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Environmental Challenges and Sustainable Family Living in a Depressed Economy

Prof. Imaobong D. Akpan,
Department of Educational Foundations,
Guidance & Counselling, University of Uyo, Uyo-Akwa Ibom State

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Abstract

Environment refers to the surroundings in which a person, (animal or plant) lives and operates from. There are issues within the environment that may be hazardous to human population which may be both biological and physical. Human activities within the environment may create environmental challenges which include developmental, economical, psychological and technological amongst others. These challenges may in turn become detrimental to human/family sustainability. This paper therefore explores environmental challenges such as (economic viability, environmental protection and social equity; aging; job creation and sustainable skill development; social media, ICT and sustainable skills development and rape) and sustainable family living in a depressed economy. The concepts have been explained, the prevalence rate and symptoms given, types and forms highlighted, effect of such challenges identified, and strategies/solutions proffered for sustainable family living in a depressed economy.

Key words: Sustainable family living, Depressed Economy, Economic viability, Environmental protection, social media.

Introduction

The world is enclosed with diverse possessions that humans must contend with. The geographical location where people reside constitutes their environment and there are issues within the environment that have positive and negative effects on the human population. Human activities the world over attracts side effects which may be hazardous to health, economy, as well as the social wellbeing of individuals. This comprises both biological and physical aspects of the environment. These human activities often create environmental challenges. Environmental challenges refer to the harmful effects that arise from any human activity on the environment. Such challenges include developmental, economical, ecological, technological, psychological as well as social. The adverse effects of these challenges may in turn affect human/family sustainability with increasing attendant impact in a depressed economy like Nigeria. In view of these challenges, families must remain resilient to guarantee for sustainable family living.

Sustainable family living has to do with the ability to meet the needs of the family without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. Family needs are enormous and vary and these needs must be met at all times using the available resources (Anyakoha, 2015). Natural resources should be conserved; ecosystems should

be protected to support present health and wellbeing of family members, while social resources by way of infrastructures as well as relationships must be maintained for the future. Economic resources should be properly planned for as well as managed to ensure family sustainability.

Sustainability, therefore, is a concept which recognizes the exhaustible nature of resources within the environment, humanity, as well as in all living things. It can also be broadly used to indicate programs, initiatives and actions that are aimed at the preservation of a particular resource in four distinct areas: human, social, economic and environmental, these are known as the pillars of sustainability (RMIT University, 2021).

Human Sustainability is aimed at maintaining and improving the human capital in society. Within this sector, investments are made in health, education systems, access to serious nutrition, knowledge and skills for sustainability of families, communities and societies.

Social Sustainability focuses on maintaining and improving social quality with concepts such as cohesion, reciprocity and honesty to foster relationships among people the world over.

Economic Sustainability aims is to improve the standard of living of the people through maintaining high and stable levels of economic growth.

Environmental Sustainability focuses on improving human welfare through the protection of natural capital (land, air, water, minerals). Environmental sustainability is assured when the needs of the population are met without any harm to the environment. Emphasis is placed on how business ventures can achieve positive economic outcomes without any short or long-term harm to the environment. This paper focuses on environmental challenges and family sustainability in a depressed economy.

A depressed economy is therefore defined as an extreme recession that lasts 3 or more years or which leads to a decline in real Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of at least 10% a prolonged period of declining economic activity, characterized by the length of time which may last for two or more years, with monumental increases in unemployment, as well as decline in real Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of at least 10% in any given year. It is marked by a severe and prolonged downturn in economic activities (Liberto, 2021; National Bureau of Economic Research, 2021). Depressions are relatively less frequent than milder recessions and tend to be accompanied by high unemployment rates and low inflation. Since Nigeria has moved from recession to depression, this paper addresses environmental challenges and sustainable family living in a depressed economy with focus on:

i) Economic viability, environmental protection and social equity.
ii) Ageing challenges in a depressed economy.
iii) Unemployment, job creation and sustainable skill development.
iv) Social Media, ICT and sustainable skill development.
v) Rape and sustainable family living in a depressed economy

Economic Viability

Viability is considered as a measure of the likely success of a particular action or set of actions. An assessment of economic viability is an evaluation of the various economic effects that may result from the completion of a particular project. This assessment assists decision makers to decide whether a project is feasible or not. The main method for assessment of economic viability of a project is a Cost

Benefit Analysis (CBA). Cost and benefits are expressed as far as possible in monetary terms so that they can be compared on an equal level. A project is assessed as economically viable if the project benefits exceed the project costs. (https://www.hydrosustainability.org.)

According to Azapagic and Perdan, (2000) and Bioresource Technology (2020), economic viability can also be assessed using relevant indicators such as total value added in the economy, trade balances, foreign investments, changes in overall productivity, business opportunities, long term profitability, energy diversity, project durability, and research and development. In ensuring economic viability in business for sustainable family living, the underlisted should be taken into consideration:

i) Uniqueness in business idea: seek to create a difference; Have a strong unique concept, a clear identity, well defined.
ii) Upstart funds; determine upstart funds and means of financing the business.
iii) Customer - Who will make up the customers/clients? Define the target customers, create a distinct profile.
iv) Competition: Businesses always have competitors, identify and cheek them out and be equipped to outdo the competitors. Always aim at being different, have an edge over others, outsmart all competitors.
v) Economic Mood: consider the state of the economy and how it relates to the upstart; Economic downturn for example, Covid-19 can create an avenue for the upstart of a business such as Point of Sale Terminal (POS).
vi) Timing: This is- very important in business startup as some businesses may be seasonal such as eateries in university environment. Consider diversification.
vii) Marketing: Develop a marketing strategy as a follow up to identification of customers. The internet has been extremely useful in marketing; use online platforms, friends and families, home/office deliveries.
viii) Continuous cash flow: Ensure proper financial planning and management to be a successful entrepreneur for years to come.

Environmental Protection

Environmental protection can be defined as the prevention of unwanted changes to ecosystems and their constituent parts (Jorgensen and Faith, 2019). It focuses on:

i) problems arising from the interaction between humans and environmental systems and includes issues related to conservation, pollution, loss of biodiversity, land degradation or environmental policy.
ii) preventing the degradation of the natural environment which is affected by increasing population, technology and overconsumption, all of which have created a negative impact on the environment and continue to put humans and animals to risk.
iii) resource management - the way humans interact with the natural world to protect and preserve natural ecosystems. This involves considering ethical, economic and ecological variables to limit environmental degradation.

Functions of Environmental Protection

Environmental Protection helps to preserve the diversity of species that share

the planet for the benefit of nature and people. A healthy biodiversity means clean air, fresh water, productive soil, the ability to recover quickly from natural disasters and the capacity to adapt easily to a changing climate. Some environmental degradations are irreversible or may take many decades to fix and can be dangerous to both humans and animals.

Certain measures can be adopted to protect the earth such as: the concept of 3 basic Rs (Reduce, Reuse and Recycle) (https: www.solarschools.net). Reduce has to do with minimizing the amount of waste created; Reuse involves using items more than once, while recycle involves putting a product to a new use instead of throwing it away. Environmental protection for sustainable family living necessitates families advancing from the 3Rs to the 5Rs thus employing Rethink and Recover. Rethink is about considering how individual's actions affect the environment while recover refers to the practice of putting waste products to use (Laseter, Ovichinnikov and Raz, 2010). In addition, family members should be educated to understand the importance and value of natural resources including planting trees to provide food and oxygen as well as save energy; clean the air and combat climate change.

Social Equity

Social equity is one of the challenges that threaten the fabric of human existence and sustainability in today's world globally, and in Nigeria specifically. Social equity in a lay man's sense refers to impartiality, fairness, and justice for all people (International City/County Management Association, 2021). It is the active commitment to fairness, justice, and equity in the formulation of public policies, distribution of public services, implementation of public policies, and management of all institutions serving the public directly or by contract (Johnson and Svara, 2011; Wooldridge and Bilharz, 2021). It implies acknowledging the fact that systematic inequalities should be considered to guarantee individuals equal access, opportunities and outcomes in every sphere of life and development. It is a known fact that inequalities exist in families and communities, but equity works to eliminate them. Irrespective of factors like gender, socio-economic status or physical and mental disabilities, families should work towards eliminating disparities. Equity should therefore be used to build a structure that guarantees fair distribution of family resources. The concept of social equity has been applied to many contexts such as health, education, and environmentalism amongst others with relevance to individuals and families.

People sometimes use equity and equality interchangeably, however the two terms have similar meanings to an extent, but the concepts are not the same. Equality involves treating all individuals the same whereas, equity ensures that all individuals have comparable fairness, justice and access to family resources always. In essence, equity levels the playing field so that it is possible for all individuals to enjoy healthy complete lives (Brandeis University, 2021). For sustainable family living in a depressed economy, key players (parents, children, grandparents and heads of households) and stake holders (parents, government and non-governmental organizations, religious bodies and institutions) in family development should take into cognizance the concept of equity and not equality in formulation of policies and distribution of wealth and family resources.

Aging Challenges in a Depressed Economy

Aging is an eventuality for every human being. It is a natural phenomenon that is typified by wear and tear that comes with daily physical, cognitive and emotional exertions. To the psychologist, aging refers to both physical and psychological challenges that occur because of maturation. Normally, aging commences from birth, however, it is mostly associated with changes that take place as an individual approaches middle age. Culturally, aging comes with a sense of pride; a sign of divine benevolence bearing in mind that life expectancy continues to drop drastically in Nigeria, the aged requires special attention.

Cadmus (2020) revealed that an estimated 5% of Nigeria's 200 million population are aged, 60 and above are therefore regarded as aged. This figure is expected to rise to 25.3 million by 2050. The psychological concept of individual differences also applies in aging. This explains why some people tend to age faster than their peers. This is often because of health factors, genetic makeup and the quality of care available to the aging individual. For the aged, provision of (short and long term) care is vital. The World Health Organization, (WHO, 2017) asserted that long term care includes "the series of activities undertaken by others to ensure that individuals at risk of significant loss of capacity can maintain a level of functionality that is consistent with their basic rights, fundamental freedom and human dignity. In the western world, providing help for the aged is institutionalized. Aging individuals in the developed nations have access to nurses, therapists and primary health care specialists who look after them. In Africa, unfortunately, same cannot be said for the over 200 million persons that are above the age of 60. This is definitely because of the huge gap in economic fortunes between Africa and the Western world.

Aging is a gradual phenomenon. It entails a consistent deterioration of physical, emotional and cognitive functioning. Some of the symptoms of aging include increased vulnerability to infections, bones break, decrease in overall energy, decrease reflexes, difficulty in motor coordination, declined visual acuity, weight loss because of loss of muscle tissues, some degree of hearing loss, urinary and bowel incontinence, greater risk of heart attack, stroke and gradual loss of memory. These symptoms make it difficult for the aged to function at optimal level. However, with proper care, the aged can still live a healthy life and may even remain lucid late into their 80s. As a result of the harsh economic realities in Nigeria, as well as the increased functional dependence, aged people experience various challenges which include financial insecurity, mobility, access to care, end of life preparation, long term health conditions.

In view of the symptoms and challenges of the aged in Nigeria, coupled with lack of institutionalized care the following strategies should be adopted for sustainable family living:

- Providing the aged with free/ subsidized and quality medical care.
- Providing the aged with mobility aids.
- Formulation and institution of social policies for proper care of the aged.
- Providing the aged with family support.
- Providing access to free gerontological counselling.

Job Creation and Sustainable Skill Development

The current economic hardship in the country is felt by individuals, households and business enterprises. To break even or make profits, firms attempt to minimize cost by laying off some staff. This has increased the rate of unemployment in Nigeria today. The increasing rate of unemployment in Nigeria has become a source of worry to the governments at all levels. Bloomberg (2021) placed Nigeria's unemployment rate at 33%. This report revealed that half of Nigeria's workforce is either underemployed or unemployed. This problem is further worsened by the fact that the nation's population continue to rise astronomically. It is estimated that by the end of 2021, Nigeria's population will hit 212 million (Worldometer, 2021). The consistent rise in unemployment rate and population increases paints a gloomy picture for a country that has suffered two economic recessions in four years.

The over dependence on job seeking continues to stretch the already saturated labor market. Tertiary institutions keep producing thousands of graduates annually and almost all of them are plunged back into the streets, hunting for paid jobs. This should not necessarily be the case bearing in mind that education equips individuals with skills on how to create value, jobs and solutions to societal problems. One would wonder why our graduates still struggle to become gainfully employed. This magnifies the need for a cursory look at sustainable skills development in Nigeria.

The need for sustainable skills development cannot be over-emphasized in a developing nation, such as Nigeria to achieve sustainable development. Sustainable skill development entails equipping individuals with the requisite skill set(s) that would potentially transform their lives and enhance their chances of becoming prosperous. The United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, (UNCTAD, 2019) succinctly explained that sustainable skills development could fill the mammoth development gap between the first and third world countries because it offers an avenue of regaining value lost in transactions with other countries, especially in exportation of human and natural resources. UNCTAD (2019) posited that developing countries mostly export unprocessed products which are refined and sent back to them at a higher cost. This has continued to erode foreign exchange stock and lies at the center of most of the economic problems of today. With sustainable skills development, the needed manpower for a robust economy built on manufacturing, ICT proficiency, and large-scale agriculture, will no longer be in short supply.

Sustainable skills development involves processes undergone to acquire practical knowledge that does not only solve an individual's immediate problem(s), but also guarantees the skilled individual's survival in the long run. They are classified as: strategic, process and practical skills (Turok and Taylor, 2006).

i. **Strategic Skills:** This class of sustainable skills is also known as leadership skills. Strategic or leadership skills involve the ability to exhibit sound judgment, out-of-the box thinking and leadership in problem-solving situations.
ii. **Process Skills:** These are skills needed to bring about change. Process skills stem from individual's personal characteristics. This class of sustainable skills are also known as "people skills" or "soft skills",

and includes the ability to negotiate, communicate, adapt and understand.

iii. **Practical skills:** These skills involve the day-to-day application of knowledge in creating value. Practical skills typify expressing the experience internalized by the individual over time in solving the various societal problems faced daily. In expressing practical skills, the technician, computer analyst, fabric designer, chef, machine operator, and sculptor apply their proficiencies in their areas of expertise in creating value which yields financial benefits for them.

To reduce unemployment and create jobs for the numerous job seekers, there is need for a collective effort by the government, institutions of higher learning, young individuals, students and the organized private sector to bring their expertise to bear on this endemic problem. The government through MDAs should formulate policies, empower youths with grants and subsidies for entrepreneurial ventures. Individuals and families should be encouraged to identify the sustainable skills that they possess and maximize such skills for sustainable family living in a depressed economy.

Social Media, ICT and Sustainable Skills Development

The social media, over the past decade, has significantly changed the face of digital communication. With the proliferation of mobile telecommunication gadgets, a large proportion of young people now have access to one form of social networking site or another. Facebook, Pinterest, Twitter, Instagram, Reddit, Quora and WhatsApp are some of the most used social media platforms in the world, with over 3.8 billion users worldwide (Digital, 2020). In Nigeria alone, an estimated 25 million users are connected to the social media, a figure projected to rise to around 45 million in 2025 (Statista, nd). Social media engagement is on the rise because it allows users connect with both virtual and "real" friends around the world. The applications also allow users share multimedia content from any location that has access to the internet.

Social media has been linked to various vices like cyber bullying, cyber fraud, child pornography racketeering, social media addiction, ritual killings and several adolescent risky behaviors (Soomro and Hussain, 2019; Vannucci et al., 2020). However, there are several opportunities to be harnessed by individuals and families. Social media as an ICT component is now explored by individuals and families as a tool for virtual learning in form of lectures, symposia, conferences and workshops, live broadcast features, facilitating the impartation of various kinds of skills with attendant and instant feedback from the audience. Lukman (2020) identifies skills that can be learned on social media to include:

i. **Basic and Foundation Skills:** These are primary skills that can be consolidated upon to acquire proficiency in other tasks in the future. Examples of these skills are active writing and ICT literacy, among others.

ii. **Technical and Vocational Skills:** These skills are referred to as hard skills which entail proficiency in tasks that require dexterity with the hands to fabricate and design objects. They can be acquired in both the formal and informal school setting and includes tasks in baking, clothing construction,

craft etc. These skills can be learned on social media channels like YouTube where comprehensive tutorials are offered in audio-visual form to subscribers.

iii. **Professional and Personal Skills:** These skills refer to human capacity development that involves engaging in mentorship programs and participating in webinars, virtual symposia, as well as learning from role model figures who have attained the zenith of their professions. These skills are inevitable for individuals who desire to rise to the very top of a chosen vocation.

Information and Communication Technology, (ICT) just like social media also offers a lot of opportunities to users. ICT subsumes social media, given the fact that social media cannot exist without ICT innovations. ICT provides opportunities that enhance skill development. Therefore, beside the numerous benefits of collaborative learning enhanced by social media, ICT also expose users to several soft skills that involve proficiency in the use of digital technology. ICT skills are very valuable as a result of the sweeping innovative changes in digital technology. Some of the sustainable skills that can be acquired in ICT include: website designing, programming, coding, artificial intelligence, computer analysis, video editing, online collaboration, etc. These skills, when properly harnessed, can provide an individual with several opportunities that are sustainable. When properly utilized, ICT and social media can create avenues for survival, self-reliance, professional advancement and sustainable family living.

Rape and sustainable Family Living in a depressed economy

Rape has been acknowledged as a global and national issue of great concern in recent times. Incidences of different forms and types of rape have pervaded the media which poses as a threat to sustainable family living. There is no universally acceptable definition of rape as various jurists and scholars have given different definitions to the term (Obinuchi and Izzi, 2016). However, Davis (2021) defines rape as forced sexual intercourse or sexual assault; sexual intercourse between an adult and a minor; it could be heterosexual (involving members of the opposite sex) or homosexual (involving members of the same sex). Rape involves insertion of an erect penis or an inanimate object into the female virginal or the male anus. Legal definitions of rape may also include forced oral sex and other sexual acts. Rape victims are faced with severe physical and psychological trauma, high risk of unwanted pregnancy, infection with sexually transmitted disease including HIV/AIDS and rejection by their family and Community. Many also experience depression, guilt, diminished interest in sex, breakups of relationships, obsession concerns for safety and loss of trusts as well as divorce and suicide.

Nature of Rape

Rape is classified in three different ways: by reference to the situation the rape occurred, by identity and characteristics of the victim and identity and characteristics of the perpetrator (Obinuchi and Izzi, 2016). The author listed the forms of rape to include.

1. **Marital rape** also known as spousal rape, partner rape or Intimate Partner Sexual Assault (IPSA) occurs between married couples. This type of rape is not

always recognised as being possible or as a problem, since marriage by description includes sexual relationship thus, many legal systems exclude the wife of the offender as the victim of rape.

2. **Date rape** or acquaintance rape: this refers to a non-domestic rape committed by a person who is known to the victim. Date rape may be distinguished from acquaintance rape since date rape involves a pre-arranged social engagement while acquaintance rape involves manipulated or coerced sexual contact.
3. **Gang rape** also known as serial gang rape, group rape or multiple penetrator rape refers to the rape of one victim by two or more violators.
4. **Drugs assisted rape** is a premeditated rape that often happens in an informal social setting such as bar, party or dance. Generally, the rapists doses the drinks of the victim with a colourless, tasteless and odourless substance that renders the victim incapable of resisting unwanted sexual advances. These drugs may be the central nervous system depressant rohypnol, gamma hydroxybutyrate (GHB) or ketamine
5. **Child rape:** This is a form of child sexual abuse. This comes in many different forms for instance when the perpetrator is another child (usually older and stronger) it is referred to as child-on-child rape; when committed by parents or close relative such as grandparent's auntie or uncle, it is known as incest. Sometimes the child may be raped by an adult who is not a family relative, who could be in a position of authority over the child, for instance a teacher, pastor, religious leader, therapists amongst others.
6. **Statutory rape**: this is a sexual activity in which one of the individuals is below the age of consent and the victim is not forced.
7. **War rape:** this is a rape committed by military personnel, combatants or civilians during an armed conflict or war. It involves situation where women and girls are forced into prostitution or sexual slavery by the occupying power.

Other nature of rape includes prison rape, payback rape (punishment rape or revenge rape), Corrective rape, systematic rape, punitive rape, male rape and custodian rape. Custodian rape is rape committed by a person employed by the state in supervisory or custodian position such as police officers, public servants or hospital employee. It also includes the rape of a child in institutional care. Thus, the rape of women and girls by public officers whose duty is to protect such persons and is paid in such duties but who later turn around to rape those they are protecting or taking care of amounts to custodian rape. Some risks factor of rape includes insecurities, family living structures (living with an extended family member), divorce, living environment, cost and standard of living.

It is an established fact that rape has a deleterious implication on individuals and family development especially in a depressed economy where material and human resources are scarce resulting in incessant indulging in disreputable activities that militate against the norms of the society. It is against this backdrop that parents, community leaders, religious leaders, non-governmental

organisations and relevant governmental agencies should sensitize the populace on the causes, types and consequences of rape with a view to drastically reducing the menace of rape in Nigeria.

Conclusion and Recommendations

In conclusion, it is globally an established fact that the human environment is facing serious challenges both physically and psychologically. These challenges pose serious threats to sustainable family living. Concerted efforts must be made by all stakeholders such as individuals, heads of households, family members, corporate and religious bodies, non-governmental organisations, traditional institutions and the government to ameliorate the hazard of environmental challenges on the individuals, families and the society at large. There is also the need to instil in Nigerian families the value for human life and safe environment through seminars, town hall meetings, the social media and other enlightenment campaigns.

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