

Functional Adult Education as an Instrument for Sustainable Rural Livelihood Development in Nigeria

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Abstract

Rural areas in developing countries are characterized by dependence on agriculture and natural resources; high prevalence of poverty, isolation, and marginality; neglect by policymakers; and lower human development. Functional adult education was provided as a second chance to those that have earlier missed schooling or could not complete schooling or want to further their education. Apart from being a right of everyone to be educated, adult education paves way for people to contribute to the development of themselves, their communities and the society at large for their livelihood improvement. It is on record that the present level of illiteracy is very high in Nigeria; this makes it difficult for Nigeria to achieve sustainable rural livelihood improvement. This paper therefore looks at various aspects of sustainable rural livelihood development and how functional adult education can serve as major instrument needed to achieve the desired goals. Using secondary data such as various documents and various Scholars' view which add the Nigerian illiteracy rate at 31% as at 2023, the paper established that there is high number of population of illiterates in Nigeria; this number could drastically reduce through different functional adult education programmes to enhance rural livelihood development as no society can develop above the educational level of its members. The paper concludes that, an effective collaboration among all stakeholders is mandatory so that learners' interest could be addressed and the paper suggests that, a systematic adult education policy be adopted and comprehensive education and training opportunities for adults that would expose them to various professional, vocational and other programmes of interest be embraced in order to achieve sustainable rural livelihood development.

Keywords: Functional Adult Education, Sustainable Development and Rural Livelihood

Introduction

Developing countries and their rural areas in particular are characterized by poverty, unemployment, unequal distribution of resources, acute shortage of social, physical institutional infrastructure and increasing rural-urban drift (Sanusi & Barma 2022). Imhabekhai (2009), opined that; the world, whether rural or urban settings is made up of communities and the quality of life in any community is a function of the level of development achieved by the people of that particular community themselves, and with meaningful assistance from governments and other agencies. It is therefore, evident that functional adult education programmes are the secrete to rural livelihood development. Olojede, (2012) is of the opinion that Adult Education in Nigeria is presently geared towards national development.

Education; generally, aims at transforming societies to conditions better than they were. Adult and non-formal education specifically is meant to equip man with everything he needs for his personal and collective development. It is pertinent to recognize that, development whether social, economic, political, national and so on, is of man, by man and for man. This transformation and development is better effected through the cultural elements that are desirable such as the traditions, beliefs and values, skills and competences, accumulated knowledge and institutions like the family, age groups, other social groups and the entire community have been largely responsible for the training of the youth in the African traditional education which is purely non-formal in nature (Sanusi 2023).

The objective of functional adult education and the process of national development is to get the adults, either as individuals or as a group, to learn, and through learning to change their attitude and behaviour. The FRN clearly states the objectives of adult education in NPE (2014) as: -

To provide functional literacy education for adults who have never had the opportunity of any formal education; To provide functional and remedial education for those young people who prematurely dropped out of the formal school system; To provide further education for different categories of completers of formal education system in order to improve their basic knowledge and skills; To provide in-service and on-the job vocational and professional training for different categories of workers and professionals in order to improve their skills and To give the adult citizens of the country aesthetic, cultural and civic education for public enlightenment.

Sanusi and Barma (2022) opined that all these objectives have one end in view-to equip the adult with everything he needs for life in order to be relevant to his society by helping to solve some of its problem. We have to recognize that, man is the master of his destiny and functional adult education serves to bring about a fundamental change in man's attitudes and lifestyle. Therefore, to have a sustainable community development and an improved rural livelihood, people must have awareness and to become aware they must not only be made literate, but functionally literate.

Functional Adult Education

Muntaka, Ibrahim, and Ali, (2024) opined that, the term 'Adult Education' conjures up in many minds; the picture of old people in the villages attending classes in order to learn the alphabets, so as to be able to read and write. But the point is that, adult education is for all class of people and at all stage of life. Thus, making learning a lifelong process. Adult education is one of the most difficult terms to define. Yet it is very often on the lips of many people. In many universities, colleges of education and polytechnics. Many learners including those studying adult and non-formal education remain unaware of what constitute adult education. It is therefore a business as usual for adult education practitioners to attempt to define the term adult education.

United Nations' Education Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO 2009), define adult education as *"the entire body of organised educational processes, whatever the content, level and method, whether formal or otherwise, whether they prolong or replace initial education in schools, colleges and universities as well as in apprenticeship, whereby persons regarded as adult 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 twofold perspective of full personal development and participation in balanced and independent social, economic and cultural development, adult education, however, must not be considered as an entity in itself, it is a sub-division, and an integral part of, a global scheme for life-long education and learning"*.

Sanusi, Alakoso, Ojedapo and Ibrahim (2021), opined that; "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’’. It must therefore be an integral part of any modern country’s educational system’’. From the above definitions, it is clear that adult education cannot be understood in a vacuum. It has to be seen in the cultural context and in the nature of the activity as well as in its functionality. Thus, adult education centred on the individual and collective development, and the encouragement of social, moral and intellectual responsibilities in relation to local, national and international citizenship to ensure rural development through livelihood improvement.

The United Nations made education a fundamental right of a man. It is therefore clear that, zones of illiteracy are always zones of poverty be it in developed, developing or under developed countries of the world. Also, a cursory look at the political climate of the world shows clearly that regions of mass illiteracy are generally regions of instability, economic and political underdevelopment. Economically; the illiterates are on the periphery, politically; they stand outside, and technologically, they are completely in the dark (UNESCO 2016).

Functional literacy is one of the fundamental requirements of modern civilization, because the functional significance of people’s ability to read and write depends on it. It is in fact, a common belief among contemporary scholars that a nation needs above forty percent literacy level among its citizens for a sustainable economic growth, livelihood improvement as well as socio-political stability (Sanusi 2023).

Adult education train an individual for a better appreciation of his own cultural traditions whilst at the same time equipping him with the ability to absorb new ideas, new information and new data for resolving the constantly changing problems of his environment. Secondly adult education train individuals to develop creative ability especially in cultural and technological realms and foster in the individual those values which make him a good and productive citizen such as tolerance, honesty, hard work, selflessness, dedication and personal integrity, which will provide the rich soil from which good leadership is spawned (Sanusi 2023).

Rural Community

“Rural” refers generally to areas of open country and small settlements, but the definition of “rural areas” in both policy-oriented and scholarly literature are terms often taken for granted or left undefined in a process of definition

that is often fraught with difficulties. Sanusi (2023), claimed that, Rural areas in developing countries are characterized by a dependence on agriculture and natural resources; high prevalence of poverty, isolation, and marginality; neglect by policymakers; and lower human development. These features are also present to a lesser degree in rural areas of developed countries, where there are also closer interdependencies between rural and urban areas (such as commuting), and where there are also newer forms of land use such as tourism and recreational activities (although these also generally depend on natural resources).

Some of the key points describing rural communities as identified by International Fund for Agricultural Development IFAD (2010) are:

1. Rural areas, even after significant demographic shifts, still account for almost half of the world population.
2. The overwhelming majority of the world's rural population lives in less developed or least developed countries.
3. Rural dwellers also account for about 70% of the developing world's poor people. Around 70% of the extreme poor in developing countries lived in rural areas.
4. Rural areas are a spatial category, associated with certain patterns of human activity, but with those associations being subject to continuous change.
5. Rural areas are largely defined in contradistinction to urban areas, but that distinction is increasingly seen as problematic.
6. Rural populations have, and will have, a variety of income sources and occupations, within which agriculture and the exploitation of natural resources have privileged, but not necessarily predominant, positions.

Sustainable Rural Livelihood

Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO 2003), define Livelihood “as the means of gaining a living”. “A livelihood comprises the capabilities, assets (including both material and social resources) and activities required for a means of living. A livelihood is sustainable when it can cope with and recover from stresses and shocks and maintain its capabilities and assets both now and

in the future, while not undermining the natural resource base. There are therefore, three perspective words; “sustainable, rural and livelihoods” meaning a specific methodology as the people-oriented progress that the initial argument was the rural realities of poor people (Sanusi et al 2021). A livelihood is sustainable when it can manage with and improve from pressures and shocks, maintain or enhance its capabilities and assets, while not discouraging the natural resource base. The term Sustainable Livelihood has been well-defined in a different way by several authors in the context of Poverty Alleviation and Rural Development. There are certain resemblances and likewise contradictions in these explanations, depending on the diverse situations in which examinations are undertaken. The maximum similarities are that, a sustainable livelihood can be defined as people’s capacity to sustain a living by surviving shocks and stress and enhancing their quality of life on a long-term basis without threatening the livelihood possibilities of others (Sanusi et al 2021). The concept of sustainable livelihoods is increasingly important in research about regional development, poverty alleviation, rural agricultural development and rural resource management. A Sustainable Livelihoods approach to rural development demands a more holistic understanding of poverty, and of the linkages between different livelihoods components. Rural people’s ownership of and access to certain livelihood assets may have a positive impact on their strategies for coping with vulnerabilities and risks.

Functional adult education builds the capacity of rural people at both local and national levels which is central to the goals of progress and sustainable development. Organizations persuaded to handover only capital and modern technology or provide formal education to rural communities, these actions were directed by Government, Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), Researchers and Extension Officers, with slightly participation of local people. After finishing the project, local people could not continue to recover themselves and grow their groups. Matarrita and Brennan (2021) mentioned additional comments that “investment alone cannot lead to the desired level of improved livelihood in rural communities”. Therefore, building the capacity of local people, groups and organizations especially through functional adult education is vital, because they must have the ability and responsibility to resolve their problems in order to develop their communities and improve their livelihood.

Functional Adult Education for Sustainable Rural Livelihood Development

Political and scientific debates have stressed the growing importance of functional adult education over the last few years. Muntaka et al (2024) states that, there prevails a consensus that functional adult education plays significant role in promoting personal, social and economic well-being, which has also long been recognised by Deutscher Volkshoch-Verband (DVV) international and the German Adult Education Association (GAEA). There is a deep rooted belief that adult learning has the potential to create personal, economic and social value (Matarrita and Brennan 2021). This paper argues that functional adult education promotes sustainable rural livelihood improvement, in ways that go far beyond what can be measured by the labour market earnings and economic growth. Important as they are, the wider benefits of functional adult education are neither currently well understood nor systematically measured. Following are some of the ways functional adult education can enhance rural development and livelihood improvement:

a. Economic Development

Economic development is seen as creation of jobs, wealth, and general improvement of livelihood. It is also described as a process that influences growth and for restructuring of an economy to enhance the development of a community (Stephan, 2012). UNESCO (2016) explained that “Despite the challenges and constraints, adult education empowers people by opening avenues of communication, expands personal choice and controls over one’s environment, and the acquisition of many skills like tailoring, knitting, processing of agricultural products, rearing of animals and many more. Functional Adult education can improve employability and income through its number of programmes that are contemporary and synonymous to rural community development, and which is a key pathway to realizing a range of other benefit. For example, it enables people to some extent, choose and shape the context in which they live and work and even increase their social status.

i. Health Benefit

Empirical evidence has shown that functional adult education can have both transforming and sustaining effects on health. Transforming effects are when functional adult education changes health behaviour (for instance from smoking to non-smoking, child spacing for women and acceptance of family

planning among couples etc.) while sustaining effects are when health behaviour is maintained, for example, the likelihood of remaining a non-smoker. Manninen (2008) states that, people attending adult education course are more likely to have healthy lifestyles, and there is a body of literature which describe adult learning and its relation to mental health. Also, Inter-generational effects of educated parent on the health of their children are very relevant.

ii. Civic and Social Engagement

Many countries share a concern about declining levels of voter participation and about the state of civic participation. It is possible that functional adult education might inspire a change in attitude which in turn brings about a change in behaviour. Several studies conducted by Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development; (OECD, 2007), Desjardin and Schullar (2006), Field (2009), amongst others, show that functional education has the capacity to promote social cohesion and strengthen citizenship. functional adult education also supports the development of shared norms, greater trust towards other individuals, communities, societies and the government at different levels for civic co-operation.

iii. Attitudinal Change

An individual who participate in functional adult education programme is different from the one who does not, in terms of his characters and characteristics. Matarrita and Brennan (2021) opined that, adult learning is associated with more “open-minded” perspectives on race and authority, greater understanding of people from different backgrounds, challenging previously held beliefs and with a sustaining effect on non-extremist view. Thus, youths and adult exposed to learning would have an open mind to accept others in terms of race, colour and religion. Condemning each other would be a thing of the past as appreciating other peoples’ opinion and personality, shows that human can always disagree to agree in a more civilised manner.

iv. Educational Development

Progression into other learning is an important outcome of functional adult education. Given the opportunity to start from where one stops and wish to

continue in order to achieve a dream is one of the benefits of adult education. There is clear evidence that successful engagement in learning provides incentive for further learning. Manninen (2010) found that 93 percent of course participants in adult learning programmes said that, their participation has motivated them to learn more. Furthermore, learners described their progress by referring to real life activities they could now do in a wide variety of life context. Self-confidence, finding voice and giving one's time up to learning were identified by almost all learners and seemed central to their perspective on learning. These outcomes provided improvement in the quality of their livelihood and become part of their identity.

v. Alleviating Poverty

Functional adult education programmes have been cited as key to poverty reduction at different levels around the world (European Association for the Education of Adult: EAEA, 2010) as it has the capacity to positively affect many dimensions of poverty. This means that functional adult education has a role to play in nurturing the skills and knowledge necessary to both reducing the risk of poverty, and also for providing the capacity to withstand poverty inducing pressure. EAEA (2010), underlines the empowering role functional adult education can play in times of crises, providing a stable community, a chance for reorientation, a safe place and social recognition. Sabates (2008) expressed that participating in adult learning can help substantially to reduce poverty through enhancing employment prospects, improving health levels of poor people and giving better chances of acquiring the tools needed to improve their own livelihood and develop their communities by reducing the poverty levels.

Conclusion

Successful and sustainable rural development and livelihood improvement cannot be achieved when the majority of the populace are illiterates, this is why lifelong learning stresses the need for learning to be ongoing throughout life. This entails that a comprehensive adult education policy that would sustain a culture that would lead to the emergence of a learning society is necessary. Based on the importance of functional adult education especially for youths and adults and for the adequate planning for the implementation of Sustainable Development Goals; SDGs, there should be effective collaboration among all stakeholders so that learners' interest could be addressed.

This paper identified Functional Adult Education as a tool that could be used in achieving human capacity for sustainable development in Nigeria. Through its programmes like technical and vocational knowledge, acquisition of the necessary skills, values, and attitudes needed by the adult populace for sustainable community development and livelihood improvement. In addition, it enables people to become well-informed, capable of thinking critically and owning their destiny through active participation. The discipline is a useful instrument for meeting needs of people, improving their livelihood and developing their communities.

Suggestions

This paper presents the following suggestions for urgent attention and implementation

1. A systematic functional adult education policy should be adopted in Nigeria. The policy should be guided in both conception and implementation by a philosophy of continuing education or lifelong learning for sustainable community development.
2. A comprehensive education and training opportunities for adults that would expose them to various professional, vocational and other programmes of interest be embraced in order to achieve sustainable rural livelihood development
3. Adult education practice should be revived at all levels, constantly organised and systematized in order to develop a more coherent and useful agenda for functional adult education to give it the needed respect among other disciplines.
4. Functional adult education should be well funded, adequately administered and its programmes well monitored to facilitate effective and sustainable community development and livelihood improvement.

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