

Sustaining National Development through Healthy Living, Exercise and Fitness in Nigeria

¹Bala Mohammed Shira

gmail: balashira3425@gmail.com

²Bala Yunusa Tilde

gmail: balayunusatilde@gmail.com

³Sagir Abdulkadir

gmail: sagirabdulkadir74@gmail.com

^{1,2&3}Department of Physical and Health Education, Aminu Saleh College of Education,
Azare, Bauchi State

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Abstract

Sustainable development is a process that envisions a desirable future state for human societies in which living conditions and resource-use continue to meet human needs without undermining the "integrity, stability and beauty" of natural biotic systems. Thus, for any development to be sustained it needs more than the government efforts indeed citizens of a nation must contribute their quarter. It is also observed that, a person who is healthy and physically fit is an asset to his society as he is more capable of working tirelessly towards maximizing his productivity. A person who is fit is capable of living life to its fullest extent. Physical and mental fitness play very important roles in lives and people who are both, physically and mentally fit are less prone to medical conditions as well. This paper attempts to overview the concept of healthy living, exercise, fitness, sustainable national development and the relationship that exists among them. The paper provides an insight into various challenges confronting sustainable development in Nigeria and finally suggested ways on how to solve these challenges. It is concluded that, to become (and stay) strong and healthy, every one simply needs to move naturally, like all humans used to do not so long ago. Every individual needs to practice fundamental movement skills to develop a baseline of physical competence that is useful in real-life, tangible ways. It is recommended that, it is not only a biological duty, but also a moral duty for everyone to be equipped with the movement skills, strength, conditioning, and mental fortitude that are required to respond effectively to the physical demands of real life. It should also believe that nature is what we all need — the nature outside of us, and just as importantly, the physical nature within.

Keywords: *Sustainable Development, Healthy Living, Exercise and Fitness*

Introduction

Physical exercise is important for maintaining physical fitness and can contribute positively to maintaining a healthy weight, building and maintaining healthy bone density, muscle strength, and joint mobility, promoting physiological well-being, reducing surgical risks, and strengthening the immune system. Through these benefits, exercise increases life expectancy. According to the World Health Organization (2006) lack of physical activity contributes to approximately 17% of heart disease and diabetes, 12% of falls in the elderly, and 10% of breast cancer and colon cancer.

Worldwide there has been a large shift towards less physically demanding work. This has been accompanied by increasing use of mechanized transportation, a greater prevalence of labour saving technology in the home, and less active recreational pursuits. Personal lifestyle changes however can correct the lack of physical exercise. Research indicates that, integrating mindfulness to physical exercise interventions increases exercise adherence, self-efficacy and also has positive effects both psychologically and physiologically. The industrial revolution, marking the transition from manual production methods to machine-based manufacturing processes, began around 1760 and quickly generated social, economic, and cultural trends that changed the way people lived, worked, and of course, moved. As people became more sedentary, a new movement towards intentional physical exercise arose. This movement was given a boost in the 19th century from the rise of a nationalistic fervour in many countries especially in Europe. Staying healthy, fit, and ready to serve became a point of civic duty and pride (Tremblay, Colley, Saunders, Healy, Owen, 2010).

However, several recent studies have shown that oil and gas wealth is a paradoxical development ‘curse’ for many developing countries. Development problems such as poverty and inequality, low economic growth, conflict and high possibility of authoritarian rule has been associated with oil and gas dependent countries (Malina, 2010). In Nigeria, it is obvious that the benefits of the oil and gas wealth is been enjoyed by a few wealthy people, leaving those in the rural areas (including the areas where the where the oil is being extracted), very impoverished.

Fitness does not only refer to being physically fit, but also refers to a person’s mental state as well. If a person is physically fit, but mentally unwell or troubled, he or she will not be able to function optimally. Mental fitness can only be achieved if the body is functioning well (Colfer, 2004). People who are physically fit are also healthier, are able to maintain their most optimum weight and are also not prone to cardiac and other health problems. In order to maintain a relaxed state of mind, a person should be physically active. A person who is fit both physically and mentally is strong enough to face the ups and downs of life, and is not affected by drastic changes if they take place (Colfer, 2004). Becoming physically fit requires a change in life style as well. An individual has to incorporate a regular exercise routine in life and also eat healthier. By avoiding junk foods, fizzy drinks, bad habits like smoking and alcohol and by getting adequate amount of rest, an individual will be able to become physically and mentally fit.

It is in line with this background that, this paper overviewed the concept of healthy living, exercise, fitness, sustainable national development and the relationship that exists among them. The paper provides an insight into various challenges confronting sustainable development in Nigeria and finally suggested ways on how to solve these challenges.

The Concept of Sustainable National Development

Previously, the attention was basically on the concept “Development”. However, the Bruntland Commission shifted the attention by reshaping and modifying the concept to “Sustainable Development.” The most interesting aspect of sustainable development is the fact that it puts in to consideration the present conditions of people as well as not compromising those that come later. Therefore, the concept of sustainable national Development remains the modern parameter of measuring development. The Bruntland Commission, (1987) defined sustainable Development as “the development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of the future generations to meet their own needs.” In another definition by Munasinghe (2004), sustainable national Development is a process of improving the range of opportunities that will enable individual humans and communities to achieve their aspirations and full potential over a sustained period of time while maintaining the resilience of economic, social and environmental systems.

Age (2005), identified some objectives which sustainable national development is expected to realize: increase capital income and employment, promoting human welfare satisfying basic needs; protecting the environment. Considering the path of future generation, achieving equity between rich and poor and participation on a broad basis in development and decision making is important. From the above definitions, there are common phenomenon which they all shared; that is prioritizing the development of the present generation without compromising the future generation.

Healthy Living

Health is the level of functional and metabolic efficiency of a living organism. In humans it is the ability of individuals or communities to adapt and self-manage when facing physical, mental, psychological and social changes with environment (Callahan 2003). Generally, the context in which an individual lives is of great importance for both his health status and quality of his life. It is increasingly recognized that, health is maintained and improved not only through the advancement and application of health science, but also through the efforts and intelligent lifestyle choices of the individual and society (Huber, Knottnerus, Green, van der Horst, Jadad, Kromhout, Smid 2011).

The maintenance and promotion of health is achieved through different combination of physical, mental, and social well-being, together sometimes referred to as the "health triangle. Health is not just a state, but also "a resource for everyday life, not the objective of living. Health is a positive concept emphasizing social and personal resources, as well as physical capacities. People can improve their health via exercise, enough sleep, maintaining a healthy body weight, limiting alcohol use, and avoiding smoking. Factors such as clean water and air, adequate housing, and safe communities and roads all have been found to contribute to good health (World Health Organization 2006).

There are a lot of types of health issues common with many people across the globe. Disease is one of the most common. According to Taylor and Marandi (2008) approximately 36 million people die each year from non-communicable (not contagious) disease including cardiovascular disease cancer, diabetes, and chronic lung disease. As for communicable diseases, both viral and bacterial, AIDS/HIV, tuberculosis, and malaria are the most common also causing millions of deaths every year. Other contributing factors to poor health are lifestyle choices. These include smoking cigarettes, and also can include a poor diet, whether it is overeating or an overly constrictive diet. Inactivity can also contribute to health issues and also

a lack of sleep, excessive alcohol consumption, and neglect of oral hygiene (Huber, Knottnerus, Green, van der Horst, Jadad, Kromhout, Smid 2011). Many teens suffer from mental health issues in response to the pressures of society and social problems they encounter. Some of the key mental health issues seen in teens are: depression, eating disorders, and drug abuse (World Health Organization 2006; Bellieni & Buonocore 2009; Huber, Knottnerus, Green, van der Horst, Jadad, Kromhout & Smid 2011; Moffett, 2013)

Physical Exercise

Physical exercise is any bodily activity that enhances or maintains physical fitness and overall health and wellness. Physical exercise is important for maintaining physical fitness and can contribute to maintaining a healthy weight, regulating digestive health, building and maintaining healthy bone density, muscle strength, and joint mobility, promoting physiological well-being, reducing surgical risks, and strengthening the immune system. Some studies indicate that exercise may increase life expectancy and the overall quality of life. People who participate in moderate to high levels of physical exercise have a lower mortality rate compared to individuals who by comparison are not physically active. Moderate levels of exercise have been correlated with preventing aging by reducing inflammatory potential (Pedersen, & Febbraio, 2012). A lack of physical activity causes approximately 6% of the burden of disease from coronary heart disease, 7% of type II diabetes, 10% of breast cancer and 10% of colon cancer worldwide (Hu, Manson, Stampfer, Colditz, Liu, Solomon, Willett 2001).. Overall, physical inactivity causes 9% of premature mortality worldwide (Pedersen, & Febbraio, 2012).

The neurobiological effects of physical exercise are numerous and involve a wide range of interrelated effects on brain structure, brain function, and cognition. A large body of research in humans has demonstrated that consistent aerobic exercise (e.g., 30 minutes every day) induces persistent improvements in certain cognitive functions, healthy alterations in gene expression in the brain, and beneficial forms of neuroplasticity and behavioural plasticity; some of these long-term effects include: increased neuron growth, increased neurological activity, improved stress coping, enhanced cognitive control of behaviour, improved declarative, spatial, and working memory, and structural and functional improvements in brain structures and pathways associated with cognitive control and memory (Blair, 1993). The effects of exercise on cognition have important implications for improving academic performance in children and college students, improving adult productivity, preserving cognitive function in old age, preventing or treating certain neurological disorders, and improving overall quality of life (Disease Prevention and Health Promotion 2008).

According to Stampfer, Hu, Manson, Rimm and Willett (2000) physical exercise is said to decrease healthcare costs, increase the rate of job attendance, as well as increase the amount of effort women put into their jobs.

Physical Fitness

Physical fitness is a general state of health and well-being and more specifically, the ability to perform aspects of sports or occupations. Physical fitness is generally achieved through correct nutrition, moderate-vigorous physical exercise, physical activity and sufficient rest. Before the industrial revolution, fitness was the capacity to carry out the day's activities without undue fatigue. However, with automation and changes in lifestyles physical fitness is now considered a measure of the body's ability to function efficiently and effectively in work

and leisure activities, to be healthy, to resist hypokinetic diseases, and to meet emergency situations (Gillen & Gibala, 2014).

A comprehensive fitness program tailored to an individual typically focuses on one or more specific skills and on age- or health-related needs such as bone health. Many sources also cite mental, social and emotional health as an important part of overall fitness. This is often presented in textbooks as a triangle made up of three points, which represent physical, emotional, and mental fitness (Mackenzie, 2001). For instance, in America, Disease Prevention and Health Promotion (2008) suggests that all adults should avoid inactivity. For substantial health benefits, adults should do at least 150 minutes (2 hours and 30 minutes) a week of moderate-intensity, or 75 minutes (1 hour and 15 minutes) a week of vigorous-intensity aerobic physical activity or an equivalent combination of moderate- and vigorous-intensity aerobic activity. Adults should also do muscle-strengthening activities that are moderate or high intensity and involve all major muscle groups on 2 or more days a week, as these activities provide additional health benefits.

Regular exercise is effective for preventing the age-related decline in cognition and improving overall neuropsychological function. The increased synthesis of neurotropic factors in the body and brain and the resulting neurogenesis in various brain structures is largely responsible for these effects. Exercise also has persistent antidepressant effects and has been found to serve as both a means to prevent and treat drug addictions, particularly psychostimulant addictions (Disease Prevention and Health Promotion 2008).

Developing the Rural Sector and Non-oil Economy in Nigeria

However, several recent studies have shown that oil and gas wealth is a paradoxical development 'curse' for many developing countries. Development problems such as poverty and inequality, low economic growth, conflict and high possibility of authoritarian rule has been associated with oil and gas dependent countries (Malina, 2010). In Nigeria, it is obvious that the benefits of the oil and gas wealth is been enjoyed by a few wealthy people, leaving those in the rural areas (including the areas where the where the oil is being extracted), very impoverished. It is obvious that, prior to the discovery and commercialization of oil in Nigeria, the country was mainly wealthy through agricultural produce from each region of the country; the North was known mainly for groundnut and cotton, the south was known for cocoa and palm oil. The country was also producing other mineral resources such as tin and iron ore. But once oil was discovered, all attention shifted and people abandoned their farms for oil fields. Now agriculture has been left to mainly those in the rural areas and a few in the urban areas.

Given existing levels of poverty and the relatively low level of human development, it is vital that the non-oil economy and particularly the agricultural sector be developed as a matter of urgency. Strategies to develop the non-oil economy should focus on specific areas: improving agricultural productivity; diversifying cultivation; facilitating rural markets; developing agricultural processing; enabling marketing for crops with export potential; facilitating the growth of the non-agricultural economy, with the government and donors addressing current constraints and supporting appropriate and sustainable investments in specific areas. The rural development constraints that needs to be addressed includes repair and good maintenance of road for easy and faster movement of goods and persons, provision of good water within easy reach of every Nigerian, access to more sanitation facilities. Most

importantly, there is a need to improve the power supply in the country; this will encourage more investors, even from other countries.

One very important step that needs to be taken is that more investment needs to go into agriculture through the government and other stakeholders. In the area of education, health and fitness, the rural farmers need to be taught ways to improve their farming, provide them adequate health education and standard health care system, and also they should be provided with financial means of achieving this.

Healthy Living, Physical Exercise, Physical Fitness and Sustainable National Development: The Relationship

Having stated above, the various definitions of health, exercise, fitness and sustainable national development, it is imperative to examine the relationship among the concepts. In all nations, Nigeria inclusive, health and fitness are among the instruments for effective national development. Development is championed through healthy living and fitness, which is often assumed to have significant influence. Healthy living and fitness entail the ability of people to pursuit in life. Development is associated with a positive change in the condition of either individual groups, communities or even a country as a whole (Bologun & Umoh, 2002)

Healthy living, fitness and sustainable national development are interwoven, intertwined, and interconnected. While on the one hand, development is geared towards producing or creating something new or more advanced for the society and its members. On the other hand, healthy living and fitness are tools which can enhance the desired sustainable development. Bologun and Umoh (2002) therefore, refer healthy living, fitness and sustainable development as two sides of the same coin. The fact that healthy living, fitness and sustainable development shows glaring connectivity probably explained why it emphasized the need for being healthy and fit for the purpose of achieving the desired sustainable development.

Ebong (1996) stated that health and fitness deal with mental, physical, psychological and social development of the citizens in a given society. He further stated that “the goal of being healthy and fit is aimed at national growth and development. For any country therefore, to attain sustainable national development, he concluded that “there is need for skilled manpower and those skills required are basic ingredients for national development and can only be utilized when the citizens are healthy and fit as acquired through designed exercise.

Health and fitness provides ability to individuals in order to properly pursue their aspirations and yearnings. It is also mentioned that, it is only healthy and fit populations that can command skills necessary for sustainable economic growth and a better quality of life. Sustainable national development may therefore be seen as the target goal since it is meant for the society and its members; healthy living however is one of the instruments for achieving and attaining the target goal (Bwala & Koroma 2005).

From the above, healthy living seems to directly determine whether sustainable national development is going to be achieved or not and therefore, the need for an optimal well-being that will enhance the achievement of the aforementioned development.

Nigeria Sustainable Development: Main Challenges

Considering the calibre of the citizens and other problems like corruption and insecurity, Nigeria as a Nation has major challenges of sustainable development as follows:

- i. Reliance on oil and gas sector; dwindling agricultural production and productivity; and limited value addition in the agricultural sector to grow the economy creates jobs, address poverty and ensure food security remains critical challenges. Dwindling in agricultural productivity is mainly due to climate change; desertification; natural and manmade disasters; unresponsive land tenure and a general low utilization of mechanized farming.
- ii. Another major challenge is infrastructural deficit and technology gaps, which hinder service provision and application of science, technology and innovation in many spheres of life.
- iii. Economic recession in the country due to fluctuating oil price in the international market and the humanitarian crisis in the North East of the country present unique challenges to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals.

Way Forward

The following are some of the suggestions:

- a. Given the current economic recession, the country will need support in mobilizing adequate financial and other resources which can only be achieved through healthy and fit citizens.
- b. However, the country has advanced on curbing illicit financial flow and asset recovery which will enhance effort on resource mobilization and producing healthy and fit citizens for implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals.
- c. Technology transfer and capacity building among citizens on inter alia, data, information and performance management will be needed to support Sustainable Development Goals implementation.
- d. Every citizen of Nigeria must stay strong and healthy by engaging himself or herself into every fundamental movement skills to develop a baseline of physical competence that is useful in real-life tangible ways.
- e. Citizens also need to employ a realistic approach that is practical in both its practice and objectives, which people find enjoyable, that is scalable and progressive, that doesn't compulsorily require very expensive custom-made equipment, and that can be done in groups.
- f. Citizens must not only find it a biological duty, but also a moral duty for everyone to be equipped with the movement skills, strength, conditioning, and mental fortitude that are required to respond effectively to the physical demands of real life.

Conclusion

Healthy living is one of the cornerstones of achieving a sustainable national development. There is no doubt; achieving sustainable national development is the goal of all developing nations, Nigeria inclusive. As such there are the needs to invest, encourage and enlighten people on importance of healthy living, exercise and fitness.

The roles of government at all levels are to facilitate the achievement of any development. Government should continue the contribution towards achieving this sustainable development. However, the need for monitoring, supervising and ensuring that all the financial and other investment on health care services and fitness programmes of the citizens are not diverted for other purposes.

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