

# Improved Livelihoods and Poverty Reduction through Functional Education Programmes in Nigeria Rural Areas: A Prescription

Dr. Abdulkarim Ishaq    Dr. Tijjani Kalli    Abubakar Abba Aji

Department Of Continuing Education And Extension Services, University Of Maiduguri, Nigeria

## Abstract

There is general global call for provision of basic education for all and sundry to overcome poverty, as poverty transcended beyond its traditional meaning of “have not.”

The poor populace is deprived of basic education rights, especially in southern Asia and African. Absolute and relative types of poverty do exist in Nigeria in particular.

The study was anchored on theory of andragogy. The paper therefore aimed at exposing such blatant types of poverty in Nigeria and proffered solutions for eradicating the poverty via functional education programmes in the country.

## Introduction

In recent years, Nigeria and world over witnessed unprecedented rapt attention paid to basic education and declared that basic education is basic right of all and sundry. Bakari and Mohammed (2007) indicated that a great deal of government programmes and policies dwelt on making life better for people in respect of shelter, food, education and health by the year 2000 and beyond.

The Millennium Development Goals (MDG) reaffirmed and placed basic education alongside the goal of poverty reduction. For this reason, action in education must be strategically designed to have impact on the economic life of the populace in general and the poor in particular.

At the global situation, the poor deprived of their basic education rights constitute the majority of our population particularly in Southern Asia and Africa. Recent study covering 107 of such countries revealed that between 1980 and 1990, there was significant declines in gross domestic product, public expenditure and private consumption per head. The United Nation (2000) reported that more than 2.8 billion people live on less than the equivalent of US \$2 per day, more than 1.2 billion people, or about 20 percent of the world population, live on less than the equivalent of US \$1 per day with the highest number of such people coming from South Asia, our sub-saharan Africa has the highest proportion of people who are generally poor, with poverty affecting close to 50 percent of the region’s population. In the same vein, Baregu (2008:21) said “poverty is increasing in most African countries while wealth is growing rapidly in the rest of the world.”

In Nigeria, the north-west part has the highest (77.2%) incidence of poverty, (Federal office of statistics, 1999.) this part of Nigeria is dominated by over 70% of small scale farmers who drive their livelihoods from agriculture. Majority of these farmers cultivate small land holding usually less than 3 hectares. The crops cultivated include maize, sorghum, soyabeans, cowpeas, etc. These crops are grown for both subsistence consumption and for the market.

The population of this region is characterized by low per capital incomes, at most ₦ 200 per day, high population growth, high morbidity and food insecurity. The MDG is directed toward improving communities which found themselves in such paradoxical situation. There is commitment in improving their poor nutrition, poor health, poor education, poor development and unwise use of resources, high mortality, high morbidity and debilitated capacity to work (Oxenham 2004). Some of the objectives of the MDG are eradication of extreme poverty and hunger, reduction of child mortality and improvement of maternal health (Bakari and Mohammed 2007). Hence, the discussion calls for improvement of livelihoods of the Nigerian rural populace.

Poverty is a multi-dimensional concept, in the strict sense of it. It is an individual predicament; community action is critical for reducing misery arising from poverty. The traditional definition of poverty is low level of income among the individuals or as a slow growth of GDP at the macro/national level. Now, poverty transcends this traditional definition. It is a deprivation of essential assets and opportunities to which every human is entitled, (Asia Development Bank, UNESCO 2003). The Human Development Report (1997) perceived poverty as deprivation in valuable things that an individual can do or be (Aminu, Oumar and Sanusi (2005). Everyone should have access to basic education and primary health services. Poor households have the right to sustain themselves by their labour and be reasonably rewarded, as well as having some protection from internal belligerence.

Thus, poverty includes lack of participation in determining what goes on in one’s community as well as vulnerable livelihoods. In Nigeria, food insecurity is a high poverty indicator. Further, the main feature of the specific dimensions of the poverty is the historical situation that deprives our people of the several resources necessary to ensure their physical existence, development and the right to socio-cultural development of our own. This has yielded submissiveness, lack of self esteem and shortage of technological knowledge and intra-

cultural education tools, (Rampel and Eniues 2004). As communities become poorer, they fragment and polarise which results into ethnic conflicts (Baregu, 2008).

This simply means, poverty status of individual or groups of people may be directly related to their geographical location, to the vulnerability arising out of their belonging to particular ethnic or linguistic minorities, or to gender-based and other culturally dependent discriminatory practices. Thus, social structure characterizing the society to which the poor belong is one of the most powerful factors intrinsically correlated with their economic status, as the gross inequality of assets often persists because of entrenched social power hierarchies and vested interest groups.

By implication, even if an individual has good income in basic services, he is poor, provided he is not empowered to participate in making the decisions that shape his life. World Development reported that, to be poor is to be hungry, to lack shelter and clothing, to be sick and not cared for, to be illiterate and not schooled. For the poor, living in poverty is more than this. Poor people are vulnerable to adverse events outside their control. They are often disdainfully treated by the institutions of state and society and excluded from voice and power in these institutions, (World Development Report, World Bank, 2001)

### **Theoretical Framework**

The concept of literacy denotes the skill of transmitting and receiving messages in an intelligible manner in a written form. Literacy does not only mean the physical ability to read and write; it includes both intelligibly. Thus, functional literacy involves transmission and reception of learning programmes curricular that linked to the recipients' predominant social needs.

Theory of andragogy was found by Malcon Knowles at the Williamsburgh conference in 1969 (Malumfashi; 2002:59). The word andragogy was built from the Greek ANER meaning adult. Hence, andragogy is the art and science of teaching adult. Andragogy treats trio basic concepts: adult learning is self-directed and extensively individualized, adult learning is a problem-oriented and of immediate application; the readiness of adult to learn has community social roles as its fulcrum.

Hence, the study is based on the theory of andragogy, which assumes that adults learn items that are of immediate use for them. Thus, the poverty reduction functional literacy in Nigeria should be based on curricula, which reduces poverty and improve their lives.

In line this, Obi (2006:40-41) said.

*Functional adult literacy project is prepared  
Specifically for a particular group or groups  
Of adult learners. It is to satisfy the functional  
Literacy needs of their group.*

This shows that a functional adult literacy programme gets its learning content from the specific literacy needs and problems of the learners. Thus, UNESCO (2001) indicates that such projects mirror the lives of the participants.

### **OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY**

The study has the following as its objectives:

1. Suggestion for improvement of the rural peoples' livelihood in Nigeria.
2. Use of functional literacy programmes as means for improving the rural Nigerian communities.

### **THE WAY FORWARD**

Taking into consideration the foregoing discussion and having conceived what poverty is all about, it is pertinent to tackle poverty problems. It is necessary to take comprehensive action to rely on effective cooperation of different sorts that channel incomes in such a way that they easily lead to human capacity building. Poverty alleviation is more than just increasing the income levels of the individual poor. It possesses challenge of transforming physical and social context in which the poor live. Governments and international donor agencies in recent years became very much concerned about the poverty situation faced by communities. Several poverty reduction programmes, which contribute to social and economic integration, were introduced. These programmes are supposed to facilitate the learning needs of young people and adults through equitable access to appropriate learning and skills acquisition.

The primary responsibility for implementing policies and strategies to achieve the transformation of the poor lies with the government. This must be coupled with orchestrating the right kind of public action. Success will therefore, inevitable depend on the united effort of the government and civil society made up of the people themselves. It is also requires consistent political will and interest to transfer and build essential physical, social and human capital for the poor.

This however, does not mean that there has been no progress in terms of the world's economic prosperity, but such progress has not forestalled poverty from increasing as well. UNESCO Commission and

culture reaffirm that poverty remains high inspite of four decades of development efforts. Over a billion people have been bypassed by the globalization process. Involuntary poverty and exclusion are dangerous evils. Efforts are being made to eradicate them so as to enable people develop their potentials by making it easier to have access to the world's knowledge, better technologies for delivering products and services and be exposed to wider markets. Although these efforts are well spelt out in terms of promoting economic prosperity, in Nigeria, such efforts are yet to have influence on the lives of the poor living in remote or inaccessible areas. This is simple put; the potential benefits of these efforts cannot be realized in the absence of an appropriate regulatory framework.

What the writers have in mind is the concept of education as an instrument. Perhaps, the question to be asked attempting to determine strategy and way forward is to establish relationship between education essentially training and poverty reduction. At this juncture, a framework has been provided between development and poverty on one hand basic education (Non-formal education) on the other. The basic education in this framework is not viewed merely as schooling, but as encompassing all age groups and all other means of delivery and organization of formal and non-formal education. Are non-formal education programmes involving skill building for income generation a potential instrument/strategy for poverty alleviation?

If they could be strategies then, there is need to create sustainable institutional mechanisms that will facilitate transforming communities in the social and economic structural factors. Worth noting is that; externally driven efforts alone, cannot change the lives of the poor permanently; this means the poor must strongly be involved in the process. It is from this point that overcoming economic and social exclusion and empowering the poor to actively determining their life pattern becomes a reality.

Building capacities among the poor to self-direct their lives through Non-Formal Education (NFE) programmes demands serious attention. Poor people have to acquire the capacity to not only have access to public institution mechanism but also to reorient the functioning of these mechanisms so as to assist their continued progress. The way forward is an education programme that effectively equips the poor to meet their immediate need for alleviating poverty and also liberate them from intergenerational trap that subjects their children to lives of servitude and misery. If poverty means lack of human well-being, non-formal educations seems fit eminently as a strategy for poverty alleviation. It is well known that countries which have invested in education of any kind, have benefited in terms of better economic growth and reduced poverty levels. The linkage between education and poverty has to be viewed within this evolving situation. Japan for example, has enhanced its economic growth through social opportunity especially provision of basic education. The economy of Japan went in for massive expansion of education and later to health care and so on before Japan was able to scuttle the restrains of general poverty. Hence, investment in human capital is one of the important keys to break the poverty cycle I Nigeria. In this realm, Bichi (2006:6) rightly said: "development is a socio-economic process that was adopted by developing countries in order to overcome their economic and institutional backwardness.

A key component of development is the improvement of the material condition of the populace and equitable distribution of resources and elimination of poverty."

The majority of our people here are farmers and the literacy rate among them is low; the Chinese strategy for poverty alleviation could easily be adopted, such as

- i) Technical skill training via functional literacy could be developed and given to farmers, particularly young men and women. Such training should be based on the needs of the farmers. This could be taken as the key element of poverty reduction in our communities.
- ii) Poverty reduction funds are given by the government, 5-10% of such funds be allocated to communities for capacity building programmes with emphasis on skill training to farmers. Cooperation and coordination mechanism should be set up among them in order to effectively implement poverty reduction programmes.
- iii) Our higher agricultural education institutions can play an important role in skill development. Further, the institution can assist in reviving the loss of capacity, which is another dimension of poverty among older generations (Yonggong &Lihe, 2006).

Once such strategies are adopted by a nation or state, it will surely attract the attention of development Agencies and consequently, poverty among the poor shall be surmounted.

Education is there, related to poverty at both micro and levels. At the micro level, illiterate individuals or households are less productive, are stuck in low paying occupation and remain at absolute levels of poverty. At the macro level, nations with illiterate or less educated masses cannot progress well, nor can they increase their outputs substantially, as a result, enduring a low standard of living. Hence, the country suffers relative level of poverty.

We can further argue that education contributes to higher incomes and thereby, reduces the misery arising out of poverty. Discourses on poverty articulated recently including the familiar concept of the "human development index" have significantly expanded the contours of understanding the relationship between education and development. Poverty in terms of capability deprivation has brought the role of NFE into sharper

focus not just in its instrumental role in alleviation poverty but also as a core constituent of development and human well-being. Not only are basic levels of education and health right of the poor, but they are also important in accelerating poverty reduction as they enabled the poor to take advantage of the opportunities created by economic growth. Today, in Nigeria, the poor have less physical and economic access to education and health services than the non-poor. This in most cases, results into lower rates of utilization and hence, worsens health and literacy outcomes and promotes rural-urban migration. This is the vicious circle of poverty leading to ill-health, malnutrition and illiteracy and consequently, perpetuates poverty.

In conclusion, providing training for skills acquisition plays an important role in equipping communities with relevant skills require to meet social and economic integration knowledge; and skills for human development will be generated and consequently, development among such rural communities will be strengthened. In poor communities of Nigeria, emphases should be paid to preparing youths to have access to informal economy within the framework of basic education and poverty reduction policies. Training quality control and impact assessment system should be developed and implemented. Fortunately enough, in Nigeria, the informal economy is fast growing. Needless to say; but skill development, NFE plus other social protection measures can certainly be a powerful tool for poverty reduction in our communities.

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