

## **Literacy initiatives of the International Development Partners in some resolute parts of Nigeria**

**By**

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### **Abstract**

*To eradicate non-literacy has been a major challenge which has been confronting Nigeria over the years. This has gone extensively to draw the attention of International Development Partners hence their intervention in most part of Nigeria especially in less educational advantaged areas like northern part, middle belt and marine areas. Many International Development Partners have contributed to various sectors but this study is set out to determine the type of initiatives used by them and find out the outcome of their contributions towards literacy provision in the areas.*

*A participatory research approach was used with the participants at the literacy programme centres forming the target population and descriptive survey design. This study revealed how youths that were hawkers, herdsmen, fishermen, touts, willingly registered for literacy acquisition after initial funding by the international development agency.*

*Some advantages derived include the improvement in education quality demonstrated by increased reading skill, many out-of-school were registered in the centres and less violence occurrence are recorded in the areas among others.*

*The study recommended among others, the needs to extent the gesture to the remaining less developed communities, awareness be created through public enlightenment to the intending learners and their parents so as to make literacy at the increase.*

## Introduction

Nigeria is one of the developing countries that has the highest number of non-literate population in the world. She occupies the 5<sup>th</sup> position after India, China, Bangladesh and Pakistan (UNESCO, 2008). Thus, Nigeria needs to be concerned about literacy. The word 'literacy' has different definitions: at the initial stage, literacy was just seen as ability to read and write, numerate, and being able to write ones name. Later on, it has extended to a larger field, like computer (ability to operate with the computer for processing data correctly). Others include political, environmental, visual and health, information and cultural literacy. In fact, it has gone to the level of science as well. According to UNESCO (2008), literacy may also mean a sense of mastery of a particular thing that someone is learning at a specific period. Adults use literacy in many ways and various ways like reading newspapers and business purposes. International Development Partners (IDPs) has gone to the level of 'literacy as practices'

In EFA, Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and National Economic Empowerment Development Strategy (NEEDS), the goal for the integrated schools is not different from the goal for all children that are out of school. The goal is that, by 2020, the percentage of out-of-school children (*almajiris*, girl child, out-of-school boys and many more) that receive basic education will increase to 95 percent (UNICEF, 2008). In spite of the fact that the government has made efforts at various levels, with the support of the international development partners, such as United Nations Educational Scientific Cultural Organisation (UNESCO), United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF), United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), World Bank to mention but a few, in order to exterminate non-literacy in the country; the challenges remain formidable with the youths even as we are in 2020, the goal is yet to be achieved. Only the contributions of two agencies shall be considered in this study; which are UNDP and UNESCO because they have similar initiatives on literacy and according to UNESCO, the organization can work hand- in- hand with

any non-governmental agency that has related programme that can assist the developing countries as well (UNESCO, 2018).

**Rational Behind the Intervention:** In this part of the country, the attitudes of most youths to learning is not encouraging due to their political and religion background as many believe to become an *almajiri* than going for basic literacy education. The *almajiris* are well known as knowledge seekers who are mostly children and youths that migrate from one town to another, for the purpose of seeking knowledge from the Muslim teachers (*mallams*) (Yusuf, 2010). They migrate without adequate provision for feeding, clothing, shelter and other essential human needs with the belief that mallams and well-wishers will provide their needs. The alarming rate of the growth of these youths per mallam and per centre makes it difficult for mallams to make adequate provision for them. Therefore, many of them resort to begging under unsecure conditions.

As Quranic education is generally accepted by the Muslims, large enrolment of learners may recorded in their various literacy centres, which may lead to congestion, health hazard, poor environmental conditions and insecurity. Quranic education promotes Islamic injunctions and moral values but, then, every child needs to be integrated into basic literacy education for the potential needs of the child, capacity building and preparation for better livelihood.

Now that Nigeria is democratically governed, the external donors have shown more interest in the educational development of Nigeria. In fact, the attention to non-formal education would be divided, as its foundation is from two prominent books, which were published in the 1960s and the 1970s. They are the world educational crisis, 1968 and attacking rural poverty; 1974. This may be one of the reasons for international community develop interest in developing nations to help in improving their standard in all areas especially education. This will enable the young ones to embrace literacy with their religion.

In some riverine areas, some children are exposed to parents' occupation too early in life to think of acquiring basic education. Such occupation like fishing, farming, hunting to mention but a few are being chosen by these children when they are too young to identify their needs or to discover themselves. There are lot of reasons why the literacy programme is supported by these bodies which include the fact that the programme if left in the hands of the indigenes, will hardly record any success due to political, religion and social background of the areas concern.

**Initiatives:** The IDPs has made efforts to increase awareness among all stakeholders on the goals and objectives of integration, as this will go a long way in attracting their support (FME Baseline, 2004). This explains why literacy could not be seen as something that would drift their children away from religion.

Attempts have also been made to advocate increased establishment of vocational centres for learners in integrated Quranic centres. This will provide employment for youths who would have been engaged as cheap labourers.

Among other things the IDPs incorporated is literacy, numeracy, as well as other essential life skills, so as to help the learner, not only for his benefit alone, but also for the benefit of the entire society.

Another development is the increase in access to basic and vocational education for children in their Quranic schools, so as not to be limited to Quranic induction alone, but for extension to a broader knowledge. It is also to ensure that children attending integrated Quranic schools acquire life/livelihood skills to empower them for the future. Such literacy helps to sensitise the community members about the benefit of integration, which will create awareness on the part of the learners and the community.

In addition, the objectives of these agencies include the provision of improved facilities, instructional materials, water and toilets, and many more, in order to promote quality education and encourage them to learn

in their various centres which has been achieved in some of the literacy centres.

Also, one of the goals is to develop Quranic schools' technical capacity and pedagogical skill, to create a child-friendly school environment that will enhance participation and improve learning outcomes. Another of this drive is to promote child-friendly school (CFS) principle, as minimum benchmarks for effective schools linked to community empowerment and development and to promote synergy between education, community empowerment and poverty alleviation programme (UNICEF 2008; George & Adedokun M.O., 2010).

**Challenges:** Nigeria has been facing a lot of challenges most especially in the area of literacy. As earlier stated, many initiatives has been employed in these areas in order to eradicate non-literacy which include, nomadic education/mobile classroom for the vulnerable citizens of Nigeria but which they still ignore. Many parents still register their wards in non-integrated school, in spite of the fact that the awareness was created by the international agencies representatives in the areas.

Their reason being the fear for their wards being converted to another religion different from their parents' belief.

Pupils from non-integrated Quranic schools do not often have the broad opportunities to improve their lives, families or societies, since such schools do not provide the basic elements of formal education and vocational skills. Basic education is one of the best investments for human, social and economic development (National Benchmark, 2008).

Language barrier is another challenge which drift many indigenes away from the programme because they do not understand the language spoken by the officials and vice versa and to acquire interpreters becomes difficult. UNDP does not run a continuous programme in some of the areas in study because it will appear for some time but later for many years, it may not surface again though it's impact is always felt whenever is available for assistance (ICF on EFA, 2000).

Progress has been slowed down in some part of the region due to high level of poverty, armed conflict, insecurity, disparities between rural and urban areas and many others (UNDP, 2018).

**Achievements:** Before the advent of this agency, basic literacy was barely above 30%, according to the Ministry of Education in Kogi State. Basic literacy introduced the aspect of literacy that teaches the 3Rs" Reading, Arithmetic and Writing. A substantial percentage of people for example were non-literate in Kogi State at the time. Although some efforts were made to eradicate it by the Federal Government, it was ineffective.

The agencies created and sponsored thirty centres in all the sixteen local government areas in the state (*NFE Annual Report, 1997*). As at the time this programme was established, according to the Mass Literacy Background of 1997, the literacy level was not up to 50%. In order to reduce non-literacy level in the state, the agency financed the centres, as it also sponsored nine (9) senior officers of the agency for a month training programme in administration, and management of adult literacy programme.

Training seminars were also organised for adult education instructors in the area of capacity building. Under monitoring, eight (8) motorcycles were provided for the supervisors. Before the advent of the intervention of these international agencies, the major types of literacy were the basic and the post literacy types, but when the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) came to Kwara State as well, it introduced a new programme of literacy entirely different from the previous ones, that is, literacy by radio.

In addition, the agencies make effort to incorporate 'Benchmark' curriculum with the Quranic system, and so makes use of the *mallams* to teach Koranic studies with the 3R's, thereby making the Muslim children have access to literacy as well. However, owing to religious difference between the organisations and most of the communities, many people are yet to secure literacy, thinking that their children can be easily lured to a

different religion. The agency covers four 4 local government areas, namely: Kogi East, Igala, Yoruba Okun and Ebira.

**Recommendations:** The following suggestions can assist the educational stakeholders both within and outside Nigeria to reach the less educational advantaged people in their domains.

- Federal Government of Nigeria along with other stakeholders should be committed to ensuring that pupils acquire basic education, in order to make EFA a reality, regardless of the religious background of any individual. Such programme should not be left alone in the hand of the international agencies who has come to assist the citizen of our noble country.

-In order to meet its declaration for the achievement of education for all by the year 2020, which is one of the targets expected of member countries, it is paramount that the reduction of the non-literacy rate in the developing nations should be a concern of everybody (Serbessa, 2010). World bodies now assist in mass literacy programmes because the international community is in mass literacy, especially in developing countries.

-In order to achieve the expected result from such programme in all these disadvantaged areas, all the stakeholders, like government, parents, religious leaders, traditional rulers and community leaders, need to support the integration of basic education into Quranic schools. Some tangible goals have been set up to actualise this in order to mobilise all stakeholders to accept the integration of basic education into Quranic school system.

-Children should be allowed to choose their career themselves. This would only be possible when they are being exposed to early education and should be left there until they are grown up to discover themselves, though the parents should always guide them not to force them.

**Conclusion:** In spite of the fact that the International Development Organisations has applied laudable initiatives in order to alleviate non-literacy in these areas under study, many Nigerians still fail to embrace the programme due to ignorance, religion and political reasons. However,

many registered for the programme and this brought about an increase to the level of literacy in those states. The organization has helped in community development most especially in disadvantaged communities where the people are marginalized.

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