

## THE ROLE OF SUSTAINABLE CONSUMER SCIENCES IN CONTRIBUTING TO NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA

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### ABSTRACT

*Education is the bedrock of development of any nation. Over the decades, Nigerian educational system especially in the public universities has suffered from poor infrastructural development and funding thus leading to demotivation of teachers as well as students. This paper discusses the role of Consumer Sciences in National development in Nigeria. It covers some national issues, consequences of poor education and Consumer Sciences as a well-rounded field for quality education and character building beyond academics. The importance of the field in human, social, economic and environment development and recommendations for possible sustainable education are also emphasized.*

**Keywords:** Consumer Sciences, Quality Education, Character, Development, Sustainability

## 1.0 National Issues in Nigeria

Nigeria though regarded as the giant of Africa is a nation faced with many challenging issues which include:

**Social issues:** With rising insecurity, Nigeria is regarded as the 16<sup>th</sup> least peaceful country in the world (GPI, 2021). Violent conflict such as religious, farming-herdsmen, Boko-Haram insurgency, kidnapping, raping and increasing divorce rate in families are some of the social issues amongst many.

**Economic issues:** These include poorly-executed policies and increasing unemployment rate of about 32.5% (NBS, 2021) which renders about 500,000 graduates jobless in Nigeria annually. Others include increasing crime rate, corruption, and devaluation of the Naira. We are a nation engaged more in consumption of goods than in production.

**Education and university system issues:** Poor government funding of public universities, poor human capital development, libraries with old books, poor internet facilities, inadequate infrastructure (such as office space, laboratories with obsolete equipment, epileptic electricity and inadequate water supply), poor learning environment and incessant strikes are some of the issues in the educational system. These lead to poor human development and result in production of *half-baked* graduates.

**Socio-political issues:** Poor and ineffective leadership, election-related violence, terrorism and lack of patriotism are some of the issues.

**Agriculture, Environmental and Health issues:** Food insecurity and hunger, climate change, oil spills, poor waste management and disposal, diseases (HIV/ AIDs, non-communicable health problems and COVID-19 pandemic) have been reported.

## 1.1 Ignorance, Poor Education and Consequences

*Ignorance or illiteracy* is the root cause of many problems and constitutes threats to the environment or any society. Moreover, poor education brings about lack of understanding, improper behavior and actions which negatively impacts man himself and his environment hence, posing threat to the world. Aristotle once said, “Education of the mind without educating the heart is no education at all.” Therefore, an illiterate is described as a person who is not just able to read and write but also ignorant about certain subjects.”

Many issues have been found to be interconnected (Bhargava, 2006). Illiteracy and poor education have been linked with effects such as increasing morbidity, high mortality, ineffectiveness, unproductivity, poverty, lack of growth and development.

## 2.0 Consumer Sciences as Well-rounded field for Quality Education

### *Family and Consumer Sciences as an Interdisciplinary Science*

Family Life and Consumer Sciences education is a field of study that focuses on family, work and the interrelationship. Family and Consumer Sciences is the study of nutrition, food, clothing, child development, family relationships and household economics.

Consumer Science can be defined as a discipline of understanding consumer choices, behaviors/routine, and preference in relation to products including media, packaged goods, communications, food/beverage and user experience.

It is a well-rounded field: it integrates Social Sciences, Physical and Biological Sciences, Arts, Humanities and Mathematics. A content-rich curriculum is not just a necessary building block for education but also for comprehension beyond the classroom. The curriculum content includes Career, Community and Family Connections, Consumer and Family Resources, Family Development, Human Development, Family Development, Interpersonal Relationships, and Wellness, Parenting, Childhood Education, Facilities Management and Maintenance, Consumer Service, Food Production, Food Science, Dietetics, Nutrition, Hospitality, Tourism, Recreation, Housing, Interiors and Furnishings.

### 2.1 *Consumer Sciences and Values for Character Building beyond Academics*

Education is not just about the ability to read and write. It is about knowledge and its application in meeting societal needs. Quality education ought to be well-rounded, all-rounded, balanced, and whole, that is, it entails; mental or intellectual, emotional, moral, physical, social, work, and financial aspects. It is key to eliminating all problems (Raman, 2019). It is the foundation to improving people's lives and sustainable development. It enables students to develop all of their attributes and skills to achieve potentiality as human beings and members of the society. It is what helps individuals to develop all their talents maximally and to realize their creative potentiality including responsibility for their own lives and the achievement of their lives aims. It is the process of facilitating learning or acquisition of knowledge, skills, values, morals, beliefs and habits.

Values have been shown to impact actions. The field develops the ability to think critically and creatively. It builds understanding and character, the ability to make informed choices or decision, better attitudes, behavior and habits, therefore better practices that bring about better results. Quality education has formative effect on an individual's mind, character or physical ability.

Character is foundational to growth and development. The seven pillars of character include respect, responsibility, integrity, fairness, care, citizenship and courage. Character is a key factor to success in life and in leadership (Ayokunle, 2015). When people gain better understanding, they do things in a better way.

### 2.3 Consumer Sciences from History

Back into its history as Home Economics, it advances in the development of its curriculum in the following order:

- Early 1900s: It was known as Home Economics with emphasis on cultural, ethical, social ideals and the scientific management, improving the quality of life, helping students develop critical thinking skills, and to improve lives and communities.
- By 1945: There was a curriculum update which involved community leadership, developing responsible family members and citizens, healthy and moral households, and productive and confident individuals.
- By 1950s: Career choices expanded to home care, production of food and clothing, parenting roles, managing families and community responsibilities.
- In 1972: The course opened to males and females and consequently increased men enrollment.
- By 1994, the field changed the name to Family and Consumer Sciences to reflect cultural and educational developments. Beyond home making skills, interpersonal and skill development in family, workplaces and communities, practical and ethical reasoning, economic values for effectiveness and productivity, moral and ethical values such as personal responsibility, social responsibility and respect for all people were incorporated in the curriculum.
- Today, it entails different personal development courses designed to help adolescents and adults learn about themselves, career and family responsibilities, life skills, orientation in life and career, adult roles and responsibilities, leadership in workplace, career choices, financial and life planning, and entrepreneurship. It meets diverse needs of populations from cultural, political, and legislative. This field has evolved with growing sophistication in research methods, specialization within the field, use of new technologies for dissemination of knowledge, advocacy for policies to protect families and consumers rights.

Consumer Sciences cover academic competence in knowledge and skills, employability skills such as critical and creative thinking skills, written and oral communication skills, problem solving skills, planning, teamwork, self-management, initiative, enterprise skills, resourcefulness, motivation, commitment, life skills, leadership skills, digital skills, and character.

It is what makes students grow, to be successful and to make a difference in the society. It is discovered that students who receive proper education are likely better prepared for life and careers because they develop a wider range of knowledge and skills necessary to succeed in life. High-performing countries excel because they exposed students to a vibrant, balanced education that teaches them to read and think critically (Jimenez & Sargrad, 2018). It expands the vision and creates awareness. It builds students into skilled manpower in line with the international labor market.

## 2.4 Purpose and Goals of Consumer Sciences

Family and Consumer Sciences contribute to a broad range of intellectual, moral and workforce development goals. This means it helps to develop right values and to develop character that will lead to lasting success in life. The mission is to prepare students for family life, work life, careers in family and consumer sciences. The nine (9) goals that provides direction for curriculum development in the field are to:

1. strengthen the well-being of individuals and families across the life span;
2. become responsible citizens and leaders for family, community and work settings;
3. promote optimal nutrition and wellness across the life span;
4. manage resources to meet the material needs of individuals and families;
5. balance personal, home, family and work life;
6. use critical and creative thinking skills to address problems in diverse family, community and work environments;
7. foster successful life management, employment, and career development;
8. function as providers of consumer goods and services for families;
9. appreciate human worth and accept responsibility for one's action and success in family and work life.

## 3.0 National Development and Scope

National development is a broad and comprehensive term which includes all aspects of development of a nation namely, social, economic, environmental and political. The scope includes:

- **Removing poverty;**
- Improving national income and per capital income;
- Developing **quality education;**
- Revolutionary change in **agriculture;**
- Developing transport and **communication;**
- Developing medical facilities;
- **Use of science and technology;**
- Preservation of nature and **environment;**
- **Improving economic** and living standards of the citizen;
- Enriching culture and promoting **sustainable development.**

## 3.1 Sustainable Education and National Development

Sustainable education is important to national development. The word 'sustainable' is defined as 'making something exist or happen for a long time' (Longman Dictionary); 'being able to last or continue for a long time' (Merriam- Webster); and 'meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of the future generation to meet their own.'

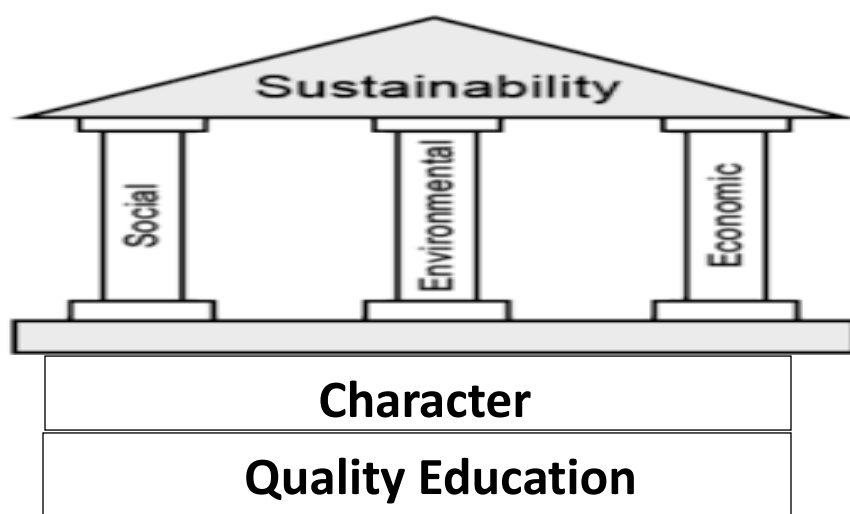
Education is important in passing on of values to future generations. Families, societies, schools,

colleges, universities and other institutions deliberately transmit its **cultural heritage** and its accumulated knowledge, values and skills to each generation through education.

Sustainable development rests on these three major pillars:

1. **Human/social development**
2. **Environmental development**
3. **Economic development**

The relationship between quality education, character, and sustainable development is shown in Figure 1.



*Figure 1: Relationship between quality education, character and sustainability pillars for development*

### 3.2 Consumer Sciences and Contributions to National Development and SDGs

Consumer Sciences contributes to human, social economic and environmental development. It will contribute to eight areas on national development in Nigeria. Table I shows how sustainable Consumer Education will contribute to national development and twelve goals of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

**Table I: Sustainable Consumer Education, National Development and SDGs**

Sustainable Education	3 Pillars of sustainability	*National/Sustainability Development Goals
	Human development	1* No Poverty, 2 No Hunger 3 Good health & Well-being, 4*Quality Education 6 Clean water & Sanitation

	Social development	5 Gender Equality, 16 Peace, Justice & Strong Institutions, 17 Partnerships
	Economic development	8* Decent work and Economic Growth 9 Industry, Innovation and Infrastructures
	Environmental development	11 Sustainable Cities & Communities 13 Climate action

## Consumer Sciences: Human and Social Development

### 3.2.1 Producing well-rounded quality graduates as leaders

Quality graduates are groomed students who mentally, emotionally, morally, socially and financially prepared to serve and lead. Leadership in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is not limited to a position but the ability to identify needs and add value, contributing, solving problems and making a difference in the society. Quality graduates as change agents can initiate and bring about transformation. They grow and adapt as a whole person. They make informed decisions and demonstrate problem-solving skills. They are hardworking and ensure good practices. They are creative and innovative to bring about technological changes that improve life of the modern society. They create job opportunities and are after effectiveness and productivity. They grow the economy through knowledge and practical applications. They live in harmony with other people. Quality graduates are able to contribute to the society's growth and progress, creating a stable and stimulating community. By sharing knowledge, educated people can impact numerous lives and make the individual lives meaningful, happier and prosperous.

### 3.2.2 Developing students for services through different career paths

The course prepares students to become professionals to meet nation's needs. Family and Consumer Sciences provide career options in Child Development, and Guidance, Consumer Education, Family and Health Development, Fashion and Textile, Food and Nutrition, Housing and Furnishing, Financial Management, Grooming and Leadership Development. Graduates find varied and wide career opportunities in business, industry, health, human service and education settings.

### 3.2.3 Consumer education and better practices

Consumer education brings about better understanding which leads to better knowledge, skills, choices, attitudes, behavior, practices, habits and life. People can be educated on one-one basis as in counselling for adolescents to groups training such as in body grooming. Figure 2 shows that consumer education can use different communication means including technology such as

radio, television, newspaper and internets to disseminate messages to reach different target audience such as sensitizing and training on food choices and nutrition, food and water safety, sanitation and good hygienic practices, quality products and consumer right.



Figure 2: Consumer education of different target audience

### 3.2.4 Research for development and new knowledge and technologies

Research studies by food nutritionists and scientists have solved problems or proffered solutions to food insecurity, hunger and malnutrition (stunting and wasting). They have also provided immuno-boosting products to address communicable and non-communicable diseases, new product development and food preservation techniques.

### 3.2.5 Household food security

**Addressing undernutrition:** Food fortification of locally-available and affordable foods address protein-energy malnutrition by supplementing or complementing cereals with available legumes. Locally-available foods are fortified to provide amino acid balance and develop richer foods. Maize-soybean, maize-cowpea, maize-pigeon pea or cassava-pigeon pea fortified products have been developed as breakfast meals, snacks, lunch or dinner meals which will impact food security, better nutrition and health especially for young children (Ashaye, Fasoyiro & Kehinde, 2000; Fasoyiro, Arowora & Ajani, 2017; Fasoyiro *et al.*, 2019; Obatolu, Omueti & Adebawale, 2006).

Dietary diversification of cassava, cereals and other biofortified food crops include vitamin A maize, vitamin A cassava, orange-flesh sweet potatoes for increase household food security has been achieved. Figure 3 shows examples of dietary diversification of cassava and pigeon pea.





Figure 3: examples of dietary diversification of cassava and pigeon pea

### 3.2.6 Better nutrition and health

**Addressing overnutrition:** Dieticians should advise on food choices as dietary concerns include overconsumption of calories, added sugar, saturated fats, salt intake, and underconsumption of whole grains, fruits and vegetable leading to health conditions such as obesity and other non-communicable diseases.

Better nutrition impacts mental (cognition), emotional, physical, social, health and well-being, outputs and economic productivity of the society.

### 3.2.7 Family and societal peace

Family life and Consumer Sciences as a field focuses on family and work, and their interrelationship. Challenges are experienced by people of all ages in their families, workplaces and communities. Through counselling, professionals in the field can help stabilize families and communities going through challenges. Professionals in the field can guide in making informed choices, in problem solving, in coping with stress and emotions, in conflict management, in leadership and management issues.

Students trained in these areas can be helpful in resolving family/ relationship issues, guiding and raising healthy and productive children, and they are also prepared to serve and lead in human engagements (Amato & Booth, 2006).

As a social worker, they can assist the physically challenged, the sick, the elderly, and the drug or alcohol addict. They can help in retirement planning.

## Consumer Sciences: Economic and Environmental Development

### 3.2.8 Entrepreneurial activities, job creation and economic growth

Consumer Sciences provide various entrepreneurial opportunities for self-reliance, to become employer of labour and to contribute to the economy. These includes food preparation, manufacturing, child care and elderly support, nutrition and fitness consultants, fashion designing, textile making, interior decoration, hotel management, hospitality services, event planning, and tourism and recreation. Increased Gross Domestic Products from *production and services* contributes to national economic growth and development. A positive relationship has been reported between crimes rates and unemployment (Kapuscinski, Braithwaite, & Chapman, 1998). With various work options for engagement, this will reduce unemployment rates and crime rates associated with doing illegal works. Figure 4 shows some entrepreneurial opportunities in food area from IAR&T.



Figure 4 Entrepreneurial opportunities in food areas from IAR&T technologies

### 3.2.9 Agricultural and environmental development

Urban agriculture is encouraged through home and school gardening, and subsistence farming. Planting of fruits of vegetables and food crops at household level have impact on the environment. Environmental health is improved through improved soil fertility, erosion control, improved oxygen which help in climate change mitigation. Good landscaping also beautifies the environment. Poor sanitation contributes to diarrheal diseases through fecal contamination of food and water (Campbell, 2015). Proper sanitation practices aid clean environment and the people's health.

### 3.3.0 Financial and resource management

The course teaches students to budget, manage personal finances and be accountable. A family and consumer scientist can guide in taking wise decision on buying and selling of products. Graduates can form their own marketing or consulting firms to assist businesses in understanding their consumers.

### 3.3.1 Poverty alleviation and quality of life

Quality education has influence on quality of life. According to WHO (2012), quality of life is defined as individuals' perception of their position in life to the context of the culture and value systems in which they live, and in relation to their goals, expectation, standards and concern.

Quality of life indicators include: quality air, quality soil, shelter quality, urbanization, communication, nutrition, health, education, economic conditions, security, social, and leisure/recreation (Dennis, Remwick, Brown & Rootman, 1996). Reduction in total crime, murders, rape, robbery, assault, death, divorce, hospital bed patients are also signs of better quality of life in a community. This also manifests in economic growth and development, reduced poverty, nation development, peace and prosperity. Family and Consumer Sciences will aid quality of life of individuals by contributing to the three pillars of sustainable development.

## 4.0 Sustainable University Education System

Sustainable university education requires

- Stabilized and secure society through effective peace-building bodies;
- Good governance;
- Close interaction between the universities and professional bodies with the government;
- Effective and sustained educational policies; and
- Partnerships within universities and relevant educational bodies nationally and globally.

Furthermore, sustainable Consumer Sciences requires professional and experienced teachers, consistent development, updated curriculum, quality library, well-equipped facilities (such as office space, state-of-art-laboratories, good learning environment and classrooms), better remuneration of the teachers, and proper mentoring and employment of departmental graduates for continuity.

## CONCLUSION

Sustainable Consumer Education is vital to equipping quality graduates and future leaders in competence and character to contribute to human, social, economic and environmental aspects of national development for growth, peace and prosperity. Potential students should see Consumer Sciences as a field of learning which provides wide employment opportunities to serve as either a professional or an entrepreneur.

The field should be made a high priority area for learning, support and funding because of its high capability to contribute to the nation's development especially towards addressing unemployment and character development. Sustainable education will also require stable and secure society, good governance, close interaction of the universities and FACSSON as a professional body with the government for effective and sustained policies, adequate and consistent funding, support and partnerships among universities and other relevant educational bodies nationally and globally.

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