

Covid-19 and Beyond: Repositioning Adult and Non-Formal Education for the Achievement of Sustainable Development Goals in Nigeria

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Abstract. The COVID-19 pandemic resulted in total lockdown of all social and economic activities posing a major challenge to socio-economic development of all countries and a major threat to the 2030 target for achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), as set by all United Nations member states in 2015. The pandemic is also potentially one of the greatest threats to global education and as of March 2020, had caused more than 1.6 billion children and youth, which is close to 80% of the world's enrolled students, to be out of school in 161 countries. The adults are mostly affected in Nigeria. However, ignorance and illiteracy are impediments of socio-economic and political development of nations and with Adult and Non-Formal Education (ANFE) been pushed further to the margins during the pandemic in Nigeria, its potential contribution to the creation of healthier, happier and more inclusive societies has never been clearer. This paper examines the impact of COVID-19 pandemic on adult and non-formal education provision and delivery in Nigeria, the challenges, and way forward to better equip the various programmes participants to benefit maximally in the present global village using Information and Communication Technology (ICT). It also highlights the need to reposition ANFE during the COVID-19 pandemic and beyond for the achievement of the SDGs target in Nigeria by 2030.

Keywords: COVID-19, Adult Education, Non-Formal Education, Sustainable Development, Sustainable Development Goals.

1. Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic is much more than a health crisis resulting in total lockdown of all social and economic activities and also posing a major challenge

to socio-economic development of all countries of which Nigeria is not left out. The pandemic has posed a threat to the 2030 target for achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) as set by all United Nations member states in 2015 as a universal call to action to end poverty, protect the planet and ensure that all people enjoy peace and prosperity. Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) consist of 17 goals and 169 targets to be achieved by the year 2030. The 17 goals to be implemented basically is to ensure; zero hunger, good health and well-being, quality education, gender equality, clean water and sanitation, affordable and clean energy, decent work and economic growth, industry innovation and infrastructure, reduction of inequalities, urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts, promoting peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development amongst others. . These goals capture the essence of development in any nation and have as its slogan to “Leave no one behind” (sdgs, 2020).

According to Asiyai (2015), obtaining a quality education is the foundation to improving people's lives and sustainable development as it is only quality education that can sharpen the minds of the individual and help transform the society economically, socially and politically. However, World Economic Forum (WEF, 2020) posits that due to the pandemic, the topic of innovation in education has never been so crucial, noting that while most developed countries moved their classes online with ease, many developing countries have been found wanting, due to a lack of infrastructure and the high cost of data. According to WEF (2020), the technological revolution sweeping the world is beginning to have a profound impact on the continent, presenting an opportunity to hit the reset button and reimagine the education landscape by

addressing the challenge of exclusion, to achieve quality education for all.

Adult and Non-formal education (ANFE) is one of the fields of academic endeavour that is saddled with the responsibility of solving socio-economic, cultural, political and environmental problems. Umar, Eshak, Bichi, & Aujara (2010) cited in Hussain (2013) confirm the positive association between adult education programmes and increased levels of self-esteem and high levels of knowledge and skills which thereby encourage positive and active engagement of people in their own development. According to Omolewa (2019), the duty of adult education is to break the barriers to learning for every individual and provide access to education. The author noted further that before and during the colonial rule, when there was no provision for university education in Nigeria, adult education filled the gap by helping to provide the education that was required for social change and under those circumstances, adult education became the last hope of the ordinary people, helping them to realise their full potentials and capabilities, to explore their possibilities and giving them the encouragement never to give up their dreams and visions for a better and improved future for themselves, their families and communities.

Aliogo (2019) notes that Nigeria developed a transition strategy from MDGs to SDGs in 2015 as follows: build on existing foundation between 2016 and 2020; scale up SDG implementation between 2021 and 2025; and between 2026 and 2030 arrive at a place where no Nigerian is left behind. The author further states that to integrate SGD into National Development Plan the federal government integrated the three dimensions of the SDGs which are economic, social and environmental into the Economic Recovery and Growth Plan (ERGP) 2017-2020, maintaining that core areas such as food security, agriculture, energy, infrastructural development, industry, macroeconomic stability and inclusive growth were given special attention.

The coronavirus pandemic of 2020 affected all aspects of the social, economic and political lives and activities globally. Mostly affected are the adults and with the 2030 Agenda in its fifth year, there is a need to reposition Adult and Non-Formal education (ANFE) provision, access and delivery efforts in Nigeria to ensure the attainment of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by year 2030. Therefore, the need for all hands to be on deck cannot also be over emphasized as it is quality adult and non-formal education that can sharpen the minds of the adults, out of school youths, the disadvantaged, and the

vulnerable groups so that they can in turn help transform the society economically, socially and politically.

This paper examines need for repositioning of ANFE provision and delivery in the covid-19 period and beyond in Nigeria for the achievement of the SDGs by 2030.

2. Historical Development of Adult and Non-Formal Education in Nigeria

In Nigeria, the historical development of adult and non-formal education has been interwoven with the history of formal schooling. From the early decades of the colonial period, the British government in Nigeria paid little or no attention to the provision of adult education. It was not until pressure and criticisms came from the Phelps-Stokes Commission report that the British colonial government made some feeble and half-hearted efforts to improve educational provisions in the British West African colonies (NMEC, 2008).

There appears to have been some conceptual problems surrounding the meaning and scope of adult education and these problems tended to have affected its historical development. Though, it is recognized that informal learning forms part of the educational pattern by which adults traditionally gain knowledge and understanding, adult and non-formal education is generally used to connote organized activities and programmes concerned with the education of adults outside the formal school system. Certainly, the social milieu and circumstances of a given society strongly influence the pace and pattern of adult education development (NMEC, 2008).

Adult and Non-Formal education programmes constitute useful tools for achieving Universal

Basic Education (UBE), promotion of gender equality and women empowerment, and improving the health status of Nigerians. According to NMEC (2008), between 1997 and 2008, the percentage allocation of funds to Adult Learning and Education ranged between 0.65% - 8.94% of the total allocation of funds available to education. This result shows that less than 10% of the total amount of money available to the education sector goes into adult education in Nigeria. NMEC (2008) further states that:

The total allocation of funds to adult education from Local Government Areas (LGAs) was the highest. This was followed by the contributions from other Ministries and Community Based Organisations (CBOs) while the contributions from the LGAs are very substantial to literacy activities.

UNICEF made the largest financial allocation to adult and non-formal education in Nigeria followed by the UNDP and the World Bank. UNESCO came fourth followed by the DFID.

In the area of the quality of adult learning and education provision, participation and achievement, it was reported that between 1997 and 2008, there were more women in basic literacy classes than men. In addition, many States did not attach much prominence to the participation of the girl-child in non-formal education.

Many participants drop out of Adult and Non-Formal Education programmes due to some shortcomings in the management of some of the programmes which could depend on the specific needs of the learners too.

The private sector is not sufficiently involved in the funding of adult learning and education programmes. Adult and Non-Formal Education (ANFE) in Nigeria.

The concept adult education has for a long time suffered from conflicting definitions due largely to its varied connotations, emergence, goals and implications across cultures. Whatever the variations and considerations that are made, adult education denotes the entire body of organized educational processes which employ different methods and contents for various levels of clientele in the community. This involves acquisition of knowledge, skills and attitudes for the benefit of the individual and the larger society. Thus, adult education broadly speaking is a comprehensive and diverse mode of learning for all adults irrespective of their previous educational attainments. It is indeed an integral part of life-long learning or continuing education (Federal Republic of Nigeria (FRN) & Association for the Development of Education in Africa (ADEA), 2011). The Hamburg Declaration of 1997 cited in FRN & ADEA (2011) indicates that:

Adult Education denotes the entire body of ongoing learning processes, formal or otherwise, whereby people regarded as adults by the society to which they belong develop their abilities, enrich their knowledge and improve their technical or professional qualifications or turn them in a new direction to meet their own needs and those of their society. Adult learning encompasses formal and continuing education, Non-Formal learning and the spectrum of informal and incidental learning available in a multicultural learning society where theory and practice-based approaches are recognized

Adult education therefore covers the entire spectrum of learning from basic education to professional

development occurring outside the formal school system. In fact, all forms of higher education by all the teachers and learners are adult education (Barikor, 2005 cited in FRN & ADEA, 2011).

Non-formal education (NFE) refers to an organized educational process given to adults as well as children outside formal schooling. Being an out-of-school activity, its scope is wide ranging and is often used interchangeably with adult education. While some scholars see the two terms to mean the same thing, others have attempted to draw some distinctions between them. For instance, it is argued that while adult education focuses mainly on adults, Non-Formal education extends to the youth and children. These children could be those in nursery schools, drop-outs, apprentices, the girl-child, children of nomads, children of migrant fishermen, the traditional Quranic school children and youth (almajirai) including those who have not been to school at all (FRN & ADEA, 2011).

Accordingly, FRN & ADEA (2011) identifies Non-Formal education (NFE) as practiced in Nigeria, as any intentional and systematic educational enterprise outside the traditional settings in which content is adapted to the unique needs and situation of the learner to maximize learning and minimize the other elements which often occupy the formal system like roll calls, enforcing discipline and close supervision. It is more learner-centred and result-oriented. In NFE, the learner is the one to decide on who to learn from, when to learn, where to learn, how to learn, why he/she learns and what to learn. Thus, NFE is quite broad, flexible and elastic. Thus, in NFE, learners can leave at any time if they feel that they have achieved their goals or if their objectives are not being met.

FRN & ADEA (2011) identifies 6 different types of adult education programs being run across the country. These are Basic and Functional literacy; Vocational Skills Acquisition; Post-literacy; Remedial, Extra-mural and Continuing Education, and Nomadic Education. According to ADEA (2011), Adult and Non-formal Education is beset with formidable challenges, such as the dearth of facilities in learning centers, limited support services, inadequate and unqualified facilitators or instructors, ill-motivated teachers and a weak monitoring system.

3. Covid-19 Pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic is the defining global health crisis and the greatest challenge since World War II reaching the tragic milestone of one million deaths, and the human family is suffering under an

almost intolerable burden of loss. The pandemic is much more than a health crisis but also an unprecedented socio-economic crisis, stressing every one of the countries it touches with the potential to create devastating social, economic and political effects that will leave deep and longstanding scars (UNDP, 2020b). UNDP (2020b) therefore posits that every country needs to act immediately to prepare, respond, and recover.

The Federal Ministry of Health confirmed a coronavirus disease (COVID-19) case in Lagos State, Nigeria on the 27th of February 2020, which was the first case to be reported in Nigeria since the beginning of the outbreak in China in January, 2020 (Adepoju, 2020). As the spread of the coronavirus intensifies, Nigeria started dealing with enormous social and economic impacts exacerbating existing inequalities and creating new inequalities, which are hitting the most vulnerable people the hardest. In a country that is overwhelmingly tied to the informal sector, the COVID-19 pandemic affected livelihood and spending patterns, which in turn could have a negative impact on the economy and wellbeing of the people (UNDP, 2020a).

According to Saavedra (2020), the world is living amidst what is potentially one of the greatest threats to global education, a gigantic educational crisis because as of March 28, 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic had caused more than 1.6 billion children and youth to be out of school in 161 countries. This is close to 80% of the world's enrolled students. Stanistreet (2020) posits that the long-term impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on education and learning remains to be seen but it is clear, however, that across the world, formal systems of education have not been able to reach every learner in this crisis. Underlying structural issues in terms of priorities, roles and delivery models for education systems and services have been exposed by the crisis. In some parts of the world, learning from home through online and distance learning became the new norm during lockdown, as teaching and learning activity in physical classrooms became impossible to maintain. This shift in provision has opened up the possibility of further development and investment in alternative, non-formal and family-based learning pathways such that the solutions adopted during the pandemic can be integrated into education systems to ensure learners have greater opportunities to learn through multiple pathways (Stanistreet, 2020). Razzaq cited in Stanistreet (2020) argues that while adult education has been pushed further to the margins during the pandemic, its potential

contribution to the creation of healthier, happier and more inclusive societies has never been clearer. Repositioning adult education for the achievement of sustainable development goals in the new normal Nigeria

As of March 28, 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic had caused more than 1.6 billion children and youth which is close to 80% of the world's enrolled students to be out of school in 161 countries. The above assertion by Saavedra (2020) has therefore deemed it necessary for every country to act immediately to prepare, respond, and recover from the devastating effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on education. This is because the children and youths that would be out of school as a result of the pandemic will grow up to be adults who lack the necessary quality education to contribute to their self-development and development of the society and country to which they belong. This is in addition to the already existing population of illiterate adults globally before the pandemic.

In some parts of the world especially Europe and some other technologically advanced countries, learning from home through online and distance learning became the new norm during lockdown, as teaching and learning activity in physical classrooms became impossible to maintain. World Economic Forum (2020) notes that the technological revolution sweeping the world is beginning to have a profound impact on the continent, presenting an opportunity to hit the reset button and reimagine the education landscape by addressing the challenge of exclusion, to achieve quality education for all. Razzaq cited in Stanistreet (2020) argues that while adult education has been pushed further to the margins during the pandemic, its potential contribution to the creation of healthier, happier and more inclusive societies has never been clearer. The author's argument can be seen from what was experienced by some school children and youths who could not benefit from the online learning organized by some schools and states government in Nigeria because of some circumstances like poor or no power supply, poverty, illiteracy and low level of education of their parents or guardians. With such experiences it may become difficult to achieve the sustainable development goals target of 2030 as not only education will be adversely affected but other goals and targets as set by the United Nations member states in 2015.

Adult education should be repositioned in the new normal Nigeria following the great negative impact of the covid-19 pandemic on education not only in

Nigeria but across the globe. The negative impact is more felt in Nigeria and other African countries where information technology and online learning have not been fully taken advantage of at all levels of education. However, for the above to be achieved all categories of adults (irrespective of past educational achievements), out of school children, the disadvantaged groups, teachers, facilitators, etc., must be exposed to the use of ICT in information dissemination especially in the teaching/ learning processes. Provision of sound education for all will go a long way to enable the citizens contribute meaningfully to socio-economic growth of Nigeria. This is because the more educated a country is the more productive it becomes.

4. Recommendations

To reposition adult and non-formal education in the new normal Nigeria the following are recommended:

- Adult and non-formal education should be viewed as an investment in human capital and high government priority unlike what is obtainable presently where government budgetary allocation to education is very low with adult and non-formal education funding pushed to the background and not given priority.
- Government should strive towards ensuring power supply to all nooks and crannies of the country so that the rural dwellers in rural areas where the country has majority of illiterates, drop-outs and vulnerable groups can also benefit from adult and non-formal education provision and delivery through the use of ICT.
- Nigerian government should promote, make provisions for, and fund more online education for the adults (especially the illiterates), out of school children, the educationally disadvantaged and the vulnerable groups.
- Computer literacy should be rigorously funded and invested in especially for the adults and the vulnerable groups in Nigeria. This will go a long way to help in the achievement of the SDGs when people can seek for information and learn on their own taking advantage of the world as a global village.
- Information and communication technology should be recognized and used in the delivery process for adult and non-formal education programme for beneficiaries to be able to fit into the world of work and to cope

with globalisation and the attendant benefits. This is very important because presently most adult and non-formal education programmes are not employing ICT in the delivery process.

- All those involved in the planning, implementation and evaluation of adult and non-formal education programmes should be exposed to training and retraining in ICT utilization and use because what they do not have they cannot give.
- Innovation in education has become a major priority due to COVID-19. There should be training and retraining of instructors, facilitators, and tutors involved so as to keep abreast of new developments in provision and delivery of adult and non-formal education across the globe.

5. Conclusion

This paper concludes that for Nigeria to achieve the SDG goals by year 2030 considering the devastating impacts of the coronavirus pandemic on education, adult and non-formal education should be given utmost priority. Repositioning adult and non-formal education provision and delivery through the use of ICT to capture all citizens thereby changing their lives positively and giving room for independent or self-directed learning and further education will allow for better connection between homes and schools. This will enable the adults to contribute meaningfully to the education of the children at home through online learning in the new normal Nigeria.

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