

CONFINTEA, EFA, MDGS AND SDGS: REVIEWING GOALS, TARGETS AND NIGERIANS POLICY FRAMEWORK FOR ADULT AND LIFELONG LEARNING

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ABSTRACT: *This article examines the various international commitments to adult education and lifelong learning such as the CONFINTEA, EFA, MDGs and SDGs. The paper reviews the goals of these global declarations comparing the 4th goals of SDGs with EFA goals and constrains to attaining the CONFINTEA, EFA and MDGs in Nigeria while reviewing the efforts of the Nigerian government in attaining these goal. The paper argued that adult education is a Cinderella of all global policy framework for development, but it has received lest attention and less budgetary allocation in Nigeria and that the policy deficiency in lifelong learning and adult education over the years could undermine the attainment of goal 4 of SDG in Nigeria*

KEYWORDS: Adult Learning, Lifelong learning, Cinderella, Sustainability, Policy Framework.

INTRODUCTION

The former President of Tanzania Julius Nyerere, once asserted that adult education is the Cinderella (Cinderella a metaphor of any girl whose beauty or merit become known only after a period of neglect) of government departments. This is true both at the global level and at the national level in all nations and in particular in Nigeria. Since the establishment of the United Nation Organization and in particular its agency the UNESCO, adult education has been treated like Cinderella in all its global declarations on development and education. The declarations were mere rhetoric without concrete actions until late twenty century. According to Tuckett (2013) the first decade of the twenty first century began with high hopes for improved opportunities for adult learners. Since 1949 several conferences on development and education has been organized by UNESCO emanating in policy framework for national government and Non-governmental action. In past few decades the vision of lifelong learning is a constant feature in 21st-century policy discourse (Hanemann, 2016). Some of these are CONFINTEA, Education for All (EFA), the United Nations Literacy Decade (UNLD), the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Nigeria from the time of its independence is a signatory to all of these global policy frameworks for action. Some of the conferences lead to proper definition of Adult Education (the Nairobi 1976 conference and the Hamburg Declaration of 1997); giving new impetus to lifelong learning policies, and establishing a broad developmental agenda for adult education, recognizing it as a key part of the educational system and as a catalyst in achieving improved health and wellbeing, industrial development, and securing vibrant democracy through active citizenship. The question is within the framework of the global declarations how has Nigeria fared and what are the implications of these declarations for adult education and lifelong learning in Nigeria? In view of these, this paper reviews the policy goals of declarations of CONFINTEA, EFA, MDGs and SDGs and the policy framework of Nigeria to attain the avowed goals; the paper also focuses on the challenges for attaining these goals in particular the SDGs in Nigeria by 2030.

Global Efforts and Commitments for Adult Education and Lifelong Learning

Confinte

Once every twelve years, UNESCO calls for world conference on Adult Education which is widely known as CONFINTEA. It started in 1949 in Denmark. From that time to date six conferences have been held. The latest of it was CONFINTEA VI in 2009 at Belem in Brazil. The CONFINTEA VI closed with a call to move from rhetoric to action, harnessing the power and potential of adult learning and education for a viable future. At this conference series of decisions were taken to strengthen lifelong learning and adult education. The paradigm of lifelong learning was first put forward in CONFINTEA V in 1997 as the key to the twenty first century. The CONFINTEA VI reaffirmed this paradigm and asserts that adult learning and educations at all levels and in all dimensions represent a significant component of lifelong learning and that the adult learning is a human right (Bochynek, 2011). The CONFINTEA VI affirmed that literacy is the most significant foundation to build comprehensive, inclusive and integrated lifelong and life-wide learning for young people and adults, and that given the magnitude of global literacy challenges that countries should redouble their efforts to ensure that existing adult literacy goals and priorities as enshrined in Education for All (EFA), the United Nation Literacy Decades (UNLD), and the Literacy Initiative for Empowerment (LIFE) are achieved by all means possible. The conference affirmed EFA goal four which emphasis reducing illiteracy by 50 per cent from 2000 and by 2015 with ultimate goal of breaking the cycle of low literacy and creating a full cycle of literate world (UNESCO, 2010). The conference also recommended literacy action for women and disadvantage populations including indigenous people, prisoners and rural population; implementation of continuing education, training and skills development beyond the basic literacy skills.

To achieve this goal, it was recommends that countries should have a road map with clear goals and deadlines, mobilize and increase resources and expertise to carry out literacy programme with greater scale and coverage, develop literacy provisions that is relevant and adopted to learners' needs that will ensure functional and sustainable knowledge, skills and competence and lifelong learning. The conference also recommended the development of appropriate legislation, full-cost policies; good governance, investment of 6% of GNP in education; inclusive education and equitable access to, and participation in adult education; and quality assurance. This is in furtherance of the Global Campaign for Education recommendation of "at least 3% of the education budget" allocated to adult literacy in order to attain the EFA goal of reducing illiteracy by half by 2015.

Tuckett (2015) observed that CONFINTEA VI demonstrated a more modest aspiration; while ICAE/FISC (2010) pointed out that CONFINTEA VI tends to neglect goals 3 and 4 of the Dakar framework for action for Youth and Adult Education as well as adult literacy. Two years after the conference, Ireland (2011) observed that CONFINTEA VI caused barely a ripple on the international development agenda and the expected impact did not occur.

Education for All (EFA)

In the 1990s the Jomtien UNESCO conference made the declaration for Education for All (EFA). In Jomtien, representatives of government of various nations signed a declaration and a framework for action in which they made a commitment to ensure quality basic education for children, youth and adults. These commitments were expressed in six goals to be achieved in the year 2000. These are: expansion of early childhood care, universal access to basic

education, improvements in learning achievement, reduction of adult illiteracy by half, expansion of basic education and training for youth and adults (linking it to health, employment and productivity), and use of media and other communication technologies to promote better living and sustainable development. Schugurensky and Myers (2013) observed that when the Jomtien declaration was translated into actual policies and programmes by national educational agencies, it lost most of its comprehensive, inclusive, innovative and progressive potential. Most countries could not implement fully the policies and programmes to achieve the six goals.

Ten years later these goals were revised by the Dakar Educational Goals with emphasis on adult education. The third goal ensures that the learning needs of all young people and adults are met through equitable access to appropriate learning and life-skills programmes, while goal four sets a target for achieving a 50 percent improvement in levels of adult literacy by 2015, with an emphasis on women, and equitable access to basic and continuing education for all adults. The underlying assumption of these goals is that the policy options outlined can bring long term gains that will have a wider spin-off effect in moving toward quality education for all. The Dakar framework for action did refer to a lifelong learning framework in recognition of the expanded definition of education in which countries committed themselves in the CONFINTEA V.

Tuckett (2015) pointed out that successive annual independent EFA Global Monitoring Report (GMR) by UNESCO shows continuing failure of reduce illiteracy among adults, and the report have not been able to show any commitment to wider adult learning opportunities because data on provision were unreliable or non-existent in many countries. An interim report issued in 2005 showed that there is an educational crisis looming large over Sub-Saharan African countries as they lag behind other regions of the world in making progress toward the goal of providing education for all, particularly the target areas of universal primary education (UPE) and gender parity (UNESCO, 2005). The Fast Track Initiative (FTI) as part of the measure of attaining the EFA goals in 2015 only funds primary education neglecting adult education. According to Torres ((2013) out of the six EFA goals, Goal 2 which refers to primary education received the most attention while Goals 3 and 4 which are meant for youth and adult education received the least attention, as acknowledged every year by EFA Global Monitoring. Similarly, Semali, (2009) pointed out that 23 African countries could not meet the 2015 EFA goals. Nigeria is one of the countries that could not meet the EFA goal. Nigeria is classified as 'E-9' country that is countries with the highest number of illiterate people in the world.

Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)

The implementation of the Dakar declaration on Education for All (EFA) took place side by side with Millennium Development Goals (MDG), which were both declared to run for 15 years in the year 2000. The Millennium Declaration of the United Nations (UN) set out the agenda for international policy in the 21st century, laying down four interlinked areas for programmatic action. The four areas are: Peace, Security and Disarmament; Development and Poverty Reduction; Protection of the shared environment; and Human rights, Democracy and good governance. These were further broken into 8 goals, 18 specific targets, which can be measured by means of 48 indicators. The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) are: 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. None of these goals directly touches on adult

education and lifelong learning not even goal 2 in specific terms. Goal 2 is Achieving Universal Primary Education.

Although goals 1, 3, 5 and 8 may facilitate adult education and lifelong learning perhaps because adults participation in education and lifelong learning may be undermined by poverty, poor maternal health, HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases and gender inequality and on the other hand adult education can help nations to achieve all of these MDGs. Just in the first quarter of the implementation of MDGs, Almazan-Khan (2005) asserted that MDGs target was not unrealistic to meet, and Oxenham (2009) towards the third quarter of the implementation of MDG pointed out that a growing body of empirical evidence from more than 30 countries suggests that literacy and numeracy education for out of school and older adults would accelerate progress towards achieving the MDGs.

Sustainable Development Goals

To consolidate the gains of the MDGs which terminate in 2015, in September 2015, the UN member states adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development with 17 goals and 169 specific targets, which address a broad set of economic, social and environmental challenges. The new universal agenda includes a standalone goal on quality education and lifelong learning (SDG 4), with 10 targets, which effectively succeeds and, in many ways, expands on the unfinished Education for All (EFA) and MDGs agendas (Benavot and McWilliam, 2016). According to Benavot et al, the SDGs 2030 Framework for Action in education is an ambitious principle particularly in terms of its implementation. SDG 4 specifically commits countries to adopt free and compulsory pre-primary education, universal primary and secondary education; equal access of men and women to affordable and quality technical vocational and tertiary education including university; eliminate gender disparities in education, ensure inclusiveness of the disable, indigenous people and children; ensure that all youth and substantial proportion of adults achieve literacy and numeracy. SDG 4 includes several targets such as to increase the skills and competencies of the adult population, upgrade educational facilities as well as increase supply of qualified teachers.

SDG 4.3, 4.4, and 4.6 specifically touches on adult education and lifelong learning. The SDG went beyond other declarations on development and education in respect of adult education as it does not limit adult learning needs to literacy, it rather expands adult learning needs to areas of vocational and technical skills, tertiary education and university. It also went further to emphasize the promotion of culture of peace and non-violence, and global citizenship. While EFA goal 4 emphasizes reducing illiteracy by half, the SDG 4.6 emphasizes reducing illiteracy in substantial proportion. According to Hanemann (2016), SDG target 4.6 establishes “proficiency levels of functional literacy and numeracy skills that are equivalent to levels achieved at successful completion of basic education” (WEF 2015: 15). This corresponds to the level envisaged in Education for All (EFA) Goal 4 (“improvement in levels of adult literacy by 2015 and equitable access to basic and continuing education for all adults”; WEF 2000: 16). While the two global education agendas are similar in spirit, SDG 4 is considerably more comprehensive and ambitious both in terms of the scope of the education targets and the extent to which progress can be measured. Notable differences include targets beyond basic education (e.g., upper secondary education, higher education, TVET, skills for employment).

The SDG 4 also differs somewhat with EFA in how skills and competencies are addressed. Under EFA, objectives to improve adult skills were included under goal 3 (Promote learning and life skills for young people and adults) and goal 4 (Increase adult literacy by 50 percent).

In contrast, adult skills are included in three of the SDG targets. Under SDG 4, adult skills are primarily covered under target 4.4 to provide “relevant” skills for decent work and employment (removing reference to life skills) and target 4.6 to achieve literacy and numeracy among a substantial proportion of adults. Finally, there is SDG 4.7 emphasizes ensuring “that all learners acquire knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development, including, among others, through education for sustainable development and sustainable lifestyles, human rights, gender equality, promotion of a culture of peace and non-violence, global citizenship and appreciation of cultural diversity and culture’s contribution to sustainable development.” (UNESCO Education 2015: 18). A critical assessment of SDG 4 suggests a tacit shift towards assessment of skill proficiency on a scale, moving away from binary measurements of literacy employed as part of the EFA agenda⁶, and allowing a more accurate and nuanced understanding of adult capabilities. The overarching goal of SDG 4 is to: “Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all

Adult Education and Lifelong Learning in Nigeria within the Context of Global Declarations

Adult and non-formal education in practice and in policy framework is not new in Nigeria. Adult learning and in particular adult literacy education started in the 14th century by itinerant Islamic scholars and traders in the Northern Nigeria and later by Christian missionaries who brought western education to parts of Southern Nigeria (Fasokun and Pwol, 2008). The first deliberate policy framework on adult education was articulated by the British colonial government in 1925 later by 1946 following the ten years colonial development plan. When Nigeria became independent in 1960 and as a member of United Nation Organisation and its agency the UNESCO, there were so much expectations and commitments for adult and lifelong learning. The Nigerian government responded with a variety of initiatives including the establishment of National Commission for Mass Literacy, Adult and Non-Formal Education, Commission for Nomadic Education, an approved national curriculum for women’s education and an advocacy campaign including enrolment drives, mass literacy campaigns, and public enlightenment efforts. Establishment of Adult and Non-formal Education Unit in the Federal Ministry of Education and at the State Ministry of Education, Establishment of the State Agency for Adult and Non-Formal Education, the Declaration of 1982-1992 as a decade for National Mass Literacy Campaign and a host of other initiatives by the government both at the federal and state level. Also the adoption of the “Each-one-teach-one” or “fund the teaching of one” approach enunciated by the then Minister of Education, Professor Babs Fafunwa. All these were an indication that Nigeria was committed to the success of mass literacy education according to Ihejirika (2013). But the question is did the commitment produce an appreciable and plausible result in a sustained manner?

In 1993 a National Conference on Education for All (EFA) was held in Nigeria towards achievement of the goals established by the 1990 EFA conference in Jomtien. However, while laudable efforts were made towards meeting EFA goals, the concentration of efforts was more on a formal interpretation of the nature of the illiteracy problem. This view has been shared by Torres who observed that of the 16 main thrusts of the EFA, only two or three speak directly to the issue of adult literacy component of Adult Basic Education (Torres 2002). The adoption of the Education for All (EFA) goals in Dakar brought a significant policy 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 focused on the education of vulnerable groups, including nomads and migrants, girls and women, street children and the

disabled. As before, federal agencies are responsible for policy and for the implementation of adult and non-formal education (Fasokun and Pwol, 2008).

The Dakar EFA declaration took place side by side with Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and the Nigerian government made greater commitment to attain these goals by 2015. These include the launch of the UNESCO Literacy Initiative for Empowerment (LIFE), scaling up literacy on Radio project so that reducing the level of illiteracy by half by 2015 could be achieved. Nigeria was among the 35 countries that LIFE was implemented. This was designed for countries with either an illiteracy rate of more than 50% or more than 10 million people who cannot read and write. The Nigerian government also adopted and fully implemented the universal basic education policy making the first 9 years of education free and compulsory. This was expected to scale up school enrolment in primary and junior secondary school level. Adult literacy was accorded recognition in the Universal Basic Education Act of 2004. The Act in Section 15, defines Basic Education as “Universal Basic Education” including early childhood care and education, the nine years of formal schooling, adult literacy and non-formal education, skills acquisition programmes and the education of special groups such as nomads and migrants, girl-child and women, *almajiri*, street children and disabled groups. This was part of the measures to attain the MDGs on achieving Universal Primary Education in 2015.

The National Commission for Mass Literacy, Adult and Non-Formal Education is responsible for the organisation, monitoring and assessment of the adult literacy practices in the country. The Commission adopted the policy of decentralization by the establishment of offices in the six geo-political zones of the country (South-West, South-South, South-East, North-East, North-West, and North-Central), in the thirty-six States (including the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja) and in all the seven hundred and seventy-four local government areas. Local adult education officers, supervisors and literacy instructors were responsible for the coordination and supervision of literacy classes. The minimum number of literacy classes expected in any local government is ten. In addition, non-governmental organisations support government efforts by establishing as many as they could manage and finance.

Although the Nigerian state lacks a deliberate policy on lifelong learning, there seem to be a commitment to lifelong learning through resuscitation of the National Open University of Nigeria in 2002. The open university has as its motto ‘work and learn’ with a delivery system that revolves around print and electronic media which includes printed instructional materials, audio and video tapes, CD ROMS, VSAT, and other Wireless communication systems (Jimoh, cited in Chukwuma and Patrick, 2015). The Open University system and distance learning were introduced to accommodate increasing demand for higher education among the adults who are interested in leisurely and continuing learning according to Omolewa (2016). The open university system has not only created avenue for greater flexibility to the learning approaches by adults who can decide on the place, time considered most appropriate, suitable and convenient for learning.

Policy Issues Unresolved Before SDGS

Despite these efforts of the Nigerian federal and state governments, the EFA Global Monitoring Reports (GMR) reported that, out of the six EFA goals, Goal 2 which refers to primary education, has received the most attention while Goals 3 and 4 which focuses on youth and adult education, have received the least attention in Nigeria. Furthermore, in spite of these efforts Nigeria is classified as one of the E-9 countries (E-9 countries imply countries with the highest level of illiteracy in the world). Furthermore, UNESCO (2012) national survey reported

that seventeen (17) states out of thirty seven (37) are at risk of not achieving EFA goal 4 by 2015 as these states have youth and adult literacy rates between 14.5% to 49.3% These States have concurrently experienced very low enrolment rates in primary education. These are Northern states which have majority Muslim and pastoralist population. Furthermore, these states have 11 million children that are out of primary school which in few years later will put greater pressure and need for adult basic education in the country. So the country entered into the era of SDGs with enormous amount of rhetoric's arising from the EFA and the MDGs with little action consequently the attainment of the EFA and MDGs in 2015 absolutely challenging and unaccomplished.

From the UNESCO report, the budgetary allocation to adult and non-formal education in Nigeria has been between 1.41% and 2.01% whereas internationally, in 2005, the Global Campaign for Education proposed "at least 3% of the education budget" allocated to adult literacy in order to attain the EFA goal of reducing illiteracy by half by 2015. Many countries have set financial benchmarks for the education sector in their constitutions, laws and/or policies. Most of them aim at having 6% of the GNP allocated to education. In Nigeria the percentage sectorial budgetary allocation is not defined in the constitution or in any status book, it is rather a discretionary matter left to the chief executive and a function of his policy direction and priorities, so adult education has not received reasonable budgetary attention in Nigeria as required by EFA and MDG. It has remained a Cinderella.

Adult education in Nigeria faces overwhelming challenges that cannot be separated from larger issues of poverty and inequality in the country. The UNDP Human Development Index released in 2016 indicates that Nigeria ranked 152 out of 187 countries in human development index and 54.1 percent of the population lived in multidimensional poverty (the MPI 'head count') while an additional 17.8 percent were vulnerable to multiple deprivations. The intensity of deprivation – that is, the average percentage of deprivation experienced by people living in multidimensional poverty – in Nigeria was 57.3 percent (UNDP 2016). However, recent computation by the World Bank, using GHS panel, indicates that poverty rates are significantly lower than estimates based on 2009/2010 HNLSS. It dropped from 35.2 per cent in 2009/2010 to 33.1 per cent in 2012/2013 (as opposed to 62.2% from the 2009/2010 HNLSS) (World Bank, 2014b). The consequence of the high level of poverty is the decreasing level of access to education. Differential access to education is an important contributor to inequality in Nigeria as demonstrated by the UNDP Report (2015). The computation of IHDI for Nigeria in 2012 and the disaggregation of losses show that the proportion of loss due to inequality in education was the highest of losses accounted for by the different component dimensions of the HDI. Loss due to inequality in income was 34.5 per cent, loss due to inequality in life expectancy at birth was 43.8 per cent, while the loss due to inequality in education was 45.2 per cent. This pattern is instructive and points to education as a key sector in creating and expanding inequality across geopolitical zones and across rural/urban divides in terms of availability and access. Nigeria faces an ongoing challenge of making its decade-long sustained growth more inclusive. Poverty and unemployment remain prominent among the major challenges facing the economy. One reason for this is that the benefits of economic growth have not sufficiently trickled down to the poor. In other words, poverty has been widespread in Nigeria despite the enormous resource endowment of the nation and so reducing illiteracy has become a daunting task in Nigeria.

Educational index is computed using Mean Years of Schooling (MYS) and Expected Years of Schooling (EYS). This reflects the knowledge, learning and literacy of a people. Across the

geo-political zones, data for the year 2013 shows that mean years of schooling was highest in the South-South zone (10.664) and lowest in the North-West zone (3.8126) according to the UNDP Human Development Report of 2015. The North-East and North-West zones had values lower than the national average figure, while the southern zones all had higher values than the national average figure. There was nationwide drop in MYS from 8.4333 in 2010 to 7.404 in 2013. At the national level, males have higher MYS (8.4) than females (6.6). This is an indication that the literacy rate continue to decrease while the illiteracy rate increase contrary to the objectives of EFA and MDGs which both ended in 2015 thereby increasing the challenges of attaining 4th goal of SDG in Nigeria.

Nigeria as a country still has a long way to go in the area of adult education and lifelong learning. Although many push strategies have been launched over the years, these have been undermined by pull factors. Olayode cited in Omolewa (2016) identified the following dysfunctionality in educational system over many decades. These are: inadequate planning, mismanagement of resources, weak political will, decaying infrastructures, obsolete facilities, low-quality output, and a general lack of synergy among the multifarious educational agencies. Within the context of Universal Basic Education there are problems of increase drop-out rates, low transition rates, poor teacher qualification and the poor utilization of funds. Also included in the pull factors were inadequate infrastructure, and unqualified teachers. All of these accentuated the daunting challenges in attaining EFA, MDGs and CONFINTEA VI goals in Nigeria and put the attainment of SDG in 2030 at risk and uncertain.

Concluding Remarks

Nigeria entered into the era of SDGs with much daunting challenges which includes militancy and insurgency, economic recession and declining revenue due to fall in the oil price which is the main stay of the economy. The fall in oil price has created serious funding challenge while the insurgency in the North East and militancy in the South-South will likely widening the literacy gap. With the increasing level of inequality there will be inequality in access to education and the attainment of SDG goal 4 which emphasis equal access of men and women to affordable and quality technical vocational and tertiary education including university will be a mirage. The SDG has been seen as an ambitious principle both in terms of its implementation. The Federal and state governments have no deliberate plan, structure and action yet two years already gone in SDG years. In spite of the call of CONFINTEA VI to move from rhetoric to action, harnessing the power and potential of adult learning and education for a viable future, Nigeria is yet to wake up for action due to the contested nature of the policy space with different actors and ideologies.

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