Chike Okoli Center for Entrepreneurial Studies, UNIZIK - Deputy Director (2010 - 2012).

From the SelectedWorks of Prof. Uche J. Obidiegwu

Spring 2012


Dr. Uche J. Obidiegwu
Dr. Williams Emeka Obiozor

Available at: https://works.bepress.com/druche_obidiegwu/8/

Williams Obiozor, EdD.
Lecturer in Adult Education & Deputy Coordinator
Collaborative Linkages for the Americas & Canada
Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, Anambra State – NIGERIA
we.obiozor@unizik.edu.ng

Uche Obidiegwu, PhD.
Lecturer in Adult Education & Deputy Director
Chike Okoli Center for Entrepreneurship Studies
Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, Anambra State – NIGERIA
Ucheobi200@yahoo.com

INTRODUCTION

Nigeria is a highly endowed nation with human and material resources which requires careful, effective and efficient strategies to develop into a prosperous society. Further to the Nigeria’s Vision 2020 which is a perspective plan; an economic business plan intended to make Nigeria a fully developed economy by the year 2020; literacy is expected to be at the forefront of the implementation process of any national strategic plan/policy framework required for the attainment of the vision. Literacy plays a pivotal role as an agent of change and societal development, in a society that understands its value and need. It is the key to socio-economic and overall growth of any nation. This means that any society can ignore the enlightenment of her citizens to great peril. Nigeria has launched myriads of developmental programmes aimed at eradicating illiteracy, reducing poverty and improving the wellbeing of the citizens; however, inadequate planning, lack of strong political will, corruption, poor funding, the implementation and monitoring process has been the greatest problem. These problems have also made it difficult for Nigeria to attain the Millennium Development Goals (MGDs), and the Education for All agenda which she is a signatory. It is only by adopting a well-planned and sustained national development strategy which would incorporate effective literacy programme that national development, community development, poverty alleviation, equal opportunity for the citizens, closure of gender gaps and nepotism, among others, could be achieved in any country.

Since Nigeria’s independence in 1960, successive governments have planned and implemented several reforms, introduced national development programmes and structural economic projects with little positive results. However, the stable democratic dispensation since 1999 have given rise to Nigeria’s quest for national transformation and growth in the 21st Century with the introduction of reforms in different sectors of the economy, especially with government’s interest in promoting education, agriculture, natural gas and crude oil business, tourism, science and technology, etc. It is in this process of transforming the nation that the country needs to revisit the National Economic Empowerment Development Strategy (NEEDS), State Economic Empowerment Development Strategy (SEEDS) and Local Economic Empowerment Development Strategy (LEEDS) programmes, as well as include them in the national transformation agenda.
The authors’ argument is for these strategic economic and development programmes embarked by the previous administration to effectively incorporate literacy programmes, if the nation is to achieve the set transformative goals and objectives. Literacy lays the foundation to every human development and national growth, whether in developed or developing society. Globally speaking, literacy, special education, formal and non-formal education instructors are constantly challenged with new educational technology inventions, tools and resource materials, as well as faced with Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) which aid in the training, learning, skill acquisitions and applications by individuals; for independent living, employment, community integration and attaining other forms of postsecondary options in the society (Obiozor, 2011). Such efforts should be encouraged for the National Economic Empowerment Development Strategy (NEEDS), State Economic Empowerment Development Strategy (SEEDS) and Local Economic Empowerment Development Strategy (LEEDS) programmes in the national transformation agenda of Nigeria.

The Concept of NEEDS, SEEDS and LEEDS Programmes (NEEDS 2004 Report)

National Economic Empowerment Development Strategy (N.E.E.D.S)

N.E.E.D.S: This was Nigeria’s medium term (2003-2007) reform plan that encapsulates macroeconomic, structural and social policies and programme for citizens’ empowerment and national development. N.E.E.D.S has education component in form of institutional reforms for efficient and effective service delivery. From 2003 to 2007, Nigeria attempted to implement an economic reform program called the National Economic Empowerment Development Strategy, reported Wikipedia (2012). A longer-term economic development program is the United Nations (UN)-sponsored National Millennium Goals for Nigeria. Under the program, which covers the years from 2000 to 2015, similar development processes like in NEEDS are anticipated.

The purpose of the N.E.E.D.S was to raise the country’s standard of living through a variety of reforms, including macroeconomic stability, deregulation, liberalization, privatization, transparency, and accountability. The N.E.E.D.S addressed basic deficiencies, such as the lack of freshwater for household use and irrigation, unreliable power supplies, decaying infrastructure, impediments to private enterprise, and corruption. The government hoped that the N.E.E.D.S would create 7 million new jobs, diversify the economy, boost non-energy exports, increase industrial capacity utilization, and improve agricultural productivity. A related initiative on the state level is the State Economic Empowerment Development Strategy (S.E.E.D.S); and Local Economic Empowerment Development Strategy (L.E.E.D.S) at the local government level. In all these dreams and aspirations of the federal government, literacy is vital. The nation cannot produce adequate manpower to man the offices, industries and related government agencies without a literate population. The workers must acquire literate skills. In the same vein, government cannot educate nor train the population without a literacy component infused in the areas of agriculture, technical and vocational training, industrialization, health, job creation, provision of social amenities and infrastructures, among others.

State Economic Empowerment Development Strategy (S.E.E.D.S)

On the State level, State Economic Empowerment and Development Strategies (SEEDS) were being developed to compliment N.E.E.D.S. The donor community, made up of IBRD, DFID, EU and UNDP, is taking advantage of this change to align their local programs to
improve the quality of assistance to the country. Since states receive over 52% of federal resources, NPC – in collaboration with the donors-decided to develop a system whereby state performance can be monitored using S.E.E.D.S and to identify priority areas and states that demonstrate effective use of allocated resources. The S.E.E.D.S process was launched in early 2004 and a S.E.E.D.S Manual designed by the National Planning Commission (NPC) setting out the required contents and process for an effective S.E.E.D.S was disseminated to all states via a national dissemination process involving representatives of government, civil society and the private sector at state level. Subsequently, technical assistance was offered to all state to support the development of their S.E.E.D.S by teams of consultants with relevant expertise.

**Benefits to Selected States (NEEDS 2004 Report)**

- The Federal Government, together with a number of donors are committed to provide project matching grants to those States that perform well in the exercise.
- Possible debt relief is to be made available to states that perform well in the exercise.
- Increase Donor presence is also one of the benefit for performing well in the exercise.
- The Federal Government, together with donor partners is also committed to give capacity support to States that perform well in the exercise.

**Local Economic Empowerment Development Strategy (L.E.E.D.S)**

Following the successful launch of N.E.E.D.S and S.E.E.D.S at the Federal and State Government levels respectively, the challenge was to evolve similar development strategy documents at the Local Government level to be known as the Local Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (CPED, 2010). This challenge becomes more pertinent when it was the general consensus that the formulation of N.E.E.D.S and S.E.E.D.S has not involved the participation of grassroots population. Yet most of the action programmes articulated in N.E.E.D.S and S.E.E.D.S are targeted at the grassroots communities where poverty is pandemic. Ideally, most of the action programmes in N.E.E.D.S and S.E.E.D.S should have been conceived after the input of the grassroots communities through the articulation of their LEEDS. This would have ensured the principle of bottom-up planning rather than top-down planning that has dominated development planning in Nigeria over the years (CPED, 2010). The overall success of N.E.E.D.S and S.E.E.D.S thus also depends upon the implementation of L.E.E.D.S. This may be an even greater challenge than S.E.E.D.S. The States and the FCT have been advised to encourage local governments and councils under their jurisdiction to also come up with their own development strategies and programmes for the elimination of poverty.

**Significance of Literacy and Development**

Literacy aids national development and growth; the nation and her citizens would not function successfully without a literate background. The citizens must possess the ability to read, write, calculate and socialize among each other to be able to plan, execute, monitor and attain success in government programmes and projects for the survival of the country. All the administrators, technocrats, policy makers and other stakeholders in every nation have literate background which enables them to function and contribute to the building of a great nation. This underscores the essence or significance of literacy for development in every nation, hence, the authors’ call for the eradication of illiteracy among the citizenry in Nigeria via the N.E.E.D.S and related strategic programmes established by the government for national transformation and growth. As argued earlier, lots of advances have been made in Nigeria towards eradicating
illiteracy but “the country still houses about 60 million illiterates (Non-formal Education Policy and Issues, 2010).

A cursory look at the International Benchmarks for Adult Literacy shows that Nigeria is not yet operating within the recommended framework for adult literacy programmes (Fasokun & Powl, n.d). As its stands today, a great number of the population are still illiterates, there is a great doubt whether the EFA and the education related MDGs could be achieved by the year 2015 as stipulated by the United Nations. In addition to the challenges identified earlier in this study, some other challenges to eradicating illiteracy in Nigeria include:

- Inadequate planning and funding
- High level of corruption among the leaders
- Lack of commitment from the government.

The above three factors causes attendant problems of insufficient data, poor learning/teaching strategies, inadequate capacity building, poor monitoring and tracking of literacy programmes, etc. Having pointed at some of these challenges, it becomes pertinent that this study suggests some of the ways towards the achievement of mass literacy development in Nigeria through the N.E.E.D.S programme. For this to be done, an analytical approach will be followed by raising some vital issues and asking necessary questions related to some of the stated challenges for emphasis and clarity.

One of the strategies set up by the Nigeria government to eradicate illiteracy, ignorance and poverty, as well as achieve the EFA and Education related goals of the MDG are the Universal Basic Education (UBE) programme. Towards the actualization of the objective, the Basic Education Act (2004) stated as follows; “Universal basic education (UBE) means early childhood care and education, the nine years of formal schooling, adult literacy and non-formal education, skill acquisition programme and the education of special groups such as nomads and migrants, girl child and women, Al’majiris, street children and disabled group”. As stated in the act, the UBE being universal is bound to carry every citizen along without exception. It is also expected to be free, i.e. without any payment and also compulsory, so as to achieve wider access and create equal opportunities among the people. For the programme to achieve its purpose, it was adapted to the nine year programme of the basic formal education which is also synonymous to the programmes of the non-formal education as presented below:

**Figure 1: Components of Basic Education in Nigeria.**
Fig. 1 shows that formal and non-formal education are geared towards the same objective of eradicating illiteracy and poverty and if articulated, planned carefully and funded well, they can be used to achieve a wider reach of the people and at a faster rate because those that cannot access education through the formal sector can easily do so through the non-formal sector.

In contrary to this idea, what happened? From the onset of the programme due to improper planning, lack of political will and attendant corruption, there has been inadequate funding of the entire programme particularly in the adult literacy and non-formal sector. The UBE as stated in the basic education act (2004) should incorporate adult literacy and non-formal education but as it stands presently, the National Commission for Mass Literacy Adult and Non-formal Education (NMEC) is excluded from the Universal Basic Education Commission (UBEC) disbursement of funds to relevant agencies. Negedu (2012) noted that mass literacy and non-formal education does not benefit from the 2 percent consolidated fund meant for basic education…. At the state level, the recognition accorded to State Universal Basic Education Board (SUBEB) is not equally accorded to the State Agencies for Mass Literacy Education (SAME) but both agencies have the same task which is to eradicate illiteracy and promote basic education in the country.

In an interview with the People’s Daily, as stated in Adeiza (2011) the executive secretary of NMEC lamented that funding was a huge problem facing the literacy programmes in
the country. He further stated that several quality projects meant for 2010 were not executed because of paucity of funds.

Fund allocation in some states only trickles sporadically and in some others, it eluded the adult and non-formal education sector. The national action plan for UBE shows that no state of the federation has allocated fund for the promotion of adult literacy (FME, 2007) and yet it is through the non-formal sector that the educational needs of 53 percent of the population who are poor and disadvantaged and live in the rural areas will be met. The poor funding has so many multiplier effect, which include poor and nonpayment of the facilitators, inadequate training and capacity building, poor monitoring, tracking and evaluation of programmes and insufficient data.

*The pertinent question raised at this point is therefore whether the UBE programme is truly universal and designed for wide access or for the privileged ones. Through this attitude, is it possible to realize the national aspiration of building a land of bright and full opportunities for all citizens as stated in the National Policy on Education (2004). Have Nigerians been able to estimate the number of adult learners that will be in the Non-formal Education (NFE) centers within a certain period of time in order to know the number of schools and center that will be built? What is the guide to the steps taken to build new NFE centers, libraries or renovate existing ones?*

If there is no strategic plan, no guide or focus to what is done; there is serious problem because failure to plan means planning to fail. Funding is a very important aspect of sustainable literacy education programme. In 1981, Omolewa noted that inadequate funding and allocation impeded the little progress which could have been made. Up till today funding is still a clog in the wheel of progress of mass literacy education in Nigeria. Funding for adult education subsector is relatively marginal and inadequate. Only 82 million was budgeted for NMEC for capital expenditure in the 2012 national budget. Given the great task the commission is faced with the budgetary allocation seems a far cry (Nagedu, 2012).

The success of any literacy programme anywhere in the world demands serious funding, yet no Nigerian leader at national level has ever given mass literacy the seriousness it demands (Aderinonye, 2007). Any planned and worthwhile activity meant to eradicate illiteracy and poverty must gulp a lot of money. The masses themselves cannot take care of such programmes because many of them are battling with problems of their basic needs. The government should appreciate the fact that the ignorance of a people is more expensive than whatever fund allocated to acquire literacy, hence the sayings “if literacy is expensive, try ignorance”. The gains of a literate nation cannot be quantified with the money spent on eradicating illiteracy. Democracy can only take root in Nigeria if the level of literacy improves. Aderinonye (2007) noted that Nigerian leaders uses free education like a bait to attract Nigerian electorates. It is also quite obvious that Nigerians never resisted such bait of free education when it is offered to them by these politicians.

*What happened after most of these politicians are elected into office?* They forget their promises and in fact the duty owned to the people who elected them to serve, relegate the electorate to the background, corruption and embezzlement becomes their next of kin. Recently, in one of the states in Nigeria a UNICEF Desk Officer was sent on transfer and replaced by a more docile one by a Commissioner because the officer refused to ‘cooperate’ and pay-in the UNICEF fund meant for NFE in the state into the Commissioners account. Most of
The mass literacy interventions and research are undertaken and funded by donor agencies, NGOs and Nigerian National Council on Adult Education (NNCAE).

The question at this point is:

*Do Nigerian leaders have strong political will to enhance literacy development via the N.E.E.D.S or related development programmes? When will Nigerian government fund literacy without waiting for donor agencies and NGOs?*

N.E.E.D.S has education component in form of institutional reforms for efficient and effective service delivery. Such educational component should have adequate funding, effective policies, efficient and accountable programmes for adult literacy, and citizens’ empowerment to propel individual growth and development in various areas within the communities and states of the federation. Furthermore, in most states in Nigeria because fund is always insufficient, there is none or scanty records in the NFE sector; hence, making planning and implementation of literacy and other NFE programmes difficult. Also, outdated information and communication Technology (ICT) gadgets for data collection are still in use, so the analysis of data is not in line with contemporary technological practices. In addition to these issues are language problems which still exist in Nigeria.

*When do Nigerians solve their language problems? How do we train facilitators in our multiple languages that cut across ethnic groups? Have they been trained to read and write on these languages?*

Having raised some of the pertinent issues on persisting mass illiteracy in Nigeria, it becomes very necessary to discuss some of the forces which could bring about the progress of mass literacy programme in Nigeria, especially if they are infused into the N.E.E.D.S, S.E.E.D.S and L.E.E.D.S programmes in Nigeria.

**THE WAY FORWARD**

In order to raise the literacy level and achieve EFA and MDGs in Nigeria; participatory strategic plan on education and adult and non-formal education in particular should be developed. This is where the N.E.E.D.S, S.E.E.D.S and L.E.E.D.S programmes in Nigeria come in to join other government agencies in developing/promoting further the literacy/educational needs of the people/nation so as to attain the EFA/MDGs agenda for all nations. This will serve as a guide and a roadmap aimed at improving the entire education sector. It will enable the nation to shift to evidence-based programming and project design, provide informed and more relevant data and improve the education sector (Aluede, 2006).

The plan should involve all states education planning consultants and major stakeholders in the education sector. This is to ensure that the plan is government and people owned, realistic, widely acceptable and achievable. Such strategic plan will provide reliable data on the financial implications of the entire programme, number of teachers, facilitators and learners, salaries/allowances, teacher/learner ratio, cost of providing or renovating existing structures and other learning materials required for the programme. This will ensure better planning, tracking, monitoring evaluation of progress and more.

There should be strong commitment to literacy by our leaders which should be shown by their action and not on papers or by paying lip services. Exemplary leadership should be shown
by them as done in Indonesia were according to the UNESCO (2011), the Governor of West Nusa Tenggara participated in teaching illiterate people how to read. Adult literacy and non-formal education sector should be incorporated as part of UBE by allocating and releasing enough funds to it. By so doing, wider access and opportunities will be provided and gender gap closed. It is only through non-formal education that the literacy needs of the great percentage of Nigerians who live in the rural areas, (women, marginalized groups and minorities) could be met. There is need for strong advocacy to the government and other stakeholders on the potentialities of adult and non-formal education towards eradicating illiteracy. Attention should not be paid to formal education alone. Education of adults is imperative because they are at present the backbones of the families and the economy. Furthermore education of adults has a strong positive relationship with the education of children.

According to Obidiegwu (2012), literacy should be seen as a continuous and not a sporadic process. It is time the government takes the lead and become truly committed towards eradicating illiteracy. In corroboration with this view, Archer (2007) noted that

Literacy should be seen as a continuous process that requires sustained learning and application. There is no magic line to cross from illiteracy to literacy. All policies and programmes should be defined to encourage sustained participation and celebrate progressive achievement rather than focusing on one off provision with a single end point.

There is a dire need for NMEC to institutionalize policies on community learning centers (CLCs) in order to complement the existing NFE centers. Programmes in the learning centers, if well designed, funded and implemented will help to curb illiteracy and poverty at the grassroots particularly among the marginalized and the underserved. CLC provide social awareness and functionality among community members and improves their socio-economic status. It encourages life-long learning through Participatory Rural Approach (PRA), develops a love to learn and creates a learning society. It is very effective for empowering people and promoting community development (Literacy watch bulletin, 1999). It provides a circle for acquisition and retention of literacy and livelihood skills. This is necessary because unless the neo-literates (for example, out of school children) continuously utilize their literacy skills, they tend to lose them pretty quickly (Subba Rao, 2007). Innovative rural public library services can be established in such centers and cyber CLCs built.

Review of literacy programmes in the NFE centers is very necessary in order to make sure it caters for the differential needs of the different communities. It is designed for in the country. This is because any programme which is designed in contrast with the need of the people could cause them to drop out from such programmes which may account in part to high dropout rate in many literacy centers (Knowles, 1980). It was also recommended by Fasokun and Powl (n.d) that for literacy programme to be relevant and meaningful a baseline survey/needs analysis is required to access current literacy levels and practices as well as the social and cultural issues that have to be considered before programmes are designed and materials developed.

There is need for capacity building of facilitators in the andragogical process skills and also training them to read and write in many of the Nigerian languages. Training and retraining of relevant officers on participatory monitoring and evaluation activities also ensuring report to stakeholders and authorities is very necessary. Literacy by radio project for improving
community education and literacy should be enhanced and upheld as an effective strategy for delivery of literacy and basic education to a large number of learners across the nation. In the North, it is necessary to map out concentration clusters of the Alamajiris and street boys and facilitate their literacy education based on entrepreneurship and learning of life skills. It is also necessary to update continuously their literacy skills. Advocacy to them on the need to acquire skills and provision of special inducement packages for those that have interest in learning is also necessary.

CONCLUSION
Nigeria is committed to achieve a wide range of ambitious objectives involving poverty reduction, education, gender equality, health, the environment, and international development cooperation. N.E.E.D.S is a nationally coordinated framework of action in close collaboration with the State and Local governments (with their State Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy, S.E.E.D.S) and other stakeholders to consolidate on the achievements of the last four years (1999–2003) and build a solid foundation for the attainment of Nigeria’s long-term vision of becoming the largest and strongest African economy and a key player in the world economy.

Specifically, Nigeria had advanced efforts to provide universal primary education, protect the environment, and develop a global development partnership. However, the country lagged behind on the goals of eliminating extreme poverty and hunger, reducing child and maternal mortality, and combating diseases such as human immunodeficiency virus/acquired immune deficiency syndrome (HIV/AIDS) and malaria. This is why the authors strongly advocate more government commitment to adult literacy on the federal, state, local government and communities levels. The collaboration, partnership networking and experience sharing among the stakeholders towards adult literacy are very necessary in order to accelerate action towards the attainment of EFA and MDG goals by 2015.

REFERENCES
CPED (2010). Methodology for the participatory formulation of local economic empowerment and development strategy (LEEDS) in local government areas in Nigeria. CPED Monograph Series (1). Centre for Population and Environmental Development (CPED), Benin City, Nigeria.


FME (2007). National action plan for the achievement of UBE. Abuja: FME.


**Document**
