LITERACY FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVILLOFMENT OF A MAGNIEDGE ECONOMY

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Literacy in Nigeria: An Overview

E.B. Anyikwa and A.F. Afonja

Introduction

A literate society is a developed one, thus, education is seen as the right of every individual. Literacy is not only an indispensable tool for life-long education and learning but is also an essential requisite for citizenship, human and social development. Hence, every government strives to educate and make its citizens literate.

The introduction of literacy to Nigeria dates as far back as the 11th century by Islamic scholars in the North and in the 14th century by Christian missionaries using the church to spread literacy among the people in the South. This literacy was basically to train converts to read the holy books. Efforts by the Department of Education in 1940 in collaboration with the district officers, school teachers, religious leaders and traditional rulers resulted in the first mass literacy campaign of 1946. The campaign recorded some progress across the country and lasted till 1954. It was however, not without problems, such as lack of national cohesion, as the campaign was considered a regional affair. Also, regional administrators failed to fulfill their promises to learners, resulting in low attendance (Aderinoye 1997).

Post-independence literacy efforts received a boost when UNESCO supported the establishment of an Adult Literacy Institute in Ibadan and in 1965, the University of Ibadan started the training of professional adult educators, which saw the emergence of the Nigeria National Council for Adult Education (NNCAE).

The administration of President Shehu Shagari launched another mass literacy campaign in September 1982. The campaign was well-articulated and planned at the federal level with inputs in terms of materials and trained personnel. A 10-year literacy campaign was planned for Nigeria, covering the period 1982 to 1992. To achieve the goals of this 10-year campaign, the federal government asked each state of the federation to establish an Agency for Mass Education. This gave birth to two agencies - Directorate of Food, Roads and Rural Infrastructure (DFRRI) and the Directorate for Social Mobilization (MAMSER), to assist in the implementation of the national campaign.

In 1990, the National Commission for Mass Literacy, Adult and Non-Formal Education was established. This resulted in the creation of State Agencies for Mass Education (SAME), and at the grass root level, the Local Government Adult Education Department (LAGAED). A further step towards a literate society was taken by the federal government when it incorporated adult literacy into the Universal Basic Education Scheme launched in 1999. The collaboration of the federal government and the UNDP raised the literacy level of Nigerians from 50. percent to 80 percent by the year 2000 (Aderinoye, 1997).

The Non-Governmental Association for Literacy Services (NOGALSS) and the Civil Society Action Coalition for Education for All (CSACEFA) are also operating at different levels to eradicate illiteracy in Nigeria. Presently, there are 7 National Mass Education Commission zonal offices, 37 state agencies of adult education and 774 local government adult education offices in Nigeria; yet, the research survey carried out by Onibon (2007) and the National Literacy Survey (2010) both put the literacy rate at 57 percent. These show no increase in the rate despite the efforts put into making the society a literate one. This paper therefore, examines past and present efforts of both government and non-government agencies towards the provision and implementation of literacy programmes in Nigeria, the challenges and commitment for the future.

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In 2006, Nigeria's population was estimated at 140 million. The country is composed of more than 250 ethnic groups, and more than 500 indigenous languages and dialects, with three major tribes - Igbo in the East, Hausa in the North and Yoruba in the West. However, the official language in Nigeria is English. The 2006 population census suggests a literacy rate of 70.3 percent consisting of 63.8 percent for females and 77.8 percent for males (Bali, 2008a). According to the National Literacy Survey by the National Bureau of Statistics (2009), the literacy rate was calculated based on ability to read and write in English and any language, and the overall adult literacy rate was 56.9 percent. The overall adult literacy rate among the male population was 65.1 percent, while that of the female was 48.6 percent. Lagos maintains the lead among the states with 88.3 percent, while Yobe State has the lowest rate of 14.4 percent.

Target Groups of Literacy Programmes in Nigeria

The target groups of literacy programmes in Nigeria can be deduced from the mandate and objectives of the National Commission for Mass Literacy, Adult and Non-Formal Education. The mandate is to provide basic literacy, post literacy, vocational and continuing education to the following target groups:

- Adults and adolescents (15 years and above) who have never been to school and cannot read or write;
- Adults and adolescents (15 years and above) who are above school going age but have not achieved the competencies of reading, writing and numeracy;
- Early school leavers who could not stay to achieve permanent literacy for effective work;
- Adults/youths requiring rehabilitation education including prison inmates known as yandaba in the North, areas boys in the South-West and out-of-school boys in the South-East and South-South of Nigeria;
- School age children and youths (6-14 years) not enrolled in the formal school system.

These target groups are found among women in purdah; rural women; peasant farmers; market women and men; out-of-school children and youths; girl-child and out-of-school boys; street children with no fixed addresses; traditional Qur'anic school children (almajiris); adult nomads/migrant folks; physically-challenged children/youth; non-literate drivers; non-literate workers/semi-skilled workers (road-side mechanics, artisans etc); non-literate/semi-skilled junior workers in the public and private sectors; and prison inmates requiring rehabilitative education.

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Literacy is an integral part of basic education and the benefit of quality basic education to individuals and the society is immense. A good basic education strengthened by the acquisition of literacy and numeracy is the minimum educational foundation upon which an individual can build life-long learning attitudes. This is the reason why from as far back as the 70s, the federal government had started to emphasize functional literacy in all its policy documents: the National Policy on Education in 1977 to date; the decree establishing the National Commission for Mass Literacy, Adult and Non-Formal Education Decree 17 of 1990; the vision 20: 2020, and the National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDS, 2004) to mention a few.

Empowered by literacy and numeracy, a person will be able to recognize and make economic, social and political choices. Government recognizes that literacy education will help equip individuals with the knowledge, skills and attitudes needed for economic self-sufficiency, poverty reduction and sustainable. development. Adult literacy will help the people to ease the challenges they encounter in their daily lives, such as challenges of poverty, income generation, health issues, shelter, food, security, etc. However, this is still a huge challenge as the majority of illiterates in Nigeria live in remote rural communities, far from the purview of the government. They remain marginalized and unreachable.

Actions to Raise Public Awareness

To raise public awareness of and support literacy activities as a means to achieve national development goals at the national and local levels, the federal and state governments have consistently made remarkable efforts. Beginning from 1982, the federal government launched a 10-year National Mass Literacy Campaign and directed state governments to establish agencies for mass education. In addition, two agencies at the national level, the Directorate of Food, Roads and Rural Infrastructure and the Directorate for Social Mobilization were also directed to assist the states in the implementation of the mass literacy programmes. These efforts were consolidated with the establishment in 1990 of the National Commission for Mass Literacy, Adult and Non-Formal Education by the Decree No. 17 of 1990 to, among other mandates, monitor and coordinate activities relating to the national mass literacy campaign to ensure the rapid and successful eradication of illiteracy in Nigeria. Efforts on the part of government have been supported by development partners and non-government organizations such as

UNESCO, Civil Society Action Coalition for Education for All (CSACEFA), Non-Governmental Association for Literacy Support Services (NOGALSS), Nigeria National Council for Adult Education (NNCAE) and others. Some other programmes in which several states and communities participated in the past and in which some are still participating include Regenerated Freirean Literacy through Community Empowering Technique (REFLECT) and Literacy by Radio.

In 2007, Action Aid organized an international roundtable on literacy titled, "Writing the Wrong", and in 2008 an international workshop was organized by the Federal Ministry of Education with support from UNESCO on the theme "Mass Literacy Campaign as a Strategy for Achieving the Education for All (EFA) and Millennium Development Goal (MDG) on Education in Nigeria". Unfortunately the National Literacy Survey in 2009 by the National Bureau of Statistics revealed that only 33 percent of the adult population was aware of the existence of a literacy programme, as well as of literacy centres. A comparative analysis among the 36 states in Nigeria and the FCT Abuja shows that this awareness varies among the states, with states in the northern part of Nigeria having greater awareness (Niger - 76.7%, Katsina - 65.2%) than in the southern part (Ogun - 5.5%, Lagos - 13.5%). This is a challenge that the government and other stakeholders need to overcome by embarking on a more coordinated and sustainable awareness creation nationwide to give access to the teeming population of illiterate people in the country.

Literacy: The Journey

Literacy in Nigeria has come a long way. As early as 1946, a national literacy programme was well under way, although poor implementation limited its success. With independence in 1960, literacy efforts in Nigeria received a boost with the support of UNESCO in the establishment of an Adult Literacy Institute in Ibadan in 1965. In 1971, the Nigerian National Council for Adult Education (NNCAE) was set up, becoming a "voice" for adult education practice in Nigeria.

Since its inception, the Nigerian National Council for Adult Education (NNCAE) has worked in collaboration with governments and non-government agencies in Nigeria to:

 Establish the Adult and Non-Formal Education Unit in the Federal Ministry of Education in 1974;

- Establish adult and non-formal education agencies in all the states of the federation from 1980;
- Establish the National Mass Education Commission (NMEC) in 1990;
- Develop the Blueprint on Adult Education and Non-Formal Education and the Declaration of 1982 - 1992 as a period for national mass literacy campaign; the blueprint is still relevant in Nigeria today;
- Establish departments of adult education in federal universities;
- Develop a human resource base of experts in adult and non-formal education:
- Conduct national conferences/seminars and document research findings, and partner with international agencies in the promotion of adult and non-formal education.

The federal government first made provision in real terms for adult education in . the country in the Third National Development Plan (1975 - 1980). In 1980, the Government of Kano State established the Kano State Agency for Mass Education which made tremendous progress in adult literacy, winning UNESCO literacy awards in 1983 and 1990. A great wind of change came in 1990, when the Federal Military Government established the National Commission for Mass Education (NMEC), responsible for the organization, monitoring and assessment of adult literacy practices in the country.

The Current Situation

The adoption of the Education for All (EFA) goals in Dakar brought a significant shift in the position of Nigeria on adult and non-formal education. Nigeria's 2004 National Policy on Education placed great emphasis on adult and non-formal education and focussed on marginalized groups, including nomads, migrants, and women, amongst others. Other identified activities include creating synergy between literacy and other adult empowerment programmes (agricultural extension, family planning, primary health care etc.) for more effectiveness and efficiency; evaluating, improving, and expanding ongoing literacy programmes (Literacy by Radio, Reflect, Adult Literacy for the disabled, etc.) nationwide.

LIFE in Nigeria

The launch of the Literacy Initiative for Empowerment (LIFE) by UNESCO covering the period (2005 – 2015) provided a ray of hope for the development of a strategic framework for literacy education in Nigeria. LIFE operations are country-led and respond to specific needs and priorities identified in the country. They also correspond to national capacities. Activities so far in Nigeria have included a national stakeholders' meeting to create awareness of LIFE; identification of fiscal policies and strategies for promoting literacy and literacy work in Nigeria; carrying out a national need assessment for literacy; scaling-up of the LIFE flagship project – Literacy by Radio amongst others.

The Role of NMEC

The federal government established the National Commission for Mass Literacy, Adult and Non-Formal Education (NMEC) by NMEC Act 1990, and ensured that each of the 36 states and the Federal Capital Territory (FCT) established an Agency for Adult and Non-Formal Education to address the illiteracy pandemic in the Nigerian society. The mandate of these agencies is to eradicate illiteracy within their areas of jurisdiction by providing literacy programmes that suit the economic, cultural, social and political needs of illiterate youth and adults. The NMEC and state agencies are actively engaged in running four main programmes namely; Basic Literacy, Post-Literacy, Continuing Education and Extra-mural Studies for workers, the physically-challenged, women, non-formal education (NFE) for the boy/girl child, and migrant fishermen/women. The strategies used in the basic literacy programme include the each-one-teach-one or fund-the-teaching-of-one, the face-to-face classroom interactive method, PRA/REFLECT (participatory rural appraisal/regenerated Freirean literacy and empowering community technique) methodology and the literacy by radio.

Poverty Reduction Strategies and Literacy

Adult literacy is promoted at the level of advocacy under the National Poverty Eradication Programme (NAPEP). In fact, NAPEP advocates that every state government in Nigeria should commit at least 5 percent of its annual budget to economic empowerment and participation programmes including adult literacy, remedial programmes, and health insurance for the poor, as well as training and empowerment programmes. This advocacy has yielded some dividends although much remains to be done.

Literacy Financing

Although literacy education is relatively underfunded, its sources for funding are many and varied. The bulk of literacy funds come from regular allocation by the federal government through its annual budget, the MDGs intervention funds, and . donor agencies. The NMEC receives a regular allocation from the Federal Ministry of Education and intervention fund from the Office of the Senior Special Assistant to the President (OSSAP) on the MDGs. For example, the commission received №53.74m in 2007 and №67.0m in 2009. For 2010, government has approved a budget of N 1.68 billion for the NMEC, which is the highest so far in the history of the commission (FME, Nigeria's Country Report, 2010b).

Nevertheless, poor funding by all levels of government is one of the most serious constraints militating against the successful implementation of mass education programmes. Since the NMEC is not the only agency involved in implementing literacy programmes as earlier stated, it is difficult to ascertain the actual or even the extent of investments that governments and people of Nigeria make towards providing adult literacy and non-formal education in the country.

Monitoring, Assessment and Evaluation of Adult Literacy Programme in

The monitoring of the implementation of literacy programmes in Nigeria is a core mandate of the National Commission for Mass Literacy, Adult and Non-Formal Education (NMEC), covering the four programme areas namely; Basic Literacy, Post Literacy, Continuous Education/Extra Mural Studies and Vocational Education. Many literacy surveys have been carried out in Nigeria in the past five years; the 2009 National Literacy Survey is the most significant for literacy policy and planning. The following excerpts illustrate the details from the survey on adult literacy.

Adults, as defined by the National Literacy Survey, include persons aged 15 years and above by the time of the survey. The adult literacy rate in English language stood at 48.3 percent. Lagos State had the highest adult literacy rate of 86.4 percent, while Sokoto, with the least rate, had 8.3 percent. As usual, males had a higher literacy rate of 55.1 percent compared to females at 41.5 percent. The gap between the urban and rural areas is very large; 69.4 percent for urban against 38.5 percent for rural. The literacy rate in any other language apart from English among the adults was 52.9 percent. The overall literacy rate was calculated based on ability to read and write in English or any other language. According to the survey, overall adult literacy rate was 57.9 percent. It was observed that about one-third (33.9%) of the illiterate population would like to attain the status of a literate person. Thirty-three percent of the adult population seemed to be aware of the existence of a literacy programme or centre, while access was measured by the distance of the nearest literacy centre.

The purpose of the evaluation of literacy programme was to assess the visibility and profile of literacy programmes such as LIFE, NMEC etc. and the reports show that the holistic approach of LIFE ensures good results in different dimensions: harnessing local initiatives and resources; ensuring sustainability of literacy programmes; 100 percent community participation in literacy programmes which are self-driven; amongst others.

Challenges: The Review

Despite the relatively impressive achievements recorded in the reduction of illiteracy in Nigeria, the financing of adult literacy education is far from satisfactory. It is quite apparent that Nigeria is yet to match her intention of placing literacy on a higher pedestal with the actual budgetary allocation to that sub-sector. This no doubt, constitutes a very big challenge in literacy policy, planning and implementation processes at national and even sub-national levels.

Though many agencies are involved in literacy activities, there is an apparent lack of uniformity in programme objectives, planning and implementation process, and this is because there is minimum representation of professional adult educators in both policy making and planning of literacy programmes at various levels of government agencies.

Furthermore, another key challenge in providing institutional backing to literacy programme implementation in Nigeria is limited infrastructural facilities in NMEC and state agencies. These institutions and agencies suffer inadequacies in office accommodation and basic material resources for literacy programme implementation. The constraints of qualified adult education personnel and the loose link between NMEC and state agencies present a challenge to effective literacy programme implementation in the country.

The inadequate involvement of the NMEC in participating in policy decisions is another challenge. The participation level in policy decision is so minimal. For instance, in the Roadmap for the Nigeria Education Sector (2009b), NMEC was neither represented in the National Steering Committee nor in the

Implementation Task Team. The result is that little or nothing was written about literacy provision in the Roadmap (FME 2009b).

Most states and LGAs do not pay the №7,500.00 stipulated in the benchmark. In some cases, even the paltry sum being paid is owed for months on end. This situation is a big threat to the success of literacy programmes as the instructors/facilitators are the frontline implementers of the programme.

It is very disheartening that record keeping is a big challenge in Nigeria. With this, adequate planning and implementation is impossible as there is a need to capture relevant data which would be needed for adequate assessment of interventions.

According to the NMEC (2008a), the National Certificate in Education (NCE) should be adopted as minimum teaching qualification in compliance with the provisions of the National Policy on Education to ensure quality delivery in literacy classes. Statistics, however, show that this is far from the case as there are still even less qualified personnel teaching in literacy centres.

Monitoring of programmes is a vital ingredient for successful implementation and should be integrated in the programme plan. Unfortunately, most of the time, this is hardly the case. Adequate funds are not provided and required information about status of programmes is not readily available.

Yearly statistics from the NMEC show an average of 1.7 million learners whereas Nigeria has over 44 million learners being targeted. At this rate, it will take more than 22 years to achieve the EFA goals in Nigeria.

The NMEC launched programmes such as Literacy by Radio in order to eradicate illiteracy in the country faster and in compliance with EFA and MDG goals (NMEC, 2008), but the programme is saddled with the challenge of lack of support from state and local governments; technical committees do not know their functions, commitments on the part of facilitators are lacking because of poor incentives. Due to the policy of commercialization of state-owned radio stations, the time required for the airing of lessons of literacy by radio cannot be paid for through funds contributed to the state radio stations by NMEC (NMEC, 2008c).

Commitment for the Future

In order to meet expectations as regards the EFA goals, the aspects that focus on adult learners will be the target, with the examination of the critical importance of up-scaling literacy and adult learning in Nigeria, funding sources and access to

intervention funds. The question now is: 'Will the present tempo meet the following targets as stated in EFA Goal 4 on adult literacy?' This goal is targeted at achieving 50 percent improvement in the level of adult literacy by 2015, especially for women and all adults.

In line with this target, the National Action Plan (2006) set five objectives targeting the 2015 time-line. These include: (i) progressive recruitment and training of 260,000 adult literacy instructors by 2010; (ii) provision of access for renovation of existing facilities and construction of additional 100,000 training centres for adult literacy classes and centres for nomadic education by 2010; (iii) main-streaming of alternative participatory approaches to adult literacy by 2007; and (iv) reduction by half of the current number of illiterates in Nigeria by 2015.

It is observed that the Federal Government of Nigeria is committed to driving the imperative of access through several strategies such as launching an aggressive national campaign on access by May 2011 and "Declar(ing) a national literacy emergency for five years"; and creating a programme that utilizes National Youth Corps members and volunteers as facilitators in mass literacy programmes. Deliverables targeted include "50% increase in mass literacy whereby 10 million adults would be trained every year" (FME, 2009b). With the present tempo, Nigeria will meet its literacy target but the underlying challenges are funding, efficient planning, appropriate technologies and IT infrastructures which are necessities for the operation of any literacy programme.

Recommendations

In order to continue the present tempo toward meeting the target amidst the above challenges, the following are recommended:

While the Universal Basic Education Commission attracts 2 percent of the consolidated federal revenue, nothing has been set aside to address the challenge faced by the National Commission for Mass Literacy Adult and Non-Formal Education and its nomadic counterpart. It is proposed that apart from the funds from the Debt Relief Gains, the Federal Ministry of Education should through UBEC dedicate at least 2 percent of the UBEC consolidated Federal Revenue Fund to NMEC and nomadic education activities. There is no time to waste on this matter if Nigeria wants to achieve good results; the time to act is now.

- Planning and disbursement of funds should consider specific target groups per session. A clear definition of these groups will help in the incorporation and budgetary allocation for such groups e.g. if Youth Corpers will be used as suggested as facilitators, then they should be fixed appropriately in the budget yearly so that they are paid as at when due to avoid loss of interest and abandonment or discontinuity.
- In planning, database is of utmost importance. A problem observed in Nigeria is the lack of data base. It is therefore recommended that departments of adult education nationwide should be involved in the assessment, collation and verification of adult literacy centres in order to create a viable data base. This will in turn help in the planning and allocation of funds, and resources/infrastructure.
- Awareness programmes among all stakeholders for the promotion of literacy in Nigeria should be a continuous project. The operation and implementation should also incorporate those who are specialists or who specialize in adult . education and adult literacy for efficiency.
- Identification of literacy centres is not enough, quality assurance should be. maintained through effective monitoring and evaluation mechanisms such as literacy monitoring officers and standardized tests as evaluation mechanisms.

Conclusion

Literacy for all is a concern for all stakeholders in education and adult education in particular in Nigeria and it is also obvious that the government has demonstrated its willingness to remedy the situation, but the stark reality is that the current strides are short for the distance to be covered. Stakeholders need to continue to rise up to the challenges to make Nigerians literate. This is the only way to achieve the goal of reducing illiteracy rate by 50 percent by the year 2015.

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