

COVID-19 PANDEMIC: IMPLICATION FOR SUSTAINABLE NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN PRIMARY EDUCATION

By

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Abstract

The study examined Covid-19 pandemic and its implication for sustainable national development in Primary Education. The concept of sustainable development, coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic education were extensively discussed. The paper highlighted the seventeen sustainable development goals as well as the implication of Covid-19 on the goals as it affects education (primary) in Nigeria. The goals include (a) No poverty (b) Zero hunger (c) Good health and wellbeing (d) quality education (e) Gender equality (f) Clean water and sanitation (g) Affordable and clean energy (b) Decent work and economic growth (i) Industry, innovation and infrastructure (j) Reduced inequalities (k) Sustainable cities and communities (l) Responsible consumption and production (m) Life below water (n) Climate action (o) Life on land (p) Peace, justice and strong institution (q) Partnership for the goals. Conclusion and some recommendation were made.

Keywords: sustainable development, coronoravirus, primary education.

Introduction

The most important policy tool available to develop skills and potentials is going to school. School time can be very interesting and from an economic stand point, the primary point being in school is that it increases a learner's (child) ability to become useful and acceptable member of the society. Adelaku (2020) opined that even a relatively short period of missed school may have consequences for skill growth in future. Adelaku (2020), also stated that this is why we cannot estimate how much the Covid-19 interruption will affect learning; it is only the visible effect we can see, the gradual decay of in built abilities may not be easily noticed precisely.

UNESCO (2020), reported that about 35.9 million primary and secondary school learners are currently out of school as a result of the school closures. For primary schools, this number totals approximately 25.6 million learners of which about 87 percent 23.5 million are learners enrolled in public schools. The numbers are just as stark for secondary school learners.

What is Coronavirus (COVID-19)?

This is a type of common virus that infects humans typically leading to an upper respiratory infection (URI), Davis (2021). Seven different types of human coronavirus have been identified. Most people will be infected with at least one type in their life-time. The viruses are spread through the air by coughing and sneezing, close personal contact, touching an object or surface contaminated with the virus and rarely, by fecal contamination. The illness caused by

most coronaviruses usually last a short time and is characterized by runny nose, sore throat, feeling unwell, cough and fever. Coronavirus (Covid-19) was first discovered in December 2019 in the city of Wuhan (China) and is recently posing a global challenge to health. In January 30, 2020 the World Health Organization (WHO) announced that the outbreak had constituted a public health emergency of international concern.

The novel corona virus was initially named 2019-ncov and officially severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARSCOV-2). In February 26, Covid-19 has been recognized in 34 countries with a total of 80,239 laboratory confirmed cases and 2,700 death (WHO 2021). The World Health Organization, (WHO, 2021) defined coronavirus disease (Covid-19) as an infectious disease caused by the SARS-Cov-2 virus. According to them, most people infected with the virus will experience mild to moderate respiratory illness and recover without requiring special treatment. However, some will become seriously ill and require medical attention.

Older people and those with underlying medical conditions like cardiovascular disease, diabetes, chronic respiratory disease or cancer are more likely to develop serious illness. Anyone can get sick with Covid-19 and become seriously ill or die at any age. The best way to prevent and slow down transmission according to WHO 2021, is to be well informed about the disease and how the disease spread. Protect yourself and others from infection by staying at least 1 metre apart from others, wearing a properly fitted mask and washing your hands or using an alcohol-based rub frequently and get vaccinated.

The virus can spread from an infected person's mouth or nose in small liquid particles when they cough, sneeze, speak, sing or breathe, WHO (2021).

Symptoms of Coronavirus: These include

- Most common symptoms; Fever, dry cough, tiredness
- Less common symptoms; aches and pains, sore throat, diarrhoea, conjunctivitis, headache, loss of taste or smell, a rash on skin, or discoloration of finger or toes.
- Serious symptoms; difficulty in breathing or shortness of breath, chest pain or pressure, loss of speech or movement etc. WHO, 2021.

Impact of Covid-19 on the Nigeria School System (Primary School Education)

In Nigeria, the outbreaks of lassa fever, bird flu, monkey pox, ebola disease etc. did not weigh down the socio-economic and educational system as the case of coronavirus, this has been raising serious concern in the country, school system and heartfelt burden to the concern personnel knowing well the possible effects of the prolong holidays as a result of the pandemic. Ajijie, (2021).

The outbreak coupled with the spread of the disease in Nigeria has led to shutdowns of economic activities in most major cities, states in the country have been severely affected by the Covid-19 pandemic. In the views of Ozili (2020), the existing structural weaknesses have led to the severity of the crises in the country. Again, given the large poor population in Nigeria, house orders and other restrictions employed in some high-income countries cannot be practical or may not yield better incomes. WHO, (2020).

Managing Coronavirus Pandemic in Nigeria Primary Education System

According to the coronavirus response monitoring plans by UNICEF Nigeria (2020), Nigeria Education sector maintains a response monitoring tool (RMT) named 5W Matrix (Who is doing what, Where, When and for Whom) for monitoring Education sector partners activities under the current Covid-19 contingency response. While the pandemic is still on, partners are submitting their reports on a monthly basis to the Education sector secretariat appointed team.

Based on this, the education sector secretariat team on a regular basis developed maps and other tools to strengthen the coordination on the response; they ensure proper documentation in identifying gaps and prevent duplication of activities/ programmes during and after the pandemic period. The monitoring system also aimed to minimize reporting requirements to partner while at the same time provide regular required information and ensure alignment with the sector. (UNICEF Nigeria 2020).

Implication for Sustainable Development

The concept of sustainable development was popularized by the Brundtland Report in 1987, Usoro and Modo, 2012 in Lorngurum (2020). The report defined sustainable development as the tendency for any development programme or policies to meet the needs of the present generations. Also, Jhingan (2006) in Lorngurum, (2020) asserted that sustainable development means development should keep going. He emphasized the creation of sustainable development in the quality of life of all people through increase in real income per capital, improvement in education, health and general quality of life and improvement in quality of natural environmental resources.

Simply put, sustainable development refers to using and managing the world's resources, both human and natural in ways that meet current and growing human needs without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs. (UNESCO, 2012).

Sustainable development goals (SDGS) also known as Global goals were adopted by the United Nations in 2015 as a universal call to action to end poverty, protect the planet and ensure that by 2030 all people enjoy peace and prosperity (UNDP, 2021). These are a collection of 17 interlinked global goals designed to be a blue print to achieve a better and more sustainable future for all. They were set up in 2015 by the United Nation General Assembly and intend to be achieved by the year 2030.

Sustainable development is "competent management of a country's resources and affairs in a manner that is open, transparent, accountable, equitable and responsive to people's needs." Alexander (2000) in Bellow and Chibado, (2020). According to them, the most widely and used definition described sustainable development as: "development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs".

UNDP (2015) enumerated the following SDGS

1. No poverty
2. Zero hunger
3. Good health and well being
4. Quality education
5. Gender equality
6. Clean water and sanitation
7. Affordable and clean energy

8. Decent work and economic growth
9. Industry, innovation and infrastructure
10. Reduced inequalities
11. Sustainable cities and communities
12. Responsible consumption and production
13. Climate action
14. Life below water
15. Peace, justice and strong institution
16. Life on land
17. Partnerships for the goal. (UNDP, 2021).

For a truly sustainable development, many factors have to be considered and evaluated before embarking on any developmental programme, if this is not carefully done, then some sectors will suffer negatively, if not now, then in the future. One thing that must be given a pride of place for the attainment of these SDG'S is education.

Undie and Ferdinand (2021); viewed education as a tool for sustainable development of any nation and schools are established as social institutions charged with the major function of producing the necessary manpower for her development. Primary education can achieve this by guaranteeing desirable changes in learners in terms of attitude, skills, abilities, knowledge and values through effective teaching and learning to make them (learners) positive agents of development. (Federal Republic of Nigeria (2013). The National policy on education (2014), makes it clear that primary education is not only a fundamental human right, it is also an enabling right but that with direct impact on the realization of all other human rights it is a global common good and a primary driver of progress across all 17 sustainable development goals. The upsurge of COVID-19 almost led to the collapse of primary education in Nigeria. This is because schools were closed for almost a year. When primary education system collapses, peace, prosperous and productive society cannot be sustained, hence the need for a proactive step by government. In order to mitigate the potentially devastating consequences of the Covid-19 pandemic, government and stakeholders are encouraged to pursue the following:

- Suppress transmission of the virus and plan thoroughly for school reopening.
- Protect education (primary) through financing and coordination for impact.
- Build resilient education system for equitable and sustainable development.
- Re-imagine and accelerate change in teaching and learning.

In the short term, children have experienced access to essential goods and services, increased poverty, food insecurity and exposure to violence, abuse and exploitation, as well as decline in physical and mental health, nutrition and learning outcomes, psychological well being and on the ability of households to recover, especially among vulnerable household. UNICEF and Social policy Research Institute (2021).

Conclusion

The outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic has not only unravaged the poor state of infrastructure and facilities in the health sector of Nigeria but has also revealed the reality of the dilapidation and poor funding of the education sector particularly the primary education. Besides the health sector, primary education has suffered tremendously the impact of Covid-19, while most countries have easily adopted and switched to virtual classes, in Nigeria, it is not only difficult but also impossible to open our schools virtually due to lack of facilities necessary to operate

virtual classes, poor provision of the internet, electric power supply, high cost of mobile data etc.

Recommendations

The following recommendations were made:

- Equitable and adequate funding of primary education is necessary to check future interruption of the sector.
- Experts should be employed to manage the ICT sectors of the Nigerian education system.
- Google classrooms should be designed for learners.
- Provision of preventive kits for both teachers and learners in the school to curb the spread.
- The electricity supply should be made available to power all the ICT gadgets in the school.

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