

# ADULT AND NON-FORMAL EDUCATION AS A VERITABLE TOOL FOR ATTAINING MILLENNIUM DEVELOPMENT GOAL 1: ERADICATION OF EXTREME POVERTY AND HUNGER IN NIGERIA

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## ABSTRACT

The roles of adults are critical to the realization of the goal of eradication of extreme poverty and hunger as entrenched in the Millennium Development Goals. Therefore adults must be equipped with relevant knowledge and life skills if they must serve as efficacious conduits to stem the scourge of extreme poverty and hunger in Nigeria. It is only with well informed and adequately empowered adults that the resources of our environment can be harnessed to conquer poverty and hunger. Based on this premise, this paper explores the relevance of adult and non-formal education as a complementary tool to the fight against poverty and hunger in Nigeria. The paper therefore recommends among others that adequate funding of adult and non-formal education programmes is imperative and urgent to improve service delivery by adult educators; and also, adult education programmes must be reformed to respond to the needs of learners who must acquire knowledge and skills to improve food production, create employment opportunities and generate income in order to reduce poverty and hunger in Nigeria.

**KEYWORDS:** Adults, poverty, hunger, eradication, knowledge.

## INTRODUCTION

Concept of Adult and non-formal education

Skeptics and neophytes to the field of adult learning have misconstrued, misjudged and misconceived adult and non-formal education as mere literacy and remedial education whose main focus is the adult who must be given a second chance to learn formally. This narrow view was jettisoned since the 1930s and 1940s and substituted with a comprehensive description of adult and non-formal education to cover the wide range of activities, institutions and agencies and to include a content as wide as life.

Tugbiyele in Okedara (1981:4) substantiated this life long learning nature of adult education as follows;

by adult education we do not mean literacy Education alone. Adult Education is more than literacy or remedial Education to 'fill the gap'. It is something people need and want as

long as they are alive and regardless of the amount of their previous education.

However, new variants have continued to emerge as adult and non formal education has been transformed from its association with certain learning opportunities to mean all responsibly organized learning opportunities such as seminars, workshops, etc, which enable people who are considered to be adults in their communities to enlarge and interpret their own living experiences (Indabawa & Mpotu 2006).

This view of adult and non-formal education gave impetus to Combs and Ahmed's (1974) definition of non formal education, a term which encompasses adult education as any organized, systematic educational activity carried out outside the framework of the formal system to provide selected types of learning to particular subgroups in the population, adults as well as children:

UNESCO, in her international conference in Nairobi, Kenya (1976) as reported in Nzeneri

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(2010:10) defined adult education as: the entire body of organized educational process, whatever the content, level and method, formal or otherwise, whether they prolong or replace initial education in schools, colleges and universities as well as in apprenticeship whereby persons regarded as adults by the society to which they belong develop their abilities, enrich their knowledge, improve their technical or professional qualifications or turn them in a new direction and bring about changes in their attitudes or behaviour in the two fold perspectives of full personal development and participation in balanced and independent social, economic and cultural development.

This implies that irrespective of the setting, content, level and method adult and non-formal education seeks to empower adults with requisite knowledge and skills for personal improvement and maximum participation in the development of their communities.

Furthermore, in different countries of the world, adult and non-formal education programmes are designed to meet divergent needs such as welfare and employment oriented activities aimed at serving the needs of the economy. In other words, adult and non-formal education activities should be relevant to the daily lives of the adults and according to learners'

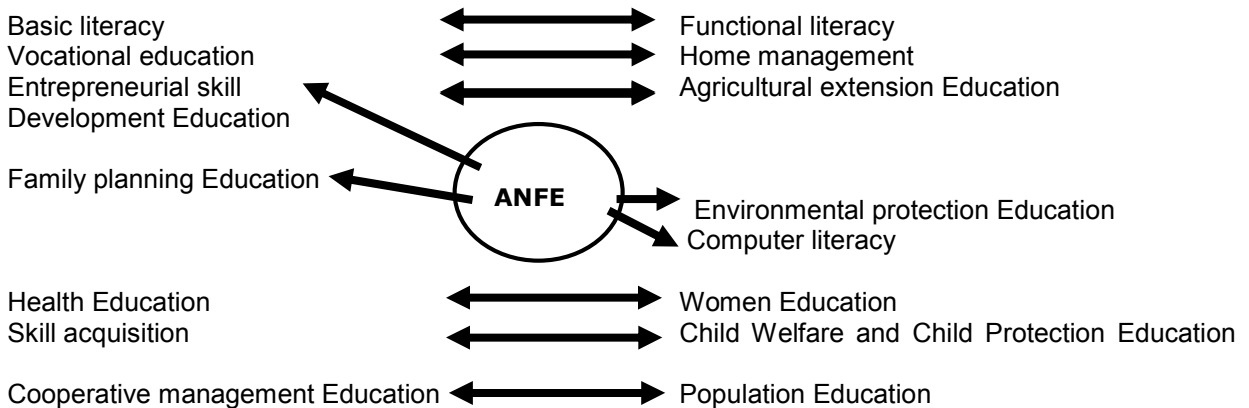
readiness to learn so that these adults can be helped to become self reliant individuals (Knowles, 1980).

Essentially any organized learning or educational activity outside the structure of the formal education system that is consciously aimed at meeting the specific learning needs of people who are considered (regarded) to be adults in the community or their society constitutes adult and non-formal education. The contemporary emphasis on adult learning which includes adult education must be broadly construed to refer to all learning activities undertaken by adults throughout life. It includes non-formal learning through which adults acquire attitudes, values, skills and knowledge, through non-formally organized education. It also incorporates informal learning by adults from their day to day experiences through interaction with family, neighbours, colleagues at work, or through the mass media (Becquelaine and Raymaekers, in Uche (1993:2) and cited in Indabawa and Mpotu (2006:5).

Based on these conceptualizations, adult and non-formal education denotes all activities despite their contexts which are meant to develop the capacities and capabilities of people who are considered as adults. These learning activities should be organised around the felt needs of these adult, learners to enable them acquire requisite life skills to extricate them from their poverty stricken conditions.

**Scope and forms of adult and non-formal education (ANFE)**

Adult and non-formal education could take divergent forms as diagrammatically presented here. Some forms of adult and non-formal education programmes related to eradication of extreme poverty and hunger



**Source:** Akpama, S.I. Asor, L. and Erim, C. 2010

The diverse forms of adult and non-formal Education programmes depicted in this diagram are meant to equip adults with divergent knowledge, attitudes and skills to cope with the ever changing demands of our dynamic society since according to UNESCO:

- i. Education is both a human right in itself and an indispensable means of realizing other human rights. As an empowerment right, education is the primary vehicle by which economically and socially marginalized adults and children can lift themselves out of poverty and obtain the means to participate fully in their communities. Education has a vital role in empowering women, safeguarding children from exploitative and hazardous labour and sexual exploitation, promoting human rights and democracy, protecting the environment and controlling population growth (UNESCO 2003:7).

(General comment 13, on the right to education, Article 13 of the international covenant on Economic, social and cultural rights);

- ii. it could be inferred from this excerpt that adult and non-formal education must be viewed and treated as an economic and social empowerment right which should be properly streamlined and funded to enhance the emancipation of adults from the clutches of poverty, dehumanization and hunger.
- iii. it must also be stressed that reducing adult illiteracy attenuates poverty and strengthens the demand for education. Studies show that as long as parental illiteracy persists hunger and poverty stricken conditions will prevail and less number of children will enrol and complete primary school programmes. Therefore ample opportunities must be created for adults to access education which has been aptly described as a socio-economic empowerment tool.

### Concept of poverty

Poverty has multiple conceptualizations. It has been described in terms of income, capability and participation, recognizing that poverty leads to trauma, powerlessness and shame (UNDP 2002 and Preece 2009). Poverty is also measured in terms of human development index which includes literacy, life expectancy, health, gross domestic product and employment figures. It is directly related to physical quality of life such as access to basic facilities like water,

shelter, basic education, health services and safety, but it also includes lack of material possessions (Preece, 2009). Akpama (2001) associates poverty with a state of despair and the motivation to search for improved conditions of living. According to Usman (1999) the UNDP citing the Federal Office of statistics in its Human Development Report for Nigeria (1996:31) revealed that 71 percent of Nigerian households are poor with half of this classified as core poor or very poor. This same report revealed that about 77% of the urban and 68% of the rural households are considered poor and the larger, the size of the households, the poorer they usually are. This segment of the Nigerian population lives in dehumanizing, poor, hungry, degrading, insatiable, pitiable and insecure conditions (Akpama 2001:80).

Furthermore, as a non-economic phenomenon, poverty is also typified as inadequate access to education, illiteracy, social seclusion, poor health, declining status of the institution of marriage, lack of civil participation and low self esteem (Raditioaneng, 2002 and Preece, 2009). Economic and non-economic deprivations have been conceptualized as lacking freedom to participate in economic and social life (Sen, 1999).

The cumulative effect of poverty according to Preece (2009:9) include lack of access to participation, decision making, self determination and capability functioning. This implies that people who lack these capabilities are poor. Eid (2004:13) gave credence to this view and observed that poverty means more than just low income;

- i. Poverty means not having a voice and hence having no influence on important decisions which have an impact on the lives of the poor;
- ii. Poverty means hunger: each day more than 25,000 people, most of them children die as a result of hunger and malnutrition
- iii. Poverty means suffering from disease: since the out break of HIV/AIDs more than 58 million people throughout the world have been infected.
- iv. Poverty means lack of educational opportunities: 113 million children of school age are not able to attend school, the number of illiterate adults is estimated to be 860 million world wide (Eid, 2004:13).

In order to fight extreme poverty and hunger the millennium submit of the United

Nations in November 2000 committed itself to the actualization of eight international development goals one of the major aims in this context is better education for adults and children since education enables people to improve their social, cultural and economic situations. Adults who are deprived of education will remain poor and thus perpetrate the vicious cycle of penury, disease and hunger.

### **Adult and non-formal education as a tool for eradication of extreme poverty and hunger**

It is a grim reality that the number of people living in poverty and hunger in developing countries like Nigeria is still growing. The magnitude of the problem can be viewed in two figures: half the world's population is poor (living on less than two dollars per day) and 1.2 billion people get by on less than one dollar per day (Torres, 2003).

Therefore, all the MDGs (Millennium Development Goals) are related to reducing poverty. But we know and therefore have a sound basis to fear, that there will be no reduction in poverty and hunger unless all development initiatives are deliberately doubled or tripled both quantitatively and qualitatively, and accompanied with radical changes in the variables which impede development and globalization.

Most MDGs are concerned with adult and non-formal education, how to eradicate poverty and hunger, promote gender equality, empower women equally, reduce child mortality, improve material health, how to combat HIV/AIDs, malaria and other diseases and how to ensure environmental sustainability. The rational question is, how can these be achieved with dominantly illiterate and poor adults and hungry children:

Ouane (2009) asserted that it is only with an informed, literate and active citizenry that we can meet the challenges of our society effectively and this can only happen by ensuring that adult learning and education form the main focus of policy and action of governments at all levels.

In corroborating this stance, the 2000 World Forum on Education for All (EFA) in Dakar took a serious look at what had occurred in the preceding decade, and came up with a framework for action up to the year 2015, four of the six commitments made in Dakar relate to Adult and non-formal Education: improvement in its quality, a 50% growth in adult literacy, equitable access to life skills programmes and training of parents in better early child care. This

global commitment validly assumes that there are positive correlations between investment and involvement in education and development, literacy and livelihood, skills training and productivity, adult education and poverty reduction.

However, it might be too difficult to prove these correlations in terms of cause and effect but it is reasonable to believe that a certain plausibility is inherent in these assumptions. This is premised on the assumption that if literacy and education are missing, then all development efforts are hampered (Ouane, 2009).

Therefore, in order to combat poverty and hunger we must aggressively encourage inculcation of income generating skills and employment creation through effective teaching of adults who have been rightly described as the readiest agents of socio-economic transformation.

The fourth quarter 2009 and first quarter 2010 MDGs report on the progress of Nigeria so far paints a bleak scenario which shows that 54% of Nigerians are still unemployed, and poor, 40% of Nigerian children (6-11 years) do not attend primary school, 30% of pupils drop-out of primary school to engage in child labour, 1 million children die each year before their 5<sup>th</sup> birthday, every day 2,300 children under age 5 die, 145 women of child bearing age die every day, 700,000 children under age five die of preventable diseases every year, 16 million children are not enrolled in school and only 500,000 out of 40 million adults register for mass literacy programme (special report, Tell Magazine September 6, 2010:60). The afore described scenario indicates that Nigeria will not meet the Millennium Development Goals by the target date and by extension will not succeed in reducing poverty and hunger by half in 2015 unless initiatives are redoubled to ensure that all requisite issues are addressed. One of such issues is to mainstream adult and non-formal education practice in Nigeria to equip adults with requisite capacities since their roles are critical to the realization of the millennium Development Goals which partly focus on eradication of extreme poverty and hunger.

According to Biao (2008) and Ouane (2009) adult learning and education comprise a powerful way to move towards alleviating poverty, and hunger improving health, promoting peace and democracy, fostering inclusion, achieving environmental awareness and helping people to adapt to the socio economic and political advances our societies are facing.

The MDGs constitute a poverty

alleviation strategy fashioned by the United Nations General Assembly and the roles of adults whose literacy status must be improved are summarized in this component of our discussion which focuses on some of the millennium development goals.

A critical analysis of some of the Millennium Development Goals shows that most of the goals are focused on the adult population, thus the extent to which these goals would be achieved by 2015 is related to the knowledge and activities of the adult population now and in the future. For instance, in Goal 1, which emphasizes eradication of extreme poverty and hunger, the target audience is the adult population of the society. In fact, it is the adults who must harness available resources to conquer poverty and subsequently eradicate hunger. Therefore, through adult and non-formal education programmes such as agricultural extension education, vocational education, empowerment programmes, capital formulation and loan utilization, co-operative education etc adults could be equipped with requisite knowledge and skills for the actualization of this goal.

Research findings consistently validate a strong correlation between Education and development in all its ramification. Education of adults therefore indisputably yields enormous benefits which in turn alleviate poverty and reduce hunger in the under listed ways.

- i. Adult and non-formal education equips adults and young people with knowledge and skills which remove barriers to entrepreneurship and improve livelihoods. Adults who are literate actively participate in a diversity of business activities and are protected against being cheated and manipulated in the market place.
- ii. Functional adult literacy programmes provide immediate work oriented skills which empower its beneficiaries to engage in productive and remunerative employment which in turn alleviates poverty. Martin (1989) cited in Akpama (2001) asserts that apart from its productive and redistributive functions employment is indeed the best weapon to combat frustration, social tension, poverty and hunger. Therefore, in order to ensure sustainability, poverty alleviation programmes must be fine tuned to incorporate contemporary functional literacy skills for adults as a basis for improvement of the socio-

economic conditions of our urban and rural based impoverished adults. Also, adults who are introduced to agricultural extension services improve their productivity and thus generate more income. Functional literacy skills acquired by adults through agricultural extension services help adults to accept and apply new technologies meant to improve crop production, income generation and thus conquer hunger.

- iii. Beneficiaries of adult and non-formal education on health related matters acquire knowledge and skills for improved family health. Healthy people become vibrant and aggressively create wealth which lifts them out of poverty and hunger.

### Recommendations

- i. Government at all levels ought to improve funding of adult and non-formal education programmes as a basis to eradicate illiteracy which constitutes a major impediment to all poverty eradication efforts of Nigeria.
- ii. Adult literacy centres must be properly and adequately equipped to facilitate efficacious instructional service delivery. Adult and non-formal education service providers must collaborate efforts and resources to expedite the actualization of the Millennium Development Goal number one in 2015.
- iii. Adult education facilitators must be trained and retrained for improved instructional delivery
- iv. Remuneration of facilitators must be improved to boost productivity.
- v. Adult education professionals must reform the curriculum to reflect the needs of learners and our contemporary realities
- vi. Budgetary allocations to adult education by the federal, state, and local government must be improved upon if adult and non-formal education must serve as a potent instrument for eradication of extreme poverty and hunger in Nigeria.

### CONCLUSION

Relegating adult and non-formal education to the background through poor

funding would be tantamount to glossing over the insightful thought of a writer who cautions that: an excellent plumber is infinitely more admirable than an incompetent philosopher. The society which scorns excellence in plumbing because it is a humble activity and tolerates shoddiness in philosophy because it is an exalted activity will have neither good plumbing nor good philosophy. Neither its pipes nor its theories will hold water. In essence, when governments at all levels treat with levity the issue of adult illiteracy eradication, the attainment of other seeming noble policies of government would be impeded.

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