



## The Role of Social Studies in Achieving the Sustainable Development Goals in Nigeria: An Overview

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### ABSTRACT

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This paper highlights the transformative role of social studies education in achieving the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in Nigeria. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are a set of 17 global goals adopted in 2015 at the United Nations General Assembly which sets out a framework to achieve the goals in a span of 15 years, by 2030. This paper shows that social studies, as an interdisciplinary discipline, plays a pivotal role in creating awareness and fostering civic engagement among Nigerian citizens to achieve these development goals. Also, this paper explores the crucial role of the social studies curriculum particularly in higher education institutions in advancing the sustainable development goals (SDGs) by fostering a deep understanding of societal challenges and encouraging active engagement in addressing them. This paper underscores the need for integrating principles of sustainable development into the social studies curriculum and provides recommendations for effective implementation strategies.

### KEY WORDS:

Social studies, Sustainable Development, Sustainable Development Goals, Higher Education Institution (HEI).

### 1. INTRODUCTION

In Nigeria, research evidence shows that Social Studies has a special task to perform in transforming Nigeria into a modern state through nurturing to create awareness of and sensitivity to man's environment (Shaibu, 2020). The impact of social studies education in achieving the sustainable development goals is a topic of interest in the field of education and sustainable development. Ogunbiyi (2011) opined that the rationale for the inclusion of social studies education into the school curriculum in Nigeria is governed by the belief that social studies has the capacity to positively influence, modify and change student's behavior in the direction of acceptable norms, values, beliefs, and attitudes of the society. This is sequel to the belief that Social Studies deals with the inculcation of positive societal values and attitudes in order to make an individual a functional member of the society.

In this line of thought, Ikwumelu (2012) affirms that one of the aims of social studies is to make students loyal to their society and to develop a commitment to act responsibly and reasonably. Social Studies education focuses on values that

enable man cope and proffer solutions to the diverse problems in his physical and social environment. More so, Odogbor (2010) views social studies education as an integrated field of study that attempts to study man in-depth within the ramification of his dynamic environments as well as equipping him with positive knowledge, attitudes, values and adaptive interactive skills, for the purpose of producing a socio-civically, competent, humane and effective citizenry who can contribute positively to the good of the society.

The 17 sustainable development goals (SDGs) adopted by the United Nations in 2015 aim to address various social, economic, and environmental challenges by 2030, including poverty, inequality, and climate change, environmental degradation, peace, and justice. Social studies plays a critical role in achieving the sustainable development goals (SDGs) by fostering a deep understanding of the societal challenges and encouraging active engagement in addressing them. Through an interdisciplinary approach, social studies equips learners with the knowledge and critical thinking skills needed to understand the interconnectedness of social, economic and environmental issues. By exploring real-life problems and historical contexts of the sustainable development goals, students develop a sense of empathy, cultural awareness, and civic responsibility, which are essential for creating a just and sustainable world. Through social studies education, students can learn about the factors

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that contribute to inequality and poverty, the importance of human rights and social justice, and the ways in which different communities view sustainable development. This knowledge enables them to become informed and engaged citizens who can contribute to positive change within their local communities and across Nigeria.

In essence, social studies education lays the foundation for active global citizenship and supports the development of well-rounded individuals who are capable of driving sustainable development forward. This introduction highlights the transformative potential of social studies education in shaping informed and empowered citizens committed to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals.

## 2. RATIONALE FOR THE REVIEW

This paper reviews the role of social studies education in the achievement of the sustainable development goals in Nigeria. This is important because previous studies have addressed the role of the arts and social science disciplines in achieving the sustainable development goals, however, less is known about the role of social studies education in the achievement of the SDGs in Nigeria. So, this paper contributes in presenting specific knowledge with regards to the contribution of social studies in the effective achievement of the SDGs. This serves as a guide to help students, educators, researchers, and policy makers better understand and further research on the great role social studies plays in achieving the sustainable development goals in Nigeria.

## 3. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

### 3.1 Social Studies as a Concept

Etymologically, the term "Social Studies" is derived from two Latin words, "Socius" and "Studium". Social - which is a noun, means ally, associate, and companion. Whilst, Studies is used to describe an act or behavior which takes interest in something directed towards learning, seeking to become acquainted with or to understand a phenomenon, a state of circumstance, and series of events (Shaibu, 2020).

The National Policy on Education in Nigeria recognized the need for Social Studies education to foster the desired social orientation needed after independence to promote growth and national development. More so, it was introduced to heal the wounds of the Nigerian civil war and inculcate the spirit of national consciousness, unity and patriotism. According to Olatunde (2010), Social Studies is more than a study, it is a way of life about how man influences his environment and how he is being influenced by his physical, social, cultural, psychological and religious environments. Shaibu (2020) further affirmed that any definition of Social Studies that fails to take cognizance of the fact, that social studies is an academic discipline that brings the realities of everyday societal living to the learners with the desire to making them acquire the knowledge, attitudes, values, and skills required to be responsible and disciplined

members of the society will be failing in its scope and relevance.

Shaibu (2020) sees social studies education as a way of life, a way of seeing, viewing, conceptualizing, and appreciating things and issues with special regards to their proper place and function in the reordering and management of man's natural, social and technological environment. In other words, Social Studies aims to produce people who are able to solve some social problems as it relates to man's physical and social environments. Lending credence, Bozimo (2010) argue that Social Studies provides opportunities for important social and moral issues such as attitudes to the destitute, poverty, corruption, racialism and different types of governments, cruelty to animals, children, brutality and injustice to be analyzed, internalized and applied. The question that comes to mind is, has these been achieved? A guide to answering this question is found in the interrogative statements of Meziobi (2013) as follows:

- i. What has been happening to poverty?
- ii. What has been happening to unemployment?
- iii. What has been happening to inequality?
- iv. Why such intimidating injustice in the society?

The dynamics of the Nigerian society and the demands it has placed on individuals requires the search for solutions to curtail these prevailing challenges. New realities and pressing social needs have compelled very many nations across the world to adopt an educational system and curriculum that is functional (Shuaibu, 2018).

### 3.2 Concept of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

Sustainable development is an organizing principle for meeting human development goals while also sustaining the ability of natural systems to provide the natural resources and ecosystem services on which the economy and society depend (Blewitt, 2015). The Sustainable Development Goals aim to address a wide range of social, economic, and environmental challenges to achieve a more sustainable and equitable world by 2030. These goals cover key areas such as poverty, hunger, health, education, gender equality, clean water, affordable and clean energy, decent work, responsible consumption, climate action, and more.

The SDGs provide a framework for international cooperation and action to promote social inclusion, economic growth, and environmental protection whilst leaving no one behind. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) were adopted at the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) in 2015 and they include;

- i. No poverty
- ii. Zero hunger
- iii. Good health and wellbeing
- iv. Quality education
- v. Gender equality
- vi. Clean water and sanitation

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- vii. Affordable and clean energy
- viii. Decent work and economic growth
- ix. Industry, innovation and infrastructure
- x. Reduced inequalities
- xi. Sustainable cities and communities
- xii. Responsible consumption and production
- xiii. Climate action
- xiv. Life below water
- xv. Life on land
- xvi. Peace, justice and strong institutions
- xvii. Partnerships for the goals.

## 4. RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SOCIAL STUDIES AND THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS (SDGs)

The Sustainable Development Goals consists of 17 goals and 169 targets that addresses a wide range of social, economic, and environmental issues. To solve these global problems, a sound curriculum in social studies education is critical. Among institutions of higher education in Nigeria, universities, that offer social studies education programs can play a key role in advocating for the importance of the SDGs. In other words, higher education is a sub-sector within the education sector that can contribute to achieving the sustainable development goals.

In Nigeria, the goals of the Social Studies curriculum is aimed at building a basis for the development of a responsible and self-reliant citizen. The implementation of the Social Studies education curriculum in Nigerian universities is targeted towards the following objectives: self-confidence and initiative; power of imagination and resourcefulness; desire for knowledge and continued learning; sense of compassion for the less fortunate; sense of respect for and tolerance of the opinion of others; social values and attitudes such as: cooperation; participation; interdependence; honesty; integrity; trustworthiness; diligence and obedience; and a spirit of national consciousness and patriotism (Garba, 2012). All of these are considered necessary for a sound and functional Social Studies education.

As postulated by Ifegbesan (2017), the content of the social studies curriculum in Higher Education Institutions (HEI) should include: socio-cultural, environmental and economic perspectives. The Social Studies education curriculum promotes critical thinking, problem-solving, and awareness about the interconnectedness of the social, environmental, and economic systems. The overarching goal is to create environmentally responsible and socially conscious citizens who can contribute to a more sustainable future. There are several key themes in the social studies education curriculum which focus on citizenship, peace and conflicts, poverty alleviation, ethnicity, democracy and governance, natural resource management and biological diversity. The social studies education curriculum in higher education institutions should therefore adopt sustainability

principles and sustainable development in its content, in these four main dimensions namely:

**Social** - SDG 1 [end poverty], SDG 2 [zero hunger], SDG 3 [good health and well-being], SDG 4 [quality education], SDG 5 [gender equality] and SDG 10 [reduced inequalities];

**Environmental** - SDG 6 [clean water and sanitation], SDG 7 [affordable and clean energy], SDG 12 [responsible consumption and production], SDG 13 [climate action], SDG 14 [life below water] and SDG 15 [life on land];

**Economic** - SDG 8 [decent work and economic growth], SDG 9 [industry, innovation and infrastructure] and SDG 11 [sustainable cities and communities]; and

**Governance** - SDG 16 [peace, justice and strong institutions] and SDG 17 [partnerships for the goals].

## 5. CHALLENGES

Some of the challenges facing the integration and implementation of the principles of sustainable development into the social studies education curriculum in Nigeria includes;

- i. Lack of awareness about the importance of the sustainable development goals and non-willingness to adapt the existing curriculum to accommodate the SDGs, resulting in a dysfunctional curriculum. (Offor, 2022)
- ii. Poor training and professional development of social studies teachers to effectively teach the SDGs and incorporate them into their lessons.
- iii. Inadequate educational resources such as teaching and learning materials like textbooks which support the inclusion of the SDGs. Thus, the current learning environment does not meet the demands for the implementation of the sustainable development goals.
- iv. Poor community participation and stakeholder engagement.

## 6. CONCLUSION

Conclusively, Social Studies education in Nigeria has the capability to make significant strides in fostering awareness, understanding, and action towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Social studies education can contribute to raising awareness about gender equality issues, fostering a more inclusive approach to development, and an improved awareness of the SDGs among students. It can equip them with a foundational understanding of the global challenges and sustainable development principles. Also, students exposed to an SDG-focused social studies are more likely to engage their local communities in discussions and initiatives related to the SDGs, which can lead to the development of practical solutions that address specific development challenges. More so, teacher training programs are effective in equipping social studies educators with the skills and knowledge needed to integrate the SDGs into their

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lessons, thus influencing a new generation of students. Furthermore, the integration of the SDGs into the social studies curriculum can influence educational policies, with emphasis on the importance of sustainability and global citizenship in the Nigerian education system.

### 7. RECOMMENDATIONS

Some recommendations for the integration and implementation of the principles of sustainable development into the social studies education curriculum in Nigeria are outlined below:

- i. Provide opportunities for cross-disciplinary collaboration in promoting a holistic understanding of the SDGs and encouraging students to see the interconnectedness of various development challenges.
- ii. Nigeria should increase funding for education, including providing teacher training and professional development programs on the SDGs for social studies teachers, and ensuring that schools have adequate instructional materials and resources that support the teaching of the SDGs.
- iii. Incorporate the project-based teaching and learning method into the social studies curriculum to ensure that students proffer solutions to real world problems directly related to the SDGs.
- iv. Foster partnerships with community leaders and non-governmental organizations to provide support for social studies students to get engaged in community service initiatives that contribute in achieving the SDGs.
- v. The Sustainable Development Goals should be incorporated into higher education degree programs in Social Studies to ensure that students are able to apply these goals in solving real world problems in their immediate communities.

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