

Utilization of Adult and Non-Formal Education Programs In Combating Rural Poverty in Nigeria

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Abstract

The purpose of this paper was to examine the concept of poverty and its causes in Nigeria and to analyze how adult and non-formal education programs can be utilized to reduce rural poverty in Nigeria. In spite of Nigeria's affluence in human and material resources, it is classified among countries with high level of poverty. Incidentally, the incidence of poverty in Nigeria assumes wider dimensions in rural areas where larger proportion of the population (about 70%) reside mainly as subsistence farmers, fishermen and women, retail traders, herdsman, palm wine tappers, the aged and hunters whose cultural and occupational affiliations do not encourage them to migrate. The incidence of rural poverty in Nigeria is attributed to lack of adequate education/illiteracy, subsistence farming, protracted illness due to inadequate medical care services, lack of employment opportunities, and failure of government to provide basic social amenities. To ameliorate the extent and dimensions of rural poverty in particular, successive governments, over the years, have introduced various economic recovery programs, most of which failed due to official corruption, lack of proper mobilization and top-down nature of such programs/schemes. This paper advocates a revert to the use of adult and non-formal education programs to educate and train the rural poor outside the formal education system on how and what to do to come out of the stronghold of poverty. In this regard, the use of adult basic education and functional literacy, agricultural extension education, women education, health extension education and vocational skills acquisition programs are seriously indicated. It is strongly recommended that for poverty alleviation programs of government to succeed, community members particularly, the poor for whom the programs are meant, should be well mobilized as to make inputs in the planning, execution, monitoring and evaluation of such programs and schemes that concern them.

1. Introduction

It is an irony that in spite of Nigeria's well-endowed human and natural resources, the gap between actual and potential development performance remains unacceptably wide (Okuwa, 2008). In fact, since the collapse of the oil boom which Nigeria depended upon as a monoculture economy in the 70s and 80s up to half 90s, there has been a dramatic increase in the incidence and depth of poverty resulting from mostly mismanagement of the country's economic resources Akinpelu (2008). Paradoxically, in a recent report from the United Nations Development Program (2004) Nigeria is ranked 171st on the index of national development, with more than 70% of the population living in extreme or abject poverty. In almost all the sectors of the economy, Nigeria is not on the winning side. For instance, agriculture, which was the mainstay of the economy, has experienced a secular decline in output and productivity. Recently, Okuwa (2008) revealed that the nation's infrastructure has been routinely unreliable. The road systems, water supply, electricity generation and communications operate at abysmally sub optimal level thereby creating severe problems for the people and escalating the cost of production/industrialization. Moreover, it is on record that Nigeria's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) has suffered several stagnation since mid 80s. It was about US\$93 billion in 1980. This value has fallen to almost US \$41.2 billion, about 54 percent reduction compared to what it was two decades ago. It is informative to add that Nigeria maintains a low and fragile growth rate of about 3 percent between 1991 and 2000, which hardly exceeds its population growth rate of 2.83 per cent. This is serious because in a nation where the growth rate does not exceed the population growth such a nation cannot sufficiently feed her population and hunger and poverty become a big challenge as is the case in Nigeria currently.

Also the nation's debt burden has constituted a major development drag, while the 30 years military rule has wrecked havoc on governance. This, according to Okuwa (2008) "has been reflected in the culture of the pandemic corruption in

the country". The issue of corruption has undermined all good policy initiatives of the government leading to the collapse in the core fabric of key sectors and institutions of the economy like education, the police, the civil service etc. All these culminated to the observation of Akande (2006) that despite Nigeria's position as the seventh largest exporter of oil, the poor in Nigeria has a cash income that is insufficient to cover minimum standards of food, water, fuel, shelter, medical care and schooling.

Poverty situation in Nigeria assumes wider dimension in rural areas where the larger proportion of the populace live mainly as subsistence farmers, fishermen and women, herdsmen, local craftsmen, the aged, etc. whose cultural life and occupational attachments do not encourage them to migrate. In support of above, a national data provided by UNDP (2004) attest that the incidence of poverty is, indeed, more pronounced in rural areas of the country compared to urban areas that have more job opportunities and access to credit facilities. To buttress the above attestation, the report stated that "in 1980, the proportion of poor people in rural areas was 29.3%; it rose to 51.4% in 1985 and fell to 46.1% in 1992 and by 1996, the rural population in poverty had increased to 69.8%." On the other hand, the report further stated "that the proportion of poor people in urban areas rose from 17.6% in 1980 to 37.8% in 1985, 37.5% in 1992 and 55.2% in 1996". As observed by Okorie (2006), the case with Nigeria is that while poverty is ravaging the economy at a terrific speed, progress towards curtailing the menace is moving rather slowly, hence the masses remain poor and hungry. Examination of the concept of poverty and its causes in Nigeria and analysis of how adult and non-formal education program can be used to reduce poverty mostly in rural areas of the country form the focus of this paper.

2. Concept Clarification

Adult and non-formal education is an effective instrument in Nigeria for adaptation to change for better living in our development programs for its clientele cuts across the entire citizenry – adults, youths and even children. There is no aspect of Nigerian economy; be it health, agriculture, nutrition, youth development, and employment, women development, government etc. that adult and non-formal education does not have prominent role to play. No wonder why Darkenwald and Merriam (1982) noted that:

Adult and non-formal education is concerned not with preparing people for life, but rather with helping people to live more successfully. Thus, if there is to be an overreaching function of the adult and non-formal education enterprise, it is to assist adult to increase competence, or negotiate transitions in their social roles (worker, parent, retired person) to help them gain greater fulfillment in their personal lives, and to assist them in solving personal and community problems (p. 9).

This quotation is emphatic that adult and non-formal education exists for service of humanity for it helps people to live more successfully and assists them to increase competence in whatever position they find themselves. Soon, we shall discuss the roles adult and non-formal education programs can play in combating rural poverty in Nigeria. Before that is done, it is expedient that we look at the main concepts of this study.

2.1 Poverty

Poverty, a condition that is characterized by "lack of this, lack of that" can be explained from different perspectives. One angle of it may show material conditions which involve absence of goods and services for the people. There is economic aspect which involves situations where a person or a group of persons have low income with limited resources. Fasokun (2008) identified social dimension of poverty which affects the poor through exclusion, lack of entitlement and being too dependent on others in order to survive. Poverty connotes very poor level of living, inaccessibility of social, infrastructural and educational facilities from which people can benefit for their individual or collective development. In fact, it is a complex multidimensional problem, which has to do with lack of control over resources, including land, skills, knowledge, capital and social connections. To this end, Ali-Akpajiak and Pyke (2003) attest that poverty in Nigeria in all forms (absolute, relative and subjective) is rising at an increasing fast pace as illustrated in Table 1.

<Table 1 about here>

Table 1 above shows that there is no part of the country where the incidence of poverty is on the decrease. An analysis of the table indicates that in twelve years (1986-1998), poverty rate nationwide rose from 43.0% to 69.2%, an increase rate of 26.2% or 2.02% annually.

2.2 Causes of Poverty in Nigeria

Identifiable causes of poverty in Nigeria as highlighted by Okujagu (2000), Odumosu et al (2003) and Umoh (2010), include the following: high cost of living; unemployment; failure on the part of the government to provide basic social amenities; lack of adequate education/illiteracy; early marriage; lack of good feeder roads; ill-health; insufficient farmlands; faulty irrigation system; lack of storage facilities; lack of electricity, subsistence farming; frustration from

life's ambition and, reckless spending during social functions or ceremonies and local festivals, corruption, mismanagement of resources, poor economic planning and implementation and global economics.

The above are characteristic features of rural areas where majority of Nigerians reside with no opportunities for paid employment, hence subsistence farming serves as common occupation of the people. The system of land tenure in rural areas is so restrictive that no farmer extends beyond his family's parcel of land and this is compounded by poverty, the effect of which does not allow people to purchase large farmlands as to do large scale or commercial farming. Furthermore, ostentatious/reckless spending during marriage and burial ceremonies which have become a mark of prestige among well-to-do urban and even rural dwellers is a source of impoverishment. Also early marriage which, according to Okorafor (2001) is a phenomenon which sex attraction drags many a youth into, when in fact, such victims cannot fend for themselves, let alone cater for wife and children, has substantially contributed to impoverish and devastate many families. It is therefore advisable that the poor should rescue themselves from the grips of poverty first before dreaming of taking wives.

2.3 Adult and Non-Formal Education Programs

Adult education is a collective name for all forms of learning programs in which adults participate in order to develop their abilities, enrich their knowledge and improve their technical or professional qualifications to enable them meet their needs and those of their societies. It is a transmission process of general technical or vocational knowledge, as well as acquisition of skills, values and attitudes, which takes place in and out of the formal education system with the view to catering for early education deficiencies of mature people and enhancing their self fulfillment and active participation in the social, economic and political life of the society. Adult education programs vary in organization from casual incidental learning to formal credit courses (Seya, 2005). Nzeneri (2008) perceives adult education as an indispensable tool for adjustment, for individuals, groups, national and international bodies, for development, for need identification, need meeting and for problem solving. Thus, adult education is development-oriented; a process that is geared towards making an adult to be more useful to himself and his society. Without mincing words, Imhabekhai (2009) described adult education as a process of removing obstacles and impediments that reduce the full realization of each adult's potentialities.

Non-Formal Education (NFE) is a process which aims at empowering mostly poor people and those who had been kept out of decision making structures in the society. To Craissati (1993), NFE aims at developing a critical awareness among marginalized and oppressed groups concerning their situation and what they can do to improve it. It is a part of the educational process in which learning is organized outside the formal school system with the aim of achieving selected learning goals for a particular group of people no matter their ages. A functional dimension was given to non-formal education by Bhola (1980) who presented it as:

Any organized educational activity or training activity for school dropouts, for illiterate rural and urban adults, for youths, women or industrial workers, aimed at improving their employment and income potential, or giving them general education which in some cases, as desired, may help them re-enter the formal system (P. 42).

The above definition tries to delimit the clientele of non-formal education as well as spells out what it aims at achieving - improving participants' employment and income potentials. Since we learn all the days of our life, particularly outside the formal school system, non-formal education is said to be lifelong; a process by which individuals continue to develop their knowledge, skills and attitudes over their lifetime.

Adult and non-formal education programs are intricately interwoven because the programs which many agencies or individuals often refer to as adult education sometimes involve a mixture of adults and children participants. For instance, in some states in Nigeria, we find children or young persons in literacy classes side by side with adult learners yet such classes are labeled Adult literacy classes or centres. The various definitions used in this study are inexhaustible as different factors determine what adult education and non-formal education mean to different people. A plethora of programs of adult and non-formal education is well represented by Akintayo (2004) in a diagram (See Appendix B).

A purposive selection of such programs that can be used in combating rural poverty as in this paper are adult basic education, functional literacy, agricultural extension education, women education, health extension education and vocational education. Before analyzing how they can be utilized to assist the rural poor to improve their desperate conditions, let us reflect on previous government efforts at reducing poverty in the country and why such efforts failed.

2.4 Previous Attempts at Poverty Reduction in Nigeria

Every year, economic poverty coupled with frustration from life's ambition, induce thousands of young and middle age people to migrate from rural to urban areas in search of greener pastures (Okorafor, 2001). This great trek to urban areas in search of paid employment leaves in its trail attendant shortage of food, fish, protein-rich "bush meat" etc. not only in the cities where they are sold but also in the villages and riverine communities where they are produced. To stem the tide, governments, over the years, have introduced series of economic recovery programs and schemes aimed at improving the standard of life of both rural and urban dwellers. For example, the Directorate of Food, Roads and Rural Infrastructure (DEFRI) was set up in 1986 to address the issue of poverty alleviation in the context of rural infrastructural development. The National Directorate of Employment (NDE) was launched in 1987 for the purpose of creating employment opportunities in the form of self employment and self-reliance towards poverty reduction through youth training and empowerment. The People's Bank of Nigeria which was established in 1989 was to provide loans to low income persons and those in the informal sector throughout the country. The fact remains that these and other earlier schemes such as Operation Feed the Nation (OFN), Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP), Green Revolution etc. have not realized their aims in concrete terms as poverty, hunger and unemployment still persist in the country.

Furthermore, Nigerian governments had earlier, in the 1970s and 80s, resorted to establishment of formal vocational education institutions with the hope that such formal approaches would enable Nigerians acquire practical vocational skills with which to fight poverty. Consequently, Trade schools, Technical schools, Polytechnics and Schools of Technology were established throughout the country. The problem with the formal vocational education, as analyzed by Akande (2006) was that the courses became stereotyped in due course and had to tow the line of conventional education with training curriculum designed to give general education to all recipients with certification at the end. In fact, the analysis of the present situations in Nigeria reveals that the so-called general or conventional education courses to which training programs in the formal vocational institutions have become, have little to do with the challenges against poverty and hunger.

According to Alachi and Aondowase (2006), the reason why the issue of poverty alleviation has remained elusive among Nigerian populace is the none involvement of the people at the local levels for whom poverty alleviation programs and projects are designed. Furthermore, they attributed failure of Nigeria's poverty alleviation programs to non adoption of need-assessment approaches, official corruption, lack of proper mobilization and the top-down nature of the programs that did not encourage due consultation with the people concerned. It is a fact that in Nigeria there has not been an effective Participatory Poverty Assessment (PPA) for designing poverty alleviation programs, hence success had been far fetched.

2.5 Utilization of Adult and Non-Formal Education Programs to Counter Rural Poverty

Akinpelu (2008), postulated that it seems more credible to say that people are illiterate because they are poor than to say that they are poor because they are illiterate. To him, both conditions are so intricately interwoven that attacking one without the other cannot lead to success, both are twin evils. Illiteracy therefore, rather than being the cause of poverty is its consequence or product. To fight poverty among illiterates would require helping them become not only literate but functionally literate which means combining literacy skills with social, technical and occupational training. Since rural dwellers such as herdsmen, fishermen and women, cocoa farmers, yam and cassava farmers etc. have a similar occupation, it is possible to integrate the terminologies or registers of their occupation into the literacy program. To Imhabekhai (2009:29), "the desire and ability to read, write and compute materials in the vocation will motivate the learners for better participation; and the utility of the skills brings about functionality and progress in the vocation or occupation, thereby fosters permanent literacy". There is no doubt that once illiterate adults become literate, a new vista is opened in their lives which enables them to plan better, do their work better than before, use information from a variety of written sources for a variety of personal, economic and civil development purposes. Literacy skill can embolden former illiterate adults to begin asking questions why they are poor and can begin to do something to come out of it. This informed Fasokun (2008) to postulate that no country has succeeded in eradicating poverty if it has not educated its people. In this sense, a fight against rural poverty in Nigeria must begin with literacy which is both a necessary skill in itself and the foundation for other life skills that can stand against poverty.

Nigerian farmers are mostly resident in the rural areas and practice subsistence farming with under average production due to lack of knowledge of modern farming techniques. During for example, mango, maize, new yam and the seasons for mass production of other food products, little or no knowledge of how to preserve them is known by the grassroots farmers with the result that a lot of farm produce rotten away annually indirectly impoverishing such farmers. This situation calls for agricultural extension education or Agricultural Development Project (ADP) which aims at improving the efficiency of rural farmers by teaching them how to utilize scientific methods of farming including preservation

techniques and market strategies. With improved farm production, the rural poor farmers are not only assured of food and nutrition for the family, but have enough products for sale to live improved life. Furthermore, the agricultural extension officer can lead the farmers to form cooperative societies through which they can obtain guaranteed loans, own better equipment, get subsidies and fair prizes for their products. In this wise, the grassroots farmers will become the architects of their own fortune, who have been trained on how and what to do to put rural poverty out of their way. In this context agricultural extension education, which is a core adult education program, is very relevant in countering rural poverty.

The wealth of a nation does not necessarily depend on the wealth of her resources, but on the health and happiness of the people who will tap the resources. Through the services of health extension officers, the rural dwellers who are more susceptible to sickness due to lack of adequate health facilities and personnel, poor environmental sanitation, lack of portable water etc. are taught the importance of clean environment, hygiene, Oral Rehydration Therapy (ORT), risks of drug abuse, alcoholism and other health tips that can keep people active and healthy. With good health condition, rural people can indulge in different activities aimed at creating wealth for themselves. For example, petty trading, farming, fishing, palm cutting, herding, traditional medicine, timber logging, etc. all of which are common practices in the rural areas, can only be effectively and successfully carried out by healthy individuals. In this sense, health is wealth as the saying goes. By helping to keep rural dwellers healthy in body and mind to pursue various life giving activities, extension education contributes significantly to the war against poverty.

The essence of vocational skill education, according to Olajide et al (2008), is to enable the citizens to acquire appropriate vocational / occupational skills that will make them better people, live in peace with others and relate well in their day-to-day life. Apart from generating income for the citizens, vocation education affords them the opportunity to learn how to use their hands for something profitable to keep going. For the rural areas, adult and non-formal vocation centres that can function without electricity can be established to teach participants various skills such as tailoring, baking, weaving, crafts, hair-dressing, catering, etc. Such skills, if properly acquired can enable recipients become self-sustained or obtain paid jobs to improve their standard of living.

Another relevant adult and non-formal education program in the context of this paper is women education which is a means of redressing the imbalance and disadvantages unjustifiably imposed on the women folk and of empowering them in their various social, economic and political roles. Women education programs include work-oriented functional literacy which aims at providing employable skills needed by women in their various roles in that home and to enable them participate more actively in various activities in the societies. At women education centres, some vocational training such as dress making, knitting, embroidery, soap making, cream making, catering, hair dressing, etc. are taught, to serve as a liberating and empowerment force particularly to the poor, illiterate and skill-less women in the rural areas of the country. At such centres located mostly at local government headquarters in Nigeria, women are armed with skills to fight poverty.

From the discussion so far, it can be understood how adult and non-formal education programs can be used to improve the standard of living of the rural poor in Nigeria. Such programs can be utilized to bring personal survival to an individual especially the poor to equip them with technical, vocational, economic, political, social and cultural skills that can bring about a degree of self-fulfillment, happiness and meaningful life devoid of "lack of this, lack of that" which are languages of poverty.

3. Conclusion

Progress in poverty eradication in Nigeria through formal education approaches has been rather slow hence the persistence of hunger, unemployment, illiteracy and poverty into the 21st century. Arguably, the failure of Nigeria's poverty alleviation programs and schemes emanated from none adoption of need assessment approaches, official corruption, lack of proper mobilization and the top-down nature of such programs which did not encourage consultation with the people concerned. In the light of the above, this paper has made a case for utilization of adult and non-formal education programs to counter poverty particularly among rural dwellers. Adult and non-formal education programs can achieve this feat due to their capability of being used to conscientize the rural poor to achieve some measure of personal development, improved health conditions, high standard of living, economic survival skills, all of which can enable them to embark on productive ventures aimed at eradicating poverty.

4. Recommendations

Gleaning from the discussion, the following recommendations are proffered.

1. Local technology workshops/local vocational training centres need be established in strategic rural communities to train youths, women, dropouts etc. in income generating skills that can accelerate their socio-economic development to avert poverty among rural dwellers.
2. The programs of preparing rural adults for jobs and self-employment must of necessity go along with their alphabetic literacy in a functional mode.
3. The services of agricultural and health extension officers need to be intensified among rural dwellers and farmers to enable them achieve high productivity as well as be in good health condition to be able to carry out sustainable economic activities.
4. Local Government Councils should make more efforts to stimulate economic activities among rural dwellers especially building of markets and improvement of feeder roads to such markets where the rural poor in particular can sell their goods and services.
5. For poverty alleviation programs of Nigerian governments to succeed, community members particularly the poor for whom the programs are meant, should be well-mobilized as to make inputs on implementation, monitoring and progress evaluation of such schemes that concern them.

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Table 1. Incidence of Poverty by Geopolitical Zone in Nigeria

Geopolitical Zone	Percentage		
	1985/1986	1992/1993	1997/1998
North East	53.2	N/A	68.0
North West	48.4	N/A	62.0
Middle Belt	48.4	N/A	53.0
South East	30.9	N/A	79.5
South West	42.0	N/A	74.1
South South	38.0	N/A	76.6
Nationwide	43.0	N/A	69.2

Source: Central Bank of Nigeria, 1999, P, 25, cited in Akande (2006), P. 72