Sustainability and inclusion from African perspectives

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Abstract

Sustainability entails a change in the exploitation of resources while maintaining essential ecological processes and life support systems, preserving genetic diversity, and ensuring the utilisation of species and ecosystems. Effective realisation of sustainability requires the implementation of inclusive practices, whereby diversity is embraced from the educational, economic, social, cultural, and psychological dimensions of human life and climate change. Commenting on the African perspective, the need to search for alternative solutions to Africa's development challenges calls for a critical examination of what sustainability and inclusion mean for Africans and how these can impact their lives in the 21st century. Sustainability and inclusion from African perspectives, therefore, raise concerns about the cultural, socioeconomic, political, health, spiritual, environmental, and socially responsible processes, underpinned by Africentric humanistic philosophies of communalism and socialism. The discussions of this paper posit a paradigm shift from Eurocentric scientific and pedagogical principles. In this light, the paper critically situates the significance of Ujamaa and Ubuntu, African philosophies to illustrate that sustainability and inclusion, are exemplified by harmonious relationship between the human being and nature. Nonetheless the changing context of Africa poses some new challenges for sustainability and inclusion within African cultures. Development issues ought to be people-driven, inclusively focusing on African values, guided also by relevant orientations from Africa's Agenda 2063 of "an integrated, prosperous and peaceful Africa, driven by its citizens and representing a dynamic force in the international arena".

Key Concepts: Sustainability, Inclusion, African People-driven Philosophy

Introduction

This paper draws inspiration from Pope Francis's many statements on the environment, human rights, and sustainable environment. His reference to a "family of nations" stressed individual and collective responsibilities 'to ensure everyone's rights, to access quality safe health and sustainable environment, especially for the future generations'. Sustainability is a philosophy with a driving force that guides the development process (Hogde1997, Jaaree, 2008), with its three pillars being economic viability, environmental protection, and social equity. Inclusion is a philosophy for harmony in human existence through how the human mind accesses the reality that underlies its existence. To bring about sustainable and inclusive change in the world's ecosystem requires a clear understanding of cultural diversities at all levels. It is important to note from the very beginning that each continent of the world and its various cultures could exhibit a degree of differences or similarities in the conceptualisation and implementation of sustainability and inclusion. Castáno (2021) and Tovar—Gálvez (2021) posited that each cultural group has different beliefs, actions, customs, values, priority goals, means, and intentions. Within the African context, as we reflect on the held perspectives, we must equally be cautious of the vastness of the continent. Nonetheless, what is true of all Africans, or the continent is its spiritual bonding and people-driven philosophy guided by their cosmological awareness, ecological connectedness, and ontology. Relationality and focusing on reality are the bedrock of African people-driven philosophy evident in the social support systems and a socialisation strategy that strives to nurture a socially competent person from infancy to adulthood and the unique preservation of the ecosystem.

The goal of the paper is to find out how cultures in Africa perceive and make meaning of sustainability and inclusion. Given that African philosophies are people-driven as earlier mentioned, it would be crucial also to know how African perceptions concerning the issues relate to their economic, social, and environmental realities. All of these would require clarifications from Africentric epistemology and ontology that speak to Africans' social needs and interest in protecting their cultural and natural heritage, as well as philosophies and knowledge systems guiding them. Specifically, the paper examines the following:

➢ The Concepts of Sustainability and Inclusion within African Traditional Philosophies: The Cases of Ujama'a and Ubuntu.

➢ The Changing Context of Africa and Key Challenges for Sustainability and Inclusion.

➢ Towards the Future for Sustainability and Inclusion in Africa.

The Concepts of Sustainability and Inclusion within African Traditional Philosophies: The Cases of Ujama'a and Ubuntu.

In this section, we analyse the concepts of sustainability and inclusion and substantiate how they are related to the African traditional philosophies of Ujamaa and Ubuntu. By so doing we therefore consider sustainability and inclusion as philosophies and thought patterns that co-exist within African cultures and can form the bases of social and economic prosperity, as well as environmental preservation.

The philosophy of Sustainability

Sustainability focuses here on valuing community engagements which is a bottom-up approach. It also addresses the implementation of inclusive practices, whereby diversity is embraced from economic, social, and environmental dimensions. The driving force that guides the development process resides in sustainability as a philosophy of preservation (Hodge 1997) within the context of the three pillars, which are economic viability, environmental protection, and social equity. Yet as evident, sustainability as an open concept has myriad interpretations with context-specific understanding (Purvis, Mao, & Robinson, 2019) that must be considered in the context of its application.

Sustainable development goes beyond mere human and capital investment to include a more holistic dimension to development that embodies an interconnection between the whole society and the use of natural resources. Our understanding of sustainable development is underpinned by the post-2015 agenda (UNESCO, 2016a), which identifies key terms and values for sustainable development. These include:

• **People, Planet, and Prosperity:** The '3Ps' are interdependent and mutually reinforcing pillars that represent the social, environmental, and economic aspects of progress for all life forms on Earth.

• **Good governance:** This dimension supports the 3Ps through responsible leadership and active engagement in both the public and private sectors. Good governance ensures peaceful societies and upholds human rights for the good of the planet.

• **Links and connections:** Sustainable development works as an organizing principle because it recognizes that complex natural and social systems are linked and interconnected. Changes that occur in one system may affect others in ways that result in something more than the sum of the parts.

• **Intergenerational equity and justice:** Fairness is critical to a world fit for future generations, where children can grow up to be healthy, well-nourished, resilient, well-educated, culturally sensitive, and protected from violence and neglect, and with access to safe, unpolluted ecosystems. Equity and justice are also required for diverse groups in the current generation.

Sustainability is not a new concept in African cultures. According to Kaniaru (1998), during the pre-colonial period, African societies had well-founded institutional arrangements for the management of common resources on behalf of the community. Institutions were organised in the form of kingdoms and chiefdoms. The African cosmo-vision provided both men and women access to living and non-living resources. Cultural taboos, norms, beliefs, and ethics guided resource management considerations that were in harmony with the environment. Hence there was harmony between the human, natural, and spiritual realms of life. The Indigenous institutions were part of

the community, and the resource users and the decision-makers were the same, working and collaborating in partnership for the common good of the communities. Checks and balances were put in place to guard against the over-exploitation of natural resources and to maintain a good resource balance. Conservation of wildlife was governed by traditional taboos and customs which succeeded in preventing indiscriminate killing of animals, especially rare species (Kwesi, 2023). African perspectives on sustainability and inclusion rely on knowledge that enables an individual to be well-rooted in his or her culture and traditions while remaining open to embracing the diversity that is brought by other cultures through modernisation and globalisation.

For Africans, the continent's realities should be visualized to be responding to its philosophical principles embedded in its family hood and self-reliance without which there will be no sustainability. This is exemplified within the East African philosophical doctrine of Ujama'a. Ujamaa means "family-hood' in Kishwahili. Nyerere (1977) proposed the philosophy of extending traditional values and responsibilities around kinship to Tanzania as a whole. The basis of the philosophy of Ujamaa was to develop self-reliance and sustainability. The principle of Ujamaa is that of social communism where members of a community are connected, and they share common values, beliefs, norms, and practices. Based on the principle of Ujamaa members of the community are connected and depend on each other for the well-being of the society. It is a social communal philosophy that holds that knowledge, ideas, or beliefs common to the African people would make them develop while preserving their environment and cultural values.

Ujamaa as a philosophical doctrine can be approached as an education for self-reliance and adult learning for lifelong sustainability. Nyerere s (1977) vision in "Education for Self-Reliance holds that education had to work for the common good, foster cooperation and promote equality among all men. Nyerere (1977) called for adult education to be directed at helping people to help themselves and it had to be a lifelong process that is integrated with life and inseparable from it. Nyerere (1978) outlined two functions of adult education which were:

ï% To inspire both a desire for change and an understanding that change is possible.

ï% Help people to make their own decisions, and to implement those decisions for themselves.

The philosophy of Inclusion

Inclusion is about equal opportunities, focusing on access, participation, and achievement (Kochung 2011 & UNESCO IBE 2008). Inclusion is a mechanism for harmony in human existence, through how the human mind accesses the reality that underlies its actions, practices, and existence. For inclusion to succeed, we need the valuable philosophical principle of togetherness to direct inclusive culture in practices. Suffice it to say here that the human mind knows universal ethical truths that are at the root of human rights, as well as political and economic freedoms. Inclusion is a philosophy because it instills a spirit of identifying and appreciating diversity in differences where equality is crucial (Aristotle, 2001, Kraut, 2022). Examples of belongingness needs include trust, acceptance, receiving and giving, affection, and being connected. To achieve this requires cooperation and collaboration as important ways to fulfill belongingness needs. From an African philosophical position, belongingness guarantees the expression of relational unity, which translates to unity as strength and guarantees a pragmatic relationship that is symbiotic (Onebunne**, 2020)**.

The concept of inclusion is expressed within Africa's philosophical thought system as harmony between the physical, human, and spiritual spheres of life. The physical environment influenced the content of indigenous ontology in that the natural environment is meant to assist humans to adjust and adapt to the environment to exploit and derive benefit from it in a harmonious relationship (Castle, 1966). The human/social environment is embedded in a communal and inclusive lifestyle whereby living together, working together, feeling for one another and collective judgments are key elements of the social order. Parents and other adults in the community ceaselessly socialise their children to etiquettes that uphold reciprocal ties. Other significant values are respect for elders and social hierarchy, sustenance of good friendships, conflict management, caution towards strangers, appreciation of social obligations and responsibilities, and above all, subordinating their interests to those of the wider community (Tiberondwa, 1978). As concerns the value of spirituality, Africans are notoriously religious, with beliefs in the Supernatural God, deities, and ancestors, having a strong influence on physical and human environments.

This inclusivity within African cultures is exemplified by the Philosophy of "Ubuntu" commonly practiced in Southern Africa. Ubuntu is a term derived from the Bantu Nguni languages of Zulu, Xhosa, Swati, and Ndebele. It is the equivalent of the Shona hunhu and can be described as a social philosophy (van Binsbergen, 2001). Ubuntu as a value system is not unique in Africa but the extent of its ontology is more profound than the common translation of "humanism." Ubuntu is often expressed as *umuntu ngumuntu abantu* that is "I am because we are." A person is defined by his/her relationship with others. One is expected in African culture to seek to realise the community's aspirations. The

community exists as an interconnected being; connected also to ancestors and nature, to a living world seen and unseen. The values that arise from this worldview are ones of communalism; cohesion; respect; generosity; mutual care; consensus and tradition (Metz, 2007).

Ubuntu forms the core of most traditional African cultures. It embraces a spirit of caring and community, harmony and hospitality, respect, and responsiveness (Mangaliso, 2001). It is further described as the capacity for compassion, reciprocity, and dignity (Bekker, 2008). The hallmarks of Ubuntu are harmony and continuity. It is about understanding what it means to be connected. According to Karsten and Illa (2005), the basic principles of Ubuntu philosophy are:

- **Communal enterprise and a shared vision:** The Ubuntu framework requires that education not only inspires a shared vision but also has a vision for the future that offers direction for others. Enterprise is communal, with the derived benefits shared rather than accruing to the individual. Outcomes for the group are more important than individual goals. At the same time, decision-making under the principle of Ubuntu is circular and inclusive. Polyocular vision, as opposed to monocular vision, allows for multiple viewpoints, and a diversity of perspectives. Differences in what is normal and acceptable are allowable (Maruyama, 2004).

- **Change and transformation:** Change and transformation are not strong components of traditional societies. Ironically, however, applying Ubuntu to education contributes to changing and transforming the world. Leaders search for opportunities to initiate change through people. Rather than being forced on people, change comes through a process of openness and transparency; people come to accept change. Decisions to change come by consensus rather than polling and the decision-making process is circular. The

process is iterative, and decisions are revised as many times as necessary before the final one is made. The community is gradually transformed to meet the challenges of a changing global environment.

- **Collectivism and solidarity:** Another principle derived from the concept of Ubuntu is the notion of collectivism and solidarity. The African social culture is collectivist, in which the needs of the community or society trump the needs of the individual. We can also think of it by way of the gestalt principle of organization whereby the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. A collectivist mentality encourages teamwork and a non-competitive environment. Such an environment promotes solidarity and a spirit of working together toward common goals and the good of the organization.

Ubuntu is a collection of values and practices that black people of Africa view as making people and their communities authentic. While the nuances of these values and practices vary across different ethnic groups, they all point to one thing – an authentic individual human being is part of a larger and more significant relational, communal, societal, environmental, and spiritual world (Kaunda, 2007). The underpinning policies and orientations towards equality and equity as indigenous Africentric ontology and epistemologies gave little or no room for social, economic, and political inequalities in precolonial Africa. The communal lifestyle of indigenous people was defined as the collective philosophy of living together, working together, and sharing each other's joys and sorrows. It is the nucleus of the African thought system (Wirdze et al, 2011). To commune is the way of life of the Africans, an expression of African solidarity. Harmony existed in each society as everyone respected his or her position and role in society. Living and working for the common good, advanced equality, and minimising all forms of inequality which perhaps did not exclude practices in the uneven distribution of resources.

Accepted both sustainability and inclusion are philosophies directing and governing practices. Ubuntu builds on the principles that the human being can only define his/her existence and essence with others and that knowledge is a product of social construction. These metaphysical and ethical principles foster the basis for building strategies for sustainability and inclusion The Ubuntu metaphysics of interconnectedness and epistemology of social construction pave the way for both social and educational inclusion of all to livelihood opportunities. Attitudes of exclusion though exist are rare and discouraged. Ethically, Ubuntu is underpinned by the moral values of equity and equality. The morality of self-interest is highly discouraged in favour of acting for the common good.

The philosophy of inclusion, therefore, reiterates that access for all informs that institutions have the potential to support anyone to have a full and worthwhile life. For inclusion to succeed, we need a useful philosophical principle of togetherness (Ubuntu) to direct inclusive culture in practices. Belongingness refers to a human emotional need for interpersonal relationships, affiliating, connectedness, and being part of a group. The *ubuntu* concept means "beingness" which is synonymous with valuing human dignity. Beingness is defined by qualities of the individual's participation in valued family and community activities." This is enshrined in the Ndebele saying: *okusilima sindlebende kwabo.* Meaning: *"No disabled person is seen as disabled by his/her kinsmen" (*Mpofu, Kasayira, Mhaka, Chireshe, and Maunganidze, 2007). A sense of belonging is crucial, as it provides a learning environment that promotes all-around development for all learners together in the same educational setting. Our

African socio-cultural background teaches the concept of family and relationality. These are found in African proverbs, folklores, myths, symbols, songs, and names Nyerere (1968), Kanu, (2022), Kanu & Ejem (2020). Helping each other based on the African philosophy of social support is a concrete attribute that is very African and of value to the perception of inclusion as a philosophy.

Considering Sustainability and Inclusion together

Sustainability and inclusion touch all aspects of human life, this is why both concepts are seen as philosophies directing resources equitably, ensuring their availability and where necessary affordability for equal access to sustainable holistic functioning including the availability of appropriate material resources ensuring wellbeing. Sustainability and inclusion are therefore two related 21st-century approaches to change, which have developed into a global wave of concerns, in the study of politics, resources mobilisation, and organisation around the twin issues of environmental protection and economic development (Ofori, Figari & Ojong, 2023). These approaches embody the notion and ideal of a development process that is equitable and socially responsive, recognising the extensive nature of poverty, deprivation, and inequality between and within nations, classes, and communities. It advocates that the world be seen as one ecosystem and in the economic development process, should include ecological and environmental issues as essential components of development (Aina, 1996). Sustainability and inclusion touch all aspects of human life, this is why both concepts are seen as philosophies directing resources equitably, ensuring their availability and where necessary affordability for equal access to the sustainable healthy functioning of cognitive, social, and moral skills including physical and appropriate material resources that ensure wellbeing. Such is guided by responsible decision-making to achieve social, economic, and environmental outcomes in all engagements and equitable distribution.

This calls for an education for sustainability that is full of hope and confidence because it focuses on the power of personal transformation and collective action, the degree of such participation ensures high-quality productivity where the resources will always be available to all. Advocating for education for sustainability places a high premium on people's cognitive processes by integrating thinking and action around ecological, social, political, and economic activities. The Ignatian pedagogy for sustainable development proposed a new model of Education to educate resilient citizens providing them with a new vision that is cooperative and humane (Leighter & Smythe, 2019). It focuses on civic education grounded in ecological, economic, and spiritual approaches to good moral ethics.

The Changing Context of Africa and Key Challenges to Sustainability and Inclusion

This section highlights the changing context of Africa beginning from colonial to post-colonial realities and how these have affected sustainability and inclusion. This calls for an analysis of the key drivers of sustainability and inclusion in Africa. Africa is undergoing rapid educational, social, economic, and cultural changes that emanate from evolving paradigms of colonialism, development, globalisation, digital revolution, the rapidly changing role of youths and women, urbanisation and changes in family structures, migration, mobility, and the role of the African diaspora. A critical reflection would illustrate dynamic patterns that underpin change and transformation in the continent and how these pose new challenges for sustainability and inclusion in significant ways, affecting the quality of life and access to resources.

The changing context of Africa

The institution of colonialism and the emergence of nation-states put African institutions, customs, and taboos in crisis. Traditional resource management systems were replaced by commercial interests. The resource users were separated from the decision-makers. Institutions that fit the traditional communities and their needs were destroyed by the colonial administrations (Kaniaru, 1998). Conflicts between African traditional customs and colonial values became the order of the day. Development strategies were based on Western models and geared to serve the colonial master rather than the Africans. In a nutshell, development during the colonial period was dictated by the political and economic considerations of the colonisers who regarded the natural environment as a free good to control and exploit it for their gains without any measures of sustainability (Kwesi, 2023). In this regard, Africans were alienated to observe persistent tendencies of general disrespect for life and humanity, human rights, freedom, equity, and justice, thus leading to most Africans being unable to lead decent and healthy lives in safe and sustainable environments, with opportunities for economic, educational, social, and cultural development.

At the time of independence, Since the 1950s, Africa had experienced a wind of change, underpinned by a drive towards political, social, economic, and cultural liberation of Africa from Western domination. Global, continental, and country policies were enacted to foster equality but moves towards accomplishment are still marred by negative spillover from the colonial period, neo-colonialism, and corruption. Shifting the battle from a physical battle to a mental battle with a new mind theory is an uphill task for policies in Africa. Nonetheless, African governments have not succeeded in changing the status quo left by the colonial administrations. Colonial institutions find their aspirations in independent constitutions as well as other legal and institutional arrangements in most African countries. Environmental considerations are divorced from economic development initiatives and these result in grave environmental problems: endemic diseases and epidemics, deforestation and desertification, severe and long periods of drought, shortage of water and fuel, in particular fuel wood, pest infestations and invasions, floods and general environmental degradation (Kaniaru, 1998). Africans therefore argue that indigenous sustainability and inclusion have been jeopardised by the formation of states that create geographic faulty boundaries that run across the continent creating unsafe environments, obstructing stability and thus sustainability.

Challenges to sustainability and inclusion within the changing context of Africa

Change within the African context means the reality of sustainability and inclusion cannot simply be construed from its original Indigenous perception. While African cultures seek to maintain their unique identities, they must face the reality of globalisation and the digital revolution which are crucial for sustainable and inclusive practices. The changing context of Africa poses new challenges for sustainability and inclusion within the continent.

The challenge of harnessing Indigenous knowledge into current educational systems

Educational practices are directed by relevant indigenous principles. For example, the principle of belongingness reflected in the African philosophy of Ubuntu is crucial, as it provides a learning environment that promotes all-around development for all learners together in the same educational settings and homestead. Our African socio-cultural background teaches the concept of family and relationality thus the focus on the holistic approach to socialisation towards socially

competent individuals. These are reflected in the communities' proverbs, stories, myths, folktales, songs, symbols, dance, names, and cultural amplifiers that are sources of Indigenous knowledge. (Nyerere, 1968, Kanu & Ejem, 2020). Helping each other based on the African philosophy of social support is a concrete attribute that is very African and of value to the perception of inclusion as a philosophy not well addressed in most curricula in our schools and even universities.

The Continental Education Strategy for Africa (CESA 2016-2025) in reacting to the Knowledge societies called for by Agenda 2063 which must be driven by the skilled human capital above also calls for quality and relevant education. Education was seen to have a key role in the realisation of sustainable development in Africa. It is therefore important to note that the realisation of the African dream (economic, social, and cultural autonomy), lies in mindset change and formation. In reviewing African perspectives on any issues of education, its content, and methods still being dominated by colonial policy, continue to hamper traditional education practices and values, which by its principles and practices enslaved the minds of Africans. Its practices and content denied Africans not just the lack of physical access to material resources but also the denial of access to relevant and authentic knowledge, skills, and attitudes that were originally theirs. Colonial powers used education as a tool to support their political and economic agenda which was to wipe out African Indigenous knowledge systems and what constitutes sustainable development issues as perceived by Africans.

Indigenous knowledge is a process of learning and sharing social life, values, histories, economic, and political practices unique to each cultural group. Amina (2011) postulates that the focus on African oral tradition is meant to acknowledge the richness of the tradition and its contributions to African philosophical thinking. The role of oral traditions and the communitarian approach to the education of children in participative pedagogies are all common features throughout sub-Saharan Africa. The value of Africa's oral traditions has not been appreciated by the West, yet we find in early history that Socrates is known for his oral arguments and questioning styles which he handed to his student Plato. African Epistemologies are equally represented in skills in wood carving, beadwork, weaving, textiles, and rock art. The history and culture of people are represented also in their arts and crafts demonstrating complex skills of creativity through inspirational activities. Dewey's educational philosophy(1938) encouraged the development of observational skills which sharpened the development of perceptual skills for better understanding and functioning in children's daily lives in their developmental pathways. African parents have always encouraged children's observational skills. Accordingly, Africans are skilled and creative people who should not be driven to relative poverty by colonial legacy.

Economic challenges

Access to economic activities also remains a key factor in the accomplishment of sustainable development and experiencing equity in all aspects. Support for small businesses and credit facilities are of immense value, especially for women and youths. Most often the tax culture is traumatising. Poor education offerings could also be attributed to inappropriate financing of education for access, equality, and equity is paramount in eradicating economic, social, and political inequalities in Africa. Investing in education programmes that are contextually relevant for developing appropriate skills would support access to better livelihood opportunities. With the government's inadequate spending on education in Africa, much

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is left in the hands of the private sector as well as international donors who dictate educational policies and curriculum development in their favour, hence educational systems miss important contextual values for effective inclusion and economic sustainability.

Social challenges

African education addressed self-reliant skills making learners and persons, job creators rather than job seekers. The focus was on education not schooling which reproduces inequality in all its dimensions and perpetuates exclusion where the African Ubuntu, Ujamaa, and Ukama sub-philosophies of Ubuntu upheld and still uphold, responding clearly to rights and social justice.

The issue of inclusion for resource distribution and access may not be limited only to those with disability. As is recognized in the 2030 Agenda, attributes such as age, gender, ethnicity, race, religion, language, orphans, street children, poverty, and migration status continue to affect the risk of being left behind in both rich and poor countries and preclude the full participation of some groups in society.

According to the World Report on Disability, the unemployment rate among people with disabilities is twice the level of the non-disabled population in developed countries, while in developing countries more than 80% of people with disabilities are estimated to be under-employed (UNICEF, 2012). In Cameroon for example, 262,119 people are living with at least one disability, giving a prevalence rate of 1.5 % of the entire population (NCHRF, 2016). At least 46,5% are employed, with most of them doing independent jobs. (NCHRF, 2016).

Gender equality is paramount as Africa strives to achieve its Agenda 2063 and SDGs to guarantee economic, social, and political development

(Diop, 2015). Female labour force participation is high in Africa, except for North Africa. In countries such as Tanzania and Rwanda, women's employment rates are as high as 85-90%. In Nigeria, the rates are almost equal to that of men (ADB, 2015). At face value, one may be tempted to think that women are equally employed in Africa, but further statistical analysis reveals striking segregation in labour markets. Women work primarily in low-paying occupations. Furthermore, they are far more likely to be self-employed in the informal sector than earning a wage via formal employment.

In Cameroon for instance, the World Bank (2015) report indicates that the labour force participation rate (15-64 years old) in 2013 was 71% on average, 77% for men, and 65% for women. According to the National Gender Policy Document, people in formal employment are 53% of the population of Cameroon, and it is, 61% of men and 45% of women. Women account for 44% of the lowest job rank (category D: non-skilled or assistant jobs) in public institutions, but only 17% in the highest rank (category A2: directors). In the private sector, 1.6% of male workers and 0.7% of female workers are in managerial positions. It is estimated that women account for 55% of workers in the informal sector. According to World Bank data, Cameroon's estimated annual Gross National Income per capita was 3,341 dollars for men and 2,266 dollars for women (about 68% of men) in 2014. Regarding child labour, 8.6% of children (8.0% of boys and 9.1% of girls) between six to 14 years old are working. The percentage of children in labour is 12.6% in rural areas and 2.4% in the cities (World Bank, 2015). Though the statistics are old, they give an idea of what had been and what could still be as the social, economic, and political landscape is still facing challenges.

Despite the African Union's 50:50 parity campaigns, as illustrations, only Rwanda has met and surpassed the target, with an overall score of 12 percent. South Africa is in second place with 41.5 percent of parliamentary seats occupied by women, with a similar share of ministerial positions. In Cameroon, the percentage of female representation in the National Assembly is 31.1 percent. In the 100-member Senate, there were twenty-one female pioneer Senators elected during the April 2013 election, and the others were appointed by the President of the Republic. Women constitute 52 percent of the country's population yet, according to official figures, women account for just 30 percent of the seven million people registered to vote in the 2013's polls (Kendemeh, 2018). From the above, gender equality in education still poses a problem for most African countries.

Cultural challenges

Integrating all facets of development in education entails the training of citizens who are well-grounded in African cultural values, yet open to constructive inputs from other cultures. Respect for life and human dignity, equal rights and social justice, cultural and social diversity, and a sense of human solidarity and shared responsibility for our common future are important humanistic values that should be integrated into educational systems (UNESCO, 2015). A humanistic vision is enshrined in the pan-Africanist conceptualisation of Ubuntu which is an indigenous African concept of communalism that has philosophical, psychological, and ethical underpinnings. It carries the denotation of interconnectedness and interdependence, humaneness, and belongingness. Hence, by the philosophy of Ubuntu, no one irrespective of gender, disability, ethnicity, or religion is left behind, excluded, or discredited. Ubuntu is considered an African humanistic theory.

Policy, Governance, and Accountability challenges

The mixture of indigenous political systems and various forms of post-colonial political systems pose a serious challenge to governance and accountability. The challenge is not only limited to governance but also to the actual process of managing and being accountable. Centralised systems of governance, characterised by top-down hierarchical management are regarded to be abusive, corrupt, and unaccountable to citizens (Mbate, 2017). It demonstrates that neo-colonial practices are still plagued with inequality practices. Apart from Ethiopia, Lesotho, Nigeria, and Tanzania having parliamentary and federal constitutions, most English-speaking and French-speaking countries are either presidential or semi-presidential unitary republics that are sometimes contradictory to Indigenous political systems where power was not usually concentrated on a few and there was regular consultations, good governance, and accountability.

The continent has been home to notorious authoritarian and repressive regimes. The quality of governance, as represented by the political measures of accountability and stability, rule of law, corruption control, regulatory quality, and government effectiveness is almost absent in some countries (Aliu, 2014). Countries like Botswana, Namibia, and Ghana have continued to make steady and appreciable progress in the sphere of development and governance (Aliu, 2014). This is reflected in the continent's Fragility Index (2017) where Zimbabwe, Cameroon, Ethiopia, and Uganda had a more than 95% score of fragility while Ghana, Seychelles, and Botswana were below 60%. This explains the prevalence of colonial influence where sustainability and inclusion would still face great challenges.

There is a need for a bottom-up decentralised system of government, where civil society, local

governments, and the central governments can establish an effective partnership to guide quality, equity-processes. Even though most African political systems have some form of local government, these are not always given the powers to exercise their duties, and hence, there are difficulties in sustainability and inclusion. For governments to monitor and enforce adequate performance in all these intrinsically different areas, strong regulatory and management capacity is needed. Considering the limitation of public resources in the provision of education in Africa, there is a need to create an enabling environment to mobilise private sector resources to augment public resources for educational and development activities (Verger & Moschetti, 2017).

Towards the Future for Sustainability and Inclusion in Africa

Africa today is experiencing religious, economic, and cultural challenges. Today demographic changes, create the collapse of traditional cultures, weakening traditional authority. The current population increase creates instability and pressure, on land and natural resources. Other challenges are unemployment, inappropriate government policies influencing suppression, oppression, exploitation, and discrimination. Added to these is the mismanagement of public coffers. Inequalities existing create political instability and economic failure can weaken the state. Refugees put pressure on local natural resources, heighten social tensions, and create instability in the host community. The whole context of development must be examined critically, thus a holistic approach to developmental concerns. Where there is no peace there can be no sustainable development or even inclusion (Michailof, Kostner, Devictor, 2002).

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), besides SDG 4, (Quality Education), SDG 5,

(Gender Equality), SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth), and 10 (Reduced Inequalities); SDG 16 addresses Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions; "peaceful society" which should promote interpersonal understanding and respect. Learning is enhanced in an enabling environment that embraces all. The African Union Commission in its 2063 agenda for the continent calls for "an integrated, prosperous and peaceful Africa, driven by its citizens and representing a dynamic force in the international arena". The link between the SDGs and Agenda 2063 is clear from the first and sixth aspirations: In the first aspiration (pages 2-4), it states. "We want a prosperous Africa based on inclusive growth and sustainable development, healthy and nourished citizens, and a three-fold increase in food and agriculture. The holistic nature of this aspiration would require drastic change towards a positive mindset that is growth, and transformative vision. The sixth aspiration (pages 7-9) focused on the fact that Africa's hope to achieve sustainable development resides in the potential of women and youths. Ighobor, (2015) comments on Pope Francis's hope for Africa as concerns the achievement of development and reiterates his view on the unfortunate fact that women and youths are the most neglected and vulnerable groups. Africa does not have to rely too heavily on donor funds as these dictate the goals.

Africa aspires that by 2063, the continent shall be a prosperous continent, with the means and resources to drive its development, with sustainable and long-term stewardship of its resources and where:

• African people have a high standard of living, and quality of life, sound health, and well-being.

• Well-educated and skilled citizens, underpinned by science, technology, and innovation for a knowledge society are the norm

and no child misses school due to poverty or any form of discrimination.

• Cities and other settlements are hubs of cultural and economic activities, with modernized infrastructure, and people have access to affordable and decent housing including housing finance together with all the necessities of life such as water, sanitation, energy, public transport, and ICT.

• Economies are structurally transformed to create shared growth, decent jobs, and economic opportunities for all.

• Modern agriculture for increased production, productivity, and value addition contributes to the farmer and national prosperity and Africa's collective food security; and

• Africa's unique natural endowments, its environment, and ecosystems, including its wildlife and wild lands are healthy, valued, and protected, with climate-resilient economies and communities.

Within the framework of Africa's agenda 2063 for sustainability and inclusion, Africans must assume the responsibility of initiating and bringing peace to Africa. Attributing responsibility for change to Africans by Africans would not only influence their self-concept but also motivate them to succeed in the quest for peace. Continuous attributions of Africa's ills to colonialism or interference from the West and North America influence what Africans can do. How they perceive problems determines the basis for value judgments (Weiner, 1984). Culture is important because it structures the way people perceive situations, their effects, and the range of choices they consider when approaching conflict. The cultural setting and its resources shape the mind and determine its scope (Tchombe, 2009). The African mind is yet to be addressed in the educational process. Colonial education though provided a base for formal education and values, missed out in relating these, to norms and

values treasured in the African cultural scripts based on their ethno-theories.

At the macro-level therefore, policies and organisational structures as well as culture, values, and meanings shared, play significant roles in the belief systems and behaviour patterns of people in their respective communities. These have always influenced the social support system in all communities. Within the community, the partnership must be developed with members of the local community, traditional elders, religious leaders, community-based groups, neighbourhood associations, and traditional groups at all levels. There are also the village council and village-level bodies. Civil society also can contribute in a significant way to any intervention programme. The range of partners are professional groups, NGOs, the Private sector, the media, and academics.

The narratives above demonstrates that the creation and dissemination of knowledge and research on Africa should be informed by Africans' conception of their ontology (the nature of reality and knowledge) and epistemology (the ways by which knowledge is acquired and used) (Narh, 2013). Africentric ontology and the nature of reality from which knowledge can be created embody the physical, human, and spiritual cosmo-vision where these spheres of reality co-exist in a hierarchical order to create bodies of knowledge within the African context (Wirdze et al, 2011). Africentric epistemologies and indigenous beliefs about the learning process within African cultures are that learning is holistic, informal, and spiritual (Tchombe, Nsamengang & Lah lo-oh, 2013). These held views must inform perspectives on adopting and implementing the colonial vision.

In a contemporary world, marked by technological advancement and globalisation, the African culture stands at risk of being assimilated by other

world cultures. Despite its rich natural resources, Africa remains an underdeveloped continent. Africa must therefore rethink its formal, non-formal, and informal educational values to be able to match its Indigenous and traditional values with these changing times and stand a better chance in contributing to rather than being absorbed by globalisation.

The calls for an established link between education and sustainable development and a critique of the past and current global and regional policies on education concerning Africa are urgent. The urgency is because international and national policy positions have focused on individual growth, human rights perspectives, and human capital to establish a positive correlation between education and development. This cannot be the case for Africa. Moreover, in today's changing world marked by globalisation, development can no longer be a prerogative of a single country because factors within and outside a country can contribute to development (Ellen, 2013).

Examining African perspectives on the above issues is to find out also how Africans perceived inequality created by colonial practices through education and other economic and social policies. Anderson, Conway, McKay, O'neil, and Piron (2003) postulated that inequality is a multi-dimensional concept that can be defined from the perspectives of outcomes and opportunities. Inequalities in outcomes reflect differences in educational attainment, health, and income. Africa's cultural values encourage the principles of living together.

Nyerere (1968) ensured that all should have equal rights and equal opportunities without injustice and exploitation. Nyerere (1968) felt education must work for the common good, foster cooperation and promote equality based on a philosophy that is people-centered and focused

on humanness. Kassam (1995) also reiterated Nyerere's view of education as "people-centered" and humanness in its fullest sense rather than wealth creation as was the case with the colonial masters. The argument here is that societies had to be better placed through the development of people. This stems from the belief that only man alone can develop and liberate the self. African holistic education's philosophical principles addressed self-reliance, lifelong learning, and inclusion. The mind was being developed and liberated through need-interest-driven education based on norms consisting of elements that liberate the mind through skills development. Developing the minds of Africans becomes vitally important because the reconstruction of Africa requires people who can through their agency bridge the past and future by developing new goals (UNESCO,2010). How could they when the colonial masters were still in control?

Conclusion

I conclude by positioning Pope Francis's statements during his visit to Africa where he addressed World Leaders and the African continent. He focused on climate change as critical to combatting inequality and social injustice, making a further powerful statement by emphasising the relationship between humanity and nature and calling for action to protect our "common home". The Pope's statement I quote presents a nostalgia, requiring deep reflections for all in power if sustainability and inclusion must exist "A selfish and boundless thirst for power and material prosperity leads both to the misuse of available natural resources and to the exclusion of the weak and the disadvantaged."

These bold narratives, yet challenging, point to the critical issues plaguing Africa, such as poverty, hunger, and inequality, tackling climate change, building resilient infrastructures, fighting against

tropical diseases, ensuring quality education and gender equality, and achieving universal access to safe drinking water and energy. The African perspective is that sustainability and inclusion actions must target all aspects of life at all levels. Critical issues are targeting and satisfying the biological, psychological, material, and spiritual needs and protecting cultural and natural heritage. Allocation of resources to economic and non-economic activities is desirable for a realistic approach to sustainability and inclusion all of which should engage the community in all its subgroups.

Local government action is critical to the achievement of the SDGs, as most services provided at the local level have a direct impact on SDG indicators. Accordingly, there is a need to inform policy action to strengthen local capacity to drive the SDGs agenda in the 'Decade of Action' (2020–2030) (Annan-Aggrey, Bandauko & Arku,2021). Sustainable development can only be achieved with effective mechanisms for the social, economic, and political inclusion of all peoples. Despite the economic growth registered by most African countries, inequalities still exist in terms of income, financial services, basic services, education, health, and political representation. Inequality poses challenges for education ranging from policy issues to governance, financing, and conducting informed educational research including classroom pedagogic practices. Any vision should consider the contextual realities of the continent based on its philosophical and ethical values forming the basis of sustainable and

inclusive practices that need to be integrated holistically into systems in Africa.

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