

Examining the interface between the Rule of law (Goal 16) and Quality Education (Goal 4) in actualizing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

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ABSTRACT

In 2015, the United Nations adopted the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) which can also be referred to as “Global Goals”, which is a global call to eradicate poverty and protect the planet. The Sustainable Development Goals are seventeen (17) in number, however, for the purpose of this paper; we shall basically discuss the 4th goal which borders on quality education and the 16th goal which is on Peace, Justice and Strong institutions (which centres on upholding the rule of law in a nation). It is aimed that by 2030, these 17 goals would have been achieved by all the 193 United Nations member States. Thus, the SDGs’ core objective is for all people and including the planet to enjoy peace and prosperity and this is both for the present and the future. There exist a correlation between the level of quality education available in a given nation and the responsive adherence to rules and regulation in the same nation. The educational attainment in a State would make it easier for them to adhere to the rule of law, and where the law rules, the crime rate is at its barest minimal point and every citizen that violates the law is sure to be punished by the same law, thus the law rules over sentiments, over culture and over economic interests. The instrumentality of the law is needful to ensure the realization of the 2030 SDGs. Law is an instrument generally recognized as a tool that shapes the behavior of people in a given society. In this article, we shall be considering the interface between Goal 4 and Goal 16 in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The scope of this study shall be limited to

Nigeria and the United Nations member states to these SDGs and from whence the said goals emanated from. The Research Methodology adopted was purely theoretical approach sourced from the Library, newspaper and the Internet sources. It is thus recommended that the Legal professionals should keep up with the good works of upholding the rule of law in each member state, this is because upholding the rule of law would enhance peace and security in a State and it would take a peaceful and stable government to enforce quality education, free health policies, no hunger policies and any law whatsoever which would maintain and sustain the lives of the people and the environment at large.

Keywords: Sustainable Development, Education, Law, People, Planet

INTRODUCTION

The United Nations in their wisdom considered a situation and platform that can bring all the countries of the world together not minding their economic status and geographical location. It was considered that prosperity should be promoted on the planet earth while further devising means of protecting the planet. Thus, the creation of the Sustainable Development Goal aims at ending poverty and protecting the universe. It was recognized that in order to end poverty and bring out prosperity globally there are strategizes that must be put in place and once this processes are actualized, it would help to reduce poverty globally. On the other hand, while promoting prosperity, there is a vital need to protect our planet, thus conserving our environment and this is by taking adequate measures to tackle every form of climate change in order to protect our environment and save life. The Sustainable Development Goal (SDGs) has the first objective of achieving ‘No poverty’. At the creation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in 2012 at Rio de Janeiro it had a global target and which was aimed at producing universal goals which would tackle the economic, environmental and political needs of the world. It illustrates the planet earth as a global village which needs each other for survival. (UNDP, 2023).

Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

In September, 2000, the Heads of States at the United Nations Millennium Summit adopted the Millennium Development Goals which aimed at eradicating extreme poverty and other global threats within fifteen (15) years a period of 2000 to 2015. (M. C. Arthur & W. John (2014).



The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) has these eight goals according to African Development Bank (AFDB) (2003), there are:

1. “Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger
2. Achieve Universal Primary Education
3. Promote gender equality and empower women
4. Reduce child mortality
5. Improve maternal health
6. Combat HIV/AIDS media and other Diseases
7. Ensure environmental sustainability
8. Develop a global partnership for development”

These eight (8) goals were unanimously agreed upon and adopted by the 191 United Nations member states (Wikipedia (2023)). Narrowing it down further, these eight goals of the MDGs, we are tempted to ask the question, where these eight goals achieved?

According to the Millennium Development Goal Reprint 2015, they provided that indeed over one billion people were lifted out of extreme poverty (and this is her first and core goal). The MDGs was also said to make provisions against hunger and moreso, a greater number of girls were enabled to attend school and lastly the planet was protected (United Nations (2013)). In Africa, particularly from our own observation, we shall state that the MDGs actualized to a reasonable extent a reduction from extreme poverty in underdeveloped nations, the free education which was introduced helped many children to acquire Universal Basic Primary Education including girls, there has also been increase in sensitization to the grassroots on the need for mothers to give birth in the hospital and ensure that children 0 – 5 years old are properly immunized. Furthermore, HIV/AIDS and malaria, which was a fast growing disease in Africa has been reduced by the impact of the MDGs.

The Sustainable Development Goals has (17) goals and 169 targets. The goals are:

- (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) Reduces inequalities
- (11) Sustainable cities and communities
- (12) Responsible consumption and production
- (13) Climate action
- (14) Life below water
- (15) Life on land
- (16) Peace, Justice and strong institutions
- (17) Partnership for the goals”.

Thus, the MDGs have 8 goals, whereas the SDGs have 17 goals but the duo both has a 15-year life span. The SDGs seeks to accomplish all her 17 goals by 2030 and we all are embedded with the responsibility to make it work out.

Sustainable Development Goal on Education:

The goal for quality Education is the 4th goal among the seventeen goals of the SDGs. W.L. Anthony et al (2020) noted that this goal for quality education is geared towards ensuring and promoting inclusive and equitable education and promoting lifelong learning opportunities for all and thus this goal is meant for the development of education in any given nation.

P. O. Nwachukwu. (2014) observed that Education is as old as mankind and can be traced back to the beginning of human existence and its development resulting therefrom. Anthony et al (2020) further noted that our current global economy is a ‘knowledge economy, driven and sustained by education and lifelong learning’. M. E. Hanachor & E. N. Wordu (2021) states that education has been seen as both a fundamental human right, a booster for sustainable development and can further be used as a tool to confront the eminent challenges facing mankind; socially, economically, environmentally and otherwise. Thus, to affirm that education is sine qua non for the development of a nation is a statement of fact. Education aids in poverty reduction and improves social values of the people, while in return, reduces social vices. The more you know, the higher you excel in life.

The University of the People (2023) basically stated that receiving education does not only benefit an individual but also the community and society at large. Thus, societies with higher interests in education have lower crime rate, communicate better and are more productive, have



healthier lifestyles and engage more in civic responsibilities and this is made possible because of their high educational attainment. Education is thus the Bedrock of any nation's advancement. Education brings liberation, it sets one free from the shackles of ignorance and opens the door of knowledge which in return awakens the curiosity to solve problems and thus brings satisfaction. This is in line with the quote of George Washington Carver, that "Education is the key that unlocks the golden door to freedom". Flowing from the above, it is obvious that it is in the best interest of any nation to improve the quality of education in their state so that the quality of their lives can also improve; it would also make them take better decision on the background of acquired relevant knowledge. In Nigeria, the improvement on education naturally led to the wearing out of some of the cultural practices amongst the people especially the most barbaric and harmful ones.

Sustainable Development Goal on Peace, Justice and Strong Institution – SDG 16

This goal is about promoting peaceful and inclusive societies, providing access to justice for all and building effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels. Where there is no rule of law in a nation, it leads to a rise in crime rate, violence, exploitation, sexual offences and other crimes which would even threaten the peace and security of the nation. Thus, there is need to have an all inclusive government that uphold the rule of law, because wherever the law is relegated to the bins, unrest is the resultant effect (The Sustainable Development Goal Report (2022)).

The Sustainable Development Goals Report (2022) released some facts and figures stating that over 100 million number of persons have been forced to flee conflict and violence as at May 2022; and this goes to show how vulnerable the lives and properties of citizens can be without the adherence of the rule of law.

The United Nations Nigeria (2023) identifies that SDG No 16, otherwise referred to as Goal 16 has several targets which we shall replicate seriatim:

- “16.1 Significantly reduce all forms of violence and related death rates everywhere
- 16.2 End abuse, exploitation, trafficking and all forms of violence against persons and torture of children
- 16.3 Promote the rule of law at the national and international levels and ensure equal access to justice for all.

- 16.4 By 2030, significantly reduce illicit financial and arms flows, strengthen the recovery and return of stolen assets and combat all forms of organized crime.
- 16.5 Substantially reduce corruption and bribery in all their forms
- 16.6 Develop effective, accountable and transparent institutions at all levels.
- 16.7 Ensure responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making at all levels
- 16.8 Broaden and strengthen the participation of developing countries in the institutions of global governance
- 16.9 By 2030, provide legal identity for all including birth registration
- 16.10 Ensure public access to information and protect fundamental freedom in accordance with national legislation and international agreements.
- 16A. Strengthen relevant national institutions, including through international cooperation, for building capacity at all levels, in particular in developing countries, to prevent violence and combat terrorism and crime
- 16B. Promote and enforce nondiscriminatory laws and policies for sustainable development”.

Flowing from the above, one can rely on and decipher that we need a calm and peaceful environment for education to be progressive in a nation; and that is the interface between the rule of law and quality education. Where a nation is filled with all forms violent crimes such as murder, kidnapping, abduction of school children, forced child recruitment into the military and the likes as seen in some parts of Nigeria due to Fulani herdsmen, unknown gunmen, IPOB group and Boko Haram, it goes to show the quality of education inherent in that state; this is because where the quality of education is very high, then the people would be so enlightened as to have high value for human lives and properties, they would also know that when such crimes are committed, the culprits would be easily caught and made to pay for the consequences of their distasteful and nefarious acts. It is thus very clear that some of these barbaric cultural acts/behavior crimes violent delay and thwart the program of education in the state or nation as a whole. When there is social unrest, people are constrained to move around, thus the school calendar can even be thwarted just because the government would not want to put the lives of school children at risk all in the quest of knowledge, thus the resultant effect is that the quality of education reduces and then graduates of higher institutions are not so knowledgeable in their field of discipline.

The Role of Law in the realization of the SDGs

Law is as versatile as human existence. Every aspect of human endeavour be it health, education, aviation, economy, policies, governance, languages to mention but a few all have some legal inclination from which it derives its relevance and sustains its existence.

On the other hand, education can be used as a tool to liberate people from the shackles of poverty and ignorance. Thus, the adherence to the rule of law is very relevant to ensure quality education in a given society.

There are ways that the legal professionals who are custodians of the law can contribute their quota in the society to ensure quality education, thereby aiding to actualize the sustainable Development Goals. The legal professional can build up policies that would promote a more proactive right to education at all levels starting from local, national, regional and international. The right to education is provided in Section 18 Chapter Two of the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (CFRN) which is non-justifiable, that is to say, a citizen cannot seek for a redress in court where the government fails to provide equal and adequate education to her citizens. Section 18 (c) of the 1999 CRFN enjoins the government to direct her policies towards ensuring that there are equal and adequate educational opportunities at all levels. Thus, the legal professionals, the executives, the legislatures and human right activists at all levels can add their voices so that the government can enforce policies aimed at giving citizens affordable and quality education. Quality education should not only be available at Private schools but rather the Government-owned schools should guarantee affordable, equal and high quality education especially to her citizens.

The International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) states that the right to education includes the right to free, compulsory primary education for all, an obligation to provide secondary school education to an extent that it would be accessible to all and further to make the higher education equitably accessible to all (Wikipedia 2023). Thus in Nigeria, another law was promulgated in 1999 the Universal Basic Education Act which is meant to ensure that every child acquires a free and compulsory primary and secondary school education this had some difference from the 1976 Universal Primary Education (UPE). A thorough look at the above shows that we still have a huge responsibility in actualizing a free and compulsory education in reality and this would have been better actualized if the right to education was

enshrined under Chapter 4 of the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria which provides for the fundamental human right of citizens in Nigeria.

The goal 16 aims at promoting the rule of law at all levels and ensuring equal access to justice for all. It is part of the core responsibilities of the legal professionals to uphold the rule of law in a nation. Rule of law in simple terms means that the law must rule over all persons (not minding class and personal interest). It ensures that the law rules and nothing else. Rule of law involves the supremacy of the law thus the law must be obeyed by the government and the governed. The rule of law helps to deter the abuse of power, oppressions and recklessness from the stakeholders of power in a nation. Thus every democratic government adopts the concept of the rule of law as its core principle; this promotes peace and economic progression in a nation and also protects the rights of people at every given time. According to the United Nations (United Nations, 2023), the rule of law is a principle of government in which all persons, institutions, and entities, public and private, including the state itself, are accountable to laws that are publicly promulgated, equally enforced and independently adjudicated and which are consistent with international human rights norms. Thus, adherence to the rule of law would help to maintain a peaceful and stable government and when the government is peaceful, then the actualization of the SDGs would be guaranteed.

Relating this principle of rule of law to education it is write to note that education is the bedrock of all learning. If at all spheres of learning both formal and informal ways, the citizens are meant to know and understand that the law is meant to be obeyed and its principles upheld in its totality and that if one breaches or violates the provisions of the law, the resulting effect would be the punishment as provided by the law, we believe the consciousness of this knowledge coupled with the constant practice of the same principles would make the law supreme in the eyes of the people whether literate or illiterate. This, in order to actualize the Goal 16 of the sustainable development goal and even other goals, there is need to uphold the supremacy of the law at all levels both local, state, federal and international levels. Without the rule of law, access to justice, peace and security and nation building would be a mirage.

We shall briefly consider the **relevance or significance of law in some of the seventeen (17) goals** of the SDGs



1. **SDG 2- Zero Hunger:** Every human being has the need for good food and nutrition. The challenge is getting sufficient food, food security and malnutrition. Right to life is a fundamental human right of every individual. Adequate nutrition and food security is essential to ensure that man lives his life comfortably in the universe. The international law recognizes mankind's right to food.

2. **SDG 3 on Good health and well being:** It is universally said that health is wealth. It is also universally accepted that every human has a fundamental right to health. However some of the country's don't recognize same as a fundamental right but acknowledges it as just a human right (For example, Nigeria) the law helps in really enlightening the public that it is their right to be healthy and improve in healthy life styles. Lawyers engage in litigation as last option where a person's right to health has been mismanaged or neglected. Thus, the medical practitioners have the weightier responsibility here to observe and uphold individual's right to health and medical care at every point in time.

3. SDG 4 on Quality education:

Quality education is one of the globally recognized means used in poverty eradication. Law has a role in this, because before an educational policy is brought to existence, it must be first promulgated as a law which is binding on all.

4. SDG 5 on Gender Equality:

It is a universal law and a fundamental right of human being right to freedom from discrimination based on gender. However, most cultural beliefs still promote gender inequality. The law is developing in most African states to the effect as to eradicate all forms of gender inequality and this is by legal enlightenment, constitutional provisions and judicial authorities (Cases decided in the law courts).

5. SDG 6 on clean water and Sanitation:

Water is life. The United Nations recognized access to safe, sufficient and affordable water, sanitation and hygiene facilities as a human right for mankind. This is because human beings cannot survive without water. The law thus ensures that these rights are enshrined as state policy and then legal professionals ensure that the said laws are protected.

6. SDG 13: Climate Action:

Climate change is what affects all mankind. The SDG also aims to protect the environment from natural hazards. The law also aims at protecting the environment from degradation. Thus,



creating awareness of the existence of the laws, actions to do or not to do, increased learning on how to conserve an environment is among the core needs of mankind in order to achieve SDG 2030.

7. SDG 16: Peace, Justice and Strong institutions. This is like a core goal that ensures the actualization of other goals. If there is no peace and justice, the security and lives of the people would be threatened, thus, hunger and economic stability and good life would be unattainable. When a nation is peaceful and just, it follows that there is an upholding of the rule of law and access to justice is available to all and such a state would without stress observe and protect the human rights of the citizens.

8. SDG 17: Partnerships For the goals:

The goals ensures a cooperation between the national, regional and international organizations including the prosecutors, the governments and civil society in order to achieve a given goal which is the SDGs. Thus a strategic partnership from all spheres of life is what is needed to ensure the 2030 actualization of the sustainable Development goal. This is also our recommendation in this study.

Conclusion

The Sustainable Development Goal 2030 came to being in 2015, we are currently in 2023, we are already in the 8th year of actualizing these goals, how well have we actualized these goals? In the next seven years, would we have actually eradicated poverty and hunger in our country Nigeria? Would quality education be so available at all levels? Would our country been free from insecurity challenges, thereby fully embracing peace and justice and promoting rule of law? The Legal professionals are doing well same as the Teachers in ensuring that education is free and compulsorily made available to Nigeria citizen. However, we all need to willingly do more in partnership to ensure that by 2030, Nigeria would have a realistic progress in attaining the 17 sustainable development goals, despite the inherent challenges in the Nigerian government.

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