

Full Length Research Paper

Analysis of rural literacy as a panacea for socio-economy development of Nigeria

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Literacy is useful at the individual level in inculcating humanistic etiquettes and manners. The human benefits from literature are related to factors such as the improved self-esteem, empowerment, creativity and critical reflection that participation in adult literacy programmes and the practice of literacy may produce. Benefits human derive from literacy apart from ability to read and write or numerate include improved health, increased political participation and so on. Nigeria is the most populous nation in sub-Saharan Africa and has estimated population of 158.4 million. Understanding the need for a literate society, the country has been involved with many activities aimed at providing access to literacy. However, there is disparity in access to literacy between urban and rural communities in Nigeria. The social and economic dimensions of providing education for the population, within the context of prevailing national circumstances of dwindling financial and other resources in the face of developments needs are heavy and investments in health, education and water supply have been focused largely on the cities. Despite phenomenal growth of the formal educational systems and the interest shown to non-formal education in the past decades, some members of the population are still found to be non-literate in Nigeria. Statistics of the 2006 census summary also reflect that a high percentage of rural dwellers including women do not have formal education. For the facts enumerated above, this study discusses the socio-economic need of rural literacy in the face of challenges that determined the rural people assessing educational opportunities. The paper also established the relationship that exists between rural and urban communities and concludes that for sustainable development of the rural communities, literacy must be able to attend to the livelihood and improvement skills of the people in the rural areas.

Key words: Rural literacy, Panacea, socio-economy development, Nigeria.

INTRODUCTION

Nigeria, the most populous nation in sub-Saharan Africa with her population of 140 million (National Population Census, 2007) estimated now to be 158.4 million out of which rural population is 79,528,437 and estimated

50,739,143 number of rural poor (World Bank, 2010) occupying a landmass of about 923,768 km² and with over 274 ethnic groups making up the federation is a developing country with perhaps 60 to 70% of the

population still living in the countryside and 40% of GDP coming from 'agriculture' (Blench, 2003). The rural population was last reported at 50.20 in 2010, according to a World Bank report published in 2012. In Nigeria, the average household size in 2007 was 4.4%. It was slightly higher in rural (7.4%) than in urban (4.0%). The social and economic dimensions of providing education for the population, within the context of prevailing national circumstances of dwindling financial and other resources in the face of developments needs are heavy.

Nigeria's developing economy was primarily based on agriculture mainly from the rural areas but the early 70s oil boom changed the source of economy. As far as agricultural sector is concerned, the small scale farmers constitute the majority of the farming population and they have not effectively and efficiently tapped the numerous abundant rural resources. The rural people have remained in their culture and despite their rural character, those population have been increasingly affected by decisions and activities which occur in small but growing urban centres in the country (Olajide, 1980). Also, despite several investments in education, literacy level in Nigeria is still put at 60% of the total population while there is a poor literacy rate among the rural population where the majority of the nation's population resides.

Basic literacy (both formal and non-formal) in Nigeria has been hampered by many social, political, economic and cultural factors such as insufficient number and quality of physical infrastructures such as school buildings, school furniture and equipment, lack of books, writing materials and teaching supplies, an insufficient number of qualified teachers, considerable number of drop outs and repetition of grades at the primary and middle levels among others. Education statistics for 1996 and the upward review of the statistics show that only 14.1 million children are enrolled in primary schools out of the 21 million children of school age. The completion rate was 64% while the rate of transition to Junior Secondary school was 43.5% (UBEC, 1999, 2000 and 2005), there is overwhelming evidence that these vital literacy indicators have not improved to the deserved level.

Rural infrastructure in Nigeria has long been neglected. Investments in health, education and water supply have been focused largely on the cities. As a result, the rural population has extremely limited access to services such as schools and health centres, and about half of the population lacks access to safe drinking water. Neglect of rural infrastructure affects the profitability of agricultural production. The lack of rural roads impedes the marketing of agricultural commodities, prevents farmers from selling their produce at reasonable prices, and leads to spoilage. Limited accessibility cuts small-scale farmers off from sources of inputs, equipment and new technology, and this keeps yields low. As the population swells and puts pressure on diminishing resources, escalating environmental problems further threaten food production. Land degradation as a result of extensive

agriculture, deforestation and overgrazing are already severe in many parts of the country. Drought has become common in the north, and erosion caused by heavy rains, floods and oil pollution is a major problem in the south and south-east.

While rural-urban statistics on education are scarce, many countries report that non-school attendance, early drop-out of students; adult illiteracy and gender inequality in education are disproportionately higher in rural areas (Nigeria DHS, 2003). Urban-rural disparities in educational investment and in the quality of teaching and learning are widespread and need to be redressed (Nigeria DHS, 2003). At the State and Federal level, however, the rural vote is becoming increasingly less important as more and more Nigerians move to cities. Rural votes are perceived as more easily open to rigging and the rural electorate more likely to vote on the basis of local affinity rather than allegiance to larger issues. Socio-economic development in Nigeria will require making provision for this rural population. At present, however, because of socio-cultural barriers, rural people find it difficult to break out of the cycle of poverty and academic literacy deprivation for the youths and adults.

However, despite phenomenal growth of the formal educational systems and the interest shown to non-formal education in the past decades, some members of the population are still found to be non-literate in Nigeria. The total population of 140,003,542 (male = 71,709,859 female = 68,293,683) was recorded according to 2006 population figure. The 2006 census reports indicate that out of the 140 million people only 491,237 adults were enrolled in adult literacy (male = 319,309 and female = 171,928). The National Bureau of Statistics (2010) also shows that as at 2004 there was 54.4 level of poverty in Nigeria. There was 43.2% in urban and 63.3% level of poverty in the rural areas. The report also indicate that of the 140 million populace, 68.7 had no education, 48.7 had primary education, 44.3 had secondary education while only 26.3 have had higher than secondary education in Nigeria. Female youth literacy rate in 2007 was 77.3%, lower than the national youth literacy rate of 82% and male youth literacy rate of 86.7%. Female adult literacy was 61.9% in 2007; lower than national adult literacy rate of 69.3%. There was a notable drop in adult literacy in most of the states (NBS, 2007).

Statistics of the census summary also reflect that a high percentage of rural dwellers including women do not have formal education. As most of them are illiterates, they are not qualified for even the little jobs that are available at local government level. Also, for being uneducated, most of them are cut off from communication with the outside world. For the facts enumerated above, this study intends to establish the need for rural literacy as determinants for socio-economic development of rural areas in order to address issues like rural-urban migration, social, cultural and economic problems of the rural people. The paper will also

establish the relationship that exists between rural and urban communities.

HISTORICAL AND RECENT DEVELOPMENT OF EDUCATION IN NIGERIA

The Federal and State Governments of Nigeria have made certain moves against illiteracy. On Wednesday 8th of September, 1982, the Federal Government formally declared a nation-wide war against illiteracy and launched the Mass Literacy Campaign to cover ten years, 1982-1992. The setting up of Mass Mobilization for Social Justice, Self Reliance and Economic Recovery (MAMSER) now National Orientation Agency (NOA) that was changed with responsibility of mobilizing citizens, particularly the rural dwellers, for the revamping of the country's ailing economy through literacy as general mass education was a step taken to educate the masses on their social responsibility and literacy development. Major initiatives that have also taken place include the expansion of basic education in 1992 to include pre-primary, primary, the first three years of secondary education (JSS), Mass Literacy for both adolescents, adults and women's education.

The Federal Ministry of Education (2004) National Policy on Education lays emphasis on Mass Literacy, Adult and Non-Formal Education. There are Federal agencies that are responsible for formulation and implementation of adult and non-formal education policies. These include the Federal Ministry of Education, National Commission for Mass Literacy, Adult and Non-Formal Education, National Commission for Nomadic Education and the Universal Basic Education Commission. The adoption of the six goals of Education for All (EFA) in Dakar brought a significant shift in the position of Nigeria on Adult and Non-Formal Education. Adult literacy was accorded recognition in the Universal Basic Education Act of 2004. The Act in Section 15, defines Basic Education as "Universal Basic Education" including early childhood care and education, the nine years of formal schooling, adult literacy and non-formal education, skills acquisition programmes and the education of special groups such as nomads and migrants, girl-child and women, almajiri, street children and disabled groups.

The National Commission for Mass Literacy, Adult and Non-Formal Education is responsible for the organisation, monitoring and assessment of the adult literacy practices in the country. The Commission adopted the decentralisation of its activities by the establishment of offices in the six geo-political zones of the country, the thirty-six States (including the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja) and all the seven hundred and seventy-four local government areas. Coordination and supervision of literacy classes are the sole responsibility of the local adult education officers, supervisors and literacy instructors. The minimum number of literacy classes

expected in any local government is ten. In addition, non-governmental organisations support government efforts by establishing as many as they could manage and finance. Examinations are conducted on the basic learning competencies, reading, writing and numeracy. The agencies run different adult and non-formal education programmes like Adult Basic Literacy Programme, Post Literacy Programme, Women Adult Education Programme, Distance Education Programme, Sandwich Programme, and Nomadic Education Programme.

Nigeria's Constitution (1999), the Vision 20-2020 document and the National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDS) underline the importance of education as a vehicle of both individual empowerment and national development. This is further elaborated and made more focused in the National Policy on Education (NPE), cementing the country's commitment to EFA and education-related Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) through the provision of free and compulsory 9-year basic education programme, comprising 6 years of primary education and 3 years of junior secondary education.

Aderinoye (1997) observed that much effort was recorded between 1989 and 1996 in the educational history but the 'golden age' opportunity was not well utilized because the government failed to back up the various policies made with adequate funding. Other attempts are the establishment of the National Commission for Mass Literacy Adult and Non-Formal Education (NMEC) in 1991, the Universal Basic Education (UBE) in 1999, the Nomadic Education Commission (1990), State Agencies of Adult Education, and the National Primary Education Commission (1993).

Before the introduction of UBE in 1999, a six-year level of education was seen as a means of working toward the equalization of educational opportunities by providing a minimum level to which all children would be educated (Adesina, 1982), now six years of primary school and a three year Junior Secondary Education are required before a basic education can be acquired (UBE, 2004). In 1996, approximately 67% of males and 52% of females aged 6 to 11 were enrolled in Nigeria schools (Federal Ministry of Education, 1996). Writing about the current rate as well as state of literacy in Nigeria, Aderinoye (2005), states that we would need to rely on some data emanating from major partners like, UNESCO, UNICEF, World Bank and for NGOS, and we cannot write a complete thesis without acknowledging the singular efforts of University Village Association (UNIVA) in partnership with these agencies with the intention to overcome the problem of illiteracy in Nigeria.

CURRENT LITERACY RATE IN NIGERIA

Education in Nigeria is overseen by the Ministry of Education and the local authorities take responsibility for

Table 1. World Bank indicators - Nigeria - density and urbanization.

| | Previous | Last |
|---|------------|------------|
| Rural population in Nigeria | 76943793.4 | 77803783.0 |
| Rural population (% of total population) in Nigeria | 52.4 | 51.6 |
| Urban population growth (annual %) in Nigeria | 4.0 | 4.0 |
| Urban population in Nigeria | 70007683.6 | 72861947.0 |

Source: www.tradingeconomics.com/nigeria/rural-population-wb-data.html

implementing policy for state-controlled public education and state schools at a regional level. The education system is divided into Kindergarten, primary education, secondary education and tertiary education. To discuss the current literacy rate in Nigeria, it would be inappropriate to overshadow the 2006 national census reports. The NBS (2007) statistic shows that more boys were enrolled both in primary and secondary schools in 2006 and 2007. The same pattern was observed with teachers. In 2007, the proportion of male teachers in secondary schools was about 60%. Female youth literacy rate in 2007 was 77.3%, lower than the national youth literacy rate of 82% and male youth literacy rate of 86.7%. Female adult literacy was 61.9% in 2007; lower than national adult literacy rate of 69.3%. There was a notable drop in adult literacy in most of the states. 55.45, 54.77 and 60.82% of the population in Nigeria were believed to be literate in 1991, 2003 and 2009 respectively.

A National Literacy Survey (2010) conducted by the National Bureau of Statistics in Nigeria estimates the adult literacy rate as 56.9%, with huge variations between states (Lagos 92.0% and Borno only 14.5%), regions (urban 74.6% and rural 48.7%) and sex (male 65.1% and female 48.6%). Table 1 and 2 gives details of population and literacy distribution in Nigeria. Statistics from the Federal Ministry of Education indicate that only 500,000 of the 40 million adult illiterates are enrolled in adult learning classes. There are also 3.5 million nomadic school-aged children with only 450,000 of them accessing any form of schooling. Nigeria is further saddled with the largest number of out-of-school-children estimated at over 7 million (10% of the global total).

The statistics as shown in Table 2 indicate that seventeen states (17) out of thirty seven (37) are at risk of not achieving EFA goal 4 by 2015 as they have youth and adult literacy rates between 14.5 to 49.3% These States have concurrently experienced very low enrolment rates in primary education. The Nigerian Government recognizes that literacy education will help equip individuals with the knowledge, skills and attitudes needed for economic self-sufficiency, poverty reduction

and sustainable development, and is therefore making efforts to address the illiteracy challenge.

IMPORTANCE OF LITERACY FOR DEVELOPMENT

Education, as a lifelong process, is widely accepted as a fundamental prerequisite for the achievement of sustainable development. Education, formal, informal and non-formal, is regarded as a process by which human beings and societies can reach their full potential. There is a close association between the general level of education attained and the persistence of poverty irrespective of the level of a country's development. Literacy is also vital to changing people's attitudes to achieve ethical awareness, values, attitudes, skills, and behaviour consistent with the goal of building a more sustainable society. In this way, people are better equipped to participate in decision-making that adequately and successfully addresses environment and development issues around them. To achieve a sustainable developed community in Nigeria, the government need to strive for universal access to basic education, reduce adult illiteracy; integrate sustainable development into all education programmes.

The rural objective of development should be to create an enabling environment for all people to use the available methods for their well-being. Education gives people variety of choices and thus power, and educated people will tend to reject detrimental policies and make informed choices of leaders and development patterns. Literacy benefits both individuals and their communities. Learning to read boosts self-esteem and provides important new skills.

As education also serves as catalyst for poverty reduction and helps to reduce disparities in living standards of the beneficiaries which are essential to sustainable development, many of the farmers in most rural communities possessed no basic literacy skill and have no access to Information and Communication Technology (ICT) and thus could not be productive (Baseline, 2001). This is against the fact that a farmer

Table 2. Distribution of population and literacy rate in Nigeria

| SN | State | Population | | | Literacy | | | % |
|----|-------------|------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|------|
| | | Male | Female | Total | Male | Female | Total | |
| 1 | Abia | 1,430,298 | 1,451,082 | 2,881,380 | 1,075,280 | 1,013,986 | 2,089,266 | 72.5 |
| 2 | Abuja | 733,172 | 673,067 | 1,406,239 | 479,460 | 384,626 | 864,086 | 61.4 |
| 3 | Adamawa | 1,607,270 | 1,571,680 | 3,178,950 | 734,105 | 553,051 | 1,287,156 | 40.5 |
| 4 | Akwa Ibom | 1,983,202 | 1,918,849 | 3,902,051 | 1,426,385 | 1,331,413 | 2,757,798 | 70.7 |
| 5 | Anambra | 2,117,984 | 2,059,844 | 4,177,828 | 1,603,569 | 1,532,523 | 3,136,092 | 75.1 |
| 6 | Bauchi | 2,369,266 | 2,283,800 | 4,653,066 | 913,500 | 672,414 | 1,585,914 | 34.1 |
| 7 | Bayelsa | 874,083 | 830,432 | 1,704,515 | 566,164 | 491,181 | 1,057,345 | 62.0 |
| 8 | Benue | 2,114,043 | 2,109,598 | 4,223,641 | 1,084,138 | 818,653 | 1,902,791 | 45.1 |
| 9 | Borno | 2,163,358 | 2,007,746 | 4,171,104 | 392,721 | 210,771 | 603,492 | 14.5 |
| 10 | Cross River | 1,471,967 | 1,421,021 | 2,892,988 | 953,240 | 849,366 | 1,802,606 | 62.3 |
| 11 | Delta | 2,069,309 | 2,043,136 | 4,112,445 | 1,419,177 | 1,284,626 | 2,703,903 | 65.7 |
| 12 | Ebonyi | 1,064,156 | 1,112,791 | 2,176,947 | 607,913 | 545,088 | 1,153,001 | 53.0 |
| 13 | Edo | 1,633,946 | 1,599,420 | 3,233,366 | 763,011 | 719,046 | 1,482,057 | 45.8 |
| 14 | Ekiti | 1,215,487 | 1,183,470 | 2,398,957 | 914,656 | 877,622 | 1,792,278 | 74.7 |
| 15 | Enugu | 1,596,042 | 1,671,795 | 3,267,837 | 1,095,655 | 1,076,831 | 2,172,486 | 66.5 |
| 16 | Gombe | 1,244,228 | 1,120,812 | 2,365,040 | 538,463 | 390,853 | 929,316 | 39.3 |
| 17 | Imo | 1,976,471 | 1,951,092 | 3,927,563 | 1,075,280 | 1,013,986 | 2,089,266 | 53.2 |
| 18 | Jigawa | 2,198,076 | 2,162,926 | 4,361,002 | 566,164 | 491,181 | 1,057,345 | 24.2 |
| 19 | Kaduna | 3,090,438 | 3,023,065 | 6,113,503 | 914,656 | 877,622 | 1,792,278 | 29.3 |
| 20 | Kano | 4,947,952 | 4,453,336 | 9,401,288 | 2,701,175 | 1,899,636 | 4,600,811 | 48.9 |
| 21 | Katsina | 2,948,279 | 2,853,305 | 5,801,584 | 740,034 | 517,630 | 1,257,664 | 21.7 |
| 22 | Kebbi | 1,631,629 | 1,624,912 | 3,256,541 | 506,633 | 316,203 | 822,836 | 25.3 |
| 23 | Kogi | 1,672,903 | 1,641,140 | 3,314,043 | 596,641 | 513,803 | 1,110,444 | 33.5 |
| 24 | Kwara | 1,193,783 | 1,171,570 | 2,365,353 | 627,636 | 539,436 | 1,167,072 | 49.3 |
| 25 | Lagos | 4,719,125 | 4,394,480 | 9,113,605 | 4,341,595 | 4,042,922 | 8,384,517 | 92.0 |
| 26 | Nasarawa | 943,801 | 925,576 | 1,869,377 | 441,859 | 340,875 | 782,734 | 41.9 |
| 27 | Niger | 2,004,350 | 1,950,422 | 3,954,772 | 763,011 | 719,046 | 1,482,057 | 37.5 |
| 28 | Ogun | 1,864,907 | 1,886,233 | 3,751,140 | 1,218,209 | 1,138,043 | 2,356,252 | 62.8 |
| 29 | Ondo | 1,745,057 | 1,715,820 | 3,460,877 | 1,192,117 | 1,101,163 | 2,293,280 | 66.3 |
| 30 | Osun | 1,734,149 | 1,682,810 | 3,416,959 | 137,563 | 135,242 | 272,805 | 80.0 |
| 31 | Oyo | 2,802,432 | 2,778,462 | 5,580,894 | 1,819,804 | 1,691,955 | 3,511,759 | 62.9 |
| 32 | Plateau | 1,598,998 | 1,607,533 | 3,206,531 | 810,148 | 683,329 | 1,493,477 | 46.6 |

Table 2. contd.

| | | | | | | | | |
|----|---------|------------|------------|-------------|------------|------------|------------|------|
| 33 | Rivers | 2,673,026 | 2,525,690 | 5,198,716 | 1,978,446 | 1,804,143 | 3,782,589 | 72.8 |
| 34 | Sokoto | 1,863,713 | 1,838,963 | 3,702,676 | 660,204 | 453,582 | 1,113,786 | 30.1 |
| 35 | Taraba | 1,171,931 | 1,122,869 | 2,294,800 | 348,781 | 185,815 | 534,596 | 23.3 |
| 36 | Yobe | 1,205,034 | 1,116,305 | 2,321,339 | 380,274 | 237,400 | 617,674 | 26.6 |
| 37 | Zamfara | 1,641,623 | 1,637,250 | 3,278,873 | 596,641 | 513,803 | 1,110,444 | 33.9 |
| | | 71,315,488 | 69,122,302 | 140,437,790 | 38,094,541 | 32,976,373 | 71,071,014 | 50.6 |

Source: National Mass Education Commission, 2011

who is both educated and understood how to measure and apply fertilizer on his farm would have a good yield unlike those that could not read the instructions on how best to apply fertilizer (Lind, 1996). With basic literacy skills - writing, reading, and numeracy - rural people are better equipped to make more informed decisions for their lives and for their communities and to be active participants in the identified indicators of sustainable development: economic, social, health, political, environmental and institutional development (Lind, 2008). It should be noted that sustainable development aims at the highest possible quality of life like living comfortably for all people –individually and collectively. It is based on the natural limits of our environment and the comprehensive needs of the people food, shelter, water, good environment (World Bank, 2005).

CHARACTERISTICS OF RURAL AREAS

Rural population refers to people living in rural areas as defined by national statistical offices. It is calculated as the difference between total population and urban population. In addressing this topic: Characteristics Rural Areas, it is necessary to define what “Rural Areas” is before

discussing the features inherent in rural areas. To define what is rural is a daunting task, because the word ‘rural’ is an inexact term that can mean different things to different people. For example, what is considered rural in a place like the United States of America and the United Kingdom may not resemble what is considered rural in a place like Nigeria and other African countries. However, for the purpose of this paper, efforts will be made to describe the word ‘Rural’ and the general Characteristics of rural areas.

Olawoye (1987) posited that, the concept of rurality is dependent upon its relationship with urbanity for its meaning. A community that is not rural is by definition urban. Historically, rural referred to areas with low population density, small size; relative isolation, where one major economic activity was agricultural production, and where the people were relatively homogenous in their values, attitudes and behaviour (Umehau, 2008). Any community with less than 20,000 people is said to be rural. The road network cannot in any way be compared with that of the urban area in terms of motorableness and other qualities. Both inter and intra-networks in the rural areas are bad. The gutters are not dug; the roads are not tarred and therefore predisposed to erosion. Most roads to the farms are mere foot

paths. Bad road network in the area is one of the factors that increases the cost of food production, hence, increase in prices of farm products.

Rural is the opposite of urban or city; it refers to a place with small population size and consists of homogeneous people whose primary occupation is agriculture. The United Kingdom National Statistics describe Rural thus; rural areas are generally observed to have particular attributes which give them a distinctive character. These attributes include tracts of open countryside, low population densities, a scattering of small to medium size settlements, less developed transport infrastructure and lack of access to services and amenities especially of the type provided in large urban centers.

Rural area is characterized with open spaces and scattering villages. There are other features of rural areas that are Nigeria specific but which may not qualify as a standard feature of rural areas in other nations of the world like the United States of America and the United Kingdom. For instance, illiteracy is one of the characteristics of Nigeria rural population and as discussed above, high per cent of rural people are predominantly illiterates. Again, lack of safe water, and other basic infrastructure, such as primary health care, road network are all features of Nigeria rural areas.

According to statistics, agricultural activities are predominant in rural areas where more than four-fifth (86.5%) of the households participated in agriculture is the rural areas compared with only 14.0% in the urban area (Federal Office of Statistics, 2004).

Rural people and rural areas are not homogenous, and so for education to be relevant to people living in rural areas, in terms of genuine economic and social development it needs to respond to the diversity of rural situations. For education to be sustainable especially in the rural areas, the beneficiaries have to put into use the skills they have acquired in their daily activities in issues like health, the environment, economic, social and human settlements. They should have been using the skills in practical way especially in their interaction with members of the community where they are resident. Adult learners should also be able to promote a good living environment along with healthy lifestyles, preventing health threats, promote social and civil activity, sustainable crop production patterns as well as consumption habits. Other features peculiar to rural people are as follows:

- The people from rural areas feel that they are powerless.
- The majority are ignorant on legal and welfare measures provided by the government.
- The rural poor do not have a forum to assist them in securing redress of their grievances.
- Except for a few small and marginal farmers, the village people comprise child labour, agricultural labourers and people with traditional occupations.
- Many rural people have developed a kind of fatalistic attitude. This is because of their series of failures, in spite of their efforts for better living.
- There are frequent seasonal migrations to earn a living (Vasudeva Rao, 2006).

The rural environment is often perceived as a series of bucolic images set against the backdrop of economic crisis, conservation projects and ecological disasters, an idyllic place to take a vacation in contrast to the urban environment. The image is also one of regional cultures and languages threatened by the culture of the masses, by the aging of the population, or by a "cultural drain". The old cliché of the illiterate, rural peasant invariably springs to mind. Hautecoeur (1994) discovered that the population was generally under-educated and read very little (with the exception of regional or local newspaper. On the other hand, expanding cultural and continuing education services in rural areas was found to be a difficult and costly process. The rural environment was often described as a barrier to the extension of basic education service. Consequently, it was an environment in which services better geared to local needs could be tested.

Rural persons' norms, values, beliefs and culture often differ significantly from those of the urban areas. Whether

as an agriculturist, a social worker, a social scientist, or an educationist, one will find it relevant to actually study the life patterns of rural people, particularly their social life, their economic life and their cultural life. According to Ekong (1988), in the strictly traditional sense, various parts of Nigeria had their own conception of the rural area referring to the farm and farming settlements while the town referred to the seat of an important chief or ruler.

Among the traditional Yoruba, Nupe, Hausa and Fulani, the rural area was more or less a temporary farming settlement, while the town was the place where the permanent family house was located, where the dead were buried, where marriages and other feasts were celebrated. In the Eastern part of Nigeria, among the Igbos, the people traditionally lived in villages surrounded by farms and virgin forests, hence most large towns in the present eastern Nigeria are of recent emergence. One other characteristic of rural dwellers is their strong belief in superstition. Almost throughout of Nigeria, superstition avails. Though hired labour or cooperative labour is also available, the unpaid and cheap labour force from the household family is most prevalent. There are more elderly people than the youth in the rural areas. These elderly people did not have the opportunity for western education and that is why a larger percentage of them are farmers, since they cannot do to other jobs which may demand some levels of literacy.

LITERACY DEVELOPMENT, SOCIAL LIFE AND RURAL ECONOMY

Rural economy deals with the rural economic activities that yield income to the rural investors. Rural economy focuses on optimal harnessing of rural resources for enhancement of the living conditions of the rural dwellers. It therefore deals with agriculture, other enterprises and rural life as factors in nation building (Ijere, 1992). Rural economy, to a reasonable extent, sustains both the urban and national economy; hence the two major economic products come from the rural areas of Nigeria (oil and agricultural products). In fact the abundant natural resources in the areas, serve as sources of cheap labour. To this effect, a farmer that knows how and understand when to use and apply fertilizers will be more productive than those that do not know. This therefore reflects the relevance of literacy acquisition to the performance of such farmers. Table 3 reflects the level of disparity between rural and urban poverty rate as a result of unemployment in Nigeria. The north east geopolitical zone has the highest average maternal mortality ratio 1549 compared with the southeast zone which has the lowest ratio of 165 (National Bureau of Statistics, 2007). The fact stated above reflects simply the absence of and utilisation of literacy among the rural people. As literacy liberates and open many doors to what is happening in the world, rural people are prone to dangers which they

Table 3. Unemployment rate by age group and rural and urban sectors in Nigeria.

| Years | 15-24 | | | 25-44 | | | 45-59 | | | 60-64 | | | 65-70 | | | All Groups | | |
|-------|----------|-------|-------|----------|-------|-------|----------|-------|-------|----------|-------|-------|----------|-------|-------|------------|-------|-------|
| | National | Urban | Rural | National | Urban | Rural |
| 2002 | 27.5 | 29 | 26.8 | 11.1 | 6.5 | 13 | 7.4 | 5.9 | 9.5 | 11.7 | 11.8 | 11.7 | 13.1 | 12.5 | 13.4 | 12.6 | 8.7 | 14.2 |
| 2003 | 32.1 | 33.8 | 31.3 | 14.7 | 18.1 | 13.2 | 10.7 | 11.6 | 10.3 | 13.4 | 13.5 | 13.4 | 13.1 | 11.1 | 14 | 14.8 | 10.9 | 16.4 |
| 2004 | 28.9 | 31.2 | 27.9 | 11.4 | 10 | 12 | 7.7 | 4.5 | 9 | 10.1 | 4.8 | 12.4 | 8.7 | 5.1 | 10.2 | 13.4 | 9.5 | 15 |
| 2005 | 34.2 | 34.6 | 34 | 11.3 | 9.3 | 12.2 | 6.6 | 4.1 | 7.7 | 9.7 | 11.2 | 9 | 10.7 | 9.2 | 11.3 | 11.9 | 10.1 | 12.6 |
| 2006 | 30.8 | 31.9 | 30.3 | 8.8 | 5.1 | 11.1 | 4.8 | 1.6 | 6.7 | 7.3 | 4 | 8.3 | 7.1 | 4.2 | 12.5 | 13.7 | 10.2 | 14.6 |
| 2007 | 30.7 | 31.9 | 30.2 | 8.5 | 4.7 | 11 | 4.5 | 1 | 6.6 | 7.1 | 3.3 | 8.3 | 6.8 | 3.7 | 12.6 | 14.6 | 10.9 | 14.8 |

Source: National Bureau of Statistics, General Household Survey Report (1999-2007)

may consider as natural because of their ignorance.

THE NEED FOR RURAL DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA

Umebau (2008) defined rural development quoting different authors as follows:

- As a process whereby concerted efforts are made in order to facilitate significant increases in rural resource productivity with the central objective of enhancing rural income and increasing employment opportunities in rural communities for rural dwellers to remain in the area.
- An integrated approach to food production, provision of physical, social and institutional infrastructures with an ultimate goal of bringing about qualitative changes which culminate in improved standard of living of rural population.
- Rural development also involves effecting improvement in living standards of farmers and the rural populace in general.
- It is also seen as increased production and

processing of export crops especially trees with a view to broadening the revenue base of the state. Rural development, therefore, implies effecting improvement in living standards of farmers and the rural populace in general.

- The main concern in rural development is to bring about the modernisation of rural society through a transition from traditional isolation to integration with the nation. It constitutes a process of planned change for which the one approach or the other is adopted for improvement and or transformation of the lot of the rural populace. It is concerned with the improvement of the living in the rural areas on a self-sustaining basis through transforming the socio-spatial structures of their productive activities.

Rural development also involves creating and widening opportunities for individuals to realise full potential through education and share in the decision and action which affects their lives. An effort to increase rural output creates employment opportunities and root out fundamental cases of poverty, diseases and ignorance. As earlier indicated above, literacy education opportunities opened doors for many developmental process

which if used effectively will help he rural people to improve themselves and their communities. In the light of this, for any meaningful rural development in Nigeria, literacy is a prerequisite.

ROLE OF LITERACY IN THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT OF RURAL AREAS

Literacy is indeed an essential right: it ensures full participation in development and is a powerful tool for national socio-economic growth with regard to key priorities and challenges such as poverty elimination, HIV/AIDS prevention and mitigation, behavioural change regarding gender equality, as well as good government for democratic societies. Still, the priority given to literacy programmes in educational policies is disturbing low and overlooks large sections of society, namely youth, adults, and marginalized groups. Despite agreeing to the EFA goals, in practice African states have concentrated their efforts towards achieving universal primary education at the expense of adult education, and literacy in particular. The absence of effective contextualized

state supported literacy programmes aimed at sustainable livelihoods limit the possibilities of changing the socio-economic conditions of the poor. Unless the knowledge capital and reality of lives of the poor and marginalized are changed, they will persist with behaviours which expose them to HIV infection (and all the consequences of this for themselves, their families and communities) and other risk situations.

Literacy can be a powerful leveraging tool in this regard: it allows a negotiated behaviour towards diverse forms of risk to the social fabric (HIV, malaria, child labour, gender inequality, social fractures, conflicts, the challenges of globalisation), as well as catalyzing a proper gender and social equality perspectives embedded in a secure environment. Another area of concentration was the revamping of literacy programmes to integrate poverty elimination, HIV/AIDS prevention, critical citizenship and good governance and acquisition of life skills for better livelihoods.

An educated and skilled workforce is one of the pillars of the knowledge-based economy. Increasingly, comparative advantages among nations come less from natural resources or cheap labour and more from technical innovations and the competitive use of knowledge. Education is one of the most powerful instruments known for reducing poverty and inequality and for laying the basis for sustained economic growth. Literacy has a wide range of advantages and benefits for economic, social and political development of a country. As rural people are prone to poverty, literacy has become the only tool with which they could be liberated. Many of the agricultural products come from the rural areas but insufficient skills and knowledge deprived them of this opportunities.

The positive relationship between economic development and literacy levels and the impact of investment in education on economic growth are well established. Literacy is linked to economic success as literacy levels help determines the kind of jobs people find, the salaries they make and their ability to upgrade their work skills. Even at the rural areas, well mechanized farming, governmental assistance in terms of loans would go a long way to create better living for the people. Also, literacy and adult education have been recognized as essential elements of human resource development. It is a big factor in the economic success of a society. That's because our literacy levels help determine the kind of jobs we find, the salaries we make and whether we are likely to experience unemployment in our lives.

Fiedrich and Jellema (2003) state that a substantial body of evidence indicates that literacy increases the productivity and earning potential of a population, an educated person earns more and has greater labour mobility. While analysing the impact of literacy UNESCO (2005) observes that literacy not only enhances the individuals earning, it also has positive influence upon the economic growth of a country. Around the world,

renewed emphasis is being placed by governments and employers on literacy and numeric skills for all people to enhance their employability, job satisfaction, level of remuneration and community participation. Recent OECD research has indicated that raising a country's literacy score by 1% leads to a rise in productivity of 2.5% with the flow-on increase of 1.5% in GDP.

Education investments are also crucial for the sustained economic growth that low-income countries are seeking to stimulate, and without which long-term poverty reduction is impossible. Literacy directly contributes to worker productivity, and can promote better natural resource management and more rapid technological adaptation and innovation. The same findings are described by Hanushek and Kimko (2000) when they say: It is fundamental to the creation of a competitive, knowledge-based economy, not only for the direct production of the critical mass of scientists and skilled workers that every country requires—but also because broad-based education is associated with faster diffusion of information within the economy, which is crucial for enabling workers and citizens in both the traditional and modern sectors to increase productivity.

Literacy may also have social consequences that are important objectives for national policy planning. Particularly in developing countries, the gender dimension of illiteracy has been raised in this regard, as the majority of illiterate or low-literate adults tend to be female in the poorest developing nations (Stromquist, 1995 and 1999). Furthermore, there are numerous empirical relationships between literacy and fertility, infant mortality, and so forth. It is an admitted fact that literacy occupies an essential place in the life of the community. Beyond a reflection on citizenship, we put forward the idea of an active society in which individuals have a sense of freedom, but also one of responsibility.

Education can help change society by improving and strengthening skills, values, communications, mobility, personal prosperity and freedom. UNESCO (2006) observes the influence of literacy upon the social life of an individual in the following way: the practice of literacy can be instrumental in people's achievement of a range of capabilities such as maintaining good health and living longer, learning throughout life, controlling reproductive behavior, raising healthy children and educating them. Improving literacy levels thus has potentially large social benefits, such as increased life expectancy, reduced child mortality and improved children's health.

CONCLUSION

Despite its vast cities, Nigeria remains a predominantly rural country, with perhaps 60 to 70% of the population still living in the rural areas and 40% of GDP coming from 'agriculture', broadly defined (that is including livestock

but excluding forestry and fisheries). The majority of the people predominantly in rural areas are faced with chronic and persistent poverty especially as many of the facilities established in the 1970s as a result of oil booms, such as schools, clinics and water-sources are no longer functioning.

Aware of the large number of illiterates in the population, and in recognition of the importance of an educated, well informed and enlightened citizenry in any plans for socio-economic development, federal and state governments have put in place policies and programmes for mass literacy, adult and non formal education. Notable among these are provisions in the country's constitution and the national policy on education for free adult literacy education. The commission of mass literacy (NMEC), adult and non-formal education (AANFE) was established in 1999 with branches in every states, to ensure the effective implementation of policies and programmes.

The nature of the rural environment to a reasonable extent influence economic activities. Rural environment ensures that food is provided; rural industries are sustained through the provision of raw materials, providing income, etc. Government should encourage the rural people to remain there and be engaged with one economic activity of another. Meanwhile, government should provide the necessary, infrastructure for life to be meaningful. The nature of the rural life shows that, to a reasonable extent, influence economic activities.

Rural people serves as the bedrock of national economy and source of raw materials, yet, the people in the rural areas are faced with series of challenges ranging from illiteracy, low savings, inappropriate capitals, low investments, poor road network, rural-urban migration, low social interaction, high population density among others. It is essential that the government should strive to encourage the rural people to remain there and be engaged with one economic activity of another. Literacy is found to be essential ingredients that would make rural communities develop. Adult learners would see the need to encourage their wards to go to schools. the adults would also utilize their literacy to develop themselves as well as their communities through improved agricultural activities, improved social interactions, increase productivity and income, and so on. To this end, government should provide the necessary, infrastructure for life to be meaningful in the rural areas.

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