. Quite often the resulting disequilibrium challenge current production with dire consequences such as climate change (with its attendant effects). The magnitude of impact is capable of rippling into future generations except a long-term development plan, even if slow, is instituted for a more sustainable development.

It therefore means that teachers, non-teaching staff, school administrators, as well as the students themselves strive to produce doctors, engineers, lawyers, architects, politicians, teachers, etc, relevant for current socio-economic advancement with prudence in natural resources employment. The goal is to meet today's needs employing renewable resources in such way that the needs of future generations will also be secured.

Administrative accountability can ensure that current needs are met as well as accommodating future requirement. Consumption should be 'need-based' rather than 'greed-based'. The major consideration, as suggested by Wikipedia, is to ensure that system is compliant with 'Strengthening, Sharing, and Socially responsible qualities.

Therefore, the basic principles of Equality, Social development: Inclusive approach, Human-Environment Harmony, and Co-operation must be seen to be observed.

CONCLUSION

Accountability requires benefits of conservation rather than depleting available and is related to sustainable development. Meticulous consumption of resources can both meet present need and secure the future. Violators of this fundamental principle should be seen as punished to serve as deterrent to others. Until this is seen to obtain, education and, indeed, sustainable development, would continue to be a mirage.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Government should develop political and legal will to deal with the issue of accountability.
- Legal sanctions should be seen to apply on offenders of accountability.
- The character of punishment should be clearly spelt out to guide financial administration in schools.
- Code of conduct bureau should extend application to school administration.
- Authorities should ensure that school accounts regularly and systematically scrutinized with a view to sanitize the system.

REFERENCES

- Awotua-Efebo, E.B. (1999). *Effective Teaching-principles and practices*. Port Harcourt, Paragraphics.
- Bassey, U., Ekpah, U., & Edet, A. (2008). Universal Basic Education as a vehicle for Sustainable Development: Reflections on implementation problems and shortcomings in Akwa Ibom state, Nigeria. In: J.B. Babalola, G.O. Akpa, I. Hauwa, & A.O. Ayeni (eds) *Managing Education for sustainable development in Developing countries*. Ibadan: HIS LINEAGE PUBLISHING HOUSE. Pp. 169 – 175.
- Begg, D., Fischer, S., & Dornbusch, D. (2003). *Economics (7th edition)*. New York: McGraw-Hill.
- Blaug, M. (1970). *An introduction to the economics of education*. London: Penguin books.
- Chambers (2001). *21st Century Dictionary (revised edition)*. New Delhi: Allied publishers private limited.
- Carter, N. (2009). *Understanding Sustainable Development*. London: Cambridge University press.
- Craven, J. (2008). What is Sustainable Development? In About.com/Guide About. Com/Guide
- Ebong, J.M. (2006). *Understanding Economic of Education*. Port Harcourt: EagleLithograph press.
- Enaohwo, J.O. & Eferakeya, O.A. (1989). *Educational Administration*. Ibadan: Paperback publishers limited.
- Federal Republic of Nigeria (2004). *National Policy on Education*. Lagos, NERDC press.
- Hornby, A.S. (2000). *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary of current English*. London. Oxford University Press.
- Globalwarming360.net. Retrieved 22 – 9 – 2015.
- <http://trainmetobeaceo.blogspot.com>. Retrieved 30 – 9 – 2015.
- Igwe, L.E.B. (2002). *Introduction to Educational Administration*. Port Harcourt: Global Links Communications international.
- Ituen, S.A.U. (2004). *Elements of Teaching*. Uyo: Abigab Associates Ltd.
- International Institute of Sustainable Development (IISD). Canada: www.iisd.org
- Lipsey, R. G. (1989). *An introduction to positive Economics*. London: Weindenfeld &Nicolson.
- Longman (2003). *Dictionary of Contemporary English*. England: Pearson Education limited.
- Okeke, B.S. (2004). *Teaching in Nigeria: The Bureaucracy and Professionalism*. Enugu, Mercury Int'l Publishing.
- The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language. (2000). New York: HOUGHTON MIFFLIN COMPANY.
- Todaro, M.P. & Smith, S.C. (2009). *Economic Development*. Essex: Pearson Educational Limited.
- Wikipedia. The free Encyclopedia. www.wikipedia.com. Retrieved 30 – 9 – 2015.