

Review

The practice of community education in Nigeria

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This article focuses on the problems and prospects of Community Education in Nigeria. It examines the concept of non-formal community education as vital to individual and community development. It posits that, the formal provision of education cannot solve the problems of a rapidly changing society. Hence, education has to be redefined in the context of community to make it responsive to the yearning for better living conditions in the community. The work takes a rear-view mirror of the indigenous community education as a recipe for development and submits that if integrated with formal education indigenous community education can facilitate group and community betterment. Against this premise, suggests some measures that can foster community education for all-round development in Nigeria.

Key words: Community education; community development; non-formal education; poverty reduction; participation

INTRODUCTION

Community education is not a new phenomenon of human living (Anyanwu, 2002). For example, in Nigerian traditional communities people had been practicing indigenous community education before the advent of the early missionaries and the colonial administrators. However, with the introduction and general acceptance of the Western system of education and culture there was a gradual decline of enthusiasm for erstwhile indigenous community education with corollary problems of unemployment, underemployment, poverty, armed robbery and youth restiveness in Nigeria. This indicates the inadequacy of formal school system of Western Education alone to meet the socio-economic and cultural needs of the Nigerian society.

Formal education having been unable to address most community concerns, policy makers and others came up with the idea of non-formal education, community education and adult education. To this end, Social Development Policy and National Guidelines on Community Development in Nigeria were formulated in 1989 and 1990 respectively. Also, mass literacy, adult and non-formal education with strong emphasis on all forms of functional education such as community education are enshrined in the National Policy on Education (2004) where it is clearly stated that efforts shall be made to relate education to overall community needs. Community needs in this respect go beyond social amenities such as water, electricity, hospital, good roads, schools, markets stalls and recreation centres.

In realization of the invaluable role and impact of community education locally and globally, the Fifth World Conference on Community Education, was convened in 1987 in Nairobi, Kenya where the proponents and practitioners of community education from 40 countries in all continents affirm their commitment to the goals of community education.

However the perennial problems of unemployment, poverty, armed robbery, larceny, harlotry, kidnapping and fraudulence are on the increase. In recognition of the adverse effects of the above vices on the community, this study attempts to x-ray the practice of community education in Nigeria. Also, this study believes that if indigenous education is integrated with formal Western-oriented system of education, it would adequately equip the community members to become self-reliant and be able to effectively participate in the whole process of community development.

Meaning of community education

Community education is the type of education needed to ensure the self-confidence, self-respect and personal independence as well as to safeguard human rights and achieve social equality. Community education is essential in stimulating community members to actively participate in social activities, find or generate employment, increase their incomes and improve their quality of life. In this regard, educational profiles reveal that most developed and

developing nations of the world accord great importance to adult and community education as the springboard of their national development. For example, Findsen (2006) reports that the climate of change in the political, economic and cultural affairs of Aotearoa New Zealand has been tracked into adult and community education.

The term "community education" enjoys a variety of meanings. Lending credence to this assertion, Ezimah (2004) opines that defining community education is not an easy exercise because it has many configurations. Also, Delargy (1989) admits that there is a great deal of "misunderstanding or confusion regarding community education. This misconception is largely attributable to the fact that the two terms, "Community" and "education" mean many things to many societies and assume different meanings under different situations. Anyanwu (2002) asserts that the word "community", is still considered among scholars as a slippery and contestable concept. The problem of defining education is no less significant.

Notwithstanding some misconceptions surrounding community education, literature is replete with its definitions and meanings. For example, Minzey and le Tarte (1972) maintain that the ultimate goal of community education is to: develop the process by which members of a community learn to work together to identify problems and to seek solutions to these problems. The contention is that it is through this process that an on-going procedure is established for working together on all community issues.

The crux of this philosophy lies in the recognition of the fact that community education lays emphasis on the immediacy of coping with the problems inhibiting community progress. This is done through citizen participation, sharing of decision making and utilization of community problems to meet the needs of community members. Based on this premise, community education remains a catalyst to development processes.

According to the Canadian Association for Community Education (1987), community education is a process whereby learning is used for individual, community and global betterment. It is characterized by the integrated involvement of people of all ages, use of community learning resources and research to bring about community change and recognition that people can learn through, with and from each other to create a better world.

Viewed from this vantage point, community education is a channel for enhancing the initiative and creativity of the people to solve their problems. This implies that education goes beyond reading, writing and calculating, though they are important elements of the educational process. Community education as portrayed in the above definition is a tool that enables individuals and groups to develop their capacities for a full and rich personal and social life.

In this vein, Ezimah (2004) defines community education as a process aimed at raising consciousness, spreading understanding and providing the necessary skills, in-

cluding the human and material resources, for the social, economic, political and cultural development of the community.

However, the definition of community education by the Adult and Community Education Association (Aotearoa, New Zealand) quoted in Findsen (2006) is operationally adopted in this work. Community Education is defined as organized learning activities that groups or individuals undertake for their personal, community, cultural or economic development. It touches all other areas of learning but its primary focus is the adult as learner and the community as context.

It is deduced from the various definitions examined above that community education is education for life in society rather than education merely for livelihood. It is education for people's empowerment to take control over their own lives. In this vein, community education is education geared towards the articulation of community needs and problems. As a pre-requisite for community development and progress, community education is an educational process whereby people, individually and collectively, learn to help themselves and improve their lives.

Since problems and needs are numerous and vary from one community to the other, the concept of community education is characterized by diverse interpretations. Thus, Anyanwu (2002) submits that in developed countries, community education may be understood in terms of expanding existing services and resources such as those of a school, available for wider use by the local community. In developing countries on the other hand, it could be concerned with the growth in a community of a political awareness that will encourage the people to press for educational or social change. In Nigeria, for example, the incidence of mass education to promote environmental sanitation is a strong case to illustrate the peculiarity of community education. This corroborates the belief expressed in Dublin Declaration (1983) that "all people must practice community education according to their own history and experience and to the end that education for all will relate to the issues of everyday life and to the betterment of individual and social life". In this vein, emphasis in community education is usually on transformation of the citizens who in turn will transform the communities resulting in achievement of national development.

Non-formal community education

Community education is a form of non-formal education. In this sense, educational activities are carried on outside the framework of the formal school system to provide selected types of learning to particular sub-groups in the community. It is an education geared towards encouraging and assisting the community members to think about their problems, formulate and embark upon action projects to solve their problems. Anyanwu (2002) corroborated by Ezimah (2004) holds that the non-formal nature of

its operational strategies determines the objective of community education. The primary objective of non-formal and informal community education is to return education to the people in their communities. In this regard, communities are perceived as the roots of education. The implication is that programmes such as adult literacy, extra-mural classes, continuing education of all categories, vocational training, health, re-creation, citizenship, cultural activities, refresher programmes and any special activities are aimed at solving community problems.

As a non-formal form of education, community education is the type of education appropriate to a type of people as distinct from one derived from a theory. This explains the reason for diversity and fragmentation in community education programmes. Corroborating this view, Findsen (2006) holds that what characterizes community education is its diversity in terms of purposes, location, structures, processes of provision and funding sources. Thus, community education can be geared towards spreading understanding and providing the necessary skills in the areas of agriculture, health, domestic science, rural industries, housing, co-operatives, public amenities, recreation for the social, economic, political and cultural development. It is on this premise Obanya (2002) underscores non-formal education as the type of learning the Nigeria society needed in the current century. It is therefore, within the framework of community education that the dream of empowering the individuals in the community to be socially useful, participate fully in the Nation's democratic process and be economically more productive can be fully realized. Community education in this vein provides an avenue for bringing about transformation and change in individuals, communities, societies and nations.

Indigenous community education in Nigeria: an overview

Community education for individual and community is not unprecedented in Nigeria. Prior to the introduction of Western education and culture into Nigeria by the European, education was purely indigenous. That is, it was peculiar and relevant to the needs of indigenes of a particular community. In this regard, indigenous education in Nigeria was community-based as the entire community was the teacher. For example, if a child mis-behaved while the parents were not around, any other adult member of the community could discipline and correct him or her on the spot (Adeyinka, 2006). Thus, children were initiated into the socio-cultural uprightness of the society.

Also, indigenous community education in Nigeria was gender-based. In this vein, Adeyinka (2006) reports that boys and girls were given the kind of education that enabled them to fulfill masculine and feminine responsibilities respectively in the community. Thus, male education produced farmers, warriors, blacksmiths, rulers, hunters, diviners, drummers, builders, sculptors and other workers

in male-dominated occupations from which women were excluded. On the other hand, female education was predominantly designed to produce future wives and mothers. Examples of female dominated occupations include poultry raising, mat weaving, dyeing, pottery, cooking, food vending, clearing, planting, harvesting, cultural singing, dancing, and traditional midwifery.

Indigenous community education in Nigeria was not formal. It was functional, collective, communalistic and largely democratic. It placed emphasis on initiation and learning by doing profitable occupational activities. In this wise, there was no room for unemployment, underemployment, idleness and bickering on the job. In this way, the learner was productive in the community.

From the foregoing discourse, it could be rightly said that indigenous community education embraced a lifelong process and gave individuals the opportunity to continue their education throughout life. In view of this, Sarumi (2002) remarks that indigenous community education being comprehensive, effective, work oriented and less expensive should be integrated into the contemporary educational system. This will bring wider access to education and reduce the cases of unemployment in Nigeria.

Practice of community education in Nigeria

It is imperative to examine the practice of community education for sustainable national development in Nigeria. Community education can be traced back to the lackadaisical attitude of the early missionaries and colonial administrators to the traditional community education in Nigeria. They discredited traditional community education on the ground that it lacked literacy and proper documentation. Also, it failed to address the issue of poverty. This eventually led to a general acceptance of the Western system of formal education and culture. Most Nigerians thus became more European than the Europeans themselves. Accompanying the general acceptance of the Western system of education and culture, there was a gradual decline of enthusiasm for erstwhile indigenous community education, detribalization, acculturation and urbanization.

The introduction of Western formal system of education was not without its demerits. For example, there have been cases of massive unemployment, under employment, poverty, high illiteracy, diseases and general economic backwardness. As there was a growing dissatisfaction with the effects of formal school systems in relation to development goals, there was a craving for a system of education that would relate knowledge and community needs together. This brought the need for non-formal or informal community education to the fore as the recipe for a learning society.

Regrettably, an abysmal ignorance of the meaning of community education due to its many configurations exposes it to the danger of being defined so broadly that

it loses clarity and effectiveness. Consequently, there has been a misleading judgement of what the entire purview of community education can achieve either at the community, national or international level. Ezimah (2004) connects the problem with community education to that of adult education for being nebulous and indistinct.

Despite a great deal of "misunderstanding or confusion", Barikor, as far back as 1984, maintained that community education has specific content, purpose, delivery system and control. In this sense, community education is premised on the ground that education can be made relevant to people's needs and aspirations. It is locally based, and relates to people in their local community.

Inadequate financial allocation due to lack of political will on the part of the government has always been another underlying problem facing the promotion of community education in Nigeria. Unlike the formal education system, non-formal community education has not been enjoying heavy investment from the government. Community education like any other form of non-formal education does not attract much funds in Nigeria, as it is not often regarded as one of the priority areas as is the case with housing, defence and health. In view of this, Imhabekhai and Onyeozu (2006) note that no appreciable financial assistance (if any) has been given to adult and non-formal education in spite of its acute financial needs and the crucial roles the sub-sector plays in engineering national development.

Another problem facing community education in Nigeria is that no considerable effort has been made to recruit professionals, such as adult educators, community educators and social welfare officials, to provide professional advice on community education. Rather, primary school teachers, drop-outs from secondary schools with little or no knowledge of community education were often employed. With a dearth of books and other relevant materials, community educators with little or no training in the profession often find themselves in great dilemma.

For community education programmes to be effective, it is essential that the beneficiaries of such programmes be involved in the sharing of decision-making. Anyanwu (2002) holds that through this philosophy of participation, the integration for the total society can be greatly enhanced and sustained.

However, successive Nigerian governments had initiated several programmes meant to foster community education. Such programmes include Community Banks, Family Support Programmes (FSP), the National Directorate of Employment (NDE), the People's Bank, Better Life for Rural Women, the Directorate of Food, Roads and Rural Infrastructure (DFRRI), without necessarily involving the target beneficiaries in the planning and implementation processes of these programmes. This has resulted into the discontinuance of some of the programmes or projects.

There has always been a problem of overlapping roles among the governmental and quasi-governmental agen-

cies involved in the provision of community education. Most often, non-governmental organizations that work in the same communities or on related projects remain relatively compartmentalized, divulging little information about their activities and funding sources to others. For example, an NGO, Community Participation for Action in the Social Sector (COMPASS) in Nigeria has been concentrating on community education for social transformation similar to that of International Foundation for Education and Self-Help (IFESH). Thus, lack of effective collaboration among the majority of NGOs involved in the promotion of community education has brought unhealthy jealousies and different visions for development programmes.

Also, the incessant and protracted communal, ethnic, regional and religious conflicts in Nigeria have derailed the aims and objectives of community development education. The implication is that myriad of community education and development projects were abandoned during violent conflicts. For example, conflicts that occurred between O'dua People's Congress (OPC) and Hausa; Ife and Modakeke; Ijaw/Urhobo/Itsekiri in the Niger Delta; Umuleri/Aguleri in the South East of Nigeria and several indigenes/settlers have resulted in serious men homicides. With many of the men out in active combat and others killed during the war, the need for survival becomes paramount over and above community education and development.

From the foregoing it is clear that many problems confront the promotion of community education in Nigeria. This predicament leads to desperation and hopelessness in many communities as they remain backward, underdeveloped, illiterate and indigent. Obviously, many problems with community education arise from the fact that it is multi-dimensional. Community education manifests itself in a variety of forms and contexts and it is induced by a variety of causes and mechanisms. Unfortunately, past policies to tackle some social issues such as illiteracy, unemployment, underemployment, poverty, HIV/AIDs and environmental problems failed to fulfill expectations primarily because they were not grounded on adequate understanding and prospects of community education in Nigeria. However, community education, if fostered has many prospects for social transformation and sustainable development in Nigeria.

Prospects for community education in Nigeria

Notwithstanding many problems hindering community education in Nigeria, it has many prospects, as one of the factors underpinning growth and development. In the first place, community education remains a mechanism through which mass involvement in learning activities can progress. In this wise, community education has the potentiality of improving the ability to think, especially important in a fast-moving current of change and knowledge boom. This corroborates the view of Anyanwu (2002) that

there is a need for an emphasis on community education, which he describes as science of all the sciences of inter-relationships of knowledge, a critical area beyond compartmentalization, where knowledge must be integrated in order to have proper meaning. This suggests that while there is need for specialization, it is important to avail one of the knowledge in other disciplines.

Secondly, community education remains an important tool in enhancing citizen involvement, the sharing of decision making and total community participation in the education enterprise. In this vein, Obanya (2002) maintains that education for all should be the responsibility of all. Awareness is better created through community education among women, youths, trade unions, local or grass-root institutions and organizations that government cannot on its own solve all the problems of educational development in Nigeria. Such participation can be in the areas of policy formulation, determining areas of priority in education, mobilizing resources and the provision of facilities. Thus, non-formal community education deserves very special attention in view of its immense potentials in making community members responsive to educational transformation.

Thirdly, the quest for moral and ethical re-orientation in Nigeria can be met through community education. Undoubtedly, obnoxious and ignoble activities pervade the Nigerian educational institutions, thereby eroding them of their expected noble ideals and goals. Such activities include examination malpractices, drug abuse, secret cults, killing, sexual harassment, raping and maiming. While Madu (2001) proposes "New covenant" between each "Nigerian himself and God" as the plausible antidote to Nigerian's moral decadence, Ofordile (2001) and Ifeoma (2001) recommend direct non-threatening methods of educating parents, educators, police, counselors and other professionals. However, none of them hint at community education. Traditional community education encouraged moral uprightness. In this vein, curriculum of the traditional system of adult and community education if fostered in the Nigerian educational institutions can usher in pragmatic moral ethics in the Nigeria society.

Equally, non-formal community education if properly integrated into formal educational system will promote the apprenticeship system, which will in turn reduce the age-long problems of unemployment, underemployment, poverty, robbery and corruption in Nigeria. To this end, community education can serve as a tool through which individuals can achieve a degree of self-fulfilment, happiness and meaning in life. Leading professionals in local communities in the areas of farming, draining, hunting, traditional medical practice can be engaged to train the students while in conventional formal educational institutions. Students who have thus been trained in the community arts and education may not need to search for job in the labour market.

Finally, community education can be a panacea for achieving the eight Millennium Development Goals

(MDGs) in Nigeria. The MDGs advocate poverty reduction, education for national health, gender equality and aim at combating child mortality, HIV/AIDs and other diseases. Going by the present rate of progress, Fasokun (2006), President of the Nigerian National Council for Adult Education (NNCAE) expressed his dismay that a number of countries including Nigeria may not be able to achieve the MDGs by the target date of 2015. He attributes this untoward situation among many other things to the insufficient public awareness and a failure to mobilize community-level understanding and support through the civil society organizations and media. The implication is that the MDGs have to be a community programme to be achieved. Community education in this vein has a great potential in developing the process by which the community members can learn and work together within the purview of MGDs to identify their felt-needs or community problems and with governmental and non-governmental agencies' inputs seek solutions to their identified problems.

Suggested measures to promote community education in Nigeria

In the light of the above discussions, some measures could be taken to promote community education in Nigeria. Firstly, there is need for wider dissemination of knowledge geared toward a better understanding of the meaning and prospects of the Nigerian community education. To achieve this, workshops, conferences, seminars, and other fora should to be recurrently organized for the academia, professional bodies, practitioners especially the community change agents from the governmental and non-governmental agencies in raising their level of awareness of the meaning and value of community education. Participants in such fora through dialogue and discussants can be well-informed about community education as well as being able to identify their roles in promoting it for community development in Nigeria.

Secondly, apart from organizing workshops, conferences, and seminars, mass media can be utilized to increase public awareness of the importance of community education to community development. Thus, the potential use of radio, television, magazine and community newspaper cannot be overemphasized in this respect. However, all over the world, radio is regarded as the most potent method of community and mass education. The reasons for this are obvious. According to Ezimah (2004), radio is relatively inexpensive, receivers are cheap, and are readily portable. Also, with the availability of batteries, radio can be used to reach different target groups in the rural or urban communities where there is no electricity supply. Equally important in the use of radio is the stimulation of interest in cultural pursuits, and in the physical and natural heritage of the community. For example, the weekly radio programmes such as "agbajo owo" (collective hands) a community development programme, "ilera

l'oro" (health is wealth) a health programme and "agbe l'ere" (profitable farming profession) among many other programmes transmitted from Broadcasting Corporation of Oyo State (B.C.O.S) in the Southwestern part of Nigeria are some examples of community education through cultural expression broadcasted over the radio. The value of such radio broadcasts is enhanced if the community listeners can converge in groups to discuss points of particular interest in order to give feed back to the broadcasters to improve in subsequent programmes. The formation of radio listening groups has been shown to be a way of enhancing the effectiveness of community education.

Thirdly, efforts should be geared towards promoting transformative research in community education. Transformative research in this sense is a practical research activity, which operates with the community rather than on the community (Anyanwu, 2002). Transformative research if fostered will enable the local community members to recount their experience, reflect upon it, understand it and determine to improve it.

Furthermore, involving the participation of the local people especially the old community leaders experienced in culture and tradition can bring to the fore the relevance and need for integrating indigenous community education into the contemporary educational system. This corroborates the view of Kleymeyer (1996) that traditions are worth mining and that the old community leaders well experienced in traditional indigenous community education are living books. They remain the final keepers of indigenous community education and when they die, it would be as if all the libraries were to be burned.

Also, there is need for governmental and non-governmental agencies collaboration in promoting community development education programmes in Nigeria. Such collaboration is necessary mostly in the area of financing the training and retraining of the community change agents. The lack of trained community change agents to foster community education has been a stumbling block to development process at the grassroots level. Most of the people working in community development education have come from the formal system and are attuned to the methods of conventional education. The new roles of the community change agents demand a new set of skills and attitudes to be innovative, creative and visionary.

Also, there is need for governmental and non-governmental agencies collaboration in promoting community development education in Nigeria. Such collaboration is necessary mostly in the area of financing the training and retraining of the community change agents to be innovative, creative and visionary as they assist their client communities in developing effective programmes of community education for the unemployed, the poor, delinquents and various groups with specific problems requiring solution. Not waiting for the over-saddled government to do everything for them.

Finally, it is not the inadequacy of funds but the lack of direction and vision of determining priorities that hinder

educational system in Nigeria. Therefore, the limited funds should be utilized to support and strengthen the Nigerian cultural renaissance of self-reliance through community education. In this regard, educational institutions in Nigeria using the available community resources are to devise functional curricula for the school drop-outs to produce farmers, engineers, musicians, farmers, engineers, dramatists and sportsmen to tackle the problem of unemployment, poverty and violence. This implies that educational programmes should be increasingly related to communities' social and economic felt-needs.

Conclusion

This paper has documented the fact that education with particular reference to community education is pivotal to economic, intellectual, social and cultural development of any nation. In this regard, an attempt was made to provide an operational definition of community education. This paper also examined the non-formal idea in community education as offering a very wide range of learning opportunities for the individual and community as a whole. This often results in the achievement of national development. It is maintained in this paper that community education is not unprecedented in Nigeria. The indigenous/traditional community education geared towards preparing citizens for his/her communities had been in operation before the advent of early missionaries and the colonial administrators into Nigeria.

However, community education which is expected to provide opportunities for the acquisition of needed knowledge, practical and social skills for individual and community development has not fared well in Nigeria. In this vein, the study x-rayed the problems of community education in Nigeria. Considering its prospects for socio-economic and cultural development some measures has been put forward to foster community education in Nigeria. In this wise, emphasis has been placed on the integration of indigenous community education into the formal system for sustainable development in Nigeria.

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