

ENHANCING THE DEVELOPMENT OF RURAL COMMUNITIES IN NIGERIA THROUGH FUNCTIONAL LITERACY EDUCATION

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Abstract: In the development of nations, education is very paramount for men and women residing both in urban and rural communities. If people most especially those living in remote areas do not have adequate training, they will not be able to add value to their lives especially through economic empowerment and contribute to the development of their country. This paper therefore, gave some conceptual clarifications of development and rural communities. It further examined the characteristics of rural communities and their poverty level, and also the development of rural communities in Nigeria. More so, emphases were laid on the roles of functional literacy in enhancing the status and development of individuals residing in rural areas in Nigeria in addition to the challenges in enhancing rural areas through functional literacy education. Thus, it is recommended that, governments and non-governmental organizations should ensure that functional literacy education should be one of their priorities as doing that will help in rural community development.

Keywords: Development, Rural, Rural Communities, Functional literacy and Education.

1. INTRODUCTION

Functional literacy education as a tool for the development of rural communities should be seen as education which helps rural dwellers to acquire relevant knowledge and skills required to earn a living in order to be able to contribute positively to their communities. Learning contributes to the empowerment of adults including those residing in rural communities by making provision of knowledge and skills that are required to better their lives. It leads to improvement not only in the lives of the people, but also their families, communities and societies at large (Radhika, 2018). Functional literacy education plays an imperative role in reducing poverty, improving health and nutrition, and promoting sustainable environmental practices.

In Nigeria, over the years the stated objectives and strategies of rural and community development have been pronounced by policy makers and the government. However, there is still wide gap that exist between policy formulation and implementation, and also the reality of the level of development of the rural dwellers. For instance, several approaches in terms of rural development planning and execution have been adopted. Some of these include the creation of states, local government areas, mobilization of people for local participation in planning and implementation of community development projects in order to create new centres of development, and thus stem the drift from rural to urban areas.

A look at the National Development plans of Nigeria from 1975-1985 and other rural development programmes like Operation Feed the Nation (OFN), Green Revolution, River Basin Development Authorities, Agricultural Development Projects and many others have emphasized the need to tackle the problem of rural under-development. On the part of government therefore, there is the realization that there is need to bring the neglected rural areas into the mainstream of

national development. Thus, this could actually work perfectly by ensuring that the rural populace acquire some skills and knowledge that will help them collaborate with the government for the betterment of their community and the nation at large, and this could be done through functional literacy given its nature and importance in the lives of the people.

2. CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATIONS

Development

According to Wami (2022), development as a concept is multi-faceted and therefore, should be described as a multi-dimensional process which involves the organization and re-orientation of the entire social, economic and cultural systems added to improvements in incomes and cultural outputs. Critically examining the definition of development, it could mean the reduction or elimination of poverty, illiteracy, disease, malnutrition and joblessness among others. It is a programme which has the objective and strategy aimed at transforming the citizens in the rural areas from being the victims of poverty, ignorance and disease into a contented human beings, able to earn an income and capable of sustaining a reasonable standard of living for themselves and their families (Egbe, 2014). It also means the ability to provide the basic necessities of life such as food, jobs, affordable and accessible health care, good roads, water, electricity and education, among many other things for the people.

Rural Communities

Rural is the opposite of urban or city. It refers to a place with small population size and where people are homogeneous in their value, attitude and behavior and whose primary occupation is mainly agriculture production. Rural areas in Nigeria are usually inhabited by many of the citizens of the nation. The population of the areas is usually inhabitants who engage in agricultural activities and rural production. However, despite the fact that these rural communities produce agricultural products which are sold within rural, urban and sub-urban communities, the areas are not attractive to live in. Olojede, Adekunle and Samuel (2013) established that rural people serves as the bedrock of national economy and source of raw materials, yet, the people in the rural areas are faced with series of challenges ranging from illiteracy, low savings, inappropriate capitals, low investments, poor road network, rural-urban migration, low social interaction, high population density among others. Literacy is found to be essential ingredients that would make rural communities develop. Adult learners would see the need to encourage their wards to go to schools. The adults would also utilize their literacy to develop themselves as well as their communities through improved agricultural activities, improved social interactions, increase productivity and income among others.

Characteristics of Rural Communities/ Poverty Level of Rural Communities in Nigeria

According to Yerima and Okafor (2022), the rural areas in Nigeria are generally characterized by high level of illiteracy, abject poverty, unemployment and lack of basic infrastructural facilities. Rural areas are generally observed to have particular attributes which give them distinctive character. These attributes include tracts of open countryside, low population densities, a scattering of small to medium size settlements, less developed transport infrastructure and lack of access to services and amenities especially of the type provided in large urban centers (Oloyede, Adekunle & Samuel 2013). Rural area is characterized with open spaces and scattering villages. As established by Nwanenye (2021), rural areas inherited resources as land, minerals and other natural resources which are assumed to have direct bearing to the lives of the bulk of the rural population in the society. However, it is regrettable to say that the quality of life in rural areas is seen to be very low which means that the standard of living is not measurable with the urban areas.

Poverty is a major problem in different communities in Nigeria especially rural communities. This is because most of the rural dwellers engage in agricultural activities using crude instruments. Many of them are peasant farmers, fishermen and some others engage in animal rearing. In addition to farmers are petty traders whose profits from their sales are not always attractive, thereby making them to remain poor. In rural areas, individuals are residing in the conditions of poverty and backwardness, in some cases, they do not have enough sources to make provision of food and other basic requirements for their family members. Idris (2015) cited in Oji and Okemini (2022) opined that rural poverty results from lack of assets, limited economic opportunities and poor education and capacities, as well as disadvantages rooted in social and political inequalities.

Development of Rural Communities in Nigeria

Overtime, successive governments have embarked on several programmes targeted at rural development. Other measures were taken by Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), cooperatives, individuals through private initiatives, corporate

bodies as well as International Organizations. According to Mammud (2019), the various programmes initiated and mostly targeted at the rural sector by government include the following:

- i. National Accelerated Food Production Programme (NAFPP)
- ii. River-Basin Development Authority (RBDA)
- iii. Agricultural Development Programme (ADP)
- iv. Operation Feed the Nation (OFN)
- v. The Green Revolution (GR)
- vi. Agricultural Credit Guarantee Scheme (ACGS)
- vii. Directorate for Food, Road and Rural Infrastructure (DFFRI)
- viii. Better Life for Rural Dwellers (BETTER LIFE)
- ix. National Agricultural Insurance Corporation (NAIC)
- x. National Directorate of Employment (NDE)
- xi. National Agricultural Land Development Authority (NALDA)
- xii. National Poverty Eradication Programme (NAPEP)
- xiii. National Rural Roads Development Fund (NRRDF)
- xiv. Rural Banking Scheme (RBS)
- xv. Family Support Programme (FSP)
- xvi. Universal Basic Education (UBE)
- xvi. Rural Infrastructure Development Scheme (RIDS)

Functional Literacy for Enhancing the Development of Rural Communities

Literacy today has gone beyond simple knowledge of reading, writing and arithmetic. It has evolved to encompass ability to identify, connect, understand, practice, access information, create and communicate (International Literacy Association, 2018; Farmer, 2017 & Tucker, 2014). Literacy promotion is one of the keys that support inclusive engagement in rural community development. In defining functional literacy, Momoh (2017) cited in Alumona (2021) stated that, it is a form of education that is tailored towards achieving a particular goal. It focuses on the fact that, teaching within vocational skills will enable individuals perform well in their occupational task. It is the combination of literacy skills with the socio-economic activities of the recipients. Functional literacy is considered an important factor in promoting personal and professional development. It is seen as a means to a better quality of life. This is because it has the potential to fight ignorance, poverty and backwardness which are obstacles to self-fulfillment of individuals living in remote areas.

Functional literacy education helps adults to understand the social reality, and their ability to contribute to improved living conditions in the society (Aruma, 2017). It is an important aspect of adult education which helps learners to acquire relevant knowledge and skills that will enable them to contribute their own quota to the development of the nation. To achieve a reasonable level of developed in rural communities in Nigeria, the government need to strive for universal access to basic education, reduce adult illiteracy; integrate sustainable development into all education programmes. Actually, Oloyede, Adekunle and Samuel (2013) maintained that the rural objective of development should be to create an enabling environment for all people to use the available methods for their well-being.

Education gives people variety of choices and thus power, and educated people will tend to reject detrimental policies and make informed choices of leaders and development patterns. It is pertinent to note that adults are usually confronted with numerous challenges which demand the acquisition of relevant knowledge and skills that will ultimately focus on addressing them with a view to promoting national development (Aruma, 2014). In order to empower rural dwellers for

community development, some skills, knowledge and values are needed to sustain and change their behaviour and attitude for effective participation in achieving some desired objectives. Such include skills of reading, writing and numeracy in addition to the skills that will enable them function very well in their community.

Furthermore, in the context of functional literacy education as a tool for community development, the application of knowledge and skills acquired by the adult learner must, however, have relevance to provide remedy to present situation without jeopardizing the ability of future generations to take care of their own needs in stimulating community and national development. Essentially, functional literacy education must help the adult recipients to have the ability to provide for people's socio-economic needs through meaningful engagement in productive ventures in the society. Arbarini, Jutmini, and Joyoatmojo (2020) established that, functional literacy using participative learning method is used as a learning model for eradicating and strengthening rural women's literacy by combining the main content of reading, writing, and arithmetic with functional skills materials which are based on interests, needs and market opportunities. Functional literacy education could also be referred as work-oriented or socio-economic-oriented literacy programme. The implication of this according to Aruma (2014) is that it focuses on addressing emerging socio-economic challenges occasioned by high rate of unemployment, poverty, crimes, kidnapping, armed robbery, prostitution and other social vices which plague Nigeria as a developing country.

The relevance of functional literacy education involves content, methods of delivery and application of knowledge and skills. Interestingly, relevance of functional literacy education involves a practical application of knowledge and skills acquired in such a way as to enhance people's improved living conditions in the community and society at large. The objectives of functional literacy education in promoting economic conditions of adult learners include among other things to create job opportunities for people, widen people's choice of goods and services, empower people with relevant knowledge and skills as well as to promote human capacity building that will be relevant enough in managing the growing economy of Nigeria as a developing country (Aruma, 2014). Thus, from the above, it could be deduced that when individuals including those in rural communities are empowered in the areas of skill and knowledge acquisition, they will not only add value to their lives but to the lives of people around them thereby promoting the development of their communities.

Functional adult literacy has a source of information in poverty alleviation, economic and social development of communities. For example Abadzi (2003) stated that adult literacy is highly relevant to poverty alleviation efforts worldwide, because in the 21st century much of the information needed to make decisions and improve one's economic, personal, family, or political conditions is presented in written form. Illiterate farmers, for example, have limited access to information that could help them to increase their agricultural output through the adoption of modern agricultural techniques, since the dissemination of these techniques is mostly through the print media. For the majority of rural households who depend on agriculture for their subsistence and cash incomes, the inability to read, in a situation where extension services are either inadequate or non-existent, means continued use of unproductive production methods; and the resulting poor yields easily translate into poverty and undernourishment (Hassen, 2017).

Functional adult literacy can also change the farmers' production by creating a self-image, developing writing, calculating, and reading skills, developing willingness to continue education, and involving in their children's education within and outside their communities. Thus, in Nigeria, despite the rural development programmes on ground and the role functional literacy plays in the development of rural communities, there are still some challenges in enhancing effective rural community development using functional literacy. Such challenges are highlighted and explained below.

Challenges in Enhancing Rural Communities through Functional Literacy

Poor Budgetary Allocation to Adult Education: The budgetary allocation to adult education, by different levels of the government is inadequate. In rural areas, the provision of facilities and proper curriculum and instructional materials that are required for learning to take place in an efficient manner are lacking. There is inadequate funding of resources and other needs, which are considered vital that lead to improvements in the adult education techniques in rural areas (Hussain, 2013).

Lack of Motivation of Teachers/Instructors: Motivation can be regarded as the desire to do something. It may be intrinsic or extrinsic but it has power to catalyse a person to achieve more. The Federal Republic of Nigeria (2004) made it clear that, the aim of teacher education is to produce highly motivated, conscious and efficient classroom teachers and enhance their commitment to the teaching profession. However, Ogbuanya (2005) and Allen (2004) have shown that the stipulated aims in the National Policy of Education have not been achieved as instructors who teach in adult education /

literacy centres are not properly paid. Hence, when this happens, their level of commitment and development of the learners in the rural communities are affected.

Inadequate Supply of Instructional Materials by the Government: Teaching is an arduous task. It is made easier and more meaningful with certain teaching materials and aids. Books, charts, drawings and tools among others all constitute teaching aids. According to Omabe (2009), instructional materials help the teacher/instructor to increase his or her students learning experiences because as learners learn with materials, they become conversant with many issues or ideas. An investigation into the use of instructional materials in adult education classes in different geo-political zones of the country showed that government has not done much in the provision of teaching materials and instructors employed to help these adults learn do not improvise materials for learning.

Poor supervision of Instruction by Supervisors: One of the characteristics of supervision is that it provides necessary assistance that will help teachers and instructors improve their teaching style with the aim of achieving educational objectives. Ogbuanya (2005) established that the success of any educational policy or plan depends to a great extent on the efficiency of the supervision machinery. Thus, if proper supervision mechanisms are not put in place, government might not know the areas that need to be addressed to enhance the development of the learners and the community at large.

Inadequate Classroom Facilities: Another challenge in enhancing rural communities through functional literacy is inadequate classroom facilities. For proper education delivery, classroom facilities need to be adequately available. In any educational setting, the learning environment, classroom in particular, has to be enabling and comfortable for the instructor to give his/her best and the learners to learn effectively. However, the issue is that in some rural communities, some of the adult literacy centres lack adequate classroom facilities, thereby affecting the development of the learners and the communities. This collaborates with the opinion of Eze (2001) that identified physical facilities and equipment as major problem confronting adult education programmes being run at different centres in Nigeria.

3. CONCLUSION

From the paper, it could be established that acquisition of functional literacy education from literacy centres is highly important both for individuals and for any rural community development. This is because it is a form of education that enables one to acquire not only the skills of reading, writing and numeracy but also the type that helps him/her acquire practical and socio-economic skills that will help him or her live a better life and add value to the community. Thus, given its importance, there are still some challenges as highlighted in the paper that to some extent militate against its proper use in rural community development. It is therefore recommended that such challenges be addressed.

4. RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the study, the following recommendations were made.

- i. Governments at all level should ensure adequate budgetary allocation to education especially adult literacy education.
- ii. Proper motivation of instructors is highly needed in literacy education centres. This is in order to produce those people who will add value to their lives and the community in which they reside
- iii. There should be adequate supply of instructional materials in literacy centres in the rural communities. This will promote proper teaching and learner that will improve the development of the learners and the communities.
- iv. Supervision of instructions is needed in learning centres in the rural communities. This will enhance proper education delivery.
- v. Governments should ensure that classroom facilities are adequately provided and that the environment is enabling to be able to produce individuals who will understand the need for the development of rural communities.

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