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Building Human Capital for Sustainable Development: A Nexus Approach

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ABSTRACT
Development is paramount in the life of individuals and nations. Without development, there won't be meaningful social progress. Therefore, all that mankind seeks in the form of improvement of life, living conditions, and the environment is development. Meanwhile, achieving development is cumbersome and at times generates hazards that constitute a threat to human health, life, and the ecosystem. To avoid hazardous development and to achieve seamless and balanced development that is eco-friendly, the concept of sustainable development (SD) was coined by the UN agency, the World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED) in 1987. In 2015, the UN set a global agenda called the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) targeted at making the universe a better place, through pursuing an all-inclusive and balanced development. However, achieving the 17 SDGs is problematic, especially for the underdeveloped countries. Therefore, this study identified human capital development as the bedrock and pathway for the achievement of the 17 SDGs. Qualitative and contextual-descriptive approaches were adopted for data collection, analysis, and interpretation. The study pointed out the expanded critical factors that boost human capital development and suggested that persons and nations seeking development and its sustenance should first and foremost embrace the human capital development, which paves the way for the achievement of other forms of development.
Keywords: human capital development, sustainable development, social progress, ecosystem, human development index

INTRODUCTION
In the quest to develop self and the environment, mankind has encountered ubiquitous challenges that need to be conquered for the attainment, advancement, and sustenance of desired goals when achieved (Onah, Amujiri, Asogwa, Okafor, & Onuchukwu, 2023). The challenges confronting mankind in the bid to develop self and the environment range from mastery of self to the forces in the environment (nature).

Man must devise a means to overcome certain forces of nature in the environment, to generate the capacity needed for development. The capacity for development has two major phases: (1) individual/personal development, which begets the second (2) phase, being societal development. The personal development is human capital or human resource oriented, while the societal development takes the form of social collectivism. In the views of Rodney (1972), development in human society is multipronged (individual and societal). The author further noted that at the level of the individual, development entails a continuous increase in skill and capacity, self-discipline, more freedom, responsibility, creativity, and material well-being. While at the societal level, he posited that development entails increasing the capacity to control relationships both within and outside. That is, for a people or country to develop the capacity and capability needed to control both the internal and the external environments despite their inherent forces.

From the foregoing, it can be deduced that the seed for development, whether at the individual level or the societal level, should be planted and nurtured to grow and mature, to be able to serve human needs consistently. Therefore, human capital formation, just like every other development, is progressive, incremental, multi-faceted, dynamic, and evolutionary (Onah, Aduma, & Amujiri, 2023). Human capital development needs constant individual improvements, which aggregate to societal development that calls for sustenance. Human capital development and sustainable development share one indispensable and unique quality – "development", which according to Abah (2007) means to improve, to make progress, change for the better, earn a higher income, or enjoy a better living standard. Development, according to Olewe (2001), "is a constant process of transformation. It is a dynamic concept denoting a state of ceaseless change."

Onah (2011), while emphasizing the necessity to recruit only skilled and trained manpower (developed human capital) based on merit, argued that the imperative to employ only competent workers is rooted in the adverse implications of the paradox of plenty. Just like the implied assumption of the 'resource curse theory' states that the whole natural resources on earth and material assets when put together in one country or organization without adequate development of the human resources/capital into competent technocrats and experts in their respective areas of specializations, will invariably, lead the country or organization to nowhere (see Auty, 2001). Scholars such as Onah, Asadu, & Amujiri (2022), and Melissa (2017) noted that the reason for the above is that the people will have their eyes fixated on sharing the natural resources which often leads to 'conflict of resource control and allocation', and jaded political economy of rentierism that brings insecurity, underdevelopment and poverty. Therefore, the people in a resource curse environment often engage in fighting one another instead of focusing on developing their human resources/capital stock of the nation, to develop mastery of skills and creative ingenuity requisite for the efficient and effective utilization and management of the natural resources, for the economic benefits of all the citizens. This circumstance, which manifests largely in Africa, and Nigeria in particular, leads to brain and skill drain, which according to Onah & Amujiri (2023) have contributed to the massive poverty and underdevelopment in Africa, irrespective of the fact that the greatest per cent of the world's major mineral resources are deposited in the African soil, seas, deserts, lands, and forests.

Development is broad and therefore cuts across a complex web of social, political, economic, and environmental dynamics. The complex web and the inherent intricacies in the vast and broadened nature of development are epitomized in the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the UN (see UN SDGs, 2015). The 17 SDGs of the UN are all encompassing and all-inclusive, by capturing details of all that mankind needs to pursue to achieve development and consequently sustain development when eventually achieved. This is because achieving holistic development cuts across many sectors of the Society such as articulated and captured in the 17 SDGs of the UN (UN, 2015) which are: "no poverty, zero hunger, good health and wellbeing, quality education, gender equality, clean water and sanitation, affordable and clean energy, decent work and economic growth, reduced inequalities, industry, innovation and infrastructure, sustainable cities and communities, responsible consumption and production, climate action, life below water, life on land, peace, justice and strong institutions, and partnerships for the goals". To achieve any of the above 17 SDGs, attention must be paid to the critical areas serving as boosters of human capital. The areas include, but are not limited to, the education sector, health sector, agro sector -

food and nutrition, economic sector, and security which the level of adequacy of their provisions determines how far a nation can develop. This is because these factors are very critical and play essential roles in human development, which in turn leads to material development. Therefore, development and its sustenance are the essential lubricants for human progress. Following the importance of development in human progress, the UN (2015) global vision of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) agenda, aimed at achieving holistic global development, is currently the template for the world agenda, which will come to an end in 2030. To achieve any of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the UN, there must be in place a well-developed human capital driving the process of achieving and sustaining any of the 17 SDGs in any sphere of human society. This study, therefore, methodically and analytically attempts to examine the association among the indicators/indices of human capital to establishing that human capital development potently drives sustainable development.

MATERIALS AND METHODOLOGY

The methodology adopted in the study is a qualitative and descriptive approach. By adopting secondary sources of data, germane data were elicited from relevant literature based on interrogations and expositions of the nexus between human capital development and sustainable development. Therefore, data for this study were generated through secondary sources and analyzed by utilizing a contextual-descriptive approach. To ensure validity and reliability of the data used, the researchers relied mainly on secondary data generated from the UN agencies' survey research works, textbooks, peer-reviewed journal articles, and online materials written by scholars on human capital and sustainable development were juxtaposed and descriptively content analyzed.

The origin, justifications, and the 3 cardinal perspectives in sustainable development

The World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED), an agency of the UN, in its Brundtland report of a conference held in India in 1987 coined and gave the world the novel concept of sustainable development. Thus, before 1987, there was no such concept as sustainable development in scholarship and society. The World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED) defined sustainable development as "development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" (WCED, 1987). There is a need to achieve development and also preserve the development. This led to the questions of environmental impact assessment (EIA) of development, and ethical issues in development, which include but are not limited to: how ethical is today's development, what constitutes ethical development, how to deal with or roll back unethical development, and how to ensure a balanced development. That is, how to achieve healthy and harmless development for the benefit of mankind and the ecosystem, both for the present and future generations (Onah, Asadu, Okafor, Aduma, Eneh, & Amujiri, 2023).

Sustainable development borders on three significant perspectives. The variable factors in the perspectives are such as: (1) economic, (2) socio-political, and (3) environmental issues. An economically sustainable system must be able to create goods and services continuously and maintain a manageable economy without jeopardizing the sectoral balances of economic activities of a nation. On the other hand, the socio-political sustainable system must ensure fairness in resource allocation, distribution of socio-political services with health and education, gender equality and political responsibility, democracy, and inclusiveness. Lastly, the environmentally sustainable system must ensure stability in resource creation, biodiversity, and mitigation of overpopulation, control of excessive use of resources, pollution, and avoidance of extinction of resources, to make provisions for harmonious existence in the ecosystem (Obodoechi, 2009).

Sustainable development, therefore, seeks to strike a balance in man's quest to attain economic development and improve quality of life in general. This leads to the need for conservation/preservation of the ecosystem or natural environment and resources in the environment without deteriorating or abusing them. To achieve this balance to gaining sustainability, according to Jhingan (2011), it is anchors on increasing or at least maintaining the natural capital stock of a nation, to avoid depletion. Or ensuring that there is a corresponding increase in the quality of life and use of natural resources in such a way that

when a forest is cleared, its uses or purposes of clearance should be for enhanced productivity that will lead to a further increase in value generation and enhance the value chain. Therefore, sustainable development does not give room for waste, misuse, abuse, or destruction of the ecosystem while pursuing development or exploring the natural resources in the environment. So, conservation or preservation of natural resources in the environment is unavoidable while exploring or using the resources in the environment, or pursuing development.

Critical dimensions of human capital development: Expanded indicators/indices to achieving sustainable development

Developing human capital for sustainable development could be achieved through a combination of factors and conditions. The prerequisite factors and conditions are numerous, but we will examine the following:

Education: Education is the greatest tool ever known by man for the emancipation of the human mind. It is a tool for the acquisition of knowledge that liberates one from the shackles of ignorance. It positions one for the mastery of human existence and the ability to conquer the forces and the dynamics of the human environment. For the creation and sustenance of human capital towards sustainable development, functional education must be acquired by the people, and the people who possess the knowledge must deployed it to the areas of their competence for value generation and addition, which build and sustain the society. Acha (1995), defined education as the development of the cognitive, affective, and psychomotor abilities of an individual, thereby equipping him with the capacity required to function effectively and happily in society. Through education, individuals are helped to realize their potential by maximizing their mental, emotional, and physical capabilities. These in the long run will benefit the individuals and their society. The National Teachers Institute of Nigeria described the role of education in development thus:

The prime place of education in the development efforts of nations has never been doubted the world over. Various nations, including Nigeria, have for long been making efforts to develop this sector for optimal development. Although much has not been achieved in this regard, a lot more needs to be done so that the ever-increasing challenges of our time and the time to come can be effectively confronted. In Nigeria, for example, the challenges have been poverty, disease, hunger, illiteracy, and general underdevelopment. How we are to tackle these problems will reflect on the value and commitment we attach to education, which, according to Professor Baikie, "is the biggest industry that touches on every fabric of our human endeavour.

Education is the device that propels social change by introducing novel things to human society, preserves good things, and also discards loathsome practices and belief systems injurious to individuals and the social progress of a people. According to Onah (2018), education is a genuine means and an indispensable weapon against ignorance, and stark illiteracy that is the bane of individual and social progress. Education is a sharp and useful apparatus that has changed every society from primitive, underdeveloped, and rural to developed and urban communities. The road to the attainment of human capital development at any level is educational development of a nation to ensure the dispensation of quality and functional education to the citizenry. The role of education in sustainable national development cuts across every sector or sphere of society. Education, according to Abah (2007), enhances labour efficiency, factor mobility, specialization in occupation and trade, supply of entrepreneurship; it imparts modernity, which enhances the incentive for economic change. The economic quality of a population will unquestionably be high when there is extensive knowledge of what natural resources are available, alternative production techniques that are probable, the necessary skills, existing market conditions and opportunities, and the institutions that might be created to favour economic rationality. These will input the human abilities and motivations that are favourable to economic achievements.

The importance of education in development is appreciated more when one looks at the indices or indicators for measuring national development or the Human Development Index (HDI). This leaves one with no doubt that education is at the top, thereby championing the course of all metrics in the

assessment. Countries with the best educational system are the most developed nations due to the fruits of education invested and reinvested in boosting national productivity, and engendering good governance, thereby making life better for humanity. Udeh (2014) posits that without education, man may just be like other animals. Education is very significant in human development, civilization, and all aspects of progress. School enrollment and literacy level are major criteria for assessing development. Education is the tool that reengineers society at all times. The struggle for the emancipation of Africa came into the limelight when the White colonialists educated a chunk of black people whose eyes and minds were opened, and they began nationalist movements that ousted the colonialists from African soil. Every authentic liberation struggle got its light from awareness created by enlightened individuals through education and knowledge acquisition, usually by comparing the circumstances and consciousness of human rights. To achieve development and to sustain it revolves around human capital formation, which, according to Jhingan (2011), does not depend on the size of a national population but on the "efficiency" of the labour force. Notably, nothing brings out the efficiency of any productive enterprise like sound and functional education.

Values system: Certain values generate and promote peace, unity, love, and in the long run, cultivate national development at individual and societal levels. The value of democracy is rooted in a well-thought-out political culture that promotes ethical societal values which pursue freedom, human rights, equality, social justice, liberty of individuals, well-being of people, etc., that engender development both at individual and societal levels. Individuals have to develop values that support hard work, integrity, respect for others, while society has to develop a culture of social justice, social security, social progress, etc., for its overall development and sustenance. Onah (2018) asserts that the behavioral or relational facet of development demands that people's attitude, culture, character, tradition, behavior, lifestyle, and value systems must be receptive and positive to development, and not repulsive. For example, the American Dream is a strong socio-political and economic culture of collective value system that reflect the strong will of the American people built on hard work and vision that enables everybody who wishes to develop himself or herself to do so, knowing that it is developed individuals that consequently develop society and sustain it in the long run.

Obnoxious laws and practices that are repugnant to social progress as a result of "long-range fatalism" and "pre-Newtonian science" belief, according to Rostow (1960), stages of development towards modernization are an integral part of traditional society, which is anti-development, let alone sustainable development. In fused society, as averred by Riggs (1964), in his cross cultural and cross boundary studies on development administration around the world, the author noticed that the Third World countries lag because of certain inimical value systems; cultures, laws, and belief repugnant to social justice held for so long, which are antithetical to development. Therefore, such detrimental value systems that are adverse to social progress should be discarded to pave the way for a receptive culture of development. Development has culture and certain liberal values that must be instituted on the ground before take off stage could be triggered or the prismatic stage of development could be attained (Rostow 1960; Riggs 1964).

Cultures that trigger off development according to both scholars are intrinsic to the value systems imbibed by each society, especially its leaders and the socio-political institutions. Among the elements that enhance development and its sustainability are strong democratic cultures, a functional educational system, skills that build and promote indigenous technological capacity, a fearless and independent judiciary, and social harmony among the scattered and diverse elements of the social structures. Strong democratic values, productive and systemic interaction, creative ingenuity, laws, rules, and policies, healthy socio-cultural ethos, administrative capability, strong institutions, and every other positive value system in society could be referred to as the 'software for development'. On the other hand, the 'hardware for development' becomes the operational manipulations of the mechanical elements created and installed to drive development, such as infrastructure or facilities, machines, and other physical tools that engender development.

Therefore, for development of individuals and society to occur, there must be a sharp departure from those features of traditional and pre-take-off stages, and also fused and prismatic societies' typologies

according to Rostow and Riggs (ibid), respectively. This is because the value systems practiced in these stages of societies do not promote development. The practices in fused and prismatic societies that are anti-development according to Riggs in his "sala model of administration" as stated by Abah (2007), Ezeani (2005) are: a high level of heterogeneity, a high level of formalism, overlapping; and nepotism, favouritism, poly-communalism, and a culture of bazaar canteen model. Abah (2007) asserts that at the take-off stage of development, society is becoming economically autonomous because autonomous industries begin to emerge. Society at this stage is prepared to conquer those traditional barriers to development. There is social overhead capital, and also a surge in technological progress in industry and agriculture. There is also a manifestation of political leadership that has the economic growth of the nation as a priority.

Skill acquisition: Mastery of creative capacities to ingeniously bring things into existence to serve useful purposes fosters development. Therefore, people must learn skills, trade, art, business, and develop mastery abilities to conceive and command desired changes into active manifestation, for the satisfaction of personal and societal needs or goals. At the societal level, if a country purchases all modern gadgets and its installation with state-of-the-arts best practice by foreigners, especially through multinational corporations (MNCs), without its citizens developing relevant skills to man and duplicate those edifices through research, development will still elude such a country in the long run. A country that hires foreigners to deploy their skills, abilities, technical know-how to manufacture and install infrastructure like roads, bridges, houses, cars, airplanes, computer and internet facilities, state-of-art hospitals, fast moving global products or render services to her citizens without training her citizens to develop adequate indigenous skills and capacity to maintain the infrastructure, and consequently cash in on them to build its local technology base, has not developed. Until development becomes institutionalized as a culture that springs from the people through self-reliance, such development will not be sustained, let alone induce multiplier effects that can stand to trickle down to the wider sectors of society.

For a nation or a people to develop, the acquisition of certain pertinent skills must be a routine course that must be advanced to gain a competitive edge in the global community. On the need to develop skills at individual and community levels, which translate to the national level in the long run by aggregating the impacts of community development, Onah (2018) posits that technical know-how, creative ingenuity, disposition, and learnt abilities are the back bone for achievable self-help strategic efforts that are sustainable. Thus, rural people must be trained to participate in the acquisition of relevant skills and build capacity for effective contribution towards sustainable community development (Chikeleze, 2012). Acquiring skills is a functional self-help strategy available to individuals for personal development. It is a short route to the accumulation of experience, capital, and economic empowerment that make one developed and able to contribute to national development and its sustenance. Skill acquisition or technical progress generates development. Thus, it is a major factor of economic growth that positions individuals and nations to the mastery of their progress. Mastery of skills guarantees technical progress in the area of science and technology, which ensures industrialization, a hallmark of development. This underscores the emphasis on Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) education for the supply of the excessive shortage of skilled workforce across the globe. When a nation gets industrialized, it also gets developed. Even in the economy, the development of entrepreneurial skills is paramount for making economic progress that enhances overall national development. The lack of functional skills to boost earnings and income generation breeds poverty, which jeopardizes national development.

Capacity building: According to Ezeigwe (2011), capacity building is a very significant activity that enhances organizational expansion. It involves the identification of problem areas in an organization, institution of government, or a nation, and the subsequent investment in human capacity to address such challenges. Onah (2018) posits that capacity building entails discovering or finding out immediate or potential problem areas, or developing abilities, skills, attitudes, experience, and knowledge for prospective enhancement towards gaining sustainability in human and material resources deployed in communities to ensure development. Capacity building is a conscientious effort geared towards effective and efficient utilization of human resources with the view to maximally sustain the development and other resources being used, without creating adverse effects on man and the environment. Obodoechi

(2009), buttressing on capacity, asserts that capacity-building activities go beyond projects and include policies, programmes, a long-term perspective and consensus-building. This is so because human resource development is not sufficient for capacity building, thus, there are needs to be in place well-functioning institutions and an enabling environment to make such resources effective for the management of development and for the achievement of sustainable results.

Olaopa (2011), cited in Ezeigwe (2011), asserts that capacity is the process and means through which national governments and local communities build up the necessary skills and expertise to manage their environment and natural resources sustainably, within their daily activities. Capacity must be built to be able to envisage development, nurture it, implement it, use it, and sustain it– development. Building capacity is akin to building human capital development. Human capital development is futuristic, while capacity building is both present and futuristic oriented, in the sense that it takes capacity to initiate development, and it also takes capacity to execute and utilize, and sustain development. Both are strategic and aimed towards development and its sustenance. Onah (2018) opined that sustainable development is anchored on capacity building by asserting that it takes capacity to build, to utilize what is built; it takes capacity to maintain, repair, service, preserve, secure, and even improve on what is built, thereby ensuring sustainability in development enterprise. Capacity building guarantees efficient and effective social service delivery that enhances development.

Training and development: Training and development are one of the core mandates of human resource functions (Abonyi, 2021). Training and development of human resources/capital is a consistent internal and strategic growth mechanism designed to make employees or citizens gain a competitive advantage by developing and consolidating their skills and abilities. Training is needed especially in those scarce areas with a shortage of manpower, and in the key areas required to enhance performance, by creating a pool of knowledgeable workers to drive the critical sectors of the economy profitably (Eze, 2010). Training and development go hand-in-hand with each other; therefore, training brings development, and whatever development is achieved has to be sustained to remain progressive and developed. Training carried out successfully has a commensurate impact on the development of the human capital engaged in the training (Abonyi, 2021). The exception to this is in a situation of failure of training due to certain factors such as lack of adequate preparation, wrong timing, poor objectives of training, etc., which calls for repetition of training following the inability of the trained employees to carry over the training –the act of implementation of what was taught in a training programme at one's duty. A re-training exercise could be a result of the failure of training. So, repeating a failed training through effective planning and implementation, and by removing obstacles identified as factors that led to the failure of the previous training and ensuring that it does not occur again, thereby perfecting conditions to ensure a successful carryover of training, is a primary constant for development. Honey and Mumford (1996), speaking on the evaluation of training outcome, assert objectively that learning has happened when people can show that they know something that they did not know before (insights, realizations, as well as facts) and when they can do something they could not do before (skills).

Training is a learning process. Ile (2003) provides an insight into the strategic purpose of training when he posits that training is an investment and that an investment is the commitment of resources to the acquisition of assets, which in turn allows a stream of resources to be generated in the future. The assets acquired can be viewed as education, skill, mental, or managerial ability. From this perspective, it is clear that training is a consciously organized learning process engaged in to acquire deeper skills, knowledge, attitude, and education for performance enhancement, thereby generating dividends by transferring what is learnt to make progress that induces development and sustainability. Armstrong (2009) sees training as the application of formal processes to impart knowledge and help people acquire skills essential to perform their jobs satisfactorily. When people are trained, they develop abilities and skills to create new things and improve on the existing ones, thereby advancing the course for sustaining those things for the good of man and the environment –sustainable development.

Healthcare services: A healthy nation is a hopeful and prosperous nation with abundant possibilities for productivity in all spheres of society. All economic factors of national growth or the components of human capital begin from the strong and reliable health of the citizens. Different dimensions of health,

like reproductive health, nutrition, hunger, disease, sickness, debility, exercise, etc., are often traced to the level of the available healthcare system, which impacts national productivity and development. The correlation between health and nutrition, according to Abah (2007), is that both are related to productivity at work, enhance life expectancy, and the capacity to create and earn income in the future. Thus, the imperative of a healthy human workforce cannot be overstated. The health quality of a national population is a critical factor for national development. Therefore, a country that aspires to develop its human capital should ensure the institutionalization of good healthcare policy that promotes easy and affordable access by citizens to good medical facilities and attention from well-trained professionals in the health sector. A healthy body and sound mind are prerequisites for productive decisions and the achievement of goals that manifest in forms of development.

Food, nutrition, and availability are an integral part of the health of a people or a nation. Therefore, food availability, accessibility, and affordability are vital elements of health, which must be provided in the pursuit of human development and its sustainability. This is because of the critical roles of quality feeding in building and developing the human capital stock of a nation. Roetter & Van (2007) averred that having well-nourished and healthy citizens who can develop their country is the main aim for food security. However, there is an alarming global food shortage and supply, especially in Third World countries, due to climate change and insecurity ravaging different countries. At the global scene, the Vanguard Newspaper (2019) indicated that the Global Report on Food Crisis 2019 shows that a whopping sum of 113 million people were under severe food insecurity in what is termed the world's most severe food crisis in 2018. Therefore, food security is paramount in human development. This is because it engenders in the people the ability to pursue other forms of development. A hungry population can never develop because it lacks the mental health, physical agility, emotional stability, concentration, and zeal required for development. In other words, empty stock is a threat to human health, peace, and a huge setback to human development and sustainable development.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The driver of all forms of development and its sustainability is human capital. Therefore, to pursue development of any sort, the first step is to develop the human capital –the people, which will in turn develop all other forms of desired development. The achievement of the global pursuit of the 17 SDGs lies squarely in developing and having a top-notch pool of human capital. Until the complex issues of poor human capital formation and development facing the less developed countries are resolved, those countries will always trail behind others in development such as they have failed to reasonably realize the 8 Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) of the UN. This paper therefore, calls for adequate attention on the development of quality human capital, if the 17 SDGs will be achieved, especially in Third World countries with low human development index. Therefore, it is the human development index that drives other forms of development all over the world. And as such, it should be religiously planned, implemented, and developed to usher in and sustain other forms of development desired by mankind in society. In other words, education, value system, economy, healthcare services, capacity building, constant training and development, skill acquisition, and human security should be developed to develop and sustain other forms of development in society.

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