

**ADULT EDUCATION AND ADULT ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION AS TWIN  
MECHANISM FOR SUSTAINABLE ENVIRONMENT AND COMMUNITY  
DEVELOPMENT**

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**ABSTRACT :** *The over dependence of the developmental process in the rural and urban areas on national governments, and failure to meet the rising social and economic expectations of the human condition arising from teeming population, has necessitated the need for countries to reappraise and restructure their development architecture through the form and content of their educational provision. It is against this backdrop of a grim picture of more claimants for social and economic infrastructure, environmental degradation, educated unemployment and underemployment, and lack of connection between education and work, that this paper makes a number of proposals aimed at educational reforms in Nigeria, through the process of adult education and environmental education in order to achieve sustainable environment and community development.*

**KEYWORDS:** adult education, adult environmental education, sustainable community development

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## **INTRODUCTION**

Education is considered an inalienable right of every man, and inseparable from the civilizing process of any nation. The import of this statement emerges from the principles set forth in Articles 26 and 27 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, guaranteeing and specifying the right of everyone to education and to participate freely in cultural, artistic and scientific life of the community. Against this background, all Member States of the UN have taken a cue from it by providing in their national educational plans, the right of every citizen to equal educational opportunity. It is however doubtful if these educational provisions have truly provided equal and functional education to the citizens of most Member States, as some of these provisions beg the question.

In Nigeria, the National Policy on Education provides the vehicle through which the nation's educational goals are driven. These national ideals also contain the values attached to education. But value is one thing, and practice is another. Nigeria as a developing country, faces a crises in education, with uneasy efforts being made to examine the inherited educational system in order to bring it more in line with contemporary needs. For the most part of the independence period, not much was done, to ventilate and overhaul the educational system as the form and content of the

inherited system was only slightly modified. A marked departure from the inherited system came in 1982 following the introduction of the now moribund coded 3-3 secondary system of education. There can be no other time than now for us to scrutinize and overhaul our entire educational system as we greet the dawn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century so that it can yield greater social and economic dividends. The biggest challenge faced in the task of educational reconstruction is undoubtedly that posed by adult populations who are already conditioned, wholly or partially, towards values, skills and non-skills, many of which are irrelevant, if not dysfunctional. And since education is considered a necessary factor in bringing about rapid economic development and technological progress, environmental awareness and action, and in creating a social order founded on the value of freedom, social justice and equal opportunity: programmes of education must be aimed at forging the bonds of common citizenship, to harness the energies of the people, and to develop the natural and human resources of any given society.

Viewed from this perspective, any educational system must measure its relevance by its response to the educational needs for the individual and the community. Such a system will also be taken into consideration the national resources available so as to put them into full use.

### **The Formal System: The Journey So Far**

The inherent limitations of the school system and the undue emphasis on the hopes and promises held out for society by the formal system which is elitest in nature and aimed at producing leaders for society and its selection process, makes it difficult to cater for all the educational needs of citizens. The expansion of formal schooling has resulted in increasing proportion of national resources expended on it.

In spite of the efforts to make the formal system more relevant to individual and collective needs, it has failed to meet the needs of the society. Education should not merely teach reading and writing, nor should it be the means of creating an elite group with no direct relationship to our collective objectives and interests.

The irrelevance of the educational system to genuine development is continually being criticized for not offering recipients a responsive and relevant education preconditional to the cultivation and nurturing of a pool of prospective technology experts with the right skills and professional attitudes, work ethics and entrepreneurial drive necessary for self-employment and job creation (Eze, 1996.). This is seen as a major curricular lapse. Rahnema (1978) advanced the view that despite attempts to make the formal system more relevant to individual and collective needs, it remains largely indifferent – if not positively hostile – to the objectives of a truly democratic, people-centred and humanizing society. The existing system churn out the delineated and alienating elites who, themselves fail to foster development. It actively discourages the emergence of indigenous development patterns founded upon the creativity and self-reliance of individuals and groups, particularly among the rural masses. The so-called “reforms” of educational curricula and structures, have not served the needs of the nation and its citizens.

The school system may still claim to give a fair and equal chance to all, in an attempt to democratize society. This appears so in principle, but in practical terms only a small percentage of

the less privileged reach the top. Again, the system has little or no effect on the power structure and the inequalities upon which it is based. It fosters integration of a few successful members of the disadvantaged classes into the ruling elite, thereby perpetuating the very structures that constitute the basis of existing inequalities. To bring about reforms, the social structures that breed inequality in the society need to be overhauled in order to sustain and support the movement toward equality.

As an antidote for the shortcomings of the school system, adult and non-formal education has recently received considerable lip service attention. This notwithstanding, Majid Rahnema notes that educational planners appear, at last, to be showing a serious interest in these forms of education as offering a “parallel track” to the formal system and, more generally, a means of adapting education to labour and production needs. He adds that non-formal education is now popularly perceived as a miraculous “beast of burden”, whose small appetite will not deplete the economic feeding trough and whose strong back can “deliver the goods” to areas inaccessible to the formal system. This strong case is a “big plus” for non-formal system education. Well-meaning observers admit that the crisis in education may be overcome by promoting adult and non-formal education. There is little evidence, though, that the introduction of non-formal programmes in Nigeria has succeeded in making education more relevant to the overall needs of the individual and society. The unequal distribution of educational and other social services has largely remained unchanged.

Indications, are that the reasons for the failure of attempts to give education a new direction lie at the base of the social structure which perpetuate hierarchy. This presupposes that we evolve a new political culture and philosophy of education which would reflect the practical needs of the people. It will mean a change from our present “*consumptive culture*” to “*productive culture*”.

### **The Basis of Compensation**

As a result of the limitations of the school system, adults and non-formal education has become associated with compensation for deficiencies suffered inside/outside school during childhood and adolescent period. Therefore, the more the discrepancy as a result of the tendencies towards democracy and equalization and elite-stabilizing school systems, the more the emphasis placed on adult education. Suchodlski (1976) submits that adult education is considered as a process which could be initiated and completed at any time in life, as a constant effort towards the breaking down of the class barriers of the school system, through which the elite class seek to relegate the lower classes. Also as the school system distributes the benefits of education in an unjust and unfair way, it becomes the task of adult education to make up for these deficiencies and injustices.

There are many possibilities of compensating for the deficiencies of childhood and adolescent education. They range from courses for those who have never had the opportunity of attending school and who are unable to read and write, to courses in lieu of academic studies for those who are denied access to tertiary levels of education because of discriminatory official entrance qualification – thus making adult education increasingly important.

Educationalists in the field of adult education have observed that the process of educating adults is entirely different from the educational process of children and adolescents. More studies have

been made which prove that adults have greater experience of life which predisposes them to learn certain things better than children and adolescents. Numerous psychological and sociological studies show that the mind not only retains its creative capacity and power of comprehension in adulthood, but that in certain fields there is a further development of these qualities which is impossible as an earlier age.

But it is important to say that adult education does not serve only as mere “compensating type” without any special tasks of its own. The necessity for adult education can no longer be explained by the fact that many people have to make up for educational deficiencies of adulthood and adolescence. More than that, the need for adult education is accounted for by the fact that in many relevant fields the kinds of learning skill required demand a certain maturity which are resident only in adults such as in vocational and apprenticeship schemes. The field of adult education derives its value from these strong points as an education which permeates the whole course of life.

Cole (1978) adduces reasons which have compelled countries to reappraise the form and content of formal educational provision as comprising high costs of formal education and rising populations not catered for by the formal system. This situation has generated a call for a critical inquiry about whether the continuing provision of more places in schools as conventionally conceived is both wise and within the financial limits of most countries, or whether an alternative form of education cannot be established which is comparably effective in character and in cost. Such education, it is agreed, should reach out to a mass audience rather than to smaller defined groups within the community, and to offer lost chance to the rising number of uneducated young adults. The vitality of this form of education is in the belief that more children out of school today means more adults needing education and training tomorrow.

Following from the above is a worrying trend of a formal school divorced from the general life of society; which poses the question whether it should remain as the only proper means of education. To this supposition comes the answer that while the formal system may not be done away with, it should not be the only proper means of educational or economic advancement. There is the acceptance that what is learned at school is but an introduction to life; and because there is a constant explosion and mobility of knowledge in different aspects of human activities, learning must be organized to take place on continuous basis. And in order for people to make their fullest contribution to the development of the society, they must be given vocational skills and chance of understanding both their immediate and wider world.

To realize this objective, demands the application of the policy of “positive discrimination”. Since resources are scarce they should be channelled away from those who have least. This implies that both the content, programmes and methods of recruitment should be directed towards meeting the needs of the dispossessed and the disadvantaged. To this end, adult education is seen primarily as an agency of educational and social compensation and restitution (Mee and Whiltshire, 1978).

### **Compensating for Unequitable Past**

The inability of government to provide free and compulsory education as manifested in the failure of the universal primary education, the dysfunctionality of the formal school and the concomitant strain it has on the nation's resources, has led to the acceptance of non-formal education as the ideal and alternative education through which many people can be offered opportunities for continuing education which is affordable and practically orientated. Education is seen as a license to better life. Education comprises the primary and secondary schools and higher education colleges of the traditional formal system. Hence the realization that schools were not doing much for the real futures of the majority of recipients, coincided with the revaluation of rural development as a crucial focus of development policies in general and the discovery that the schools were making very little contribution to it has given rise to the call for relevance (Malhotra, 1978 and Dore, 1976). Past government efforts at increasing school enrolment at the primary level through the Universal Primary Education (UPE), has yielded little success. The problem of educational deprivation for the majority of citizens in Nigeria cannot be solved by increasing the number of school places. Even so, the economic burden of providing secondary places, by traditional methods, for a majority of children in the near future would be too heavy to bear. This suggests the need to develop a system of post-primary provision radically different from the traditional system of secondary schools. It must be much cheaper, it must make facilities available to much larger proportions of the population, and it must cater both for the children who are unable to obtain places in secondary schools today and tomorrow and for the adults who are unable to do so yesterday.

It has been constantly stated that the Nigerian system of education – and of other former British dependencies – are modelled on the British system which is too literary and academic; and it is further alleged that the curricula are biased towards white collar occupations and not blue collar occupations, and against the practical needs of the societies which inherited them (Huberman, 1973 and Dodds, 1978).

The main function of the primary education is to equip students with basic learning skills and attitudes such as literacy, numeracy, and enquiry minds. It is at post-primary level that specific and detailed knowledge is acquired whose application brings about social, political and economic changes in the community. People bring about changes and not imposed upon. Rote learning which is a strong characteristic of formal schools does not prepare students to participate in development by using what they have learned to deal with practical life problems.

It is a situation of this kind that gave impetus to the more attention given to non-formal adult education in the last 50 years in many countries. This is largely in recognition of the generation gap between formal school teaching and its effect on actual development, and the lack of connexion between the school curricula and practical problems of life. Attempts at organizing learning programmes for adults and out-of-school youth linked with community needs have achieved encouraging results. The Republic of China provides a good example where school and work are regarded as integral parts of development.

Here, in Nigeria, the Industrial Training Centres, Agricultural Development Programmes Skill Acquisition Programmes, and other vocational centres can have greater impact on development if appropriate goals and objectives are properly identified and implemented. The human and economic resources needed for education as well as for other aspects of an *endogenous* and self-reliant development must, therefore, be drawn primarily from the communities concerned. The creative and effective utilization of these resources is not only a basic objective of an authentic and participatory development but is essential for economic and financial reasons.

### **The Place of Adult and Environmental Education**

Adult environmental education is a component of education for sustainable development. It helps to develop critical thinking and active participation and to achieve balance and knowledge in how economic and social needs influence ecological relationships in community development (Locke, Russo and Monteys, 2013). In line with the Tbilisi declaration of 1978, environmental adult education goes beyond the identification of plant and animal species to development of a large degree of awareness, attitudes, skills, participation, knowledge and understanding of the ecological relationship and interactions and the long term impact on the environment. To this end, Locke, Russo and Monteys, (2013) note that:

Implicit in this connection is a value system that promotes environmental understanding and respect for a relationship between humans and their surroundings that does not give primacy to human existence over its environment. The cycle of valuing and appreciation begins with the development of knowledge and understandings and continues to grow as people learn about what they value and value what they know.

UNESCO (2005) recognizes that people must have knowledge of, listen to, and live in harmony with their local environment and with each other in order to achieve local and cultural sustainability. The adult therefore occupies an educational and inspiring role in ensuring sustainability for present and future generations. Williams (2010); David (1998) and Wooltorton (2004) agree that adults have the responsibility for providing environmental education to younger people and act as good role models to them as they tend to mimic the culture of adults among them. This corroborates the view of N’Gaba-Waye (1997) that adults are the main users of the environment through their occupational and leisure activities, and must have access to information that is relevant to the natural resources available. According to him, “adults bear both the heavy responsibility for decisions affecting the environment of the planet, and the duty to educate the younger generation (N’Gaba-Waye (1997:128).

Within the framework of its international environmental education programme, UNESCO stipulates that sustainable development is the ultimate goal of man’s relationship with the environment as set forth in Tbilisi Declaration (1978) and Rio Conference (UNCED, 1992). The concepts of adult education and environmental adult education have the same goal, with the overall goal of developing responsible societies in which individuals imbibe environmental ethics for individual and collective action for sustainable development of projects that bear on the environment.

The driving mechanism for environmental adult education for sustainable community development is an integrated approach which involves government agencies, community development organizations (CBOs), non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and the private sector.

## **APPROACHES AND METHODS**

The approaches and methods comprise information dissemination; community consultation; community participatory strategies; and community-based education. Information dissemination is a one-way mode of transmitting information to communities, using methods such as public service announcements, brochures and exhibitions. Typically, consultation provides information and seeks limited input from a community, on activities, plans or documents, using methods such as town meeting, panel discussions, open fora and exhibitions. Consultation methods which can be used to seek information from communities include focus groups and questionnaire. Community participation strategies actively engage people in decision-making related to an entire planning cycle and follow-up action, based on principles of empowerment equity and democracy. Participation is direct involvement of the masses in the process of planning, decision making, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of development projects. Community-based education related to the environment and sustainable development engages people in an on-going learning process that focus on each individual developing the knowledge, skills and values needed to participate in decision-making and action. Community-based educational approaches are many and varied, including popular theatre, community mapping, participatory research, adult/popular education, transformational learning, meetings and workshops. Many non-formal activities originating within government agencies, involve community consultation and information dissemination approaches; CBOs and NGOs are more likely to use community education and community participation approaches.

### **Target Groups**

The following are some of the groups targeted or strategically used to effect positive change within communities:

**Resources users:** This is made up of persons who use the natural resource base for economic benefit, usually through extractive activity. They include fishermen, farmers, charcoal burners.

**Consumer and householders:** This include persons narrowly concerned with private lives and home, including issues to do with products purchased, services subscribed to and the manner of managing the home environment.

**Workers:** Included in this group are persons who earn a living in an environment outside the home, and who can often be targeted through trade unions or professional associations.

**Children/youth:** This consists of infants and youths ranging to 25 years who may be targeted through educational/vocational institutions, youth clubs, church groups or on the street.

**Women:** This is defined as a critical group, particularly given their usual responsibility for household hygiene, sanitation and family health care, water collection and storage, waste disposal and fuel collection.

**Young Men:** This is potentially an important group in community mobilization for environmental management, given that they appear to have spare time and energy.

**Industry:** it is a group covering manufacturing, mining, construction, tourism and commercial activities, to which operating guidelines, standards, competitiveness, raw material availability, waste control and management, and operational efficiency are issues of concern.

**Recreation and Leisure:** This will involve people habitually involved in recreation and leisure activities directly affecting and are affected by the natural environment and, as such, have a vested interest in environmental health.

**Legal Community:** It is a group given a mandate to uphold the law, the security forces, and judiciary, and constitute an important focus for environmental and sustainable development education.

**Policy Markers:** This is made up of politicians and local authority members who have direct influence on the communities, and need to be aware of environmental and sustainable development issues so as to take them into account in policy and decision making.

### **Filling The Gaps**

To effectively realize the approaches and methods, enumerated above, the gaps that exist would need to be given attention. Many government agencies limit their education and awareness programmes at the community level, to information dissemination and community consultation. There are few opportunities for authentic dialogue and participation, which actively and meaningfully engages people in consensus building and decision-making related to a planning cycle and follow-up action.

There has also been inadequate attention given to community-based educational processes oriented to adults, which focus on engaging people in an on-going learning process and developing their capacity to participate in decision-making and action.

Consequently, many messages are divorced from real situation and from actions relevant to the local level, reducing the chance to centrally-delivered programmes to effect real change. Specific gaps that need to be filled related to enhanced community participation in local environment and sustainable development action include the following:

- a lack of standard public sector guidelines for community participation;
- few opportunities for community participation in public policy development;
- barriers to authentic dialogue and participation including a culture of secrecy, and a system of top-down power;
- a lack of integrative approaches by public sector agencies and others;



- a lack of community awareness of rights and responsibilities related to the environment and sustainable development;
- a lack of community understanding of environmental and sustainable development issues and concepts, which would enable meaningful engagement in participatory decision-making and action processes;
- a lack of community understanding of participatory processes and opportunities for civic engagement;
- inadequate government agency personnel trained in communication techniques, particularly participatory methods such as animation.
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The approaches and methods articulated above and gaps observed can be achieved by the government agencies, adult education and environmental adult education personnel working in concerted efforts. To this end, the main target audiences for non-formal community-based learning, would henceforth not only be groups of children and youth, but also include workers, consumers, households, industry, recreation and leisure groups.

Similarly, it would be necessary to establish and/or strengthen networks of resource centres which can be laboratories for best practices, disseminate information and facilitate interactive learning. Consequently, materials for good practices in participatory methodologies, adult education processes and community environmental action must be designed and adequately provided. These materials must be designed and developed within the context of local communities. This can help communities establish localized vision of their own sustainable futures, and thereby develop action plans to achieve these visions.

### **Making The Reform Work: Some Proposals**

It must be emphasized that the adult and non-formal education system is not put forward as an alternative to replace the existing formal system. Indeed adult and non-formal education should complement formal education. Education is meaningful only where and when it helps people in their daily efforts to create a better and more congenial life, to humanize the world and to enrich their praxis. Only thus can education be liberating; and a liberating education can only take place and develop in a society deeply committed to human liberation at all levels.

In his strategies for educational reform, Majid Rahnema offers some recipe in which he states that, if the objective is the provision of both relevant and liberating education, education providers must re-order educational priorities, devise new methods for mobilizing and allocating resources and engage in fresh thinking about the forms and content appropriate to new educational goals. Since resources are scarce, it seems only probable that government is able to provide to its citizens basic and functional education of the non- formal system. The proposed system of non-formal adult education will comprise community oriented education, apprenticeship training, vocational education and other differentiated range of life-wide educational activities. This form of education is intended to serve educational needs of its community and to be responsive to the changes that take place in a given society. It implies that in a given situation non-formal education provides opportunities for studies in accordance with the local or national needs. The Half-Work, Half-Study Schools of China offers a useful model in which students participate in local production

activities interspersed with seasonal periods of study. Another example comes from Cuba where there is a network of alternative vocational, workshop, and prevocational work/study schools for formal school drop-out to re-enter the system.

To this end, the concept and content of basic education must be clearly defined. In view of the limited resources available and the right of every citizen to some degree of general education, Nigeria should define the essential educational needs which it is able to satisfy. The identification of needs and objectives will be governed by many factors, in particular by the availability of resources. The aim of basic education should be to equip all citizens, and particularly the least privileged, with the basic knowledge and skills they require in order to understand and cope with their milieu and to participate consciously and effectively in the process of their own liberation. As this type of education is usually radically different from the primary and secondary schools, its implementation calls for extremely bold and imaginative reforms and restructuring of the present formal schooling system. More importantly, a more rational and equitable allocation and recognition accorded to adult and non-formal programmes will be a right step in the right direction. In order for the reform to achieve lasting success, the milieu as a whole must be transformed in such a manner that living and learning, studying and doing become inseparable aspects of man's existence.

The overall planning of education must give urgent attention to the provision of training in the basic skills required for individual and community development. It will become necessary to lay emphasis on the training of front-line workers or "animators" needed at the grassroot level to perform basic functions in the fields of production, agriculture, community development, health education, literacy teaching, cottage and small industry and the like. It is important to shift more resources to the training of these vital cadres as a matter of priority, as well as the provision of more advanced training for individuals supplying support services to the front-line workers. Finally, the principles set by Majid Rahnema are hereby recommended for adaptation by Nigeria. These principles should take into account the following:

- a) the country's stage of development and its human and material resources;
- b) the needs of the people "at the bottom";
- c) the priorities imposed by a human-centered, endogenous and self-reliant development policy;
- d) the type of activities and competencies required to meet the needs of the most disadvantaged;
- e) the most efficient way of sub-dividing the required general competencies into specific tasks;
- f) innovative approaches to the effective training of the new categories of personnel required, giving particular attention to the services and competencies most urgently needed at the base of the social pyramid.

## CONCLUSION

Having highlighted the social and economic purposes of education, it may be summed up that education has relevance in proportion to the satisfaction of political, economic and social-cultural needs of the community. To achieve this objective, education cannot be divorced from the general life of society, but should be regarded as an integral life process as a basis for sustainable environment and community development.

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