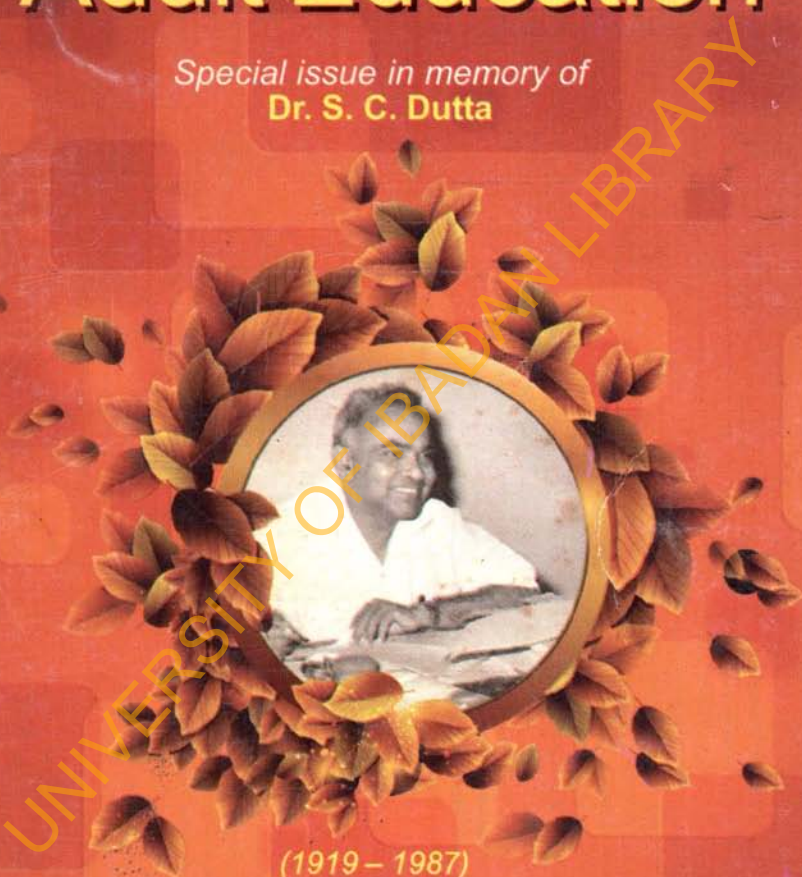


Vol. 79, No. 3

ISSN 0019-5006
July-September, 2018

Indian Journal of Adult Education

Special issue in memory of
Dr. S. C. Dutta



(1919 – 1987)



Indian Adult Education Association

INDIAN JOURNAL OF ADULT EDUCATION

ISSN 0019-5006

Vol. 79, No. 3

July-September 2018

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Mapping an Action Plan for the Implementation of Adult Learning and Education Targets of Sustainable Development Goal 4 in Nigeria

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Introduction

One of the most significant global frameworks for development was The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development approved by the United Nations in 2015. The agenda, with its specified goals, was designed at transforming the world (United Nations, 2015). It marked a paradigm shift in the global framework for development and presented a unique opportunity to reorient efforts towards a new path for development with sustainability at its core (Ojiambo, 2017).

Education has been perceived as central to the achievement of all the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and their associated 169 targets. Education directly relates to one goal (SDG 4) but cuts across the entire SDG agenda. At the 19th Conference of Commonwealth Education Ministers (CEEM) held in The Bahamas in June 2015, ministers reinforced the centrality of education for building resilience and preparing the next generation of Commonwealth citizens to contribute positively to the social, environmental and economic development of their communities. Ultimately, they highlighted the pivotal role that education has in achieving sustainable development and driving the SDGs.

The agenda has been universally conceived to have significant influence in the context and activities of Adult Learning and Education (ALE) in the 21st century and beyond. SDG 4 – 'Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all' - directly relate to Adult Learning and Education. SDG 4 can thus be appropriately termed as "transforming the world of Adult Learning and Education" through a matrix of an action plan. This paper is, therefore, written suggesting an action plan which can be adopted in the implementation of SDG 4 in Nigeria.

The Description and Context of SDG 4

SDG 4 has 10 targets. Five of these inter-related targets, which are directly or indirectly related to adult learning and education, are stated below:

**A Paper in a Book of Reading in Honour of Professor Fatima Umar entitled:
Reinventing Education and Lifelong Practice for Sustainable Development**

SDG 4.3- By 2030, ensure equal access for all women and men to affordable and quality technical, vocational and tertiary education, including university.

SDG 4.4- By 2030, substantially increase the number of youth and adults who have relevant skills, including technical and vocational skills, for employment, decent jobs and entrepreneurship.

SDG 4.5- By 2030, eliminate gender disparities in education and ensure equal access to all levels of education and vocational training for the vulnerable, including persons with disabilities, indigenous peoples and children in vulnerable situations.

SDG 4.6- By 2030, ensure that all youth and a substantial proportion of adults, both men and women, achieve literacy and numeracy.

SDG 4.7- By 2030, ensure that all learners acquire the knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development, including, among others, through education for sustainable development and sustainable lifestyles, human rights, gender equality, promotion of a culture of peace and non-violence, global citizenship and appreciation of cultural diversity and of culture's contribution to sustainable development.

The five targets, as shown above, are structured in line with all the components of Adult Education such as: access to knowledge and acquisition of skills to promote sustainable development, access of all, including vulnerable people, to education and training, literacy and numeracy, as well as integration into global citizens and cultural diversity. The understanding of these targets invariably connotes that there must be clearly specified action plan for the implementation of these targets in the country. The action plan will portray Nigeria as highly committed towards the implementation of the specified targets.

Justification for the Adult Education Targets of SDG 4

Adult learning and education (ALE) has made a long evolutionary journey from being merely a second-chance opportunity for illiterate adults to acquire basic literacy and numeracy skill; to a comprehensive canvas for providing education for all, throughout life, as lifelong and life-wide learning (CONFINTEA VI: Mid-Term Review 2017). Based on this submission, adult learning and education is now universally perceived as a fundamental human right 'for the achievement of equity and inclusion, for alleviating poverty and for building equitable, tolerant, sustainable and knowledge-based societies' (UNESCO, 2011, pp. 42-43). This definition manifests a holistic approach to adult learning and education which does not limit it to skills training for getting employed in the job market (Regmi, 2015). The last UNESCO international Conference on Adult Education, (CONFINTEA V1, 2009), conceptualised adult learning

and education as 'a significant component' of the humanistic perspective of lifelong learning (UIL, 2014; UNESCO, 2011).

Though the terms adult education, adult learning, lifelong education, and lifelong learning are often used interchangeably, the meanings of these terms differ significantly and have crucial policy implications (Regmi, 2015). The term lifelong education introduced by UNESCO (Faure, Herrera, Kaddoura, Lopes, Petrovsky, Rahnema, & Ward, 1972) highlighted an inevitable necessity of providing learning opportunities to adults irrespective of their age, class, gender, and socioeconomic statuses. Since then, various attempts have been made to provide functional as well as critical adult education opportunities to those marginalized adults. Those adults need a holistic approach to adult education that helps to enhance capabilities so as to enable them to critically analyze their day-to-day problems and find solutions through local means. These are the bases for the incorporation of the adult learning and education targets in SDG 4.

UNESCO and UIL, (2016, p. 8) identified the aim and role of Adult Learning and Education in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development thus:

[the] aim of adult learning and education is to equip people with the necessary capabilities to exercise and realize their rights and take control of their destinies. It promotes personal and professional development, thereby supporting more active engagement by adults with their societies, communities and environments. It fosters sustainable and inclusive economic growth and decent work prospects of individuals. It is, therefore, a crucial tool in alleviating poverty, improving health and well-being and contributing to sustainable learning societies.

The International and Regional Support for the Implementation of the Targets

Prior to the United Nations adoption of the sustainable development goals, the Sixth International Conference on Adult Education (CONFINTEA VI), held in Belém in Brazil in 2009, issued the Belém Framework for Action which provided a set of recommendations for the development of adult learning and education. The framework for action stressed the broadness of the concept of adult learning and education as a "significant component of the lifelong learning process, which embraces a learning continuum ranging from formal to non-formal to informal learning" as well as an "imperative for the achievement of equity and inclusion, for alleviating poverty, and for building equitable, tolerant, sustainable and knowledge-based societies" (UNESCO, 2010).

It also laid emphasis on lifelong learning and education policies and practices as having "the advantage of returning to the concepts of adult education and training, concepts that have been openly devalued over the last decade in national and

transnational speeches and political orientations, in favour of economically valued qualifications, skills, and abilities" (Ireland, 2014).

The framework equally focused on implementation issues such as: policies, governance, and financing of adult learning and education, literacy as a key competence for lifelong learning, as well as quality and assessment of learning outcomes in adult learning and education.

Similarly, a regional expert meeting of Sub-Saharan Africa, which provided the justification for the United Nations SDG 4, was held in November 2012 in Praia, Cabo Verde. The theme of regional meeting was 'Increasing the participation of youth and adults in learning and education' while the objectives were to identify successful examples of adult education policy and practice and to share and learn from these achievements. Importantly, the meeting set out to develop effective regional action points for implementing the Belém Framework for Action.

The Cabo Verde meeting noted that countries needed to distinguish between mere declarations of political intention and actual political will, which is translated into action and reflected in funding and implementation mechanisms; the operational strategies and concrete policy recommendations, the mobilization of financial and material resources, as well as an inter-sectoral approach for implementing the Belém Framework for Action (UIL, 2013b).

In May 2015, ministers, heads and members of delegations, heads of agencies and officials of multilateral and bilateral organizations, and representatives of civil society, the teaching profession, youth and the private sector gathered in Incheon, Republic of Korea for the World Education Forum 2015 (WEF 2015). The outcome of the meeting has been universally tagged "The Incheon Declaration – Education 2030". The Declaration had a vision of equitable quality education and the promotion of lifelong learning opportunities for all in the context of the 'unfinished business' of the Millennium Development Goals and the Dakar 2000 declaration.

Clause 24 of the Declaration noted that all youth and adults, especially girls and women, should be provided with opportunities to achieve relevant and recognized functional literacy and numeracy proficiency levels and acquire skills for life and decent work. Importantly, the provision of adult learning, education, and training opportunities must be ensured. Cross-sector approaches traversing education, science and technology, family, employment, industrial and economic development, migration and integration, citizenship, social welfare and public finance policies should be used (World Education Forum, 2015; & UNESCO, 2015).

Bokova, (2015), in her remark on Statements of the Heads of the WEF 2015 Convening Agencies, contended thus:

This Declaration is a huge step forward. It reflects our determination to ensure that all children, young people and adults gain the knowledge and skills they need to live in dignity, to fulfill their potential and contribute to their societies as responsible global citizens. It encourages governments to provide learning opportunities through life, so that people can continue to grow and be on the right side of change. It affirms that education, a fundamental human right, is the key to global peace and sustainable development.

Another international expert meeting towards the preparation of the adoption of the SDG 4 was held in Muscat, Oman in 2014 (UNESCO, 2014). The agreement which emanated from the meeting has been universally termed the Muscat Agreement. It was an agreement reached among various stakeholders—ministers, heads of delegations, leading officials of multilateral and bilateral organizations, and some senior representatives of civil society and private sector organizations—in the global Education for All (EFA). The Muscat Agreement endorsed an educational goal proposed by previous consultations (High Level Panel, 2013; Open Working Group, 2014; and UNICEF-UNESCO, 2013). The review of all these documents revealed that the international community agreed upon an overarching goal for education which was to “ensure equitable and inclusive quality education and lifelong learning for all by 2030”.

The third Global Report on Adult Learning and Education (GRALE III) (UIL, 2016) also provided an excellent picture of the state of Adult Learning and Education in the world and the general developments and innovations that have occurred since the Belém Conference of 2009. The report noted that ALE is often neglected compared to formal schooling and post-schooling, and has to be even more energetic to gain funding, even though it can point to the benefits that ALE can bring to people's lives.

Challenges Confronting the Implementation of the Targets in Nigeria

Some of the noticeable and well-pronounced challenges confronting the implementation of the AE targets of SDG 4 in Nigeria are discussed below:

1. Misleading Perception of Adult Learning and Education as Literacy- Nigeria was mentioned in the Regional Report of CONFINTEA VI Mid-term review, 2017 as one of the several countries in Sub-Saharan Africa that restricts their definition of Adult Learning and Education to literacy (alphabétisation) or adult basic education. Other countries are: Burkina Faso, Senegal, South Africa, Togo and Uganda, Even what is termed 'lifelong education', most times, is clearly only literacy.

2. Data Desert on Adult Learning and Education- Aitchison, (2012) lamented that in Nigeria, and other Sub-Saharan Africa, there is a data desert in regard to research and data on ALE and even when research is done and data are collected, it is often unavailable for comparative purposes.

3. Absence of a clear cut policy of Adult education targets- It is universally known that policies are the courses or principles of action adopted or proposed or agreed to by a government about what to do to further the development of lifelong learning in particular situations. In the normal course of events, policies lead to strategies and plans and sometimes to legislation and new institutions, so that the policies may be implemented. In Nigeria, the full continuum of lifelong and lifewide learning remains somewhat underdeveloped. Illiteracy and low levels of education have together acted as barriers to continuing education and training.

4. Very low level of public resources to Adult Education. By international comparison, there is the lack of criteria and benchmarks for resource allocation to adult learning and education as well as the proportional reduction of adult learning and education allocations as share of GDP in total government budget in recent years.

5. Insufficient numbers of Adult and Non-Formal Education facilitators of required quality standards. Most of the adult and non-formal education facilitators are known to lack the basic knowledge of the principles of adult learning as well as that of skills of facilitating learning with adult learners. It is also known of the inability of the system to attract and retain capable people to facilitate teaching and learning in adult and non-formal education programmes in Nigeria.

6. Supply-driven skills development with low quality in the informal economy. In Nigeria, it is known that attention to apprenticeship and needs of the informal economy is often accorded little minimal relevance even though the sector accounts for over 80% of employment.

7. Scarcity of policy document on ALE in Nigeria. Very few policy documents on efforts of Nigeria on the implementation of SDG 4 are accessible through the internet. For example, the UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning website collection of these efforts is very thinly populated. See (<http://www.uil.unesco.org/lifelonglearning/lifelong-learning-policies-database/collectionlifelong-learning-policies-and>).

8. Non-existing Post –CONFINTEA VI Action Plan. There is lack of well documented post-CONFINTEA VI action plans that covered areas of policy, literacy, governance, financing, participation and quality in Nigeria.

Recommendations for the Effective Implementation of the Targets in Nigeria

The success of the Adult Education targets of the SDG 4 requires sound policies and planning as well as efficient implementation arrangements. Therefore, the following are recommended for the successful implementation of adult learning and education targets of SDG 4.

1. There is the urgent need for Nigeria to specify timelines for national implementation of the Adult Education targets of SDG 4. The timeline can be a 10 year plan of implementing the Adult Education targets of SDG 4. The plan will indicate the national objectives, goals and targets, strategies, as well as indicators. The 10 year plan will assist the country to contribute to the international discourse on SDG 4 and its adult learning and education targets. The National Commission for Mass Literacy, Adult and Non-Formal Education can be saddled with this responsibility. The action plan should be made accessible through the internet especially on UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning website collection <http://www.uil.unesco.org/lifelonglearning/lifelong-learning-policies-database/collectionlifelong-learning-policies-and>.
2. It must be noted that policies on Adult Learning and Education are informed by how it is defined in a country. The narrow and misleading definition of Adult Learning and Education in Nigeria as literacy education probably explains the neglect the sector has suffered in the country. There is, therefore, the urgent need for the education policies planners and other stakeholders in Nigeria to officially recognize the comprehensive guiding definition of ALE as provided in the 2015 UNESCO Recommendation on Adult Learning and Education and adopt it in subsequent description of what adult learning and education connotes rather than the restriction of the sector to literacy. The 2015 Recommendation defined:

Adult learning and education as a core component of lifelong learning. It comprises all forms of education and learning that aim to ensure that all adults participate in their societies and the world of work. It denotes the entire body of learning processes: formal, non-formal and informal, whereby those regarded as adults by the society in which they live, develop and enrich their capabilities for living and working, both in their own interests and those of their communities, organizations and societies (UNESCO and UIL, 2016, p. 6).

This comprehensive definition distinguishes three core areas of skills and learning: (a) to equip adults with literacy and basic skills, (b) to provide continuing training and professional development, and (c) to promote active citizenship through what is variously known as community, popular or liberal education.

3. There is also the urgent need for the education policies planners and other stakeholders in Nigeria to recognize the comprehensive guiding definition of literacy as provided in the 2015 UNESCO Recommendation on Adult Learning and Education (UNESCO and UIL, 2016, p. 6) and adopt it in subsequent description of what literacy connotes. The 2015 Recommendation on Adult Learning and Education defined:

Literacy is a key component of adult learning and education. It involves a continuum of learning and proficiency levels, which allows citizens to engage in lifelong learning and participate fully in community, workplace and wider society. It includes the ability to read and write, to identify, understand, interpret, create, communicate and compute, using printed and written materials, as well as the ability to solve problems in an increasingly technological and information-rich environment. Literacy is an essential means of building people's knowledge, skills and competencies to cope with the evolving challenges and complexities of life, culture, economy and society (UNESCO and UIL, 2016, p. 2).

4. There is also the urgent need for the country to recognise the following areas as key areas of action for the successful implementation of the adult learning and education targets of SDG4. These areas are: policy, governance, financing, participation, inclusion and equity, as well as quality.
5. A panel of Adult Education experts, with insight and interest in the interface of education and national development, should be inaugurated and brought into the process of crafting and elaborating an action plan for each of the key areas of action identified above. The action plan must be backed by law and used as the basis for budgets to adult learning and education agencies and parastatals.
6. There is also the need for Nigeria to have new policy covering the broad field of adult learning and education especially on advocacy and consultations with all relevant stakeholders and for concretizing responsibilities as well as for forming of coordination bodies.
7. There is the need for effective inter-ministerial, multi-sectoral cooperation, coordination, support networking, and partnership in adult learning and education in Nigeria. There is the need, as well, to strengthen agencies specialized in adult learning education with relevant and well-resourced staff.
8. There is also the need to map the situation of vulnerable youth and assess their needs and conduct needs assessments to ensure the development of contextually, culturally relevant, and useful programmes for them.
9. There is the need to develop alternative programmes for marginalized and disadvantaged groups and improve the training-delivery systems to meet the needs of these groups. It is also important to revise curricula to meet the specific needs of these marginalized groups and train curriculum designers to do so.

10. Finally, there is the need to develop knowledge-management systems for the collection, analysis, and dissemination of both qualitative and quantitative data and good-practice reports to inform policy development and practice.

Conclusion

From the discussion of this paper, there are three urgent and cardinal things that Nigeria needs to do in the implementation of the adult learning and education targets of the SDG 4. They are: (1) the adoption of the expanded and comprehensive definitions of literacy and adult learning and education as specified in the 2015 UNESCO recommendations as the basis for the design of the action plan; (2) the inauguration of an action plan towards the implementation of the targets; and (3) the inauguration of expert committee to draft the action plan along the areas of policy, governance, financing, participation, inclusion and equity, and quality. When these three suggestions are instituted, it is then that the country can be taken seriously by the global community to have taken a bold step towards the successful implementation of the adult learning and education targets of SDG 4 and contribute to the international discourse on the subject matter.

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