

THE PLACE OF THE MILLENNIUM DEVELOPMENT GOALS (MDGs) IN THE PROMOTION OF ADULT LEARNING IN NIGERIA: A FOCUS ON ENUGU STATE

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Abstract

When the world leaders from 189 nations met at the United Nations Headquarters in New York in September 2000, they pledged allegiance to the new global partnership to achieve the following eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) by 2015: They include, Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger, Achieve universal primary education, Promote gender equality and empower women, Reduce child mortality, Improve maternal health, Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria, and other diseases, Ensure environmental sustainability and Develop a global partnership for development. They believed that with the combined efforts of national governments, the international community, civil society organizations and the private sector, the target of 2015 will be met. Nevertheless, the targets are within reach in some countries while in others, the contrary is the case as will be proved in this research. Adult and non-formal education is included in the second target. The education of the adult is of special importance to a developing country like Nigeria because adult education leads to a successful harnessing of adults for national development. In the words of William cited in Okafor, Okeem and Mereni (1987) "Adult education is a major means of sharing the latest and most pertinent knowledge with the people and through it human resources can be developed to much effectively what seems an avalanche of technological improvement".

Adult education is an instrument for programme changes in the adult population in a society. It enlightens them in electing the right type of persons to represent them in government and prepares them to exercise their rights, duties, educate them on issues of social living such as medicare, hygiene, family planning and security as well as the importance of recreation and leisure. In the view of Anyanwu (1987) desirable change highlights the role of the adult population in a community; it is not the children but the adults who hold in their hands the destiny of the society. It is evident that literacy programmes are making very little impact on the problem of illiteracy in Nigeria. The case of Enugu State is a reference point where out of the 17 local government areas, adult education centres are functional in only 6 local government areas – (interview report 2013). According to Adaralegbe (1979) an illiterate and ignorant adult will not only be found wanting in discharging such duties which political, economic and social changes will impose on him but will also be a break on the national wheel of progress. Indeed such a person may constitute a negation of what his child will be exposed to in school because an illiterate parent will not help his child much in the formal school system. Whereas most countries are already looking forward to post – 2015 Development plan on MDGs development agenda, quoting the United Nations' Special Adviser, Nigeria is not likely to achieve these goals on Adult literacy with only one year remaining to 2015 target of MDG.

Keywords: Adult literacy, Millennium Development Goals.

1. Introduction

Education has often been described as the bedrock for national development. It is globally a vital element for social development and economic growth. This explains why nations have expended a lot of resources on education. Education is fundamental to the construction of a knowledge economy and the society in general according to Okebukola (2000). Education is often linked to schooling, and schooling improves productivity, health and reduces negative features of life such as child labour, as well as bringing about human

empowerment. This is why there has been a lot of emphasis in recent times for all citizens of the world irrespective of age to have access to basic education. Of a truth adult education is one of the aspects been emphasized.

Education is of great value, concerned with impacting knowledge and skills, which help the individual to participate productively in the society (Ramon – Yusuf, 2003). Its quality therefore should meet a predetermined standard and the system can be assessed by how adequately accessible the facilities and materials needed for effective teaching and learning are available.

In order to ensure that educational programmes including adult meet up with national objectives, the National Policy on Education (2004) section 1 sub-section 8 provides that the quality of instruction at all levels of our educational system should be oriented towards inculcating the following;

1. Respect for the worth and dignity of the individual;
2. Faith in man's ability to make rational decision;
3. Moral and spiritual principles in inter-personal and human relations;
4. Shared responsibility for the common good of the society;
5. Promotion of the physical, emotional and psychological development of all children and;
6. Acquisition of competences necessary for self-reliance.

The general perception regarding the Nigerian education system is that the quality of education offered is low and that standards have dropped. These perceptions are based on lack of adherence to acceptable educational practice. Teacher qualifications are low, the learning environment does not promote effective learning; basic facilities are lacking, teaching and learning resources are generally not available; teacher-pupil ratios are high and general performance in examinations are poor resulting in low levels of competencies in work places by the graduates. The adult and non-formal education sector of Nigeria are not exempted from the problems enumerated above.

As a proof, a detailed survey commissioned by the Federal Government of Nigeria in partnership with UNICEF and UNESCO in 1998 (Maple 2011) confirmed that the quality of education offered at the primary school level was low. Three competencies were measured namely, literacy, numeracy and life skills. The level of numeracy competence was found to be generally low and performance in literacy was the worst amongst the three competencies measured. The situation is neither different at the other levels of our education system.

2. Adult Education Programme in Nigeria

Adult education are organized locally, nationwide and internationally as formal organizations designed to promote the development, progress and continuity of adult learning. In Nigeria they are divided into two broad categories namely;

1. Governmental organizations
2. Non-governmental organizations.

3. Governmental Organizations

The Federal, state ministries as well as the local government education departments plan and administer adult education programmes. The teaching-learning processes are handled by the school system following the 6-3-3-4 education system. Specifically, the implementation of the Adult literacy programmes is the exclusive duty of the various local governments in conjunction with the state Agency for Mass literacy, Adult and Non-formal Education. Consequent on the above, the federal government gives 5% of local government allocations to council chairmen

to enable them fund Adult education. This includes the payment of coordinators' and facilitators' allowances and stipends.

3.1. Non-governmental Organizations

In Nigeria, various voluntary and non-governmental organizations engage in the development of educational programmes for the adult members of the society. Some of them include;

1. The Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN)
2. The National Council of Young Men's Christian Association (NCYMCA)
3. Better Life Programme
4. The Islamic Youth League
5. The Young Christian Workers of Nigeria (YCWN)
6. The Nigerian National Council for Adult Education (NNCAE)
7. The Nigerian Baptist Convention (NBC) etc.

Both the governmental and non-governmental organizations involved in adult literacy programmes are greatly supported by the UNESCO, UNICEF, United Nations and the British Department for International Development in pursuance of the objectives of the Millennium Development Goals. According to the UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning (UIL) Report 2013, it said;

The 16.7 million men and 25 million women in Nigeria who do not have literacy skills are not able to fully participate in economic development and democratic processes. UNESCO supports the National Commission for Mass Literacy, Adult and Non-formal Education (NMEC) in extending basic literacy learning opportunities to young people and adults through the Revitalizing Adult and Youth Literacy in Nigeria Project (<http://uil.unesco.org> 11/8/2013)

Continuing, the UIL said that they are helping in the building of capacities of Nigerian adult educators and policy makers. From April to June 2013, the UIL hosted ten scholars who undertook desk researches on priority action areas of the project. The scholarship was funded through a special grant from the Nigerian Government. Also in May 2013, three scholars from Abuja, Enugu and Bauchi states made extensive use of the resources available in the UIL Documentation Centre, drawing on the expertise of their staff to produce research documents on Adult and Literacy programmes of Nigeria.

The evidences gathered at UIL and the recommendations drawn from it will definitely support the implementation of the Revitalizing Project and enhance long – term delivery capacities in the field of adult literacy and basic skills in Nigeria.

3.2. Adult Education Programme in Enugu State

The Agency for Mass Literacy, Adult and Non-formal Education was established by the Enugu state law of 1991 No 4 and is vested with the authority to promote Mass literacy and Adult and Non-formal Education (NFE) of the people of the state and for related purposes. Consequently, the agency established 412 adult education (literacy) centres spread out across the 17 local government areas. Apart from the adult literacy centres, there were 42 non-formal education centres and 24 communities where literacy by radio is going on now.

In the 17 local government areas, there were people who coordinated these programmes and gave situation reports to the agency. Apart from these coordinators, there were also facilitators totaling 2580 who directly taught in these centres. Adult education is meant to be free education for the participants since the point in establishing them is to enable the less privileged in the society acquire basic education and basic life skills to

improve their lives. The federal government has provided 5% of its annual budget to the council chairmen specifically for the funding of adult education in their areas. Funding of Adult Education in Enugu State is however faced with major challenges and this had led to the closure of most of the centres (Interview report from Deputy Director of Education 7th Nov. 2013).

As at the time of making this write-up, only six local government areas in the state have functional centres.

Table 1:

The table below clearly shows the six local governments areas with the total number of their facilitators and learners per local government.

S/NO	L.G.A	No of facilitators	No of Learners
1.	Enugu – East	25	435
2.	Igbo-eze north	64	531
3.	Isi – uzo	81	928
4.	Nkanu – west	59	411
5.	Igbo-eze south	53	474
6.	Udi	42	531
Total =		324	3310

Source: Enugu State Adult Education Centre-Monograph

From the fore-going, more than two thirds of the centres are not functioning, although attendance in the functioning centres stood at about 70%. This is an unhealthy development towards the realization of the MDGs' objectives by 2015.

3.3. Challenges

The following challenges were noted;

1. There is the need for wider publicity of the adult education programmes in the state.
2. While most of the instructors have NCE qualifications, they are not trained in educating the adults.
3. The poor remuneration of the facilitators heads to poor results and lack of commitment.
4. It is difficult to engage and absorb NYSC members as facilitators as was envisaged in the relevant memorandum of understanding (MOU).
5. Activities are hindered because of lack of vehicles to monitor centres' activities.

Recommendations

1. Education stakeholders should be sensitized to support the programmes of Adult education.
2. The chairmen of local government should be compelled to fund adult classes.
3. Operational vehicles should be provided to ensure effective monitoring.

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