

# Challenges and Prospects of Repositioning Adult Education for Sustainable National Development in 21<sup>st</sup> Century Nigeria

\*WAMI, Kevin Chinweikpe Ph.D

Department of Adult Education & Community Development, Faculty of Education, Rivers State University, Nkpolu-Oroworukwo, Port Harcourt, Rivers State.

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## ABSTRACT

This paper examined the challenges and prospects of repositioning adult education for sustainable national development in 21<sup>st</sup> century Nigeria. It took a cursory examination of the concept of adult education, sustainable national development, repositioning adult education for sustainable national development in 21<sup>st</sup> century Nigeria, challenges of repositioning adult education for sustainable national development in the 21<sup>st</sup> century Nigeria. The paper concluded that repositioning adult education for sustainable national development in 21<sup>st</sup> century Nigeria is faced with numerous challenges amongst which are poor funding, corruption, infrastructure deficiencies, dearth of qualified instructors. The deep-rooted insecurity threatening corporate national existence, poverty coupled with hunger, cultural, religious, ethnic, gender and class segregation that do not encourage national cohesion and sustainable development could be tackled through concerted efforts in repositioning adult education in 21<sup>st</sup> century Nigeria. The paper suggested among others that governments at all levels should take into cognizance the necessity of repositioning adult education and enhancing sustainable national development in the country; efforts should be made by stakeholders of education to devise ways to address the challenges of adult education in the contemporary period in Nigeria.

**Keywords:** Repositioning, Adult Education, Sustainability, National Development, Challenges & prospects in 21<sup>st</sup> Century Nigeria.

## INTRODUCTION

It is an established fact that the development of a nation is tied to the system of education it operates. Education generally has been adjudged as the instrument for effecting national development. It serves as a means of upholding the existing social order by imparting contemporary ideas, new ways of doing things, and fostering creativity aligning with the desired direction of development in a given society or economy. Therefore, education is an indispensable tool for any human success which should not be treated with any levity (Ajikere & Ololube, 2021). It is deducible from the above assertion that education generally and adult education in particular plays a significant role in the growth and development of any nation. Adult education is a field of academic endeavour saddled with the responsibility of solving social, economic, political and environmental problems of a given nation. It changes the social and psychological minds of adults, instills lost hope in them and liberates them from prejudice of seeing themselves as not being capable of learning (Aminu, 2022).

Adult education has the potential of achieving sustainability in the national development of any nation, but this sub-sector of education has been seriously neglected by both governments and communities. This is due to the fact that many political office holders in Nigeria lack the understanding of the importance of adult education in driving national progress and development. As such, the allocation of funds to adult education sub-sector often becomes embroiled in political wrangling and negotiations as majority of African governments allocate limited financial resources to adult education institutions annually (Maduagwu & Nwogwu in Abali & Nwapi, 2017; Obasi in Wami, 2024). The apparent neglect of this sub-sector of education has resulted in poor quality of curriculum, lack of qualified adult educators and ultimately to poor quality adult learners in Nigeria. The clarion call for sustainable national development has been taken up by all and sundry. People must be enabled to develop the values, attitudes, and skills necessary to change behaviour in order to achieve sustainable national

development. It therefore, becomes imperative for adult education to be repositioned to bring about sustenance of the required development in the 21<sup>st</sup> century Nigeria.

In the light of the aforementioned facts therefore, this paper takes a cursory examination of the concept of adult education, sustainable national development, repositioning adult education for sustainable national development in the 21<sup>st</sup> century Nigeria, challenges of repositioning adult education for sustainable national development in 21<sup>st</sup> century Nigeria, and prospects of repositioning adult education for sustainable national development in 21<sup>st</sup> century.

## CONCEPT OF ADULT EDUCATION

Adult education has been defined in varied perspectives. As cited in Wami, Nwafor, and Deekor (2019) UNESCO in Kobani defined adult education as:

The education that encompasses the entire body of structured learning, regardless of its subject matter, level, or approach. This includes both continuing education for adults, whether it supplements or replaces formal schooling, and vocational training to enhance skills and qualifications (p.166).

Natukho, Amutabi and Otango in Oghenekohwo (2017) posited that adult education is a practice whereby adults engage in systematically sustained self-educating activities with a view to gaining new forms of knowledge, skills, attitudes or values. Oghenekohwo (2017) perceived adult education as any organized educational programmes designed for adults to acquire skills, upgrade their knowledge and enhance their standard of living.

Wami (2024) averred that adult education encompasses structured and deliberate educational endeavours tailored specifically for adults, aimed at fostering personal and societal advancement, both within and beyond conventional educational settings. It enables individuals to adapt to evolving global demands and tackle contemporary and emerging issues spanning health, environment, economics, social dynamics, and political landscapes. Bala, Osagie and Yakubu (2019) opines that adult education is any educational activity that caters for the needs of adults to improve their performance in all areas of adult life so as to improve their standard of living. Obidiegwu in Oghenekohwo, Tonukari and Samuel (2022) asserted that adult education is all organized and purposeful educational activities designed for adults for their personal and societal fulfillment within and outside the school. It enables them to adapt to constant changing global requirements and needs to solve present and emerging problems which may include health, environment, economic, social and political problems to get them integrate into the society and avoid exclusion and marginalization.

### General Purpose and Specific Objectives of Adult Education

Anyanwu, Ononeze, and Chukwuji (2019) posited that the general purpose of adult education is to assist adults to increase competence to adapt to their society through the acquisition of regular practical skills, knowledge, attitudes, and values that will enable them to solve personal and community problems. Oghenekohwo (2017) identified the general purpose of adult education to include producing and ensuring an enlightened individuals all through existence (lifelong). The Federal Republic of Nigeria in Aminu (2022) enumerated the following as the general purpose of adult education:

1. To provide functional literacy and continuing education for adults and youths who have never had the advantage of formal education or who did not complete their primary education. These include the nomads, migrants families, the disable and other categories or groups, especially the disadvantaged gender;
2. To provide functional and remedial education for those people who did not complete secondary education;
3. To provide education for different categories of completers of the formal education system in order to improve their basic skills and knowledge;
4. To provide in-service, on the job, vocational and professional training for different categories of workers and professionals in order to improve their skills, and

5. To give adult citizens of the country necessary aesthetics, cultural, and civic education for public enlightenment (p.41).

The specific objectives of adult education as mentioned by Oghenekohwo (2017) include:

1. Reducing drastically the level of illiteracy thereby promoting basic literacy that can assist adults to address all forms of poverty of knowledge and know-how;
1. Empower people through the creation of access to basic education without restriction;
3. Promote lifelong learning that makes everyone functionally inclined all through life;
4. Enhance learning orientation and opportunity among adults of ages without barriers, limitation and restrictions.
5. Mitigate all forms of social exclusions that are designed to limit access to lifelong learning opportunities; and
6. Engender learning opportunities to all persons irrespective of age, sex, position, class, race, and colour (p.5-6).

### **Adult Education Programmes**

Akinkpelu in Deekor and Nnodim as cited in Wami (2022) recognized the following as bonafide adult education programmes:

1. Literacy education (literacy skills for adult and out-of-school youths).
2. Continuing education (evening schools, extra-moral classes)
3. Civic education (known as popular education in the third world, especially in Latin America).
4. Community Development.
5. Rural development or rural transformation.
6. Health extension education.
7. Mass education.
8. Population education (of family planning education).
9. Workers education
10. Nomadic and migrant education.
11. Environmental education.
12. Social welfare and social work.
13. Consumer education.
14. Prisoners welfare education and rehabilitation
15. Women education
16. Educational gerontology (including correspondence education).

17. Peace education and political action programmes.
18. Distance education/international education
19. Political education and political action programmes.
- 20 Vocational education (full-time and part-time).
21. Continuing education.
22. Culture, aesthetic and recreational education.
23. Industrial and labour education.
24. public enlightenments (or mass mobilization) (pp. 98-99).

### **Federal Government Agency in charge of Adult Education**

The National Commission for Mass Literacy, Adult and Non-formal Education (NMEC) is the statutory Federal Government agency that is charged with the responsibility of making

literate all those who for one reason or the did not or cannot benefit from formal school system. These include out-of-school youths, children in the street, women in rural areas, victims of teenage motherhood, nomadic illiterate people, almajiris and other migrant fishing folks (Paiko in Wami, 20220). The NMEC was established by ACT 17 of 26<sup>th</sup> June, 1990 by the then President Ibrahim Badamasi Babangida and became functional in 1991. The setting up of NMEC came about after the 1990 Jomtein Declaration to provide Education for All. This led to the development of the 1990 Blueprint and Action Plan for Mass Literacy in the country and subsequent enactment of Law setting up NMEC.

NMEC's main mandate was to coordinate all adult and non-formal education activities nation-wide with a view to eradicating illiteracy. Part of NMEC's major goals among others is increasing citizen's awareness of the importance of literacy and solicit the participation and cooperation of all stakeholders in the eradication of mass literacy in Nigeria (Paiko in Wami, 2022). According to NMEC (2013), the vision of NMEC is eradication of illiteracy for national development and provide non-formal and continuing education within the context of lifelong learning for sustainable development, while the mission is to develop and sustain mass education for an enduring learning society as a critical leaver for self-reliance and national development. These two indications serve as a guide in promoting adult education programmes in Nigeria.

### **SUSTAINABLE NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT**

It is imperative to define the terms "sustainable", "development", and national development for an in-depth understanding of the meaning of sustainable national development as a concept. Sustainable means the capacity to endure over an extended period of time (Hornby, 2010). The term sustainability is no longer new in the register of development (Taylor, Jack, & Wami, 2023). Sustainability has relatively gained a wide range of discuss in recent times in development literature and among development experts. It has also received wider acceptability and become the cornerstone of many development policies (Tammemagi in Kobani & Wami, 2022). Thus, we now hear social sustainability, cultural sustainability, political sustainability, environmental sustainability, and economic sustainability (Onokerhoraye in Kobani & Wami, 2022). Sustainability is a state of continuity, being able to provide support that could last for a long time (Wami & Victor, 2022).

Development is a constant positive change that is sustainable for the betterment of the people (Wami & Victor, 2022). It is the multi-dimensional process involving changes in structure, attitudes, as well as the acceleration of economic growth, reduction in inequality, poverty eradication, organization and reorientation of entire economic and social systems (Todara, 1979 & Onyeozu, 2008 in Dokubo, 2015). Akinpkelu in Kobani and Alozie (2015) asserted that development is of man rather than of infrastructures and public works, supermarkets, skyscrapers, and highways though they are indices. The emphasis of development is on the people (Balogun in Wami &

Victor, 2022). Development is for the people and must therefore meet their needs (Igbokwe & Agala in Zuofa, 2017). Nzeneri (2022) opined that development is the process of improving standard of living of human beings. It involves improving man's understanding of laws of nature and applying it to creation of tools and other implements that improves man's working conditions and living environment as well as equitable organization of work and rewards (Rodney in Ibeanu as cited in Nzeneri, 2022).

National development is the positive progress in the moral, cultural, social, economic, and political aspects of the lives of citizens. It refers to progress that goes beyond specific economic sectors and enhances the country's overall self-esteem (Abali & Nwapi, 2017). Mayomi and Alete-omoni (2020) opined that national development is the improvement in material well-being of the people, high gross domestic product, high standard of living, eradication of mass poverty, illiteracy and disease, long life expectancy amongst others. In the light of the above facts therefore, sustainable national development can be viewed as the ability of a country's population to accomplish significant progress and enhancement in all aspects of its life, including economic, social, political, cultural, and religious domains. It is a country's capacity to strategically and effectively enhance and advance the socio-economic, political, cultural, and environmental well-being of both current and future generations (Wami, 2024).

Sustainable national development is a socio-economic and political movement or strategy that has a global appeal. It is concerned with the development of natural resources as well as available funds in a manner that ensures increasing health and wealth for both present and future generation (Noibi & Lawal in Obiyai & Ehimen, 2018). According to Obiyai and Ehimen (2018), sustainable national development emphasizes the creation of sustainable improvements in the quality of lives of all the people through increase in income per capita improvement in health, education, environmental resources and general quality of life. It is the process of accelerating economic development in order to conserve and enhance the stock of environmental, human and infrastructures. Sustainable national development is a viable tool for curbing poverty, unemployment, human capacity building, and reduction in social vices (Amadi & Abali, 2021).

### **Adult Education for Sustainable National Development in 21<sup>st</sup> Century Nigeria**

It has been empirically proven that adult education plays a significant role in driving sustainable national development. The benefits of adult education from its cycles include a prospect for higher and sustainable income and better employability of individuals; attainment of a higher general social-well-being, a greater social inclusion and engagement in service endeavours; a greater capacity for creating innovation and higher competitiveness; deeping good governance and ensuring responsibility in tax payments in adults (Oghenekohwo, 2019). Sustainable development needs of adult education investment can bring about a significant leap in return on investment for governments in Nigeria (Tawari 7 Oghenekohwo, 2019). Thus, adult education provides the right kind of environment for individuals to develop skills for the successful adaptation in socio-economic and political milieu. Sustainable national development is measured in different dimensions, among which is intellectual development. The attainment of intellectual development is a progress towards enthroning sustainable national development. Intellectually developed people will demand the right of transparency of information and accountability of rulers and leaders. Intellectual development through adult education is a crucial part of sustainable national development, and without intellectual development, sustainable national development is hampered (Amadi & Abali, 2021)

### **Repositioning Adult Education for Sustainable National Development in 21<sup>st</sup> Century Nigeria**

Repositioning adult education is reshaping or redirecting it to be in tandem with modern trends. Globalization has brought dire consequences, but it offers a unique turning point; opportunities to learn, reshape, and build resilience into adult education sub-sector in the 21<sup>st</sup> century Nigeria. It has given policy makers the unique opportunity to explore how the emerging reality could usher in new adult education architecture in the country for sustainable national development. Evidence that has emerged from globalization is the need to embed digitalization into the administration of adult education. Globalization has made it necessary for the use of ICT, as ICTs such as e-mails, cellular telephone and teleconferencing enable people share knowledge without having to be in the same place (Abali & Suanukordo, 2015). For Nigeria to be in tandem with modern trends in this digital era, it has to reposition adult education, especially in this fast-changing world where globalization is the



order of the day. It is, therefore, required of everyone in the adult education sub-sector to have ICT competence to survive in this technology-driven age (Bema & Uwazuoke, 2011; Ogbuechi & Olawolu, 2011).

With the emergence of globalization, there is need to embed digital technology into our classrooms. Technological solutions, like adaptive learning technology, would bring about personalized learning with less teacher involvement. The introduction of digital technology into our classrooms would help in improving learning outcomes for sustainable national development in 21<sup>st</sup> century Nigeria. Wang in Emesiobi (2024) asserted that digitalizing the adult education sub-sector will help to enhance the quality and relevance of learning, strength inclusion, and improve education administration and governance. In times of crises, digitalization also helps to mitigate the effects of education disruption and school closures. Amadi and Abali (2021) posited that learning-based contingency planning is essential to ensure learning continuity during times of crises, to protect students and teachers, and to build resilience within the education sector. Thus, government should release a holistic contingency plan that goes beyond addressing school-based safety measures, but also identify ways of ensuring that learning continues and provide support for students and teachers for sustainable national development in 21<sup>st</sup> century Nigeria.

### **Challenges of Repositioning Adult Education for Sustainable National development in 21<sup>st</sup> Century Nigeria.**

Challenges are different tasks that test someone's ability and skill (Hornby, 2010). They are impediments in the achievement of goals. Repositioning adult education for sustainable national development in 21<sup>st</sup> century Nigeria is faced with numerous challenges. These include:

#### **Poor Funding of the Adult Education Sub-sector**

The budgetary allocation to adult education by government is grossly inadequate to reposition adult education for sustainable national development in the country. Government allocates limited financial resources to adult education institutions annually (Obasi, 2014). When compared to other sectors of the Nigerian economy and areas of education, adult education receives the least amount of financial support (Afrik in Oghenekohwo et al., 2022). Consequently, there is shortage of funding for the operations of adult education establishments (Wami, 2024). More importantly, non-formal education is excluded in the share of two percent of consolidated fund meant for basic education in spite of policy provision (Aminu, 2022); and inadequate funding has prevented most adult schools from having well equipped computer laboratories (Adiele & Steve-Beke, 2020).

#### **Corruption in Adult Education Sub-sector**

Unfortunately, many political office holders and school administrators in Nigeria lack an understanding of the importance of adult education in driving sustainable national development. As a result, funds allocated to adult education are misappropriated. Abali and Nwapi (2017) averred that funds allocated to education are misappropriated to other sectors of the Nigerian economy due to dishonest financial practices by government officials. Due to widespread corruption, most contracts for school building renovations and equipment procurement are awarded to influential political figures or loyal party members who are unmotivated to execute the projects according to the specified standards. Similarly, certain administrators of adult education institutions fail to fulfill their responsibilities with honesty and a sense of moral responsibility, as they embezzle revenue from their institutions. Oluwuo and Onyema (2013) affirmed that school officials in Imo State have been implicated in corrupt financial activities, including misappropriation, embezzlement, inflation of statistics, and diversion of cash.

#### **Infrastructural Deficiencies**

A very common challenge impeding the repositioning of adult education for sustainable national development is infrastructural deficiencies. ICT gadgets naturally have composite demands in the sense that other infrastructures such as furniture, electricity (power) and cool weather condition must be provided to provide energy, and comfortable environment to whatever ICT gadgets that are used in schools. To keep high-tech equipment such as computer functioning effectively under hot weather conditions experienced in this part of the

world, there must be adequate provision of power and backup. In Places where the schools have no access to electricity or its alternative, it is virtually difficult to take advantage of benefiting from the use of ICT gadgets such as computers, radios, television, video recorders, among others (Udensi, 2020).

### **Lack of Adequately Qualified Instructors**

One of the challenges of repositioning adult education for sustainable national development in 21<sup>st</sup> century Nigeria is the lack of adequately qualified or inadequate number of literacy instructors or personnel who possess ICT skills. The lack of personnel with ICT skills across the adult education institutions and non-formal education centres inhibits the effective use of ICT for Adult education delivery in the country (Aminu, 2022). Boseman in Aminu (2022) posited that the dedication of adult education instructors to teaching is low as they are always on the lookout for greener pasture. This directly affects output as the quality of adult education is drastically reduced by the menace.

### **Poor Monitoring and Evaluation of Adult Education**

The lack of trained personnel in monitoring and evaluation of adult education is a serious challenge in repositioning adult education for sustainable national development in 21<sup>st</sup> century Nigeria. Monitoring is a vital ingredient to a successful adult education programme and for successful implementation of non-formal education (Aminu, 2022).

### **Poor Record Keeping**

The poor record keeping in education hinders the repositioning of adult education for sustainable development in Nigeria. The problem of record keeping in adult education affects the database needed for adequate planning and implementation of adult education curriculum and programmes. It also affects the tracking of learners' performance and transition from one level to another (Aminu, 2022)

### **Politicization of Adult Education**

Politicization of adult education is another challenge in repositioning adult education for sustainable national development in 21<sup>st</sup> century Nigeria. Tribal and political affiliations influence on admission and employment processes has been reported (Nwagwu, 2020).

### **Prospects of repositioning Adult Education for Sustainable National Development in 21<sup>st</sup> Century Nigeria.**

The prospects of repositioning adult education for sustainable national development in 21<sup>st</sup> century Nigeria are numerous. The role of adult education in development is not limited to economic and social spheres alone; it also has political dimension. It has been acknowledged that there is a strong link between adult learning and democracy. For democracy to be achieved, adult education is needed so as to inform people of their rights and responsibilities as democracy also requires people to actively participate in local, national and global levels (Aminu, 2022). Therefore, adult education for sustainable national development could stabilize democracy as citizens are educated on democratic culture and are well informed on their rights and responsibilities. Adequate repositioning of adult education programmes can improve active participation in political and democratic processes at local, national and global levels (Oghenekohwo et al., 2022).

Adult education proves to be a powerful tool for favouring inclusive national development through democracy, thereby ensuring peace and stability. The prevention of political disorders and civil unrest can be made possible through repositioning adult education. The deep-rooted insecurity threatening corporate natural existence, poverty coupled with hunger, cultural, religious, ethnic, gender and class segregation that do not encourage national cohesion and sustainable development could be talked through concerted efforts in repositioning adult education in Nigeria (oghenekohwo et al., 2022). Tawari and Oghenekohwo (2019) asserted that sustained investment in adult education programmes is for the sustenance of upgrading of skills of an ever-larger segment of the world's population in response to the growth of globalization, broader markets and new technologies. Furthermore, the premise of investment in adult education is also based on the need to ensure security of the

environment, peaceful and inclusive societies for social justice, and global partnership for sustainable national development.

## CONCLUSION

Repositioning adult education for sustainable national development in 21<sup>st</sup> century Nigeria is faced with numerous challenges amongst which are poor funding, corruption, infrastructural deficiencies, dearth of qualified instructors. The deep-rooted insecurity threatening corporate national existence, poverty coupled with hunger, cultural, religious, ethnic, gender and class segregation that do not encourage national cohesion and sustainable development could be tackled through concerted efforts in repositioning adult education in 21<sup>st</sup> century Nigeria.

## Suggestions

Based on the discourse of this paper, the following suggestions were made:

1. Governments at all levels should take into cognizance the necessity of repositioning adult education and enhancing sustainable national development in the country.
2. The National Commission for mass Literacy Adult and Non-formal Education (NMEC) should sustain awareness on the need to reposition adult education for the betterment of the well-being of the Nigerian populace.
3. The three tiers of government in Nigeria should allocate adequate funds to adult education sub-sector for sustainable national development.
4. Education stakeholders should ensure that adequate instructional materials and trained personnel are provided to instruct in adult literacy centres.
5. Efforts should be made by stakeholders of education to devise ways to address the challenges of adult education in the contemporary period in Nigeria.

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