

UTILISING INNOVATIVE ADULT EDUCATION PROGRAMMES FOR GENDER EQUALITY IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

Achieving Gender Equality through education and by implication Adult education among other dimensions has long been important development objective among nations of the world. Adult education has a unique ability of reaching out to the excluded, disadvantaged and vulnerable population groups which are denied learning opportunities such as rural and urban slum dwellers, street children, the drop-outs, girls and women among others. It is viewed as the only possible learning opportunity that can be integrated within a framework of addressing gender inequality, poverty eradication and social development. It is an indisputable fact, that global and sustainable development cannot be achieved, if women who constitute about half of the world's population, Nigeria inclusive still suffer exclusion, discrimination and marginalization. This paper, therefore, examines the utilization of innovative adult education programmes in promoting gender equality. To achieve this objective, the paper begins with the conceptual analysis of adult education and gender equality. It discusses further the various innovative programmes adult education has to offer and gives a highlight of how adult education programmes can promote gender equality in Nigeria. It recommends that adult education needs to be moved higher up the agenda of the women's movement and among the concern of civil society.

Key Words: Adult Education, Gender Equality, Innovative Adult Education Programmes

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Introduction

Gender issues have been the focus of debate for many years and they are still not sufficiently integrated within the daily agendas of people and organization. Gender inequality represents a huge loss of human potential with costs for men as well as for women (DFFD, 2000). Gender equality is a core development objective in its own right in other words, helping men and women to become equal partners and giving them equal voice and better access to resources are important development objectives in its right according to World Bank (2000). This is because gender equality enhances a country's ability to grow, to reduce poverty and govern effectively. It can also enhance productivity, improve development outcomes for the next generation and make institutions more representative.

Problems and challenges of bridging gender inequalities and disempowerment still exist despite past efforts of government at integrating the women's question into the development agenda, Gender inequalities remain pervasive within most Nigerian spaces as reported by National Policy (2007). Therefore, the question that may emanate would be: Is lack of access to education by the female gender responsible for gender inequality? Gender equality is for

people (male and female) to acquire equal treatment throughout the society, with respect to rights and in legislation and in policies, providing equal access to and control of resources and services within the family and society and giving women the same opportunities in life as men including the ability to participate in the public sphere.

It has been widely recognized that in developing countries and particularly is Sub-Saharan Africa poverty, political structure the myriad ethnic groups, differing religious and cultural heritage, as well as long defined gender roles and stereotypes, all influence the opportunity costs of investing in female schooling (Shaboya & Konadu-Agyemang cited in Walsh 2014). Corroborating this view point, Hyde (cited in Walsh 2014) observes that sub-sahara Africa is a culturally and economically diverse region, which directly impacts on educational participation, particularly exacerbating gender disparities. Culture is one of the limiting factors in the development of African women.

In the light of the above, it is obvious without gainsaying that culture and traditional practices hinder girls' participation in formal schooling. This perhaps explains why Obilade and Adedolun (2007) maintain that:

The gender disparity in enrolment, retention and completion is fuelled by negative cultural values on the training/ education of the girl child. Biases against educating the girls are culturally-laden, rooted in traditional sex roles expectations and constitute a significant barrier to achieving gender parity in education (pg 207).

Butressing gender inequality in Education, UNICEF's 2000 State of the world children report, found that 16 out of the 22 countries with 70% or more illiterate women are in sub-saharan Africa (Shabaya & Konadu-Agyemang cited in Walsh 2014).

In addition, there are almost 800 million illiterate adults worldwide, of whom 64% are women (Oxam, 2007). Also, about 116th of the world's population (1 billion people) have little or no education and two-third of these people are women and girls according to Unterhalter (2007). It is clear from the foregoing that the educational system worldwide is characterized by extensive gender inequalities. It is an indisputable fact that global and sustainable development cannot be achieved if women who constitute about half of the world population, Nigeria inclusive still suffer exclusion, discrimination and marginalization. Nigeria as a developing nation with a population of over 140million people has 43.1% non-literate citizens and 2/3 of this number are women as revealed by 2006 census report. Women in developing countries fare worse relative to men compared to women in developed

countries on a variety of measures ranging from college enrolment to control over one's life (Jayachandran, 2015). Consequently, a strong education system including adult education in-line with the principle of non-discrimination is key for redressing gender inequality injustice in wider society. Education is development. It creates choices and opportunities for people, reduces the twin burden of poverty and diseases and gives a stronger voice to society (World Bank, in Egunyomi, 2006).

Education in particular according to Akande (2003) in Olomukoro and Oyitso (2014) increases a person's ability to participate in society and to improve the quality of life and standard of living. It is therefore, perhaps more important for women than men, especially in the sub-saharan Africa, where economic and social development are grossly constrained by rapid population growth and inadequate development of human resources. Abaji (2008) also argues that education more than any instrument in the world is empowering and for the female gender, nothing can be more empowering for the generality of females than the instrument of education. It is education that gives information and skill for effective participation of individuals on issues in the society. It has been widely acknowledged that investment in girl's and women's basic education has also positive impact on wider social development, inclusive of increased family income, reduced infant and maternal mortality rates, and better family health and nutrition.

Without achieving gender equality for the female folk in education, the world has no chance of achieving many of the ambitious health, social and development target it has set for itself (Koti Annan cited in Jullema and Unterhalter, 2005).

Achieving gender equality through education and by implication adult education among other dimensions has long been an important development objectives among nations of the world. This is confirmed by both International, Regional and National conventions, institutions, treaties and standards like CEDAW, Beijing Platform for Action, EFA, MDG's and many others which have been ratified by over 180 nations. Gender equality matters and it is an instrument of development.

The role of formal education in addressing gender inequality is insufficient, that is, it cannot alone provide the total requirement for human capacity building because it is elitist in nature, discriminatory and instalmental since education is long-life and can be obtainable at formal, non-formal and informal levels. This is where adult education becomes relevant vital, useful and essential because adult education has a unique edge over other modes of learning in that

it has the ability in reaching out to the excluded, disadvantaged and vulnerable population groups which are denied learning opportunities. For example, the rural and urban slum dwellers and street children, the drop-outs, girls and women, minority and indigenous groups and the handicapped. It is viewed as the only possible learning opportunity that can be integrated within a framework of addressing gender inequality, poverty eradication and social development (Oxfam, 2007).

Moreover, In Article 29 of the resultant Hamburg Declaration (during the Fifth International Conference on Adult Education- (CONFINTEAV), participants from governments, International agencies and Civil society committed themselves to “promoting the empowerment of women and gender equity through adult learning”. In addition, the Delors Report of 1996 further clarifies the “expanded vision” pertaining to adult education as a continuous process of forming whole human beings- their knowledge and aptitudes, as well as the critical faculty and the ability to act. According to this report, an expanded vision of adult education should enable people to develop awareness of themselves and their environment, and encourage them to play their social role at work and in the community level (UNESCO 2002). There is wide spread agreement that adult basic education and literacy enhance human and social development and underpin the development of all MDGs.

The opportunities for reducing inequalities in education can be achieved through a well organized, well funded, adequately staffed adult education programmes based on integrated and innovative approaches as opposed to traditional methods of adult education delivery. Adult education equips learners for productive lifestyle and expands their capacity. It is against this background that this paper examines achieving gender equality through innovative adult education programmes.

Clarification of Concepts

Adult Education

Adult education has been variously defined by many writers viewing it from different perspectives. UNESCO quoted by Omolewa (2006) regards Adult education as a form of education given to those who are regarded as adults. This gives rise to the question “who is an adult?”. The definition of an adult as a concept just like adult education has been very controversial. Some experts use the physiological/biological parameters while others use chronological, historical, economic, psychological, political and social parameters in defining

who is an adult. Akinpelu (2002) and Nzeneri (2010) perceive an adult as an individual who is physically and psychologically mature and who is socially, economically, politically, culturally and environmentally responsible and a person who has self respect and dignity. Other attributes by which one can identify an adult include physiological maturity, the capacity for marriage and parenthood, at least the potential for earning a living and contributing to society by the work of hand or brain and the recognized right to exercise whatever civic duties the political system allows (such as tax paying or voting).

Looking at the above definitions of an adult, two words stand out, which are maturity and responsibility. The essence of adulthood lies in the word ‘responsibility’. An adult is expected to take full responsibility for his actions, for any debt he incurs, for any agreement he enters such as marriage or in business partnership and conduct the affairs of his life with decorum. For example, the constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (1999) puts the adult age at 18 years. Adulthood depends on the criteria prescribed by society in order to identify an adult in that society. Hence, UNESCO in Omolewa (2006) refers to adults “as persons who are regarded as adults by the society to which they belong”. Adult education is therefore education given to adult persons in the society. It is the education specially designed and tailored towards the adult members of the society.

Adult education is a specialized education system which is targeted at the adult who desires an education either as a medium of furthering educational pursuit or starting afresh from the beginning (Wikipedia, 2003). Ugwegbu (2003) pointed out that Adult Education in Nigeria is not just about literacy or remedial education to fill a gap. It is what people need and want as long as they are alive regardless of previous education. UNESCO (1997) cited in Usman (2015) maintained that adult education is a tool that has the potential to meet people’s most vital needs and to stimulate social, cultural, political and economic development, especially on the part of the disadvantaged groups of people. Similarly, United Nation Development Programmes asserted that adult education is a means of acquiring knowledge at high or middle age whereas possessing knowledge is just like having access to resources for a decent standard of living and participating in community development programmes. Adult education can therefore be viewed as an overall means of transforming the less privileged to meet up with the minimum standard required of every citizen in the society. Adult education equips learners for a proactive life-style and expands their capacity.

Gender

Gender denotes the socially constructed roles, rights and responsibilities ascribed to men and women and the relationship and distribution of power between them, and has interpersonal, cultural, institutional, policy, political and socioeconomic dimensions (UN-REDD). Similarly, Kendal (2001) refers to Gender as culturally and socially constructed differences between males and females based on meaning, beliefs and practices that a group or society associates with femininity and masculinity. In addition, Williams (2005) views gender as social differences and relations between men and women which are learned, vary widely among societies and cultures and change overtime. The term gender does not replace the term sex, which refers exclusively to biological differences between men and women. Sex is biologically determined while gender is socially determined, changeable and variable.

Gender Equality

Gender equality exists when men and women are attributed equal social value, equal rights and equal responsibilities and have equal access to the means (resources, opportunities) to exercise and benefit from them. Gender equality according to ABC of women Rights and Gender Equality is Report (2000) means that the different behaviors, aspirations and needs of women and men are considered, valued and favored equally. It does not mean that women and men have to become the same, but their rights, responsibilities and opportunities will not depend on whether they are born male or female. Essentially, gender equality means equal access to and control over various material and non-material resources and assets in the society. Inequality relates to lack of access to rights, assets and decision making, and to lack of control over one's life.

Innovative Adult Education Programmes

Adult education programmes are meant to cater for all segments of the society. It caters for those who are illiterates who have never been to school at all, those with little schooling and those seeking adult education to sustain learning for self-improvement.

Adult illiteracy is higher in low income countries including Nigeria. The adult literacy rate in Nigeria is 61%. In order to fulfil the goals of Adult and NFE as outlined in the National Policy on Education (2004), the following innovations have been put in place to help upgrade school drop outs and illiterate population in order to close the gender gaps. They include:

- Basic literacy programme
- Post literacy programme
- Women Adult Education programme
- Distance Education programme
- Sandwich programme
- Nomadic Education programme

All the above programmes are taught and implemented in extra-mural classes, continuing education centers, extension education centers, correspondence institutions, lifelong distance learning, open Universities, vocational centers, on-the job, and in-service training among others to bridge the gender divide. Education empowers women to overcome discrimination (that is gender inequality). Nations of the world recognize gender equality and women empowerment as a cross-cutting issue in sustainable development. The National literacy survey (2010) conducted by the National Bureau of Statistics in Nigeria also estimates that adult literacy rate is 56.9%, with huge variations between states (Lagos, 88% and Yobe only 14.4%), regions (urban 74.6% and rural 48.7%) and sex (male 65.1% and female 48.6%). Nigeria as a developing nation with a population of over 140 million people has 43.1% non-literate citizens. Nigeria has a literacy rate of 61% and it is ranked 184th out of 194 countries in the world according to Human Development Report in July 2014 in commemoration of the International Literacy Day, September 8th. The Programmes mentioned above are discussed below.

Adult Basic Literacy Programme: This is the acquisition of the skills of reading, writing and numeracy. These skills are fundamental and are required for individuals to break off from the chains of illiteracy. Literacy remains a key basic learning need, it relates to many human satisfactions and it is essential to meeting several basic learning needs.

Functional literacy Education: This is a special programme designed for those with common interest such as traders, farmers, mechanics, and drivers among others. It is a combination of literacy skills with socio-economic and social-cultural activities. The acquisition of the skill of functional literacy would enable individuals to develop their potentialities and to engage in occupational activities integrated with income generation and

vocational skills. Functional literacy is a modern approach in literacy teaching tailored towards a particular need.

Post literacy Programme: This is organized for completers of basic literacy programmes and drop-outs from formal primary schools to upgrade their knowledge to the level of first school leaving certificate. At the post literacy level, the individual masters and reinforces all the acquired skills in order not to relapse into illiteracy and be able to relate more.

Women Adult Education Programme: This programme is designed to improve services of literate and illiterate women in the society. This type of education given to women will liberate them from the subjugation of tradition and society and promote gender equity. Women education is a means of redressing the imbalance and disadvantages unjustifiably imposed on the women folk and of empowering them in their various social, economic and political roles to enable them have a sense of belonging and to be able to participate effectively in national development (Imhabekhai, 2009). For example, vocational training in dress making, knitting, embroidery, soap making, catering, civic education and home economics are taught to women.

Distance Education: involves the use of multi-media for educating a large group of people who may be dispersed in different places. Distance education is described as an educational process in which a significant proportion of the teaching is conducted by someone removed in space and/ or time from the learner. Summarily, distance education is institutionally based, the teacher and learners are geographically separated, it is distributed through interactive telecommunication and lastly, the learning experience is shared via data, voice and video (Simonson, M., Smaldino, S., Albright, M & Zvacek, S., 2009). This is a form of adult education provided for adults who have the need to complete their education or professional skills. It involves the use of information communications technologies (computer, e-learning, e-mail, teleconferencing). It is more of a self/independent study or self-directed learning (Hanachor & Olumati, 2014).

Sandwich Programme: This is a form of continuing education programme usually organized by various institutions of higher education in the country for adults. Continuing education is the education acquired after the initial, formal education. It is the education that carries forward or extends whatever previous education the adult might have had. Sandwich programme is an organized educational activity designed to enhance the skill, knowledge and

qualification of school teachers without affecting their work. It affords wonderful opportunities to serving teachers who cannot abandon their jobs to participate in full-time studies necessary for improvement of their professional knowledge. Sandwich education is a professional, vigorous and determined education for improving the capability of school teachers who are majorly women and by so doing addressing the problem of poor quality of teaching personnel.

Nomadic Education programme: Nomad is a term used to refer to a group of people, who by their occupations, are moving from one location to another for their daily economic activities. Nigerian nomads are mostly cattle rearers. They do not receive formal education. Mobile Education Programmes has been established to take care of this unfortunate situation.

Achieving Gender Equality through Innovative Adult Education Programmes

Adult education can be viewed as an instrument for creating awareness and consciousness for all adults of the society to enable them have more critical views of social, economic and political conditions in their environment thus removing obstacles and impediments that hinder the full realization of each adult's potentialities. According to Sheila and Elaine (2007), Adult Education is embedded in the specific socio-economic, cultural, linguistic and environmental contexts in which learning occurs. It has the flexibility to be responsive to needs and immediate realities and the strength to create enabling learning environments. It is founded on local initiatives and resources and that requires the involvement and efforts of diverse actors such as parents, family and community members, health and agricultural extension workers, craftsmen and craftswomen. Adult education is built on innovation and improvisation and on problem solving and positive thinking. It equips learners for a proactive life-style and expands their capacity (Oxfam, 2007).

The emphasis on gender equality through adult education programmes like Adult literacy and skill acquisition is based on two principal factors:

- The understanding that gender equality is a human right issue
- The affirmation that gender equality, that is equal rights, opportunities and responsibilities for the sexes, is fundamental for effective development. There is a global consensus that adult basic education and literacy enhance human and social

development and underpin the achievement of all MDGs. It is impossible to achieve gender equality without education.

In order for adult education programmes to be gender equitable and to recognize the local impacts of poverty, discrimination against women, they need to be closely linked to social action and structural change focusing on poverty alleviation measures, side by side with their engagement with the whole range of education provision.

Gender equality refers to a situation where men and women have full human rights and potentials and are able to contribute equally to national, political, economic, social and cultural development and benefit equally from the results (Dickson, Aloba & Egbe, 2014). Gender inequalities are among the most pervasive inequalities in the world. Although women are crucial factors in the home front, they are at times denied full access to quality education as a result of traditions and customs. Gender equality in education are multidimensional and “not just a numbers game” (Bokovo, 2011). Gender equality is associated with capabilities and empowerment.

The Nigerian constitution says that everyone has right to education, that is, equality of educational opportunity is enshrined in the Nigerian constitution. The constitution makes it mandatory for Government to provide equal and adequate educational opportunities at all levels. This means that the right to education is guaranteed in the constitution. The reality about equal education opportunities is that a very high percentage of children, youths and adults do not avail themselves of existing opportunities. The most vulnerable group consists of women, disabled adults, nomads and migrant fishermen.

It is also observed that a number of persons may not, in spite of chances for educational development, acquire formal education up to the level required to position them for substantial personal growth in paid employment or in self employment. Adult education programmes like Adult literacy and skill acquisition are designed to meet the needs of persons that did not acquire enough education or none at all as well as those that need to sustain learning for self-improvement. Gender traditional, educational and career choices is one of the most important factors causing systematic differences between women and men in working life and in society as a whole.

One of the aims of adult education is equalization of educational opportunities. In the case of equality of educational opportunity, adult education idea of life-long education is a

way of giving another chance to whoever dropped by on the educational journey, so that he can drop in again. Adult education offers various programmes which will take care of those who desire to improve themselves or those who want to start afresh their education. Such programmes include adult literacy education, agricultural extension, community self-help cooperative development, social welfare, women empowerment programmes such as skill acquisition and vocational education, civic education and workers' education.

Adult education as life-long education is geared towards helping the individual reach his full potentialities. The existence of gender inequality means there are gender gaps between the sexes. Gaps in education enrolment or completion, life expectancy, labour force participation, access to economic opportunities, voice in household and society.

Women will need the following adult education programmes:

- Literacy Education Empowerment
- The skills of reading, writing and computing
- Functional literacy
- Vocational Education
- Skill acquisition to avoid prostitution

Empowerment of women involves a process of education, enlightenment campaign, workshops in places of work, seminars and conscientization sessions. One important area where adult education can be useful in reducing gender inequalities is creation of awareness in the minds of women. The development of a self-reliant individual. This is the goal of Paulo Freire's idea of adult education that education of the adult should not be for 'domestication' but for "liberation". If this principle could be adopted in adult education classes, it would soon be discovered that many glaring inequalities that are not natural will disappear.

Skill acquisition is secondary, the primary purpose of educating adults is 'consciousness'. This is Paulo Freire's principle of conscientization. Conscientization is a process in which learners are engaged actively in their learning process through meaningful dialogue. It involves dialogue, reflection, communication, awareness raising, cooperation and empowerment. It equips learners with problem-solving skills.

Innovative approaches to literacy delivery are imperative in reducing gender inequality. Regenerated Freirean Literacy through Empowering Community Techiques (REFLECT) and Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) are promising literacy innovations. PRA and REFLECT are participatory and modern approaches to literacy delivery. All participatory techniques emphasize the involvement of individuals that make up the community in the process of development. The focus of this approach is on the needs of the learners and how best to serve them in the teaching and learning activities. It is known as learner-centered approach (NMEC Training Manual, 2013). Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) is a process that involves the local people and all the external facilitators working together as equal partners towards the realization of a vision the local people consider as their symbol or indicator of development. PRA has real respect and commitment to the priorities of the poor. REFLECT approach to adult literacy is new in Nigeria. It fuses the theory of conscientization and the practice of Participatory Rural Appraisal. REFLECT shows great respect for people's existing knowledge and experience and knowledge. REFLECT approach to adult literacy is designed as a developmental tool to facilitate the 3Rs as well as enable communities to realize that they are responsible for their own development. Through REFLECT, the voices of literacy programmes participants are heard and community members are given the opportunity to participate actively in the analysis and planning for the delivery of social and civic services. REFLECT is all about active participation for literacy and lifelong learning. REFLECT has helped to redefine literacy as being beyond the mere acquisition of knowledge and skills. REFLECT aims to link literacy with empowerment and achievement of rights. It seeks to promote a multidimensional approach to literacy and under practices. This approach enables community members to come together through conscientization and sensitization by developmental specialist so that they can address and solve their identified common problems (Eustella, 2014).

These modern approaches to literacy are built on innovation, improvisation and problem-solving and positive thinking. It equips learners for a proactive life-style and expands their capacity. Literacy equips women with self-esteem and self confidence. Literacy empowers women to participate effectively in National development. It improves women/girls economic well-being of a country, enable better use of family planning, reduce infant mortality, child malnutrition and increase life expectancy. Adult education and literacy are important in themselves, and also for key areas such as health, leadership and broad issues of women's empowerment. Functional literacy combines the skills of reading, writing

and numeracy with occupational and vocational activities. Functional literacy emphasizes the relevance and usefulness of literacy skills in everyday life.

Vocational and skills acquisition programme for women is essential for attaining self-reliance and self independence. Omaye (2012) pointed out that the provision of vocational education as the envisaged form of education has been identified as a vehicle through which individuals, especially women can attain self-reliance. Vocational skills like catering, pottery, knitting, weaving, soap making, hair dressing, fashion designing, tie and dye among others can be provided for women by government and developmental agencies. Women become economically independent and self-reliant when engaged in vocational training. Vocational training equips women with useable skills that can make them to be self-reliant and self-employed so that they can be self-sufficient.

Closely associated with vocational education is Women Adult Education Programme which equip women with vocational and entrepreneurship skills. Distance education and Sandwich education programmes are embarked upon to enhance women educational attainment in order to bridge the gender gaps. Women participate in these educational programmes for the improvement of their professional knowledge and skills so that they can compete favourably with their male counterparts even in the corridor of power.

Conclusion

It has been established in this paper that adult education programmes especially basic literacy and skills acquisition through participatory methods are potent in reducing gender inequality. Gender equality matters and is an instrument of development. Women represent two-third of world illiterates Nigeria inclusive. This situation slows growth and development if not adequately addressed. Therefore, Government, development partners, civil society should double their efforts in ensuring that adult education gets top priority in educational agenda because education and literacy are important key **area** in health, leadership and broad issues of women empowerment.

Recommendations

- The civil society should sensitize and enlighten members of the public in raising the profile of adult education and literacy and ensuring it is gender equitable

- Literacy should be promoted through partnership with NGOs and civil society: NGOs need to highlight for governments the potentials of participatory approaches in adult education and literacy to achieve gender equality and social change
- Movements need to advocate for governments to establish a right-based policy framework, civil society should dialogue with government the need to ensure that a right process exists to achieve this right-based policy framework.
- More resources are needed to strengthen advocacy for change to public policies, so that gender exclusion from education for adults and promote education with gender justice.
- Adult Education programmes should be closely linked to social action and structure change for it to be gender equitable.

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