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THE IMPERATIVE OF LEGAL RESEARCH FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Femi David Falade*
Oriola O. Oyewole**

Abstract

The universe is governed by law, and so is nature and the inhabitants therein. Nature has a way of recreation and self-sustainability to a large extent. It could however give way to pressure by certain external and/or internal forces. Man, is one of the major sources of depletion or cause of imbalance in natural resources. While humans rely on available natural resources for survival, growth, and development, the effect of utilizing and pressuring these resources now, could have on the sustainability of future generations, cannot be underrated. Sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.¹ Without any law regulating human activities, the arbitrary and uncontrolled utilization of natural resources could hinder present and future human sustenance. Legal research is a tool that can determine the appropriate legislation to control human activities concerning natural resources, vis-à-vis sustainable development. Adopting a black letter methodology, this paper aims to discuss the importance of legal research to sustainable development. The paper finds that legal research, if well conducted and articulated helps the policy or law makers to come up with laws and policies that will be acceptable to the members of the society with massive compliance and less need for enforcement.

Keywords: Law, Legal research, sustainable development, SDGs

* College of Law, Afe Babalola University Ado Ekiti, Ekiti State, Nigeria. ORCID ID: 0009-0003-9539-9842
Email: dfemif@yahoo.com

** College of Law, Afe Babalola University Ado Ekiti, Ekiti State, Nigeria. ORCID ID: 0000-0002-2186-6976
Email: oyewole@abuad.edu.ng

¹ Sustainable Development Commission; what is sustainable development, (<http://www.sd.commission.org.uk>)
accessed on 1/7/2023

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Sustainable development is a critical goal for humanity. It exposes the need to balance economic growth, social equity, and environmental preservation so that future generations will not be stranded. As the world faces unprecedented challenges, from climate change to global inequality, the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) provide a comprehensive framework for addressing these interconnected issues. Achieving them requires coordinated efforts across disciplines, and legal research plays an indispensable role in this endeavor. The creator of the universe recognizes that the liberty of man in dealing with or interfering with nature needs to be curtailed, hence he forbids man from eating the particular fruit in the Garden of Eden.² This commandment seems to be the first law governing humanity's relationship with nature. While nature has the power to recreate and sustain its existence, the arbitrary and uncontrolled interference with nature and natural resources could restructure nature in a way that will endanger the present and future generations. Enacting laws to regulate human activity is essential for promoting sustainable development. However, putting up appropriate and comprehensive legal frameworks is equally critical. Employing a doctrinal research methodology, this article argues that legal research has an immense social instrument for determining the appropriate laws to meet the demand of sustainable development. This paper is divided into five sections. The Introduction, Conceptual Definitions, Pillars of Sustainable Development, Principles of Sustainable Development, Imperatives of Legal Research on Sustainable Development, Recommendations, and Conclusion.

2.0 CONCEPTUAL DEFINITIONS

The keywords identified in this paper are: Imperative, Legal Research, and Sustainable Development. Each of them is defined as it is used in the context of this paper.

Imperative is defined as something of vital importance, or crucial.³ It could also mean giving an authoritative command, or peremptory.⁴ In the context of this paper, imperative shall mean importance.

²Genesis 2:8-3:24.

³“Imperative Adjective - Definition, Pictures, Pronunciation and Usage Notes | Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary at [oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com](https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com)”

<https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/definition/english/imperative_1>

⁴Ibid.

Legal Research is a combination of two words, “Legal” and “Research”. Black's Law Dictionary defines “Legal” to mean relating to law, or falling within the province of Law.⁵ “Legal” could also mean created or permitted by law.⁶ Research, on the other hand, is a studious inquiry into phenomena to discover the truth or gain information about it.⁷ Having so defined research, legal research can be defined as research carried out to ascertain or discover the truth about the operation and or the existence of law.⁸ It was also defined by Haroun, F. as the “systematic process of conducting enquiry by identifying and retrieving information to support or make rational legal decision.”⁹ Depending on the methodology employed, legal research can also mean the study of how legal rules, laws, and concepts are applied in real-life situations. In this context, legal research is defined as the systematic study of a particular fact or situation and how it is addressed by relevant laws, legal concepts, and judicial precedents. In essence, Legal research is the pursuit of advancements in the science of Law. Finding the law may not, be so easy. It involves a systematic search of legal materials, statutory, subsidiary, and judicial pronouncements.

The 1987 Brundtland Report, *Our Common Future*, defines sustainable development as a process that integrates human livelihoods with ecological objectives through economic progress that "meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs."¹⁰ Sustainable Development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations.¹¹ It has also been defined by Encyclopedia Britannica as an “approach to social, economic, and environmental planning that attempts to balance the social and economic needs of present and future human generations with the imperative of preserving, or preventing undue damage to, the natural environment.”¹² Sustainable Development has been at the center of the United Nation’s pursuit of a better world. In 2015, UN Member States adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, also referred to as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

⁵B. A. Garner (ed), *Black's Law Dictionary* (8th Edn, New York: Thomson West 2004) 912

⁶The New International Webster's Comprehensive Dictionary of the English Language (Encyclopedic edn, Florida: 22-3 Typhoon International Corp 2004) 727.

⁷Chris Wigwe, *Legal Research Methodology and Practice*; Princeton & Associates Publishing Co Ltd (2019) 69

⁸*Ibid.*

⁹Haroun F, “Learn Nigerian Law” (Learn Nigerian Law) <https://www.learnnigerianlaw.com/learn/legal-methods/legal-research> 20/11/2024.

¹⁰Vallance, S.; Perkins, H.C.; Dixon, J.E. What Is Social Sustainability? A Clarification of Concepts. *Geoforum* 2011, 42, 342–348

¹¹*Ibid*

¹² Kulik, R. M. "sustainable development." *Encyclopedia Britannica*, November 21, 2024. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/sustainable-development>.

The SDGs is a blueprint for promoting peace and prosperity for generations to come.¹³Sustainability, according to Amelia Rose, rests on four pillars;economic sustainability, environmental sustainability, social sustainability, and cultural sustainability.¹⁴

3.0 PILLARS OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Sustainable development has been identified to hang on four pillars: economic sustainability, environmental sustainability, social sustainability, and cultural sustainability.¹⁵ They will be discussed below:

3.1.1 Economic sustainability

Economic sustainability as defined by Safdie, refers to “an activity or practice, financial or not, helps to support long-term financial growth whilst keeping the environment, community, and social factors in mind.”¹⁶ The United Nations has successfully captured the need for economic sustainability as it included it as goal 8 of the SDGs. It has also tied some targets to it which serve as the global standards for countries that adopted the SDGs. These targets include:¹⁷

1. Sustain per capita economic growth in accordance with national circumstances and, in particular, at least 7 percent gross domestic product growth per annum in the least developed countries.
2. Achieve higher levels of economic productivity through diversification, technological upgrading and innovation, including through a focus on high-value added and labour-intensive sectors.
3. Promote development-oriented policies that support productive activities, decent job creation, entrepreneurship, creativity and innovation, and encourage the formalization and growth of micro-, small- and medium-sized enterprises, including through access to financial services.

¹³United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, “THE 17 GOALS | Sustainable Development” <<https://sdgs.un.org/goals>> accessed December 2, 2024

¹⁴Rose A, “Exploring the 4 Pillars of Sustainable Development: A Complete Guide” (Lythouse, May 10, 2024) <<https://www.lythouse.com/blog/exploring-the-4-pillars-of-sustainable-development-a-complete-guide#:~:text=The%20four%20pillars%20of%20sustainable%20development%20are%20economic%20sustainability%2C%20environmental,social%20equity%20and%20cultural%20preservation.>> accessed December 2, 2024

¹⁵Ibid.

¹⁶Safdie S, “What Is Economic Sustainability?” (Greenly, May 16, 2024) <<https://greenly.earth/en-us/blog/ecology-news/what-is-economic-sustainability>> accessed December 2, 2024

¹⁷ Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs),<https://sdgs.un.org/goals/goal8>. Accessed on 11/12/2024.

4. Improve progressively, through 2030, global resource efficiency in consumption and production and endeavour to decouple economic growth from environmental degradation, in accordance with the 10-Year Framework of Programmes on Sustainable Consumption and Production, with developed countries taking the lead.
5. By 2030, achieve full and productive employment and decent work for all women and men, including for young people and persons with disabilities, and equal pay for work of equal value.
6. By 2020, substantially reduce the proportion of youth not in employment, education or training.
7. Take immediate and effective measures to eradicate forced labour, end modern slavery and human trafficking and secure the prohibition and elimination of the worst forms of child labour, including recruitment and use of child soldiers, and by 2025 end child labour in all its forms.
8. Protect labour rights and promote safe and secure working environments for all workers, including migrant workers, in particular women migrants, and those in precarious employment.
9. By 2030, devise and implement policies to promote sustainable tourism that creates jobs and promotes local culture and products.
10. Strengthen the capacity of domestic financial institutions to encourage and expand access to banking, insurance and financial services for all.
11. Increase Aid for Trade support for developing countries, in particular least developed countries, including through the Enhanced Integrated Framework for Trade-Related Technical Assistance to Least Developed Countries.
12. By 2020, develop and operationalize a global strategy for youth employment and implement the Global Jobs Pact of the International Labour Organization.

Sovereign nations all over the world have adopted the above targets as they work to achieve them by 2023.¹⁸ If carefully studied, one can observe that if earnestly achieved, there would be long-term financial growth and community, social, and environmental factors like climate change will be addressed.

¹⁸ Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda: <https://sdgs.un.org/2030agend>. Accessed on 10/12/2024.

In 2020, Nigeria came up with its Economic Sustainability Plan which highlighted the measures taken by the government to ensure economic sustainability. The measures cut across important aspects like fiscal and monetary policies, and real sectors like agriculture and renewable energy.¹⁹ Specifically, the Federal Government through the Federal Ministry of Power, Rural Electrification Agency, and the Niger Delta Power Holding Company set out to Create 250,000 jobs in the energy sector while providing solar power to 5 million households by 2023.²⁰ This was slated to be done through the following ways:

- a) Identify locations for solar installations working with state governments.
- b) Identify prospective beneficiaries.
- c) Facilitate the participation of private sector solar providers including SMEs in the deployment of solar power to 5 million households.
- d) Encourage private sector financing for off-grid solar energy projects with a minimum Tier 2(80W – 150W) system.
- e) Attract investment of solar panel manufacturers into Nigeria, building on the work already done by NASENI and others.

3.1.2 Environmental Sustainability

Morelli describes environmental sustainability as the ability to meet the resource and service demands of present and future generations while preserving the health of the ecosystems that supply them.²¹ Similarly, environmental sustainability can be understood as the responsible management, conservation, and utilization of natural resources to ensure the integrity of ecosystems, support all forms of life, maintain biodiversity, and prevent environmental degradation.²² Environmental Sustainability is hinged on two aspects: the source and the sink side. The source side entails the exploration of renewable resources within regenerative capacity, while the sink side relates to the keeping of waste emissions within the assimilative capacity of the local environment.²³ The United Nations emphasizes the importance of environmental sustainability by including it as goals 12, 13, 14, and 15, addressing

¹⁹ National Development plan (NDP) 2021-2025, Volume: 1.

²⁰ Federal Republic of Nigeria, “BOUNCING BACK: NIGERIA ECONOMIC SUSTAINABILITY PLAN” (March 30, 2020) <<http://ngfrepository.org.ng:8080/jspui/handle/123456789/1131>>

²¹ Morelli, J. Environmental sustainability: A definition for environmental professionals. *Journal of Environmental Sustainability*, 1(1),

²², “ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY IN NIGERIA: AN OVERVIEW” *African Journals Online* <https://www.ajol.info/index.php/jafs/article/view/262431/247750> accessed on 23/11/2024.

²³ Goodland, Robert. “The Concept of Environmental Sustainability.” *Annual Review of Ecology and Systematics* 26 (1995): 1–24. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2097196>.

Responsible Consumption and Production, Climate Action, Life below Water, and Life on land, respectively.

3.1.3 Social Sustainability

Social sustainability, as defined by Dyann Ross, focuses on achieving "equality, well-being, and balance across quality of life indicators between sociocultural groups over time and across generations."²⁴ It emphasizes the creation of inclusive societies that reduce inequality, promote social cohesion, and ensure long-term well-being for all. Central to social sustainability is the development of systems and policies that address social and economic disparities, ensuring equitable access to opportunities and resources. By fostering justice and inclusivity, social sustainability aims to build resilient communities where all individuals can thrive, now and in the future.²⁵ Social sustainability can be applied in different contexts, including businesses. To that end, it includes acknowledging and managing the positive and negative impacts of businesses on people. It also facilitates the capacity of the present as well as future generations to curate liveable and healthy communities that can meet the needs of the present as well as future generations. Sustainability issues in business deal with the impact of its operations on society and people.²⁶

3.1.4 Cultural Sustainability

Cultural Sustainability was formally merged with Social Sustainability. The term socio-cultural sustainability has also been used to refer to the blending of the two terms. However, cultural sustainability has recently gained recognition as a pillar of sustainability on its own. From a narrow perspective, it has been defined as "the protection and support of valued characteristics of culture, such as cultural heritage or art."²⁷ It was also interpreted by some scholars as a tool in the realization of Sustainable development. The widest definition of cultural sustainability saw it as a "deliberation on what must sustain, what must change, and how this change is to be implemented."²⁸

²⁴Ross D, "Social Sustainability," Springer eBooks (2013) <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-642-28036-8_58>

²⁵"The 3 Pillars of Sustainability: Environmental, Social and Economic" (August 9, 2024) <https://www.enel.com/company/stories/articles/2023/06/three-pillars-sustainability> accessed on 21/12/2024.s

²⁶"Social Sustainability Issues: A Comprehensive Insight" (Schneider Electric) <https://www.se.com/ww/en/work/campaign/articles/social-sustainability-issues-a-comprehensive-insight.jsp> accessed on 10/12/2024.

²⁷Siivonen, K. (2017). Kulttuurinenkestävyys. Teoksessa Enqvist, K., Hetemäki, I. Ja Tiilikainen, T.(Toim.) KaikkiVapaudesta. Gaudeamus: Helsinki, Cultural Sustainability as Part of the Concept of Sustainable Development, The University of Helsinki MOOC Center 275–292.

²⁸Ibid.

Towse R, A highlighted six set of principles by which cultural sustainability can be better understood. They include:²⁹

- i. Material and non-material well-being, which encompasses the flow of cultural goods and services.
- ii. Intergenerational Equity
- iii. Intragenerational Equity
- iv. Maintenance of Diversity
- v. Precautionary principle, which cautions against the destruction of cultural items, and
- vi. Maintenance of Cultural Systems and recognition of interdependence.

These four pillars capture the basis of human existence, and they are interconnected. Initiatives and programs are defined as environmentally sustainable when they ensure that the needs of the population are met without the risk of compromising the needs of future generation.³⁰ The basic Economic factors of production principle, that while every other factor of production, such as Labour, Capital, Entrepreneurship, that are within human control are variables, land, which comprises the Environment and Ecosystem is constant (fixed). Land includes anything that is considered a natural resource, but also the physical space within a location as well.³¹

3.2PRINCIPLES OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

The principles of sustainable development are tailored to safeguard the land, which is fixed, hence the principle of sustainable development emphasizes two basic needs: firstly, the need for socio-economic development and secondly, the need of limitation imposed on the environment's capacity to cope with the present and future requirements.³² Sustainable development is therefore based on the following principles,³³

- i) Conservation of the ecosystem and environment
- ii) Conservation of the biodiversity of the planet
- iii) Sustainable development of society
- iv) Conservation of human resources and

²⁹ Michael Atwood Mason & Rory Turner, Cultural Sustainability: A Framework for Relationships Understanding and Action, *Journal of American Folklore* (2020) 133 527, 81-105.

³⁰Ibid.

³¹ Middle grades social science; The four factors of production; <<http://study.com>> accessed on 04/11/2024

³² Justice Mensah, Sustainable development: Meaning, history, principles, pillars, and implications for human action: Literature review, *Cogent Social Sciences*, Volume: 5, 2019, published online: 08/09/2019.

³³Ibid.

v) Population control and management.

Legal research can be conducted to address any of the pillars of sustainable development or the principles. The outcome of the legal research determines its importance and relevance to any of the sustainable development principles.

Several authors had expressed their views and opinions on the impact of law and legal research on sustainable development. The contributions of two of these authors are considered in this paper.

Izobo, F.O³⁴ in his work on “legal research as an instrument for sustainable development” posited that legal research has shown that with the development and advancement of mankind, disputes and conflicts can be resolved amicably and or through resort to legal processes. The establishment of formal court and adjudicative system signifies a progression of sustainable development in human life. This position of Izobo, F.O which views formal court process as amicable settlement of dispute could only be apt if the formal court gives room for adoption of ADR, which Izobo recommended in the later part of his paper. It is also based on the satisfaction of the parties in the dispute at the end of the court adjudication.

While Izobo’s concept of the role of legal research on sustainable development dwelt on human interaction and relationship, Adeyinka Alex Banson et al,³⁵ focused on the role of law on sustainable development regarding the natural environment, by the promulgation of certain enactments, such as land use Act, Environmental Impact assessment Act; Nigeria Act; etcetera. The view of Izobo and Adeyinka Alex Banson et al are both relevant in this context, because while the formal is necessary to sustain human existence by preventing and resolution of conflicts, the latter is aimed at sustaining the biodiversity and nature that are necessary for human sustainability. This paper gives consideration to these views as necessary impact of legal research to sustaining human peaceful coexistence and preservation of nature.

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³⁴Izobo F.O, Legal Research as an Instrument for Sustainable Development, Journal of Advanced Academic Research, Vol. 5, Issue 9 (September 2019).

³⁵ Adeyinka Alex Banson, et al, The Nexus Of Law and sustainable Development in South West Nigerian Policy: A Review of Multidisciplinary Approaches in Policy Formation, International Journal of Applied Research in Social Sciences, Vol: 5, No: 8 (2023).

Generally, the importance that can be identified in the nexus between legal research and sustainable development depends on who is conducting the research. For instance, legal research embarked upon by a judge can aid him in the just dispensation of disputes before him, thereby improving the judicial system. This will help to enhance sustainable development by ensuring that marginalized groups have access to justice, and that environmental laws are enforced, so that members of the society are deterred from engaging in practice that is antithetical to sustainable development. That notwithstanding, we can outline the following as imperatives of legal research for sustainable development.

4.1 Shaping Effective Legislation

Legal research plays a critical role in identifying gaps in current laws, clearing ambiguities, critically examining the laws in order to ensure consistency, coherence and stability, and offering evidence-based recommendations for drafting new legislations.³⁶ This presents a chance for legal research to ensure that legal frameworks are dynamic and capable of addressing evolving challenges, such as the impacts of climate change, rapid technological progress, and persistent social inequalities. Already, most countries are reforming their laws and institutions to achieve a more sustainable management of natural resources.³⁷ In Nigeria, for example, we have laws like the Nigeria Minerals and Mining Act (NMMA) 2007, National Environmental Standards and Regulations Enforcement Agency (NESREA) Act 2007, and Nigerian Climate Change Act 2021. By analyzing the effectiveness of existing regulations and understanding emerging trends, legal research can easily contribute to the development of adaptive and forward-thinking laws that balance environmental preservation, economic growth, and social justice.

4.2 Facilitating International Cooperation

Sustainable Development is a global phenomenon. It requires action from individuals, Non-Governmental Organizations, and Civil Society Organizations. It goes further to leverage on the international organizations, bi-lateral and multi-lateral relationship by sovereign nations. All these phenomena require the enactment of treaties, resolutions, protocols and conventions which are binding on all the parties. Most at times, the instruments aforementioned create

³⁶Mahawar S, “All You Need to Know about Legal Research - iPleaders” (iPleaders, July 13, 2024) <https://blog.ipleaders.in/all-you-need-know-about-legal-research/#:~:text=The%20main%20reason%20behind%20this,So%2C%20let%20us%20get%20started.> Accessed on 20/12/2024.

³⁷CISDL, “Advancing Legal Research and Education for Sustainable Resources Development - CISDL” (CISDL, July 22, 2024) <https://www.cisdl.org/programmes/natural-resources/> accessed on: 20/11/2024.

agencies or bodies to implement Sustainable Development projects. The enactment of these instruments and the establishment of implementing bodies create significant opportunities for legal researchers. Investigating the effectiveness of these agreements and the innovations they introduce is essential for understanding how well they achieve their intended objectives. For instance, researchers may analyze whether specific provisions align with evolving global priorities, identify gaps in implementation, or suggest improvements to enhance their impact. Legal research also helps highlight the interconnection of laws and policies, emphasizing the importance of harmonization across jurisdictions for the success of sustainable development initiatives. As summarized by Ronnalid, “the SDGs are created through law, make use of law, and will need to reshape numerous central forms of law if the agenda is to be successful.”³⁸

4.3 Historicity or a conflict dimension to SDG discourse

Ronnalid also highlighted a significant critique of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs): its lack of historicity and the absence of meaningful engagement with the conflicts inherent in their realization.³⁹ These can hinder a comprehensive understanding of the challenges and complexities involved in achieving sustainable development. Legal research, with its inherently historical perspective, offers valuable tools to bridge these gaps and enrich the SDG narrative. Legal research can therefore make a significant effort to advance sustainable development by addressing critical gaps in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) discourse, particularly the lack of historicity and acknowledgment of struggle in their realization.⁴⁰ Law’s inherently historical nature offers a framework for connecting past practices to future goals, enabling legal scholars to construct narratives around the historical evolution of policy areas relevant to the SDGs. For instance, examining the legal arguments behind environmental permit systems or the emergence of low-tax jurisdictions can reveal the roots of current challenges and guide transformative policies.⁴¹ Additionally, legal research can counter the technocratic portrayal of the SDG agenda as conflict-free by emphasizing the struggles historically associated with achieving equity and environmental reforms.⁴² It also offers a platform for framing these conflicts constructively. Recognizing the inherent tensions in pursuing ambitious sustainability goals allows for a more pragmatic approach, fostering dialogue and collaboration among diverse stakeholders. This deeper engagement with the

³⁸Rönnelid L, “What Legal Research in Sustainable Development Could Become” [2023] De Lege :<https://doi.org/10.33063/dl.vi.514> accessed on: 05/12/2024.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ OECD, Taxation, Innovation and the Environment, <https://sdgs.un.org/goals>. Accessed on 23/11/2024.

⁴²Opcit 17.

historical and conflict dimensions of sustainable development ensures that the SDG framework is not only aspirational but also grounded in the realities of achieving equitable and lasting change.⁴³

4.4 Promoting Accountability and Governance

Accountability and Good Governance is very crucial to enhancing sustainable development. Accountability on the one hand helps in the implementation of the SDGs by requiring stakeholders to be open about their plans, activities, and achievements, thereby allowing for public scrutiny and participation. It enhances transparency, effectiveness, inclusiveness, inclusiveness and equity, and learning, which are all critical for the successful implementation of the goals.⁴⁴ On the other hand, governance is also effective for the implementation of sustainable development projects. In a study by Lisa-Maria Glass, Jens Newig, discuss four central aspects of governance for sustainable development – participation, policy coherence, reflexivity and adaptation, and democratic institutions.⁴⁵ They noted that collaborative governance, involving both state and non-state actors, is essential for addressing complex challenges like those posed by interrelated Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).⁴⁶

Accountability and Governance therefore presents a crucial aspect where Legal research can inter-relate with Sustainable development. Legal research promotes accountability by exploring areas where current governance frameworks may fall short in addressing issues such as environmental degradation, resource mismanagement, or social inequalities. Through this analysis, practical recommendations can be made for improving transparency, which is the bedrock of accountability. For instance, it can recommend mechanisms such as regular audits, public reporting requirements, and penalties for non-compliance, thereby reinforcing the rule of law and ethical governance.

In addition, legal research supports the empowerment of stakeholders, including citizens, non-governmental organizations, and community groups, by promoting access to information

⁴³Ibid.

⁴⁴“Accountability” (Sustainable Development Goals - Resource Centre)
<https://sdgresources.relx.com/accountability-0>. Accessed on 23/11/2024.

⁴⁵Glass L-M and Newig J, “Governance for Achieving the Sustainable Development Goals: How Important Are Participation, Policy Coherence, Reflexivity, Adaptation and Democratic Institutions?” (2019) 2 Earth System Governance 100031 <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.esg.2019.100031>. Accessed on 23/11/2024.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

and justice. It advocates for legal provisions that enhance public participation in governance processes, ensuring that the voices of marginalized and vulnerable groups are heard. This inclusive approach strengthens the social dimension of sustainability by fostering equitable and participatory governance.

4.5 Strengthening Rule of Law

The rule of law according to the American Bar Association, “is a set of principles, or ideals, for ensuring an orderly and just society.”⁴⁷ Many countries throughout the world strive to uphold the rule of law where no one is above the law, everyone is treated equally under the law, everyone is held accountable to the same laws, there are clear and fair processes for enforcing laws, there is an independent judiciary, and human rights are guaranteed for all.”⁴⁸

The rule of law enables the enforcement of policies and regulations critical for addressing challenges such as climate change, resource management, and social inequality. Legal research aids in refining these frameworks to make them more adaptive and responsive to emerging global issues. For example, it can explore how courts interpret environmental laws or adjudicate disputes over resource allocation, ensuring that judicial decisions uphold sustainability principles. The interrelation between rule of law and sustainable development cannot be overemphasized. The rule of law is said to promote justice, fairness, and accountability, offering a strong basis for progress in the social, economic, and environmental spheres. It makes it easier to put laws and policies pertaining to sustainable development into effect. Consequently, societies that prioritize the rule of law are better positioned to achieve sustainable development.⁴⁹ The accountability mechanisms embedded within the rule of law prevent corruption, promote ethical governance, and foster transparency, all of which are essential for sustainable development. Legal research supports these mechanisms by studying best practices, analyzing case laws, and proposing reforms that enhance institutional effectiveness.

4.6 Awareness and Response-Ability through Education

⁴⁷“Rule of Law” (American Bar Association)

https://www.americanbar.org/groups/public_education/resources/rule-of-law/#:~:text=What%20is%20the%20Rule%20of,rights%20are%20guaranteed%20for%20all. Accessed on: 05/12/2024.

⁴⁸Ibid.

⁴⁹Mahmutovic A and Alhamoudi A, “Understanding the Relationship between the Rule of Law and Sustainable Development” (2023) 7 Access to Justice in Eastern Europe 170 <https://doi.org/10.33327/ajee-18-7.1-a000102> Accessed on 15/12/2024.

Building sustainability requires action from diverse stakeholders, including educators, students, researchers, policymakers, and others. These groups play essential roles in developing the skills and mindsets necessary to address the challenges associated with sustainable development. Legal research on the other hand provides every knowledge needed to understand the historical, institutional, and normative frameworks that of policies, laws, legal systems and international instruments that are crucial to sustainability. For instance, educators and students can use legal research to examine the evolution of environmental laws and assess their impact on global governance. Policymakers too can leverage evidence-based insights from legal research that are conducted to understand how far other legal systems have gone in implementing sustainable development projects and the challenges therefrom.⁵⁰

In the UAE, the integration of sustainable development into the curricula of higher education institutions is gaining increasing recognition.⁵¹ Many universities incorporate sustainable practices in their operational and research activities and directly into their teaching methodologies. Despite these efforts, the rapid pace of societal change poses a considerable challenge to the sector. Academia plays a vital role in fostering sustainable decision-making, and there is a pressing need for educational systems to evolve to avoid perpetuating unsustainable behaviors and practices. As universities in the UAE steadily infuse sustainability into their curricula, there remains a gap between the current capabilities of academics and the requirements for addressing sustainability issues on an international scale.⁵²

By integrating sustainability into education, research, and policymaking, stakeholders across sectors can build the skills, mindsets, and frameworks necessary to address pressing global challenges. Legal research, interdisciplinary teaching methods, and policy initiatives align actions with sustainable development objectives. Together, these efforts contribute to a sustainable future that balances economic prosperity, social equity, and environmental preservation on both local and global scales.

5.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

⁵⁰Poto, Margherita Paola and Murray, Emily Margaret. "Achieving a Common Future for all Through Sustainability-Conscious Legal Education and Research Methods" *Global Jurist* 24, no. 2 (2024): 157-177. <https://doi.org/10.1515/gj-2023-0122>, Accessed on: 21/11/2024.

⁵¹Abo-Khalil AG, "Integrating Sustainability into Higher Education Challenges and Opportunities for Universities Worldwide" (2024) 10 *Heliyon* e29946 <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.heliyon.2024.e29946> Accessed on: 21/11/2024.

⁵²Ibid.

This paper therefore recommends that each degree awarding institution should ensure that outcomes of legal research that are relevant to sustainable development are sponsored by the institution as private bills to the National and State houses of assembly. Academic research will be meaningless if they end up only in the library or shelves of supervisors and Examiners. By bridging the gap between academic legal research and policymaking, institutions can ensure that research contributes meaningfully to societal progress and sustainable development.

Additionally, it is recommended as follows:

1. Governments and international organizations should incorporate findings from legal research into policy and legislative frameworks to address sustainability challenges effectively.
2. Research Institutions should encourage collaborative research between legal scholars and experts in fields such as environmental science, technology, and public health to address complex sustainability issues.
3. Legislative arms of governments should formulate innovative legal instruments that address emerging sustainability issues, such as climate change, renewable energy, biodiversity, and corporate social responsibility.
4. Research Institutions should encourage developing legal research projects to increase public awareness and understanding of sustainability laws and their implications

6.0 CONCLUSION

Legal research is an instrument for generating knowledge and ideas among people in the legal domain. It is pertinent that every human is subject to law, hence the maxim, ignorance is not an excuse in law. Legal Research if well conducted and articulated help the policy or law makers to come up with laws and policies that will be acceptable to the members of the society with massive compliance and less need for sanctions. Human activities, in every form, have consequences on the environment. The sustainability of the core pillars of sustainable development, i.e. cultural, social, Economic and Environment depends on laws regulating human activities. Legal Research is an instrument that could be used to develop adequate laws; review existing laws to meet present situation and proactive in making laws that preserves the environment for the future, thereby advancing sustainable development.

It is however, a great concern that most legal research are for awards of degrees in Nigeria and ends within the walls of each degree awarding institution, without getting to the policy makers who make and review the laws. Even state-sponsored legal research are often abandoned. It is therefore recommended that the outcome of legal research at any level, be it

academic, government sponsored or individual research should be pushed to become government policy or sponsored as legislative bill with the intent of becoming a legal framework to impact on sustainable development.