

THE FAMILY, CULTURE AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

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ABSTRACT

Sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. The family has been the basic unit of change in every culture. Unfortunately, the concept of sustainable development has failed to focus the family. It is within families that sustainable lifestyles, decisions and change that can positively impact future generations are encouraged or undermined. In addition, global sustainable development can only be achieved if families as basic unit of human societies achieve sustainability in all areas. It is from the base of a sustainable family that individuals are best able to contribute positively to society as a whole. Families operate within the dictates of culture; as such culture has an important role in families' decision making, consumption, relationship patterns, and conflict resolution; and in creating sustainable families. The family is also identified in a cultural context; culture defines roles and rules of conduct of family members; while families are also assessed by standards inherent in the culture. This paper therefore argues that making our homes and families more sustainable within the dictates of our culture is the panacea for global sustainable development.

Keywords: *sustainable, culture, family, development, lifestyles, future, human*

INTRODUCTION

The family has been the basic unit of change in every culture, saddled with the main function of provision of basic needs and all round development of its members. Sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present, without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs (One World, 2012), while culture is simply the way of life of a particular people. However, the concept of sustainable development has failed to focus on the family, being primary unit of change.

The family as the basic unit of society is important to all developmental efforts including sustainable development and should be targeted first before other systems. As an agent of socialisation the family is in the right position to encourage members to adopt lifestyles that would leave a positive impact on future generations. Families' economic, social conditions and lifestyles can also

encourage or undermine the needed shift towards sustainable development. Green Heart Education (2013) proposes that the lack of societal change toward sustainable development might be due to aiming environmental efforts at individuals, government, business and industry, or whole communities, instead of at families. It is within families that sustainable lifestyles, decision making and change that can positively impact future generations are encouraged or undermined.

Global, community and national sustainable development can only be achieved if families as basic unit of human societies achieve sustainability in all areas. It is from the pedestal of a sustainable family that individuals are best able to contribute positively to society as a whole. Families operate within the dictates of culture; as such culture has an important role in families' decision making, consumption patterns, relationship patterns, and conflict resolution; and in creating sustainable families. The family is also identified in a cultural context; culture defines roles and rules of conduct of family members; while families are also assessed by standards inherent in the culture. Cultural factors also influence lifestyles, individual behaviour, consumption patterns, values related to environmental stewardship, and interaction with the natural environment (UN System Task Team on the Post-2015 UN Development Agenda, 2012). This paper aims at establishing the nexus between the family, culture and sustainable development, and argues that no aspect of sustainable development is possible without the family. The review is approach under the following sub headings:

- The concept of culture and sustainable development.
- The family and sustainable development.
- The nexus between the family, culture and sustainable development.

THE CONCEPT OF CULTURE AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Culture is regarded as the set of distinctive spiritual, material, intellectual and emotional features of society or a social group, and that it encompasses, in addition to art and literature, lifestyles, ways of living together, value systems, traditions and beliefs (UNESCO, 2001). Culture heavily influences social, family, and gender roles through culturally determined expectations of how such roles should be performed (D'Entremont, 2007). If development can be seen as enhancement of the living standards of people, then efforts geared for development can hardly ignore the world of culture. It is important to note that culture can be either a resource to development or a determinant of development. Culture shapes what is meant by development and determines how that development can be realized (Mbakogu, 2004). Eyong and Foy (2006) posits that sustainable development itself is a planned cultural, economic, social, environmental and political change for the better, which needs cooperation at all the levels by all the stakeholders, geared towards the well-being of the masses, for the masses and by the masses.

No aspect of sustainable development is achieved without giving consideration to cultural practices of the particular place in view. Various cultural practices of a particular group of people are equally capable of promoting or

undermining sustainable development. Every family also has its own culture which may also positively or negatively impact future generations. Thus, D'Entremont (2007) suggests that it is important to understand the shifting emphasis and mechanisms of socialization within various cultures.

It is because of the importance of culture in sustainable development that the United Cities and Local Governments approved culture as a 'Fourth Pillar' of Sustainable Development (United Cities and Local Governments, 2010). Also, the first International Congress specifically focusing on the linkages between culture and sustainable development organized by UNESCO with the theme "Culture: Key to Sustainable Development" was held in Hangzhou (China) from 15 May to 17 May 2013 (UNESCO, 2013). The UNESCO Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity (2001) states that "cultural diversity is as necessary for humankind as biodiversity is for nature. In this sense, it is the common heritage of humanity and should be recognized and affirmed for the benefit of present and future generations." Throsby (2008) confirms that the call for culture is becoming more powerful along with the increasing ecological, economic and social challenges to meet the aims of sustainability.

Although sustainability had hitherto been discussed in relation to development, planning, economics and the environment, in the last several years there has been an increased interest in exploring culture and sustainability from two distinct perspectives:

- The role served by culture in planning for sustainable development (that is, the role of culture in sustainability).
- The application of ideas of sustainability to cultural concerns - ensuring the sustainability of cultural practices (Cultural Sustainability Institute, n.d.).

Considering the role of culture in sustainable development is important, as the culture of the people plays a role in all the aspects of sustainable development. Certain aspects of culture in certain places are definitely not sustainable; neither do they encourage any aspect of sustainability. For instance, cultural practices such as Female Genital Mutilation (FGM), food taboos, food restrictions for pregnant women and children, etc, have negative impact on health sustainability. Ekpoh (2010) observes that cultural practices can affect food intake through food prohibitions, or food taboos.

In the area of environmental sustainable development, many cultural practices such as traditional farming methods that encourage bush burning, indiscriminate dumping of refuse, etc, degrade the environment and impact negatively on future generations; and therefore not sustainable. UN System Task Team on the Post-2015 UN Development Agenda (2012) observes that local and indigenous knowledge systems and environmental management practices are important tools for tackling ecological challenges, preventing biodiversity loss, reducing land degradation, and mitigating the effects of climate change.

Culture also plays a role in sustainable economic development. For instance, the emerging culture of expensive burial ceremonies, expensive traditional marriages and wasteful spending in Akwa Ibom state does not enhance the

economic standard of the people, as such are detrimental to economic sustainability. More so, depletion or consumption of natural resources such as firewood without replacement is not favourable to economic sustainability. It is now left for the people to imbibe aspects of culture that impact positively on all the aspects of sustainable development.

As already stated, cultural sustainability also involves ensuring the sustainability of cultural practices. Many aspects of the culture of Akwa Ibom state are capable of impacting positively on future generation, and therefore sustainable. Cultural values such as respect for elders, commitment to kinship network, respect for human life, humility, etc, should be encouraged by adults and imbibed by the youths so as to leave a positive legacy for the future generation. The current trend of abuse of the elderly, less commitment to kinship network, violent destruction of human life, overt display of wealth and power, etc, are alien to the culture of Akwa Ibom state and therefore should be condemned as they are not sustainable. Other aspects of our culture that contribute to the preservation of our identity as a people such, as language, arts, crafts, traditional cuisines, etc, should be sustained. Presently the Ibibio language is facing near extinction as parents no longer encourage their children to speak the language. The family has a role to play in sustaining these aspects of our cultural heritage by proper socialization of their children. Marsio (2007) conclude that cultural sustainability means that change occurs in a way that respects cultural values and cultural capital of a people.

The culture of the people comes into play in resolving family and communal conflicts, for example, the practice of sending tender palm fronds to parties in a conflict, or placing palm fronds in a disputed land in Ibibioland. These are cultural practices that should be preserved for the next generation as part of our identity. Marsio (2007) confirms that the cultural sector also has its role to play in conflict prevention and management. Cultural traditions and attitudes also affect views on the importance of education, role of girls, enforcement of human rights and child protection (Canadian Teachers Federation, 2013).

THE FAMILY AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Sustainable development cannot be achieved without the contribution of the family, being the basic unit of the society. All aspects of sustainable development are directed at humans who belong to one family or the other. D'Entremont (2007) observes that any type of true and sustained development necessarily implies the betterment of the quality of human relations, not only between human beings and their geographical and social surrounding, but essentially between all persons as members of human society.

Sustainability should be concerned with the role played by the family in sustainable development and in making families achieve sustainability. The family has a role to play in ensuring that individual members make lifestyle changes that can positively contribute to their overall well being; and the benefit of the environment and other systems now and in future. Family members display diverse lifestyles that may compromise the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. Lifestyle changes in areas such smoking, alcoholism, poor

hygienic practices, lack of exercise, violence, sexual promiscuity, etc, would promote social, economic, environmental and health sustainability. In this way family members would positively impact their wellbeing and the lives of future generation.

Moreover, it has been observed that despite the need to reduce waste and conserve resources in order to develop a sustainable future, many families are still engaged in choices and practices that are detrimental to economic, social and environmental sustainability. To impact positively on the next generation, families should discourage practices that deplete resources and the environment, such as wasteful consumption of food, clothing, energy, etc. Sustainable living practices such as sustainable consumption should rather be encouraged. Sustainable consumption is using resources in a way that minimises harm to the environment while supporting the well-being of people (OECD, 2008). For instance, families could reduce post-consumer waste and reduce the amount of waste in dumpsites by taking more discerning purchasing decisions, rather than buying in binges. The current wave of empowerments in Akwa Ibom state appears to encourage wasteful spending by many privileged families on consumer goods, fashion, vehicles and ceremonies which impinge on economic and environmental sustainability. Brown (2011) maintains that sustainable development may involve improvements in the quality of life for many but may necessitate a decrease in resource consumption. Schor (2005) suggest that wasteful consumption is increasing because the richer people become, the more they spend on goods they do not use.

Family members should be encouraged to adopt the three Rs of sustainable development namely- reduce, reuse and recycle. The 3Rs offer environmentally friendly alternatives to deal with growing generation of wastes and its related impact on human health, economy and natural ecosystem (Mohanty, 2011). Reduce means that family members should reduce consumption of goods and services, and the amount of household waste generated. For instance, foods bought in bulk should be properly stored to reduce spoilage and subsequent dumping in waste bin, while cooked food should be served in portions that each family member can finish in a meal to prevent wastage. To reduce clothing wastes, consumers should only buy the clothes they know will be worn for a long time and that fits them properly to reduce wardrobe, box or bag stock pile. Families could also reduce clothing waste by proper care and maintenance practices as well as prompt repairs of family clothing, as poor maintenance can cause frequent colour fade and tears resulting in discard. Ekot (2012) in a study of Post-Consumer Clothing and Textile Waste Disposal Practices of Families in Uyo Metropolis, Akwa Ibom state, revealed that discarding as trash was the most used clothing and textile waste disposal option adopted by the respondents (65%), followed by wardrobe stockpile (57.5%).

By reusing, families can keep many consumer goods including food and clothing out of land fill to save money and ensure environmental sustainability. For instance, leftover food could be given a completely new appearance and taste the next day to be appealing and acceptable to family members instead of exposing the food to spoilage and subsequent disposal. Old clothes or clothes that have outlived their usefulness could be renovated or redesigned in line with current fashion

trends. Also discarded adult dresses or a newly bought garment of current fashion that may be too big or too small or just disliked by the owner could be renovated for children in the family. Pears (2006) opined that maximizing the use of garments through reuse means that new garments are not necessarily required and this is a significant step in a sustainable direction.

All household wastes should be recycled as much as possible to reduce the amount of wastes in dumpsites, and their future negative impact on the environment. Food wastes could be composted and used as manure, while clothing wastes should be recycled in the family. Clothing and textile wastes are recycled in various ways including hand - me - down or handed on within the family or donated as charity, using the fabrics for other things or another way, like making cleaning clothes or dusting towels, reusing the fibres for use in quilting, pillow padding or for stuffing toys, and using old clothes for creative projects such as patch work amongst others (Ekot, 2012, Glosson *et al*, 1997).

Sustainable social development may also have to do with the way families bring up their children. Embercombe (2014) recognises that future sustainability depends on the way children are raised so that the current generation of children can grow into confident effective adults. The children of today are the leaders of tomorrow; as such families have a role to play in future social sustainability through the upbringing of their children. If families do not give their children the right upbringing via good parenting practices, good parents -child relationship, modelling of good behaviours, etc, the next generation would not be positively impacted.

Sustainable development may not be possible if many families remain in poverty and lack essential amenities like electricity, water, good roads, health care, and leisure facilities. Many families face sustainable development dilemmas such as food insecurity, poor health care, electricity blackouts, lack of portable water, etc, forcing them to look for alternatives that are capable of causing environmental damage. For instance, the power situation in the country has forced many families into acquiring small generators. These apart from causing noise pollution also emit carbon into the atmosphere, which in the long run contribute to global warming and its attendant effect on the ecosystems.

Global sustainable development is not achievable when the majority of families themselves are not sustainable. A sustainable family creates a safe, positive, and supportive environment allowing all family members to thrive and develop their fullest potential over the family life cycle (Lingren, 1997). Sustainable family development helps family members support each other in making vital environmentally friendly changes in the way they live and love together, earn and spend money together, and impact the earth together (Green Heart Education, 2013). Many families no longer perform their basic function of creating safe positive environment for their members. Physical and economic stress; and deluge of family problems do not allow family members to perform their roles, spend quality time together, have good communication, partake in decision making and perform good parenting amongst others, thereby impacting negatively on social and economic development of the family. Security issues, divorce, spousal and child abuse, untimely deaths, elder abuse, food insecurity,

expensive household energy sources, witchcraft scare, etc, are also challenging issues that impinge on economic, socio-political and environmental sustainability of families in Akwa Ibom State.

Lingren (1997) summarized that problems either begin or end up in families, that the home should be a place people feel comfortable and secure, and that the home base should provide the grounding needed to face the challenges and stressors of daily living. Where the reverse is obtained, then other systems are likely to fail. Families are indeed vital to the overall effort to achieve social, economic and environmental sustainable development and should be empowered to play their role in this direction.

THE NEXUS

Cultural matters are integral parts of the lives of family members as their behaviours, thoughts and are guided by the cultural norms and values of the society. Every family also has its own culture closely related to the dominant culture of the society. With an understanding of the norms, values and beliefs important to their culture, families are able to make decisions that will ensure their wellbeing without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.

CONCLUSION

Sustainable development is concerned with the improvement in the quality of lives of individuals, while at the same time safeguarding the ability of future generation to meet their own needs. All humans belong to one family or the other, whose basic function is the provision of basic needs and socialisation of members. Culture being the overall way of life of the people plays a role in establishing acceptable norms, standards and behaviours of family members. This paper discussed the relationship between the family, culture and sustainable development and concludes that if the ground base - the family, is not sustainable, then community, national and global sustainability would continue to be a delusion.

RECOMMENDATION

Based on the review, the following recommendations are made

1. Families should embrace lifestyle changes especially in the area of wasteful consumption of consumer goods and services, and waste management, so as to promote economic and environmental sustainability.
2. Global agencies such as World Health Organisation (WHO) and UNESCO should redirect the focus of sustainable development on families who are in a position to influence their members towards the needed change for sustainable development.

3. Families should be empowered economically and otherwise to be able to play the role of encouraging their members toward achieving all aspects of sustainable development.
4. Cultural capital of Akwa Ibom state and Nigeria should be preserved through the proper socialisation of children, while negative aspects of culture such as Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) and other harmful cultural practices should be discouraged.

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