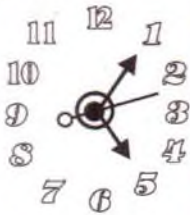




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**Literacy and Extension Services for Improved Livelihood in
Nigeria**

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Abstract

This paper focuses on literacy and extension services for improved livelihood in Nigeria. Extension in this context involves the transfer of educational activity, programmes and advisory services to people, based on their needs, aspirations as well as problems; and is designed to ensure progress towards the attainment of needs and facilitate the application of new knowledge for improved livelihood. Literacy, on the other hand, is the ability of individuals to identify, understand, interpret, create, communicate, and compute using printed and written materials associated with varying contexts; while livelihood goes beyond poverty eradication, and extends to include factors and processes that could enhance or hinder an individual's ability to make a living.

Key words: Literacy and extension services, Improved Livelihood, Rural dwellers.

Introduction

Globally, the usefulness of literacy, or the connection between literacy and livelihood, cannot be overemphasized. In the same vein, benefits derived from literacy, apart from the ability to read, write, and numerate, include improved livelihood, health, and political participation among others. Nigeria is the most populous nation in sub-Saharan Africa. The United Nations' estimate of the population of Nigeria was 200,883,894 as of Sunday, June 30, 2019 (Worldometers, 2019). Almost half of the adult population are illiterate despite a number of programmes put in place to address adult illiteracy, such as Education for All (Yusuf, Babangida, Idris and Auwalu, 2013). Specifically, adult literacy rate is about 56.9% (National Bureau of Statistics, 2010)

Understanding the need for a literate society for improved livelihood is very germane. Nigeria has been involved in many activities aimed at providing access to literacy, such as Better Life for Rural Women, which was the outcome of a workshop held in Abuja in 1987 on the role of rural women in development, with emphasis on issues relating to nutrition, agriculture and, above all, education, most especially the literacy component. According to Oghenekohwo and Oputu (2017), literacy is at the heart of sustainable development. It is emphasized that literacy is key to social change and a practical tool of empowerment, upon which the three main pillars of sustainable development – economic development, social development, and environmental protection – stand.

The attempt to tie them closely to and even derive them from livelihoods began at least three decades ago with UNESCO's pioneer attempt to integrate literacy and livelihood in its experimental world. However literacy programme, after the Teheran conference in 1965, gained attention, leading to the emergence of the term "functional literacy". So successful was the

idea of such integration that even with the rise and rapid spread of Paulo Freire's "conscientization" a few years later, it would be difficult to locate a contemporary or recent literacy course that did not claim to be functional, even if it did not claim to prepare its participants for a livelihood.

It has been observed that agricultural productivity in Nigeria is affected by high level of illiteracy among farmers. This has over the years posed great challenges to agricultural development. The low level of literacy among farmers generally affects agricultural practices in Nigeria, especially in the rural areas; thus affecting the livelihood of such individuals. However, farmers' improved livelihood in Nigeria could be achieved utilising literacy and extension services. Extension and research work are more tedious with the low level of literacy among farmers. Usually, farmers have rich local knowledge of and valuable practical experience of how best to successfully exploit their environment.

Extension is an educational process directed at bringing about change in people. It is a dynamic process, which brings about changes in what people know, changes in how they react to situations, and changes in what they can do (Van den Ban and Hawkins, 1996). The goals of extension include the transfer of knowledge from researchers to farmers, advising farmers in their decision making, and educating farmers on how to make better decisions, enabling farmers to clarify their own goals and possibilities, and stimulating desirable agricultural developments (vander Ban and Hawkins, 1996). Extension is crucial for sustainable agricultural development (Umar and Mahmoud, 2007). There is no doubt that extension is fundamental to the transformation process of activities in many parts of the world. Extension education provides individuals with the needed skills and technical information to enable them take effective farm management decisions to enhance their farm practices. Effective

extension service is therefore an essential factor for improving the wellbeing of the society, particularly in developing countries (Ani, 2007).

Improvement of a human capacity for agricultural productivity is a prerequisite for social and economic development in rural areas. This is because agriculture forms the bedrock of economic activities in rural areas. The bulk of the poor, some three-quarters according to a recent World Bank estimate, live in rural areas where they draw their livelihoods from agriculture-related activities, and 70% of them are women (Kotze, 2003). Evidently, development, food security, and poverty alleviation will not be truly achieved without rapid agricultural growth – assisting the rural poor to enhance their livelihoods. Agricultural production remains the main source of livelihood for most rural communities in developing countries generally, and sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) in particular. It is the main source of food, and it employs 70-80 % of the population in Nigeria (Ozor, 2009). With agriculture being the main source of food and employment for Nigeria, there is that need for agricultural extension to ensure the sustainability of food production. Agricultural extension must focus on working with the people rather than working for the people. This is because its aim is to build the capacity of the clientele to be resourceful and develop the ability to take initiative. The task of agricultural extension is to help rural people utilise science or innovations that are tested and viable in their day-to-day activities, so that they can be better off. It is also inbuilt in the farmers' ability to identify their problems, prioritize such, and work out how to solve them. This will also involve the ability to work as a team, that is, building team spirit in the people.

Livelihood activities can be conceptualized as those activities, which an individual engages in, in order to support/sustain or maintain his/her family. Livelihood refers to the knowledge, skills,

and methods used to produce or obtain food, water, clothing, and shelter necessary for survival and wellbeing, whether the economy is formal or informal. Often, livelihood activities are considered mainly as income generating activities. In any case, there is also a wide range of other activities, such as health, political, educational, social, and faith-based. These livelihood activities can be gained in a variety of ways from different types of jobs, all of which coincide together to form or create a totality of means by which people secure a living in a sustainable way (Loubster, 1995; Sanderson, 2000; and Olawoye, 2001).

Livelihood activities therefore become inevitable activities. 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 for reducing poverty and inequality and for laying the basis for sustained economic growth. In the same vein, literacy has a wide range of advantages and benefits for economic, social, and political development of a country. As poverty is often more pronounced among people in rural areas, literacy has become the only tool with which they can be liberated. Literacy is linked to economic success as literacy levels help determine the kind of jobs people find, the salaries they make, their ability to upgrade their work skills and whether they are likely to experience unemployment in their lives. Even at the rural areas, well mechanized farming and governmental assistance in terms of loans would go a long way to create better living for the people. Also, literacy and extension services have been recognized as essential elements of human resource development. It is a big factor in the economic success of a society.

Literacy is also vital to changing people's attitudes towards achieving ethical awareness, values, attitudes, skills, and behaviour consistent with the goal of building a more sustainable society. It is against this background that this paper highlights literacy and extension services for improved livelihood in Nigeria.

Concept of Literacy

Literacy is defined as the ability to read, write, and numerate in any given language. It's seen as a basic life skill and essential tool for learning and self-realization in the modern world. Aderinoye (2004) and Sarumi (2011) view literacy as a catalyst for participation in social, cultural, political, and economic activities and learning throughout life. In view of this, Oyebamiji (2006) maintains that when literacy skills are properly developed, they could respond to recent economic, political, and social transformations, including globalization and advancement in information and communications technologies.

Literacy, as defined by UNESCO (2010), is the ability of a person to function in all the activities in which literacy is required for effective functioning of his/her group and the community, and also for enabling him/her to continue to use reading, writing, and calculation for his/her own development and the community's development. Many writers have alluded to the potency of literacy for individual and societal development. Ampene (1980, p.2) stated that the usefulness of literacy cannot be denied. The newly literate, if properly instructed and made aware that literacy is a tool for liberation and enriched living, gains confidence and dignity. Bhola (1983) affirmed that without literacy there cannot be development. According to Nzeneri in Zuofa (2011), apart from affirming that literacy means the ability to read, write, communicate, and compute figures that are involved in day-to-day activities, a literate adult is a person who can read and understand

simple written and computed statements involved in everyday life. Akinpelu (2009) perceived literacy as lifelong learning in which its skills are permanent and functional.

Oghenekohwo (2013) remarks that literacy in capacity is factored by empowerment, engagement, experience, and evidence, which represent the variables of education for development. The United Nations (2005) highlights that literacy education can be a major tool for reducing poverty, enlarging employment opportunities, advancing gender equality, improving family health, protecting the environment, and promoting core democratic values. In recent years, it is reported that many literacy education programmes have become increasingly oriented towards local needs, especially through a focus on community development and environmental protection.

Education for All (EFA), in Oghenekohwo (2017), defines literacy as the ability to read and write and understand a simple statement related to one's daily life. At an international experts meeting of UNESCO in 2003, an operational definition of literacy education, in particular for measurement purposes, was advanced as the ability to identify, understand, interpret, create, communicate, and compute, using printed and written materials associated with varying contexts. Literacy involves continuum of learning in enabling individuals to achieve their goals to develop their knowledge and potentials and to participate fully in their community and wider society (Oghenekohwo, 2017).

Importance of Literacy

Literacy has been identified as an important instrument through which any country can attain development. The United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) (2006) observed that individuals with literacy and numeracy skills are more productive, understand family planning,

and enjoy better quality of life. Eldred (2008) also noted that literacy linked to particular job skills contributes to the development of critical thinking and problem solving skills. Ezimah (2004) emphasised that literacy is an essential ingredient for achieving personal, community, and societal development and growth. The International Labour Organization (ILO) (1994), while working on income generating activities for women in health development in Nigeria, recommended that functional literacy should be utilized to increase the impact of training in new skills and technologies. Prompted by this, Zuofa (2008) highlighted the gains of literacy in empowering women. She noted that those who benefited from literacy programmes were more confident, kept records, and progressed in their economic activities.

Literacy skills are not ends in themselves but need to serve purposes and practices that are relevant to their users. For instance, they lead to education, which results in empowerment, with the acquisition of the essential knowledge and skills that make it possible for individuals to engage in activities they require for effective functioning in self, group, community improvement, and livelihood. The benefits of literacy as follows:

Personal benefits: This involves fulfillment of human rights, self-esteem, empowerment, social wellbeing, leadership, and critical spirit. All these will help to position the individual for effective participation in society.

Political benefits: It ensures increased political participation, embracing of democratic values, good governance, conflict resolution, peace, and reconciliation. These will promote in the individual the acquisition of sound political ideals that are required in every progressive society for good governance.

Cultural benefits: Literacy promotes cultural transformation, innovation, promotion and preservation of cultural diversity. For

effective cultural transmission and perpetuation, literacy cannot be dispensed with.

Social benefits: Literacy contributes to the maintenance of good health, increased family stability, and improvement in education, gender equality, social cohesion, inclusion, and empowerment.

Economic benefits: Literacy promotes wealth creation, economic growth, increased individual income, sustainable development among others. (EFA Global Monitoring Report Literacy for Life, 2006).

Literacy is crucial to the acquisition of essential life skills that enable individuals to address the challenges they face in life, and represents an essential step in basic education, which is an indispensable means for effective participation in the societies and economies of the twenty-first century (United Nations, 2006).

Concept of Livelihood

Krantz in Zuofa (2011) advanced that livelihood comprises the capabilities, assets (stores, resources, claims, and access) and activities required for a means of living. Zuofa (2011) explains livelihood as the job or other source of income that gives you the money to buy the things you need. Livelihood refers to the knowledge, skills, and methods used to obtain food, water, clothing, and shelter necessary for survival and wellbeing, whether the economy is formal, subsistent, monetized, or a mixture of all. Furthermore, Farrington, Ramasut, and Walker (2002) opined that reducing poverty in urban and rural areas is likely to be a growing task for government and development agencies. Livelihood is thus the sum total of ways in which people make a living (DFID, 2000).

Literacy and extension services: Panacea for improved livelihood in Nigeria

The relationship between literacy and extension services has been established by Anyanwu, Omolewa, Adeyeri, Okanlawon, and Siddiqui (1985), Aruma (2006), and Omoruyi (2010) when they asserted that people cannot learn useful information required for their survival and happiness in the society without literacy. Literacy is critical for development in contemporary society, because it is used to improve living conditions of people in the society. Hence, for people to survive there is need for people to acquire literacy skills for meaningful life.

Formal education helps in the development of the individual and society, and is regarded as the key that unlocks the door to development. This is because formal education produces people who contribute immensely to the growth and development of society. Developed and developing countries recognize the fact that formal education is a pre-requisite for growth and development, and so they try to provide quality formal education for their citizens. Studies from more advanced countries, notably the United States of America, Denmark, and Japan, during the period of their economic growth and development, suggest that there had been a very significant relationship between their economic growth and the quality of formal education provided to their citizens.

Gray (1990) has identified values in literacy and extension services integration for improved livelihood in Nigeria as follows:

1. Literacy/extension services help to meet many of the practical needs of daily life, thus enhancing improved livelihood.
2. Literacy/extension services help in improving the standard of living by obtaining valuable printed information relating to health, sanitation, production, selection, and preparation of food, childcare, and home management.

3. Literacy/extension services increase economic status through engaging in vocations, which require knowledge of reading and writing.
4. Literacy/extension services enable one to take part in many individual and group activities that involve reading and writing, and this helps to gain social prestige.
5. Literacy/extension services enable one to learn about community activities through reading and the utilization of acquired skills for development.

Concept of Extension

Extension is an educational process directed to bring about change in people. It is a dynamic process, which brings about changes in what people know, changes in how they react to situations, and changes in what they can do (Van den Ban and Hawkins, 1996). Extension is the organized exchange of information and the purposive transfer of skills, in order to capacitate the rural actors for continuous relevance in a commercial economy (Akinola, Issa, and Sanni, 2011).

Kolawole (2008) remarks that extension is an informal educational process directed towards user population. This process offers advice and information to help people solve their problems. Oladoja (2008) submits that extension could be applied to several fields of study, such as education, agriculture, health, livestock, library, and forestry, to mention a few. Extension has also been defined as an on-going process of getting useful information to people and assisting those people to acquire the necessary knowledge, skills, and attitude to effectively utilize information technology. According to Okunade (2007), extension is the primary process through which individuals in a community learn the reason for change. In other words, extension is a type of education that is functional rather than formal, and its main task is

to convey meaningful information to members of the society. In the same vein, extension services is concerned with the following basic task dissemination of useful and practical information related to agriculture and home economics, practical application of such knowledge to help individuals analyse their problems (Farinde, 2006). Extension service is an on-going process of getting useful information to people. It therefore helps to acquire skills and attitude to utilize this information, with the aim of improved livelihood. It also promotes the transfer and exchange of information that can be converted into functional knowledge. It is better to say that agricultural extension is the instrument, which is helpful in developing enterprises that promote productivity and generate income in the present scenario of change, which can ultimately reduce poverty in developing as well as developed countries. In the same vein, Omoruyi (2008) views extension as educational services covering health, nutrition, home management, child care, and family planning.

Review of Related Literature

Rad, Boz, Polatöz, and Ates, (2011) opined that literacy programme, in terms of extension education programmes, plays a key role in the implementation of rural development programmes to increase the living standard of the women and their families in the rural areas. In addition, rural women's outstanding barriers to extension participation are: lack of information about extension activities, heavy loads of household task and time constraints, and permission from husband. In the research area, that is rural eastern Mediterranean Turkey, women's participation in extension education programmes and training is quite low. Their participation in agricultural training programmes is even lower. This is because women consider taking care of the home as their first duty, and they do not perceive themselves as agricultural

producers. The training activities in which women usually participate are activities which strengthen women's traditional role in the family and society at large.

Okeke, Nwalieji, and Uzuegbunam (2015) concluded that information and communication technologies play numerous key roles in literacy education exercise through extension service delivery, such as helping in expanding outreach to a large number of farmers; offering a solution to resource and capacity issues within the agricultural sector; improving information flow and connecting people within the rural areas; answering questions relating to farm problems, with the advantages of getting feedback using telephone; and obtaining market price information, weather forecasts, etc. Problems identified include poor ICT infrastructural development, high charges for radio/television presentations, inadequate capital for farmers, and insufficient knowledge of ICTs among others.

It was observed that interpersonal connectivity between farmers and agricultural extension agents will enhance farmers' information literacy, knowledge, and awareness of current trends in farming that will boost stages of farming and abundance of food supply. The importance of farmers' information literacy cannot be overemphasized as they produce what the nation needs to feed her populace all year round (Sokoya, Onifade, and Alabi, 2012; Sokoya, Alabi, and Fagbola, 2014)

Eamin Ali (2012) observed that an information-literate individual is able to: determine the extent of information needed, access the needed information effectively and efficiently, evaluate information and its sources critically, incorporate selected information into one's knowledge base, use information effectively to accomplish a specific purpose, understand the economic, legal, and social issues surrounding the use of information, and access and use information ethically and legally.

According to Otto (2011), the use of communication channels or media is of great importance because the knowledge of it will provide keys for understanding and predicting outcomes of communication processes. It is common knowledge that the practical visual transfer of knowledge will give better understanding to farmers, especially the rural farmers who are generally less literate.

Conclusion

The study concludes that literacy programme in the form of provision of accessible extension services for people in rural areas would serve as a means of not only improving their level of productivity but also enhancing their advancement in all ramifications, vis-à-vis income level, etc.

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