

Strategic Development of Literacy in Promotion of Livelihood among Youths in the UBE Scheme for Sustainable Development

O. N. Nwakaire

C. I. Oreh

Abstract

This paper is on Strategic Development of Literacy in Promotion of Livelihood Among Youth in the UBE Scheme for Sustainable Development in Nigeria. The key concepts have been thoroughly espoused to give some direction to the thoughts expressed in the paper. The paper explained that sustainable development has eluded Nigeria since the youth engage in several vices as means to secure livelihood but literacy for livelihood will help reduce the social vices. Adult education should therefore mount programmes that will equip youths with skills that will enable them to be self-reliant.

Introduction

As the world progresses toward its deadline for Education for All – 2015, there is no doubt that an evaluation of the progress thus far, is worthwhile. As always, the noble novel ideal has been couched under the framework – Dakar Framework for action, the ingredients of which bear the ring of realizable goals but devoid of effective implementation strategies. The prevalence of the problems, the educational goal was supposed to solve suggests a shift from the programme or a review of the strategies to ensure the realization of the goal, even if it means shifting the deadline. The worry here is that apart from the fact that illiteracy still predominates, there seems to be nothing to show in evidence of any literacy if ever achieved. The facts of crime, HIV/AIDS, immorality, unemployment, to mention only a few, which are manifestations of unsustainability, suggest an urgent action to reappraise the approach adopted so far. It is hereby felt that for sustainable development to ever exist literacy for livelihood becomes imperative for the youth of today and the youth of tomorrow. This is the kernel of the topic. It explores the possibility of using literacy as means to promote livelihood among youths in the UBE scheme for sustainable development and suggests a means of ensuring attainment of the goal. It starts with the key concepts for easy comprehension.

Concepts and Definitions

The key concepts in emphasis are literacy, livelihood, UBE, and sustainable development. First to receive attention is the concept of literacy.

Literacy

Literacy has received several definitions over the years especially from cultural contents and international education frameworks. Prominent among such definitions is that of the UNESCO (2005) which proposed that:

Literacy is the ability to identify, understand, interpret, create, communicate and compute using printed and written materials associated with varying contents. Literacy involves a continuum of learning in enabling the individual to achieve his or her goals, develop his or her knowledge and potential and participate fully in the community and wider society.

Egonu (2010) mentioned an aspect of literacy which she styled functional literacy or work-oriented literacy. To Egonu, this form of literacy is considered to be comprehensive enough to teach economic skills and offer immediate use to the recipients in participating in important political issues and personal matters. Another aspect of literacy which is fancied by Egonu (2010) is that which considers literacy to be not just the process of learning the skills of reading, writing and arithmetic but a contribution to the liberation of man and to his full development. This form of literacy for Egonu, creates conditions for the acquisition of a critical consciousness of the contradiction of the society in which one lives. It stimulates man's initiative and his participation in the creation of projects capable of acting upon the world, of transforming it, and of defining the aims of an authentic human development.

For Wagner (2002), literacy refers to an individual's ability to understand printed text and to communicate. In his opinion literacy must have a bearing on real life situations and therefore must be sensitive to skills needed in out-of-school contexts, as well as to school based competency requirements.

With respect to literacy and livelihoods Wagner (2000) opined that:

JOMTIEN influenced the definitional aspect of the literacy goal by broadening the discourse into that of basic learning needs or competencies (BLCs), which, are seen not only in terms of mastery of the 3Rs (Reading, writing and arithmetic), but also in terms of other knowledge, problem-solving and life skills. Together, BLCs are thought to promote empowerment and access to a rapidly changing world. They support independent functioning and coping with practical problems or choices as a parent or worker or citizen, and are seen as critical gatekeeper to job entry and societal advancement in all countries.

Literacy and livelihood are implicit in the definition above but it is vital to fully grasp the meaning of livelihood to read some meaning into the subject.

Livelihood

Livelihood has been seen by some authors as comprising income-generating activities but some others disagree since income-generating activities do not require such training that would classify them as livelihood. Hinzen and Hildebrand (2002) saw livelihood as consisting of knowledge, skills, and methods used to produce or obtain the food, water, clothing and shelter necessary for survival and well-being, whether the economy is subsistence, monetized, or a mixture of both. Chambers and Conway (1992) opined that livelihood comprises the capabilities, assets (stores, resources, claims, and access) and activities required for a means of living: a livelihood is sustainable when it can cope with

and recover from stress and shocks, maintain or enhance its capabilities and assets, and provide sustainable livelihood opportunities for the next generation; and which contributes net benefits to other livelihoods of the local and global levels and in the long and short term.

The distinction between income-generating activities and livelihood was succinctly stated by United Kingdom Department for International Development (UKDFID, 1999) thus:

Quite often the needs assessment identified the need for income-generation opportunities of which vocational training might be a part.... An additional challenge is not to confuse income generation with vocational training. Both are often important, but people developing vocational skills often need further support (such as with credit schemes and marketing to be able to generate income.

It is appropriate therefore drawing from the conclusion above to observe that livelihood refers to vocational training which confers survival skills to the clientele. Therefore, a concept that requires further explication is sustainable livelihoods.

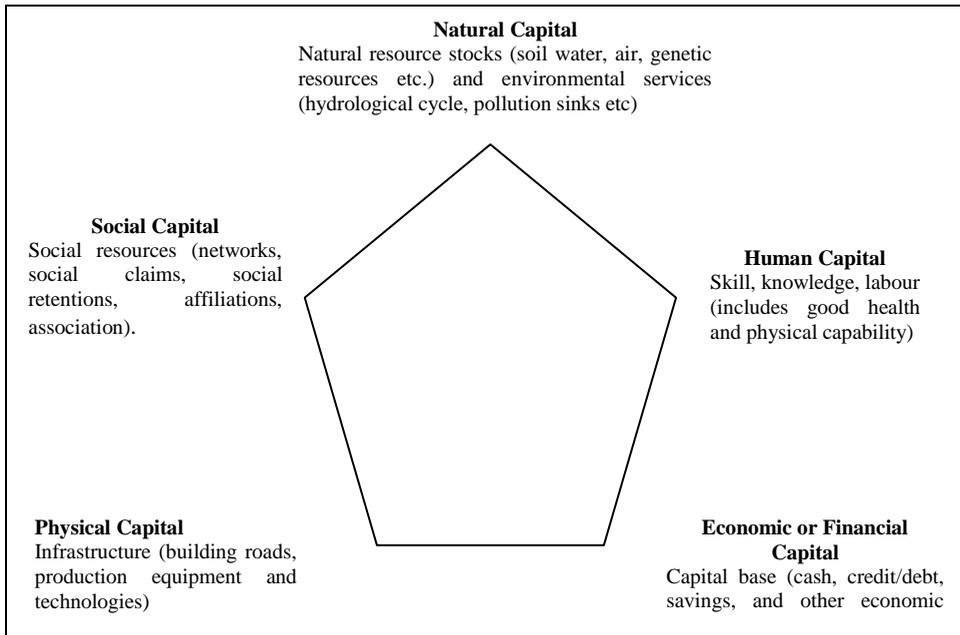
Sustainable Livelihood

Betts (2002) observed that the Kathmandu conference held in 2000 noted that sustainable livelihood approach views people as having access to contain assets, or poverty-factors, which gain their meaning through the prevailing social, institutional and organizational environment. This environmental also influences the livelihood strategies – The ways of combining and using assets – that are open to people as they pursue their own defined livelihood objectives.

Diana (2004) indicated that sustainable livelihoods approach (SLA) is a way to improve understanding of the livelihoods of poor people. It draws on the main factors that affect poor people's livelihoods and the typical relationships between these factors. It can be used in planning new development activities and in assessing the contribution that existing activities have made to sustaining livelihoods.

The same Diana (2004) further showed that SL framework places people, particularly rural people, at the center of a web of inter-related influences that affect how these people create a livelihood for themselves and their households. The author concluded that people are the main concern, rather than the resources they use or their governments. SLA is used to identify the main constraints and opportunities faced by poor people, as expressed by themselves. It builds on these definitions, and then supports poor people as they address the constraints, or take advantage of opportunities.

Five principal assets (or capitals) are suggested as important to livelihood and they are presented as a pentagon-Morse, McNamara and Acholo (2009). According to Scoones (1998) the figure below presents the five capitals of sustainable livelihood.



For Morse, et al (2009), once these assets have been identified and assessed in terms of the contribution they make (or could make) it is necessary to explore the vulnerability context in which they exist; what are the trends, shocks and stresses? It is also necessary to examine the policy and institutional context within which these capitals exist. Thus, when these poverty reducing assets are put to effective use, then sustainable livelihood is attainable and will foster sustainable development which is the concept that will receive another explication.

Sustainable Development

Sustainable development is a new development paradigm that has caught the fancy of many researchers and its relevance in our context demands its explication to ensure that meaning is put to sustainable livelihood. Nwafor (2006) showed that the concept, from all accounts will ever remain a difficult undertaking. From the number of selected definitions of sustainable development Nwafor illustrated that the definition of sustainable development is enshrouded in ambiguity, elastic in scope, vagueness, professional bias and background in emphasis, the influence of time and controversy all of which impact on the definitions of the concept.

Khor (1992) described sustainable development as the new development paradigm. For this reason, from the World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED, 1987), Brundland Report, the following definitions emerged:

1. Sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. It contains within it two key concepts:
 - WCED (1987) the concept of ‘needs’, in particular the essential needs of the world’s poor, to which overriding priority should be given, and

- The idea of limitations imposed by the state of technology and social organization on the environments ability to meet present and future needs
- 2. Barbier (1987), in his definition of sustainable development is concerned with the plight of the population of the third world. His focus is on combating the pervasive and deepening poverty and improving the quality of life.

According to Barbier (1987):

...The concept of sustainable economic development as applied to the third world is therefore directly concerned with increasing the material standard of living of the poor at the grassroots level, which can be quantitatively measured in terms of increased food, real income, education services, healthcare, sanitation and water supply, emergency stocks and cash, etc., at the aggregate national level. In general terms, the primary objective is reducing the absolute poverty of the world's poor through providing lasting and secure livelihoods that minimize resource depletion; environmental degradation; cultural disruption and social instability. P. 40.

From all the definitions of sustainable development one can deduce the fact that critical action must be taken to preserve the environment, prevent crime, ensure sustainable livelihood and foster stability. A final concept which needs explanation as a tool for sustainable livelihood and sustainable development is the Universal Basic Education (UBE).

The UBE Scheme

The Federal Ministry of Education (1999) provided implementation guidelines for the Universal Basic Education (UBE) programme which aims at achieving the following specific objectives:

- Developing in the entire citizenry a strong consciousness for education and a strong commitment to its vigorous promotion.
- The provision of free Universal Basic Education for every Nigerian child of school going age.
- Reducing drastically the incidence of dropout from all the formal school system (through improved relevance, quality and efficiency).
- Catering for the learning needs of young persons who for one reason or another have had to interrupt their school through appropriate forms of complementary approaches to the provision and promotion of basic education.
- Ensuring the acquisition of the appropriate levels of literacy, numeracy, manipulative, communicative and life skills as well as the ethical, moral and civic values for laying a solid foundation for lifelong learning.

Elements of the above objectives suggest that if fully operationalized the UBE scheme would ensure literacy for livelihood especially the life skills aspect. It should also be

recalled that the Federal Ministry of Education in its guidelines showed that the UBE includes, as pertinent to adult and non-formal education:

- Education programmes for the acquisition of functional literacy, numeracy and life skills especially for adults (persons aged 18 and above)
- Out of school non formal programmes for up-dating the knowledge and skills of persons who left school before acquiring the basics needed for life-long learning.
- Non-formal skills and apprenticeship training for adolescents and youths who have not had the benefit of formal education.

It may be safely asserted that in the UBE scheme adequate provision had been made to foster livelihood for the youth. This conclusion derives from the scheme's guideline which prescribes education programmes for the acquisition of functional literacy.... Life-skills, especially for adults (persons aged 18 and above). Another guideline of the UBE prescribes Non-formal skills and apprenticeship training for adolescents and youths who have not had the benefit of formal education. It is a marvel that with all these provisions, there is still the preponderance of unsustainability in Nigeria, especially among the youth population.

Manifestations of Unsustainability

Many are worried that in spite of the level of education attained there are still manifestations of unsustainable development in Nigeria. Ume (2006) identified a number of such problem as; absolute poverty, crime, illiteracy, women disempowerment, examination malpractice, depletion of the environment in the Niger Deltar Region, conflicts, land disputes, youth restiveness, religious/ethnic conflicts and poor nutrition.

Other manifestations of unsustainability were highlighted by Nwakaire (2010) and include; emigration of youths from the country, rural-urban migration, drug abuse, armed robbery and kidnapping. These vices proliferate because the youth have not been equipped with the appropriate literacy that would foster livelihood. Moreover, as Nwakaire (2010) pointed out, the root causes of these problems may be traced to the loss of family cohesion, failure of the school system basically because of ill-equipped teachers, who are not able to implement the guidelines of the UBE scheme and most importantly, failure of the government to monitor the implementation of its own policies. Therefore, the youths lack the coping strategies needed for livelihood. It is for this that concerted effort must be made to reverse the trend.

Promoting Literacy for Sustainable Livelihood Among Youths in the UBE Scheme

An idle mind they say is the devils workshop. All the emphases above attest to the fact that sustainable livelihood has been in focus in all school programmes including the UBE. There has been in emphasis the need for skills training matched with literacy skills of reading, writing and numeracy. Sadly this has not been the pursuit in the current school curricular – in primary and secondary schools and therefore the Universities. This failure has fanned the ember of criminality, and the society has continued to reap the sad result in the manifestations of unsustainability – the youth being at the center of the whole mess.

The capacity for sustainable livelihood approach to reduce criminality was demonstrated by the achievement of Associates in Research & Education for Development (ARED) 2000. Diallo (2000) reported that the recent ARED evaluation of a

literacy programme uncovered the surprising belief that the presence of a literacy class had cut down on violence in the village. Because the class proposed that young men should check in their “arms” (knives and machetes) at the door of the classroom, a lengthy discussion ensued about where and why they carried these objects, which they needed as herders, but which also were too often used in personal disputes.

The report showed that people claimed that young people started spending more time studying than playing cards an activity which could degenerate into conflicts. As a result Diallo reported, members of the class spontaneously responded “less violence and aggression” when asked about the impact of literacy in their community, and people were proud to claim that “the pen” had replaced “the sword”.

As proposed by Nwakaire (2010) it is not enough to read, write and calculate, along with these skills in the UBE scheme, young men should be taught livelihood skills. This will enable them to become self-reliant when there is the dearth of employment. They will be sustained and will promote sustainable development with sustainable livelihood.

Implication for Adult Education

Adult Education has been at the forefront in championing literacy for livelihood through non-formal education practices. It is not just enough to champion such course without corresponding action in support. Adult Education should be able to turn out graduates who are able to catalyze sustainable livelihood on graduation. Adult Education should be able to implement all the guiding principles of the UBE scheme, especially the skills training aspects. This will help the young to be self-reliant.

Conclusion

This topic has x-rayed the strategic development of literacy in promotion of literacy for livelihood among youths in the UBE scheme for sustainable development. Key concepts have been clarified leading to the observation that criminality among youths will be drastically reduced if literacy is matched with livelihoods. The UBE scheme has lofty ideals which have not been fully harnessed but adult education should be able to champion this through non-formal education of its own students.

Recommendations

Arising from the above analyses, it is hereby recommended that:

- i. The Nigerian National Council on Adult Education (NNCAE) as an umbrella organization should monitor implementation of all government schemes intended for skills acquisition.
- ii. All graduates of Adult Education should henceforth register as members of the NNCAE with appropriate membership fees paid.
- iii. These graduates must show a demonstrable livelihood skill before registration.
- iv. All Adult Education Departments in Nigerian Universities must establish skills acquisition centers within them.
- v. Centers for skills acquisition must be established and run henceforth by students in their practicum.

- vi. sustainable livelihood should henceforth be carried to primary and secondary schools throughout the schools in Nigeria.

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