

KNOWLEDGE, AWARENESS AND PERCEPTION OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS AMONG AGRICULTURAL COLLEGE STUDENTS IN NIGER STATE, NIGERIA

Adedeji, Emmanuel O.^{1*}

Adebayo, Olaoluwa Ayodeji²

Chikezie, Jude³

Joshua, Deji A.⁴

Oyediran, Olorunfemi B.⁵

Onihunwa, John O.⁶

^{1,2,3,4,5,6}New-Bussa, Niger State, Nigeria

*corresponding author: oriobatemyl@gmail.com

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ABSTRACT

Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) addresses the global challenges we face and is related to poverty, inequality, climate, environmental degradation, prosperity, peace and justice. The goals interconnect and each goal and target must be achieved by 2030. The study contributes to providing insights into the knowledge, awareness and perception of Agricultural College Students in Niger State, Nigeria regarding Sustainable Development Goals. A simple random sampling procedure was used in the selection of the five hundred and eighteen (518) respondents. Primary data were obtained on respondents' characteristics and their knowledge, awareness and perception of Sustainable Development Goals through the use of a structured questionnaire. Descriptive statistics were used for data analysis. The results showed that the mean age and family size of students were 25 years and 3 persons respectively while 75.5% of the respondents were male. The respondents have a piece of good knowledge ($\bar{x} = 3.36$), somewhat aware ($\bar{x} = 2.91$) and neutrally perceived ($\bar{x} = 3.45$) the Sustainable Development Goals agenda. It was recommended that students should be taught and be educated on the Sustainable Development Goals through teaching, information dissemination media and campaigns to improve their knowledge, create more awareness, develop positive perception and help them understand their roles in the fulfilment of the ongoing Sustainable Development Goals agenda.

Keywords: Sustainable Development Goals, knowledge, awareness, perception, youths

INTRODUCTION

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) is the successor to the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and is widely known as Agenda 2030, regarding the end year by which the Sustainable Development Goals should have been attained globally (United Nations, 2015). The MDGs, while they lasted was a focal point of the world's developmental agenda and brought about novel and innovative partnerships and considerable development to both developing and developed countries (UN, 2015). The Sustainable Development Goals represents a more comprehensive agenda than the MDGs with 17 goals, 169 targets and well over 200 indicators (IAEG-SDGs, 2016). The Sustainable Development Goals involves a five "Ps" agenda: people, prosperity, planet, peace and partnership and these five "Ps" are for all countries and peoples of the world (UN, 2015; UNDP, 2015). Global consultations among various bodies/sectors including governments, civil society organizations, the private sector, scientists, academicians and individual citizens were made before the Sustainable Development Goals were put in place. Thus, the educational sector was not left out of its formulation.

The role of education (with Sustainable Development Goals enlightenment as to its central focus) is central to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals just as Health Education is central to Primary Health Care. The United Nations Educational and Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) recognizes that education is a major key to sustainable development with its statement "Sustainable development cannot be achieved by technological solutions, political regulation or financial instruments alone. We need to change the way we think and act. This requires quality education and learning for sustainable development at all levels and in all social contexts" (UNESCO, 2017).

African countries, including Nigeria, were reported to have had a very slow start to the MDGs and this was a major impediment to the achievement of the MDGs (MDG Report, 2015). Perhaps the slow start to the MDGs was probably not unconnected with the initial low level of awareness and knowledge among the populace. It is plausible that if the level of social awareness is high, various stakeholders from varying sectors can challenge governments to implement global development plans nationally. Universities are higher educational institutions often regarded as the ivory towers of learning, and thus, the level of awareness and knowledge about the Sustainable Development Goals must be explored in a university setting so that possible gaps can be identified and addressed. The university system is made up of lecturers who teach, students who learn and administrative staff standing as expedient support to both staff and students.

Regardless of the significance of this query to stakeholders, in any case as an apparatus of valuation, a reassurance or otherwise, little is known about it. So many issues, together with political, cognitive, psychological, socioeconomic and religions are certain to stimulate such effort. Until now, there is a dearth of study the knowledge, awareness and perception of Sustainable Development Goals of College Students in Nigeria.

Teaching and learning about the Sustainable Development Goals are thus important in the university setting, not only to faculty members and administrative staff but also to the students so that no one is left behind when it comes to Sustainable Development Goals. Thus, this study seeks to examine the knowledge, awareness and perception of Sustainable Development Goals of Agricultural College Students in Niger State, Nigeria.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The study was conducted in Niger State, Nigeria. Niger State is located between latitude 8022'N and 11030'N longitude 3030'E and 7020'E. Niger State was excised from the defunct North-Western State and made a full-fledged State in the Federation in April 1976. The three Colleges of Agriculture in the state were purposively sampled for the study. They are the National Diploma and Higher National Diploma awarding institutions. These Colleges are Federal College of Wildlife Management and Federal College of Freshwater Fisheries Technology, New Bussa. They were established in 1978 while Niger State College of Agriculture, Mokwa which was established in June 1979 as an arm of Niger State Ministry of Agriculture and Natural Resources. However, in May 1984, an edict establishing the College was enacted by the Niger State Government.

The population of the study comprised all final year students in the selected tertiary institutions. This included all the National Diploma II and Higher National Diploma II students in the departments related to animal production disciplines of the selected Colleges of Agriculture in Niger State.

A multi-stage sampling procedure was used to select respondents. A purposive simple random sampling was used to select 90% of the total number of the 576 selected final year students of the selected institutions to give a sample size of 518 students which was used for data analysis.

Data were collected on the respondents' characteristics, knowledge, awareness and perception of Sustainable Development Goals. The knowledge, awareness and perception of the Sustainable Development Goals construct were measured using 34 items adapted from Omisore et al. (2017); CSDS, SDO – MPI, UNDP (2018) and Ejechi

(2018). The rating used was based on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from "strongly disagree" (1) to "strongly agree" (5). The questions were worded to tap the level of respondents' agreement on their knowledge, awareness and perception of Sustainable Development Goals. To check response bias, a few statements were negatively worded and later reverse-scored. Data collected were subsequently subjected to mean score analysis.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Table 1 presents the personal characteristics of the respondents. The mean age of the students was 24.55 years old. This implied that the respondents were young people at their youthful age. A majority (73.7%) of the students were less than or equal to 25 years old. The mean family size of the students was approximately 3 persons. A majority (63.1%) of the students were from a family of less than or equal to 5 persons while 75.4% are male.

Table 1: Personal characteristics of the respondents

Variables	Frequency	Percentage	Mean±SD	
Age	≤ 25	382	73.7	24.55±5.20
	≥ 26	136	26.3	
Family Size	≤ 5	327	63.1	3.16±1.45
	≥ 6	191	36.9	
Sex	Male	391	75.5	
	Female	127	24.5	

Source: Field Survey, 2020

Table 2 presents the knowledge of the Sustainable Development Goals of respondents. The respondents have very good knowledge of Sustainable Development Goal 6 - Ensure access to water and sanitation for all ($\bar{x} = 3.91$); Goal 4 - Ensure inclusively and quality education for all and promote lifelong learning ($\bar{x} = 3.86$); Goal 1 - End poverty in all its forms everywhere ($\bar{x} = 3.83$); Goal 15 - Sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, halt and reverse land degradation, halt biodiversity loss ($\bar{x} = 3.72$); Goal 16 - Promote just, peaceful and inclusive societies ($\bar{x} = 3.71$); Goal 7 - Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all ($\bar{x} = 3.68$) and Goal 14 - Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources ($\bar{x} = 3.57$).

The respondents have good knowledge of Sustainable Development Goal 9 - Build resilient infrastructure, promote sustainable industrialization and foster innovation

(\bar{x} = 3.45); Goal 11- Make cities inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable (\bar{x} = 3.45); Goal 12 - Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns (\bar{x} = 3.38); Goal 3 - Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages (\bar{x} = 3.31); Goal 10 - Reduce inequality within and among countries (\bar{x} = 3.17); Goal 8 - Promote inclusive and sustainable economic growth, employment and decent work for all (\bar{x} = 3.05); Goal 13 - Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts (\bar{x} = 2.98); Goal 5 - Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls (\bar{x} = 2.82); Goal 17 - Revitalize the global partnership for sustainable development (\bar{x} = 2.60) and Goal 2 - End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture (\bar{x} = 2.58).

In all, it can be deduced from the results in the table that the Agricultural College Students in Niger State, Nigeria have a good knowledge of Sustainable Development Goals (\bar{x} = 3.36).

Table 2: Knowledge of Sustainable Development Goals of respondents

Knowledge of Sustainable Development Goals		Mean	Std. Dev.
Goal 6	Ensure access to water and sanitation for all	3.91	1.18
Goal 4	Ensure inclusive and quality education for all and promote lifelong learning	3.86	1.14
Goal 1	End poverty in all its forms everywhere	3.83	1.33
Goal 15	Sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, halt and reverse land degradation, halt biodiversity loss	3.72	1.10
Goal 16	Promote just, peaceful and inclusive societies	3.71	1.28
Goal 7	Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all	3.68	1.25
Goal 14	Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources	3.57	1.12
Goal 9	Build resilient infrastructure, promote sustainable industrialization and foster innovation	3.45	1.31
Goal 11	Make cities inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable	3.45	1.40
Goal 12	Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns	3.38	1.26
Goal 3	Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages	3.31	1.37
Goal 10	Reduce inequality within and among countries	3.17	1.36
Goal 8	Promote inclusive and sustainable economic growth, employment and decent work for all	3.05	1.33
Goal 13	Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts	2.98	1.34
Goal 5	Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls	2.82	1.52

Goal 17	Revitalize the global partnership for sustainable development	2.60	1.37
Goal 2	End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture	2.58	1.38
Grand Mean		3.36	1.30

Source: Field Survey, 2020

Table 3 presents the awareness of the Sustainable Development Goals of respondents. The respondents are somewhat aware that Sustainable Development Goals is also called "Global Goals" ($\bar{x} = 3.23$) and it's meant to end in the year 2030 ($\bar{x} = 3.14$). They have heard about Global Goals ($\bar{x} = 3.03$) and that Sustainable Development Goals was signed by 193 world leaders ($\bar{x} = 2.97$). They know what Sustainable Development Goals are all about ($\bar{x} = 2.89$), which are the 17 goals given by the United Nations ($\bar{x} = 2.86$) and was signed at the UN in 2015 ($\bar{x} = 2.86$). They are slightly aware of Sustainable Development Goals from attendance of lectures, seminars, conferences and workshops ($\bar{x} = 2.26$).

Overall, it can be inferred from the results in the table that the Agricultural College Students in Niger State, Nigeria are somewhat aware of Sustainable Development Goals ($\bar{x} = 2.91$).

Table 3: Awareness of Sustainable Development Goals of respondents

Awareness of Sustainable Development Goals	Mean	Std. Dev.
Sustainable Development Goals is also called "Global Goals"	3.23	1.04
The goals are meant to end in 2030	3.14	1.18
I have heard about Global Goals	3.03	1.52
Sustainable Development Goals was signed by 193 world leaders	2.97	0.90
I know what Sustainable Development Goals are all about	2.89	1.34
Sustainable Development Goals are 17 goals given by the United Nations	2.86	1.00
Sustainable Development Goals was signed at the UN in 2015	2.86	0.92
I have attended lectures, seminars, conferences and workshops about Sustainable Development Goals	2.26	1.24
Grand Mean	2.91	1.14

Source: Field Survey, 2020

Table 4 presents the perception of the Sustainable Development Goals of respondents. The respondents positively perceived that Sustainable Development Goals can enhance human development ($\bar{x} = 3.74$), not a waste of time for youth

involved in Sustainable Development Goals ($\bar{x} = 3.60$) and that the knowledge of Sustainable Development Goals is required by all ($\bar{x} = 3.54$).

The respondents neutrally see that sense for a shared global vision towards sustainable development for all ($\bar{x} = 3.37$), Sustainable Development Goals are achievable within the time frame of 15 years ($\bar{x} = 3.35$), not another means of embezzlement of government fund ($\bar{x} = 3.31$) and that the adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development was not a mere UN propaganda ($\bar{x} = 3.00$).

Generally, it can be concluded from the results in the table that the respondents neutrally perceived the Sustainable Development Goals agenda ($\bar{x} = 3.45$).

Table 4: Perception of Sustainable Development Goals

Perception of Sustainable Development Goals	Mean	Std. Dev.
The Sustainable Development Goals can enhance human development	3.74	1.30
It is a not waste of time to the youth involvement in Sustainable Development Goals	3.60	1.34
Sustainable Development Goals is a positive development for development continuity	3.60	1.14
It is a not waste of resources to the youth involvement in Sustainable Development Goals	3.55	1.35
The knowledge of Sustainable Development Goals is required by all	3.54	1.16
I see sense for a shared global vision towards sustainable development for all	3.37	1.18
The Sustainable Development Goals are achievable within the time frame of 15 years	3.35	0.96
The Sustainable Development Goals is not another means of embezzlement of government fund	3.31	1.10
The adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development was not a mere UN propaganda	3.00	1.10
Grand Mean	3.45	1.18

Source: Field Survey, 2020

CONCLUSIONS

From the results of the study, it can be concluded that the Agricultural College Students in Niger State, Nigeria have a piece of good knowledge, somewhat aware and neutrally perceived the Sustainable Development Goals agenda. Therefore, there is a need to teach students about the Sustainable Development Goals to improve

their knowledge, create a positive perception and help them understand their roles in the fulfilment of the ongoing Sustainable Development Goals. Furthermore, information dissemination and campaigns by educational institutions would help to increase the awareness and understanding of the Sustainable Development Goals among students.

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