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# ADULT AND NON – FORMAL EDUCATION AS CATALYST FOR POVERTY REDUCTION AND SOCIETAL TRANSFORMATION

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By

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## **Abstract**

*Education is not only a social services but a transformation act which is fundamental to social and personal development. There is no doubt that education makes man's life desirable. This paper examined adult and non-formal education as catalyst for poverty reduction and societal transformation. It focuses on concept of adult and non-formal education and its objectives as enshrined in National Policy on Education (2004). The concept of poverty, its causes, adult literacy and poverty reduction were discussed. Conclusion and recommendations were made.*

Countries of the world in general and Nigeria in particular are making efforts toward attaining mass literacy for all her citizens as education is a vital instrument of transformation. According to Sarumi (2011:442) education is globally perceived beyond a mere tool for development but it is rather seen as a tool that can eliminate deadly diseases, terrorism and indices of underdevelopment in general.

It is through education that worthwhile knowledge, skills and attitudes are transferred from one person to another, society to society and generation to generation for the purpose of self and national development. Education can help to change society by improving and strengthening skills, value, communication, mobility personal prosperity and freedom.

However, the Nigeria society stands to gain better if due consideration is given to all types of education i.e. formal, informal, adult and non-formal especially in the light of lifelong learning.

It should be noted that no society, whether developed, under-developed or developing is static as the world is a dynamic setting where remarkable changes occur often. The invention of technological gadgets has reduced the entire universe into a global village. Transformation in the realm of knowledge are occurring in the context of emergent global social dynamics. Thus, social transformation is seen as the different ways by which globalization forces impact upon Local communities and national experience, economic relations, social patterns, political institutions and cultures. It is therefore pertinent that education in general and adult and non-formal education in particular serves as agents of societal transformation if adequate attention is given to it.

It becomes imperative to note that for any positive transformation, it must be sustained. Sustainable transformation is the type that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. It is an enduring, remarkable, non-terminal improvement in the quality of life, standard of living and life chances of people, as it favours a progressive curve in human development, encompassing enhance creativity for increased and improved productivity. It is no doubt that education would help us to record sustainable transformation of individual and the society.

It should be noted that the relationship between education and sustainable transformation is complex, but regardless of this, education is the key to a nation's ability to develop and achieve sustainability targets. Education would help especially non-formal education through its extension, as adult education has improved agricultural productivity and rural transformation.

It have been established that adult and non-formal education is a programme that has been explored and is still being used to achieve sustainable transformation in Nigeria. This is premised on numerous justifications that:

Adult and non-formal education helps people to keep up with the new knowledge required to perform responsibly in a chosen career; It permits one to continue to grow as a well-rounded person and equips citizens with competence and self-confidence for participation in the cultural, social, economic and political governance of their society. For instance, active participation is indispensable, especially in a democracy. Thus, adult and non-formal education has been responsive to the societal needs of Nigerians (Sarumi, 2011).

In summary, it enhanced social change, aids rural development and transformation.

This paper is on education for poverty reduction and societal transformation focusing on adult and non – formal education in Nigeria. This will be examined under the following sub – headings:

- a. Concept of Adult and Non – Formal Education;
- b. Objectives of Adult and Non – Formal Education as enshrined in national policy on education (2004);
- c. Concept of poverty and its causes;
- d. Adult literacy, Poverty Reduction and Societal Transformation; and
- e. Conclusion and Recommendations.

### **Concept of Adult and Non – Formal Education**

A particular problem facing adult education as a new discipline is that of ignorance of its meaning, tenets and purpose especially in developing nations. This could be attributed to the fact that there is a wide gap between what is actually achieved in the field of adult education and what policy would like the outside world to believe is taking place. In these countries (developing countries) there is a generalized lethargy towards adult education especially on the part of the policy makers.

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However, Akinplelu (1998) asserted that Adult Education is an action of external education agent in purposefully ordering behaviour into planned systematic experience that can result in learning for those whom such activity is supplemented to their primary role in society, and which involves continuity in an exchange relationship between the agent and the learner so that the educational process is under constant supervision and direction. Adult Education is an educational process whereby persons who no longer attend school on a regular basis (or person who had no opportunity to attend school) undertake sequential and organized activities with the conscious intention of bringing about changes in knowledge or skills for pragmatic development.

According to Oyebamiji (2012), Adult Education as a field of education is commonly giving a generic term. Adult Education has advanced in most countries of the world from comparative obscurity to a recognized component of educational programmes. In Nigeria; however, Adult Education is still being overshadowed by a common phenomenon of equating it with schooling of the young. For instance, taking adult learners as if they were children in learning situation – using pupils text for the adult learners. Even in educational institutions and public agencies, Adult Education is been misconstrued as education for the aged alone or as literacy education.

Okoli (1998) views Adult Education as that which embraces functional literacy, mass literacy, vocational education, remedial education, continuing or life – long education, aesthetic, cultural and civic (citizenship) education for youths and takes place outside the usual formal school system.

The International Congress of University Adult Education (1969) defines Adult Education as: a process whereby persons who no longer attend school on regular and full-time basis undertake sequential and organized activities with the conscious intention of bringing about changes in information, knowledge, understanding of skills, appreciation and attitudes; or for the purpose of identifying and solving personal or community problems.

Ogwudife (2007) therefore describes Adult Education as an exercise that deliberately, but with humanitarian intentions, tries to help men and women to acquire new skills, new knowledge, develop positive attitudes and acquire greater awareness. Osiji (2008:91) defines Adult Education as; “any educational programme, of whatever description, dimension, purpose, content or methodology, designed for people regarded as adults considering mainly the criteria of mental maturity and social role”.

Ogwudife (2007) views non – formal education as that which covers training outside formal education system. It may be vocational such as the craft training centres used in Nigeria. He went further to posit that non – formal education may be designed to provide employment for young school leavers and by so doing, they will gain skill and knowledge.

Another scholar (Osiji, 2008:7) defines Non – formal education as any organized educational activity outside the established formal system, whether operating separately or as an important feature of some broader activity that is intended to serve identifiable learning clientele and learning objectives.

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In summary, adult and non – formal education can be described as that type of education programme which is purposely designed for all category of adult members of the society to enable them acquire skills and competencies in different fields for effective development of individual and the society. The programme could be either on full time or part time basis and in most cases, are of short term duration. More emphasis is laid on acquisition of skills than on certification.

Objectives of adult and non – formal education as postulated in National Policy on Education (2004) include the following:

- i. Provide functional literacy and continuity education for adults and youths who have never had the advantage of normal education or who did not complete their primary education. These include the nomads, migrant families, the disabled and other categories or groups, especially the disadvantaged gender,
- ii. Provide functional and remedial education for those young people who did not complete secondary education,
- iii. Provide education for different categories of completers of the formal education system in order to improve their basic knowledge and skills,
- iv. Provide in – service, on – the – job, vocational and professional training for different categories of workers and professionals in order to improve their skills.
- v. Give the adult citizens of the country necessary aesthetic, cultural and civic education for public enlightenment.

Thus, from the well articulated objectives, it is established that adult and non – formal education programmes are tailored towards individual and societal transformation.

### **Concept of Poverty and Its Causes**

Poverty is a global phenomenon and it is a difficult task to define poverty. According to Adawo (2011), poverty is experienced by the poor and observed by the rich, but its definition is with difficulty.

According to Ekpong (1991), “poverty is a concept that has defied universally accepted and objective definition or assessment because it is not only an expression of life situation, but equally a state of mind and a perception of self in the complex web of social relation”. He further stated that, in general times, poverty is considered from two broad perspectives: relative poverty and absolute poverty.

Relative poverty is associated with experiencing deviational outcomes from expectations and irrelevant comparison of one’s material position with others mostly peers and age groups.

Absolute poverty is a misery linked to an insufficient resource base, lack of income, narrow margin, high risk of failure, hunger, disease etc. Without missing words, poverty has been a serious challenge to governments in Nigeria. Its effect, which includes lack and deprivation of the basic necessities of life, is worrisome. Poverty to a large extent humiliates and dehumanises its victim – (Lipong, 1996). It has been biblical established that “poverty itself is as old as the whole world”.

“Poverty has earned recognition in the extent of its ravaging society and the affairs of humanity at the international, national and local levels, the need exist now for urgent and

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radical actions to its eradication and control. Indeed, poverty is a snare. It is dehumanizing. It must be eradicated". (Obadan, 1996).

Identifiable causes of poverty in Nigeria as highlighted by Okujagu (2000), Odumosu (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 farm – lands, 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 characteristics 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.

### **Adult Literacy, Poverty Reduction and Societal Transformation**

Adult literacy has the ability of meeting up of specific learning needs and challenges of the participants or the learners in that, the acquired literacy skills are immediately applied to improve/transform their livelihood. This is further supported by World Bank (2002) view that people who had completed literacy courses/programmes tended to be more willing to take initiative in developing their livelihoods and accepting quality and suitable innovations which are ingredients of transformation.

Farmers have been observed by International Organizations like Food Agricultural Organization (FAO), International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) and International Labor Organization (ILO) to support effective integration of adult literacy with other education disciplines to enhance livelihood in many African countries with satisfactory transformation. Some researchers equally observed that without adequate adult literacy, the clientele are disadvantaged and possibilities to increase knowledge, skills, capacities and efficient transformations are doubtful.

The United Nation's Educational and Cultural Organizations (UNESCO) (2006) observed that individuals with literacy and numeracy skills are more productive, understand family planning and enjoy better quality of life. To buttress this fact, Eldred (2008) noted that literacy linked to particular job skills contributes to development of critical thinking and problem solving.

Ezimah (2004) emphasized that literacy is an essential ingredient for obtaining personal, community and societal development and growth.

Ilo (1994) while working on income generating activities for women in health development in Nigeria, recommended that adult functional literacy should be utilized to increase impact of training in new skills and technologies as a process of both human and societal transformation/development. Prompted by this, Zuofa (2008) highlighted

the gains of literacy in empowering women. She noted that those who benefited from adult literacy programmes were more confident, kept records and progressed in their economic activities.

Literacy skills are not ends in themselves but need to serve purposes and practices that are relevant to their users. For instance, it leads to education which results to empowerment with the acquisition of the essential knowledge and skills that make it possible for individuals to engage in activities they require for effective functioning in self, group, community improvement and livelihood.

Traditional adult literacy can be described as the ability to read for knowledge, write coherently and think critically while in modern context, adult literacy involves the ability to use and communicate in a diverse range of technologies. Therefore, everybody must be involved in adult literacy so as to be functional in all areas of human endeavour and subsequently being able to overcome poverty.

Adult literacy is really an effective tool to help people solve the problems they face in their daily life and also assist them to live in harmony in their rapidly changing environment. People today need to realize that they can use education particularly Adult Education to acquire vocational skills to improve their quality of life and enhance their personal and societal transformation.

According to Hussain (2005), literacy in general is a fundamental human right and a prerequisite to the development of society. Literacy is at the heart of learning, the core of Education For All (EFA) and central to the achievement of Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Access to quality literacy learning opportunities and the development of literacy environments are essential strategies for poverty reduction, equality, economic development and in general, a prerequisite for societal transformation.

### **Conclusion**

It has been established in the discourse, that adult and non-formal education is a prerequisite for individual and societal transformation as well as a vital tool for poverty reduction; federal, state and local governments; philanthropists, Education Trust Fund (ETF) and Non-Governmental organizations (NGOs) as matter of urgency should put their hands on deck in promoting adult and non-formal education programmes for great reduction of poverty in Nigeria.

### **Recommendations**

The essence of education is for the effective utilization of human and material resources for the benefit of man and the society. Adult and non-formal education programmes are the major prerequisite for individual and societal transformation. Thus, the following are recommended:

✓ Critical skills needed in the twenty-first century society because of the nature of the society should also be considered in the programmes. As an information driven age, critical skills in information handling and knowledge transfer should also be added as part of the programmes.

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- ✓ Awareness should be created for community members who are not aware of the existence of these programmes to enable them benefit too.
- ✓ Entrepreneurial skills, innovation mindset and competencies should be consciously built into the programmes to help meet the demands of this century.

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