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FROM THE EDITORIAL SUITE

Whaoh! We have made it again !

The right to learn is an indispensable tool for the sustainable development of man anywhere he may be found. The right to education / learning is a fundamental one which should not be restricted to any group or class of individuals. Education for all should not be compromised but rather should be the concern of all.

This theme has been bothering mankind right from the primordial times. In fact the modern world does not neglect the issue. An attempt to make education reach every individual in whatever clime gave rise to the world conference which called on countries of the world to implement the right to learn by creating enabling environment for the attainment of the right. It was sequel to the declaration of the right to education that the world leaders in the past seven years have adopted both Education for All (EFA) and the Millennium Development Goals (MDG) as the blue print for economic and social development of man. One may recall succinctly that the world declaration of EFA (Jontien, 1990 and Daker, 2000) was a major means of ensuring availability of access to education. In fact, looking at Article 1 of the declaration; meeting the basic needs one discovers that the present situation is a far cry from attaining the objectives which states that every person shall be able to benefit from educational opportunities designed to meet learning needs. The gap is still wide!

On the home front, the Nigerian Government is unrelenting in her activities to meet eight MDGs, but the present assessment has not indicated yet that the MDGs shall be achieved by the stipulated times.

What then, are those things that needed to be done which have not been done? Are we in time with the spirit of making every individual access education anywhere they are? Are we providing

the opportunity for every individual to learn at their own pace and convenience? Or at the convenience of who?

Are the resources – human, material and financial fully available for the provision of functional and sustainable education to all? Is the governance really committed to provide education for the governed? What type of modes are we employing to reach all? And what are the methodologies at the delivery points of providing education for all. These are some of the salient questions besetting the minds of our scholars and other stakeholders who contributed to this edition. Even so, they were worried about the marginalized, the unreached in all terrains, the drop-outs, the disabled, the handicapped, deprived or those pushed out of receiving education, one way or the other, in getting access to education. It was in an attempt to proffer plausible solutions to the problem that brought about this edition. The responses of our writers are diverse. Most have thrown challenges, made suggestions and recommendations while others have analysed and exrayed the right path to actualizing the dream – to widen opportunity to education for all. Whether we like it or not, the truth is indisputable that if we fail to provide wider opportunities for adults to learn, we are mortgaging not only our future, but that of our offspring. God forbid! And that is why we commend this edition to all stakeholders in our educational system be it pre-primary, primary, secondary or the tertiary – that provision of education to everybody is the task for everybody, scholars, educationists, educators, policy makers, government and non governmental agencies would do their best to make everybody receive functional education. What about you! Think about it and contribute your quota to providing access to education to the next person to you! Happy reading.

Abiodun Okediran, Ph.D.

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EXPANDING ADULT LITERACY OPPORTUNITIES IN NIGERIA: CHALLENGES AND PROSPECTS

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Abstract

This paper observes that the rate of governments' commitment to the provision of adult literacy opportunities in Nigeria is low. The prospective advantages of expanding adult literacy opportunities are identified to be all-pervasive, spanning the economic, political, health and other social aspects of human well-being. In view of these, it is made clear that the Nigerian government should rise up to the challenges posed by the fact that other nations of the world are leaving her behind as a result of her lack of commitment to this noble cause.

Keywords: Adult Literacy, Challenges, Prospects, Nigeria

The Place of literacy in MDGs

The term "Literacy" has been variously defined or described by several concerned scholars (Otagburuagu, Okorji Oyeniya 2006, Edung 2006, Aderinoye 1997) it is generally seen as the ability to read and

write. The question that arises then is, "read and write in what language?" The answer provided by UNESCO is, "In the person's mother tongue, at least".

A pragmatic dimension is introduced into literacy when it is viewed as involving "the development of basic numeracy, technical and vocational skills acquisition, awareness of societal norms and customs, appreciation of aesthetic values and their likes" (Eguare, 2006: 65). According to Headlam (2003), literacy can be a tool for promoting unity. In other words, literacy is being equated with functional education which goes beyond basic numeracy, reading and writing. For the purpose of this discourse, there is need to appreciate the fact that whatever extensive meaning is attributed to literacy, the underlying factor - the driving force - is the ability to read, write and function in numeracy.

The Nigerian government sees education, which can be interchanged with literacy in its extensive sense, as "an instrument par excellence for effecting national development" (FRN 2004: iii). This is in line with the axiomatic assertion that the difference between the developed nations of the world and the underdeveloped is the disparity in their literacy levels (Ajayi, 2003 quoted by Fasasi, 2007). Adequate opportunities, therefore, need to be given every Nigerian citizen to experience and acquire literacy skills. The aggressive Education for All campaigns' going on at the global level really underscores this need. Substantial external aid is given by developed nations and international organisations to finance educational programmes of developing nations (Colclough, Al Samarrai, Rose and Tembou, 2003).

For example, UNESCO organized a three-day conference to consider how to pursue the Education for All Project for education ministers and international delegates from the nine high population developing countries of the world, of which Nigeria is one, in Beijing, the historic capital-of China, in 2001 (The Guardian, Wednesday, September 5, 2001). The E-9 initiative was an offshoot of an earlier World Conference on Education for All, which was sponsored by UNESCO, UNICEF, and UNFPA in Jomtien, Thailand in 1990.

The second of the eight UN Millennium Development Goals is directly a literacy concern: Achieve universal primary education.

The explanation offered for Goal 3 too is hinged on literary matters: Eliminate gender disparity in primary and secondary education preferably by 2005, and at all levels by 2015. These and many other policies and steps at various levels in favour of literacy for all are unequivocal of the magnitude and urgency of the need to achieve the goal of literacy for all.

The Nigerian government seems to be in tune with this international concern when she makes "a land full of bright opportunities for all citizens" one of her five main national goals and "the provision of equal access to educational opportunities for all citizens of the country at the primary, secondary and tertiary levels both inside and outside the formal school system" one of the bases for her philosophy of education (FRN, 2004:1-2).

The Concept of Literacy Opportunities: The Nigerian Context

The idea of "equal access to educational opportunities for all" is really amorphous as a result of the inclusion of the adjective "equal". This is because life itself is fraught with natural and, at times, legitimate inequalities. For instance, how can equal learning opportunities be provided for the child of a medical doctor and that of a poor artisan? Is it by giving them free education? Even this is not without elements of inequalities since the medical doctor takes more from the national cake, and may be expected to contribute more to the education industry. On the other hand, can equal literacy opportunity be provided by ensuring that every recipient pays amounts commensurate to what he gains from the nation's economy? This would, then, be a case of achieving "equality" through unequal treatment. In the same vein, unequal treatment would be needed to strive at equality of literacy opportunities for a blind child and another one that is not physically challenged in any way.

The present study is, however, not concerned about equality of literacy opportunities but adequacy and widespread of opportunities. The pertinent question here is, "How effective have the literacy opportunities provided by the Nigerian government been at all level generally, and particularly for adults?"

Osokoya (2005) observes that the new Universal Basic Education in Nigeria is much wider in scope and more ambitious in objectives than, former Universal Primary Education. The time coverage has been increased from the former limit of Primary Six to include the first three years of secondary school, mass literacy for adolescents, adults and women education. The learning contents have also been increased to comprise a wide spectrum of formal and non-formal processes and opportunities. Also, it has been stated that the recipients must become so stable that a relapse to illiteracy will ever be unheard of.

According to the former Minister for Education (Professor Babalola Borishade) who spoke at the Beijing conference, Nigeria had experienced some slight improvement in the net enrolment ratio into basic literacy and the quality of primary education had taken a boost. He, however, confessed that no positive growth was recorded in adult literacy from 1996 to 2001 (The Guardian, Wednesday, September 5, 2001).

The National Commission for Nomadic Education was established in 1989 to increase the literacy opportunities of Nigerian nomads' children. Distance education has also been given much attention by government. National and state television networks have been rehabilitated to enhance their capacity to reach remote areas with basic education. Pivotal Teacher Training programme and improvement in teachers' welfare are among the definite steps taken by the government to increase the coverage and quality of literacy programmes. Some states have also introduced a school-feeding programme to encourage and strengthen primary school pupils (Okon, 2007)

The UBE is universal, free and compulsory, and sanctions would be imposed on persons, societies or institution that prevent children from benefiting from the scheme (The Guardian, Wednesday, September 5, 2001).

Prospects of Expansive Literacy Opportunities in Nigeria

As earlier stated, two of the UN Millennium Development Goals are directly in the area of literacy:

Achieve universal. Primary education (Goals 2); and Promote gender

equality and empower women (Goal 3). Colclough et al (2003) acknowledge the frequency of the theme of relative lack of education for women and its negative impacts on the economic as well as social development of the gender. They thus insist that women literacy programmes be fortified to eradicate the perennial problem. A thoughtful consideration of the maxim, "If you educate a man, you educate a person; educate a woman, then you are educating a nation" is both instructive and overworking in its reach. A list of women that have contributed immensely to our national development is inexhaustible. Had such women's substance and worth been rendered permanently undeveloped through non-exposure to literacy, their personal losses would have been amazingly insignificant compared with the national losses.

It can be safely asserted that adequate provision of literacy is the sole requirement for the attainment of every other goal in the declaration. For example, it is functional literacy that can be the most effective preventive measure against the problems related to child mortality (Goal 4) and maternal health (Goal 5). According to EFA Global Monitoring Report (2007), research in several countries have proved that women who participate in literacy programmes possess better knowledge of health and family planning, and are more likely to adopt preventive health measures like immunization or to seek medical help for themselves and their children.

The phenomenon of "Abiku" (Yoruba) or "Ogbanje" (Igbo) has significantly faded into insignificance. This is because cases of child mortality have been greatly reduced as a result of improved safe motherhood literacy. It is thus safe to conclude that the current rate of child mortality and unsafe motherhood can be completely wiped out with intensified efforts at related literacy. For example, though many Nigerians are now aware of the relationship between the compatibility or otherwise of blood groups and sickle cell anemia, many more are yet to learn to appropriate the information their marital lives. According to Ahmed (2007), about 52,000 women die from pregnancy-related problems and most of the cases are from the northern part of Nigeria, resulting from ignorance. This aspect of life needs to be well taken care of in Nigeria since the non-existence of sickle cell anemia in highly literate societies of the world

is an indisputable evidence of the connection.

Eradication of HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases (Goal 6), as well as attainment of environmental sustainability (Goal 7) too can be actualized through adult literacy. Kolawole (1997) particularly emphasizes that proper literacy can fight the menace of HIV/AIDS to a standstill.

The eradication of acute poverty and hunger (Goal 1) can be achieved through functional literacy (Nigeria is in dire need of respite from the scourge of poverty, hunger and their attendant evils as over seventy percent of her citizens are said to live below the poverty line of \$1 per day (World Resource Institute, 2007). Many local / small-holder farmers, who supply much of our domestic food, are ignorant of government provision of subsidies and other facilities that could boost agricultural productivity. They are oblivious of biotechnological innovations. Their yields are thus hindered.

Literacy would empower such farmers to access and utilize information (Oyeniyi, 2006) as regards the several opportunities they can avail themselves of in order to get improved yields with less manual efforts. Farming would then become more attractive to more people. Consequently, poverty and hunger will cease as in the advanced economy of the world. On the political plane, there have been gross condemnations of the current Nigerian pseudo-democratic experiment from both within and without the country. Our electoral processes have come under severe criticism from home and abroad (African Action, 2003; Albin-Lackey and Rawlence, 2007; Igbafe and Offiong, 2007) All of Nigeria's political problems have been traced to illiteracy and ignorance on the part of the implements of the constitutions as well as the entire citizenry (Anah, 2006; Eguare, 2006). Functional literacy has thus been prescribed as the sure antidote to Nigeria's political kwashiorkor.

This prescription would not be seen as presumptuous after considering the fact that electoral processes in highly literate nations of the world (like the United States of America, the Great Britain, Canada, and so on) have been largely free and fair. Voluntary resignations from exalted political positions at the outset of public outcry of loss of confidence have been witnessed in advanced countries. But Nigerian political office holders have always

demonstrated greatly annoying sit-tight syndrome, no matter how loud, sincere, aggressive and costly to the nation the protests against their obvious gross misconducts are. A comparative study of the Nigerian political situation alongside such largely literate countries would prove that our political atmosphere could be sanitized through a vibrant adult literacy campaign. After all, it is the adult population that votes. It is from within the same population that those voted for emerge. Thus the EFA Global Monitoring Report (2007) describes literacy as a right in itself which empowers its beneficiary to pursue other rights.

Fascinating as the advantages of a vibrant adult literacy scheme are, the benefits cannot be got on a platter of gold. We must brace up to certain challenges, some of which shall be discussed as follows:

Paucity of Trained Personnel

Adult literacy requires teachers who are specialists in andragogy, not just general pedagogy. Such specialist teachers are the ones that can give adequate consideration to the peculiarities of the adult learners for excellent results. Thus UNESCO (n.d) recommends, among other measures, investment in teachers recruitment practices, pay and conditions of service.

Policy Inadequacy

A policy is a statement of intention and plans concerning a particular aspect of life. EFA Global Monitoring Report, 7 however, observes that while almost all governments have explicit formal education policies, far fewer have adult literacy policies (UNESCO, n.d). There is need for frequent revision of the Nigerian adult education policy as included in the National Policy on Education in order to reflect changing realities if the policy is not to be rendered obsolete and inappropriate.

Lack of Political Will from Government

Successive governments in Nigeria have been severally accused of paying lip service to literacy matters at different levels (Olatunji, 2000; Okediran and Olatunji, 2007). There are too few adult literacy

centers. Aminu (2005) also observes gross disparity between the policy on nomadic education and its implementation. Making reference to NCNE (2001; 2002), he points out unspeakable underfunding of nomadic education and indicts state and local governments of unwillingness to make budgetary allocations for nomadic literacy programmes. The federal governments cannot be exonerated for its non-inclusion of adult literacy programme in the Education Tax Fund. The Nigerian government's reluctance to implement UNESCO's recommendation of devoting at least 26% of annual national budget to the education sector in developing countries is a pointer to her non-chalance to the need for literacy development in the citizenry. UNESCO (1997) observes that the benefits of investment in adult learning used to be considered less certain and more long-term than those of children's education. Though the UNESCO's document goes on to assert that things have started changing for the better generally, the Nigerian case seems to these authors not getting any better.

Socio-Economic Demands on Prospective Adult Learners

With the prevailing harsh economic conditions in the country, most men and women have to work too hard for too many hours in order to eke out a living. In addition to this, the demands of household chores on a typical Nigerian woman are enormous. These and other social responsibilities leave little or no time for any literacy pursuit. One challenge that this situation poses to government is that of revamping our economy to make life easy enough for all and sundry in order to pursue meaningful prestige needs.

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