



## Relevance of environmental adult education to the lives of rural communities in Nigeria

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### Abstract

The need for environmental education is becoming more advocated and of course, it has become an essential demand of the present day educational system in Nigeria. This is because of the challenges of human environment which are mostly caused by environmental abusers that result to degradation and pollution. Peoples' attitude to the environment and their education should be explored so that they can change their outlook and action towards protection and management of their environment. This paper, therefore, deals with the concepts of environment, environmental education, environmental adult education, and rural communities. It equally explored objectives of environmental adult education and its relevance to the lives of rural communities in Nigeria and came up with conclusion and recommendations.

**Keywords:** environment, environmental education, environmental adult education, rural communities

### Introduction

Human beings are usually influenced and confronted daily by environmental challenges in different ways. One of the major elements of environmental influences on the individual is the availability of resources which determines the type of life-style an individual lives, the tools he uses for operations and limit of his operations both in time and space. The various activities of individuals in their environment in the quest for survival have brought tremendous impact on the environment. According to Obasi (2011) [21], the activities of individuals range from participation in farming, indiscriminate destruction of forest and bush burning, the use of dangerous chemicals in fishing and fertilizer in farming. All these human activities have brought destruction to the environment which in turn affects human beings negatively and which can be addressed through Environmental Adult Education (EAE)

Environmental Adult Education according to Ezebube (2010) [10] is a process of developing in the adult, certain attitudes; skills and knowledge that will enable them live successfully within their environment. The global and local concern about growing environmental degradation has called for the need to help people transform their attitudes and practices. Consequently, environmental adult education has been recognized as one of the important tools for conserving the environment through cultivation of knowledge, skills, values and positive attitudes towards the environment among the people (Ephraim, 2016) [9]. This, therefore, calls for the relevance of environmental adult education which this paper sought to determine.

### Conceptual Clarifications

#### Environment

The word environment is derived from a French word "environner" meaning to enclose or surround. Hence, environment is, thus, defined as the circumstances or condition that surrounds an organism or group of organisms or

complex socio-cultural condition that affects an individual or community (Betiang, 2008) [6]. This includes the physical, chemical, biological, psychological, sociological or technological and cultural elements and everything that makes up the context in which an individual lives.

The Federal Environment Protection Agency (FEPA) Act of Nigeria (1991) [11] defines environment to include water, air, land, and all plants and human beings or animals living therein and their inter-relationship which exists among these or any of them. In the view of Franca (2001) [12], environment broadly refers to all conditions surrounding an individual which are extrinsic to the individual, plant or animal itself. In other words, environment is defined as the conditions that surround one or group of individuals or organisms that affect them. It includes everything that constitutes the area one lives that influences his/her life.

#### Environmental Education

Environmental education is not a new concept. Environmental education was first recognized as a sure means for addressing world-wide environmental issues as it documented 7 proclamations and 26 principles to guide and inspire individuals in the conservation and preservation of the environment (Mbalisi, 2010). Environmental Education as outlined by Mbalisi & Offor (2012) is seen as education from the environment, education about the environment and education for the environment. Education from the environment is seen as the experiences acquire from the environment, its composition and utility to man and education for the environment relates to mans commitment in the protection and conservation of the environment. Environmental education is a field of study which seeks to improve among citizens, not just awareness and understanding of the environment, but mans relationship to it and responsible actions necessary to ensure its survival while improving the quality of life (Anijah-Obi, 2002).

Environmental Education according to Mama (2007) is a process through which individuals and communities are to be educated of their environment and their interaction of its biological, chemical, physical and socio-cultural components and acquire the knowledge, values, skills, experiences that will enable them act individually and collectively so as to solve the present and future problems of the environment. Peter (1995) sees environmental education as the process of educating citizens about matters and issues that affect the environment-homes, villages, cities, farmlands, water supplies, forest and weather in order to improve environmental awareness and skill and engender a change of attitude towards environment, and thereby arouse concern about the physical problems around man. Environmental education as defined by various scholars is seen as a form of formal, informal and non-formal education programmes that are inter-disciplinary and multi-disciplinary in approach which influences the attitude of people toward sustainable use of resources of the environment

### **Environmental Adult Education**

This is a more holistic and lifelong education programme that is learner-centered and also engages learners as active participants in the learning process. Environmental education as defined by Summer (2003) is seen as a hybrid outgrowth of environmental movement and adult education, combining an ecological orientation with a learning paradigm to provide a vigorous approach to environmental concerns. Environmental adult education refers to the various efforts adopted in teaching environmental issues and how individuals can change their attitude and behaviour to ensure environmental sustainability (adulthoodeducation.wikibook.us).

In line with this definition, Eheazu (2014:19) sees environmental adult education as a unique and new field of study and practice which combines the principles and practice of environmental education with those of adult education to provide a learning experience that inculcate in the adult learners positive knowledge, attitude and skill to enable them interact harmoniously with the environmental resources as they engage in their daily socio-economic activities.

### **Rural Communities**

Rural communities can be seen from different approaches by different authors. Rural communities can be seen as communities that are under developed and which their major occupation is agriculture as a means of living. In rural communities, there are many forests and few houses where people live and interact closely with families and relations. In the same vein, Umar (2018) defined rural community as an area which is under developed and not civilized, based on geographical conditions. The author went further to list the characteristics of rural community as:

1. Rural community is sparsely populated.
2. There is homogeneity in its profession ie. Agriculture.
3. There is homogeneity in dress, language and customs.
4. Rural areas have low means of communication.
5. Rural areas have slow rate of change because of lack of education and urban technology.
6. The areas have got simple culture, strong relationship and interactions of the people, etc.

In addition, Globalchange.gov. (2018) defined rural community as highly dependent upon natural resources that are affected by climatic change. These communities also face particular obstacles in responding to climatic change that increase their responsibility to its impacts.

### **Objectives of Environmental Adult Education**

The ultimate goal of environmental adult education is to produce environmentally literate individuals who are able to protect, manage and tackle environmental degradation. Other objectives as outlined by other authors are as follow:

The three broad goals for environmental adult education according to Nnamuma (2012: 35) include:

- a. To foster clear awareness of, and concern about, economic, social, political and ecological interdependence in urban and rural areas;
- b. To provide every person with opportunities to acquire knowledge, values, attitudes, commitment and skills needed to protect and improve the environment.
- c. To create new patterns of behavior of individuals, groups and society as a whole towards the environment.

More so, the guidelines for effective environmental adult education programmes that would lead to behavioural changes on the part of the learners as defined by the Belgrade Charter of 1975 and the 1977 Tbilisi Declaration according to Hungerford and Volk (1990) are:

- a. **Awareness:** Environmental adult education should create awareness and sensitively among individuals and social groups about the environment and its associated problems. This knowledge will make individuals appreciate the beauty and usefulness of the environmental resources.
- b. **Knowledge:** It should provide individuals and social groups with the basic understanding of how the environment functions, how people interact with and depend on the environment, and how to solve environmental problems.
- c. **Attitude:** Environmental adult education should influence individuals and social groups to acquire social values, ethics and strong feeling of care for the environment and the personal zeal and commitment to actively participate in environmental conservation.
- d. **Skills:** It should make individuals and social groups acquire basic skills and ability for identifying and solving environmental problem.
- e. **Participation:** Environmental adult education should provide individuals and social group with the opportunity to actively participate at all levels in working towards the resolution and restoration of environmental problems.

Eheazu (2013) identified the objectives of EAE to include:-

- a. To inculcate in adults the knowledge and understanding of their environment and the natural and man-made factors that contribute to its deterioration.
- b. To help the adult population to identify the socio-cultural, political, physical, psychological, chemical, biological and other element that pose dangers to their day-to-day living.
- c. To develop appropriate curricula for the environmental education of adults which will reflect the circumstances and desirable actions for effective environmental

- management and harmonious relationship with their environment?
- d. To plan appropriate action programmes for mobilization of adults towards improvement of environmental quality and personal environmental aesthetic value.
  - e. To promote the practice of sustainable development among adults through non-formal environmental education programmes in relevant field of adult socio-economic endeavours.
  - f. To help adult citizens to acquire knowledge and skills useful for their understanding and avoidance of environmental abuses.
  - g. To help adults to acquire basic conceptual knowledge of causes and effects of environmental challenges and their solutions.

In a similar vein, Oduro-mensah (2005) outlined the objectives of environmental adult education as follows;

- a. To develop knowledge and understanding of the environment, the forces that contribute to its deterioration and how environment quality could be improved.
- b. To identify specific chemical, biological, physical, psychological and socio-cultural characteristics of the environment that constitutes potential hazards to life and health.
- c. To develop skills for solving environmental problems and improving environmental quality.
- d. To develop appropriate attitudes and sense of responsibility that will enable man live harmoniously with his environment.
- e. To develop appropriate curricula for EAE and train personnel for the management of natural resources.
- f. To develop aesthetic values that will encourage a culture of environmental beautification and maintenance.
- g. To plan appropriate action programmes and mobilize citizens to actively participate in the protection and restoration of the quality of our environment.
- h. To promote among adults the practice of sustainable development to ensure a continuity of resource base.

Furthermore, the objectives of environmental adult education as suggested by Betiang (2008) <sup>[6]</sup> include:

- a. To develop in adults the skills for solving environmental problems.
- b. To help adults implement appropriate curriculum for environmental adult education.
- c. To develop aesthetic values that will encourage adults appreciate culture of beautification of their environment.
- d. To develop appropriate action programmes to mobilize adults in the protection and restoration of the quality of the environment.

Environmental adult education is about development of skills, knowledge, ability and potentials, including professional skills for adults to manage their environment effectively. Based on this, the objectives of environmental adult education as identified by Betiang (2008) <sup>[6]</sup> can only be actualized when adults are able to identify those characteristics that constitute environmental hazard for harmonious cohabitation of human beings.. Furthermore, environmental adult education has the

objective of developing in adults the skills for solving environmental problems and improvement of the quality of the environment. Adult acquisition of these skills or knowledge according to Kofi (2008) is targeted at immediate application in order to provide solution to the present environmental challenges in our society. Unless these skills are acquired, implementation of the objectives of EAE cannot be actualized.

### **Relevance of Environmental Adult Education to the lives of rural communities**

The relevance of environmental adult education is discussed under the following sub-headings:

#### **Adult Literacy Programme**

Literacy involves educational activities geared towards teaching adults literacy using the 3Rs which are reading, writing and arithmetic. Environmental literacy involves the learning ability of increasing individuals with knowledge of the environment; as well as skills on how to manage environmental problems. Environmental literacy also requires more than just knowledge about an environmental issue. It also includes a person's feeling, motivations, their skills for taking action and what they actually do. All these components are what makes a person environmental literate. The environmental literary programmes will focus on the daily lives of the rural populace and the resources they depend on, as this will increase the immediate relevance and appreciation of the new knowledge to the local situation.

An illiterate individual cannot save the environment. Anijah-obi (2002) observe that, "for adequate and effective management of environmental resources, mass literacy campaign is necessary at the rural areas of Nigeria in order to educate the illiterate people who cannot understand as well as appreciate the need for environmental conservation and protection". An environmentally literate person is any individual who is determined to make positive decisions toward the environment and is also willing to act on these decisions to improve the well being of the society and the environment at large. To achieve the ultimate goal of environmental adult education, it becomes pertinent to develop an environmentally literate adult.

The rural communities in Nigeria urgently need sustainable environmental literacy to be able to understand the causes and consequences of forest degradation as it is still lacking in Nigeria when compared to other developed nations. Environmental literacy thus plays an important role in raising the needed environmental consciousness.

#### **Environmental Awareness Education Programme**

With the increase in forest degradation and other environmental problems, there is need to acquaint the farmers and other individuals with the knowledge and understanding of the total environment, man-made and natural environmental problems, their causes and consequences as it affects man and his environment. Environmental awareness as explained by Amika (2009) will enlighten the farmers on how certain farming activities can contribute to forest degradation. One of the ways of creating the awareness can be through public enlightenment campaigns around the community on the need

to protect the environmental resources for our unborn generations.

Awareness education can be achieved through the mass media like radio, television, documentaries and jingles, attractive bill board messages to create awareness about forest conservation. Short church addresses in the local dialect of the host communities to create awareness as this would agitate the minds of the farmers to protect the forest resources (Eheazu 2014). Environmental Adult Education is a permanent process in which individuals gain awareness of their environment and acquire the knowledge, values, skills, experience and also the determination which will enable them act individually and collectively to solve present and future environmental problems as well as to meet their needs without compromising those of future generations (UNESCO, 1999).

In the same vein, Ezebube (2010) <sup>[10]</sup> noted that Environmental adult education could be regarded as education for the survival of man in his environment and for his environment as well. It is that education which develops a critical awareness and understanding of the environment on the part of adult individuals (whose activities and undertakings contribute to environmental degradation), empower them with the desirable and appreciable skills, knowledge, ideas, attributes and behaviors to enable them interact freely and relate successfully with their environment, thus sustaining and living in harmony with the external forces and elements of nature for a better tomorrow.

The national's environmental situation is very challenging especially as regards to deforestation and gully erosion amongst others. Ezebube (2010) <sup>[10]</sup> maintained that when the people are sensitized and have better understanding about their environment, they will interact sustainably with the environment and its resources and this will help in reducing poverty among them. Agenda 21 of the earth summit in the year 2000 emphasized on education as very significant in the movement of environmental sustainability, especially environmental education. It emphasizes that education starts from where the people are to the environment with the people providing the option to the solution to their local problems. This is exactly what environmental adult education intends to do for the people because the various activities of man in his quest for survival have impacted on the natural environment tremendously.

### **Environmental Conservation Education Programme**

Conservation education is seen as the process of positively influencing peoples' knowledge; attitude and behaviour by making them become aware of the environmental resources, examine the anthropogenic threats towards the environment and encourage the conservation of those resources for the unborn generation. Conservation education helps individual to realize how natural resources and ecosystems affect each other and how resources can be used wisely.

The need for conservation education for farmers is to educate them on sustainable agricultural practices that would yield sustainable use of the forest resources. Through conservation education, the farmers will develop the critical thinking skills, inquiry, decision making and active problem solving skill they need to understand the complexities of ecological problems (Atte, 2010). For instance, since forest resources (like trees)

cannot be regenerated, there is need for proper conservation of forest trees through selective cutting, afforestation and reforestation methods (Anijah-Obi, 2002). Conservation education would help to encourage the needed responsible environmental behavior by developing individuals' skill to act intentionally in protecting and conserving the environmental resources.

### **Vocational Education Programmes**

Vocational education is seen as an adult education Programme geared towards developing the skills of the individuals for social, economic and occupational competence. According to Hassan and Oyebamiji as cited in Adekola and Mbalisi (2015:49) "vocational education is provided for clientele in order for them to be conversant with the theory and practice of vacation to enable them be in position to offer technical expertise, skills and knowledge to those who are in need of it". Vocational Education programmes can be organized for rural dwellers that are predominantly farmers and artisans who depend on the forest resources for their livelihood. This will act as an alternative method of conserving the forest resources. Adekola and Mbalisi (2015:50) <sup>[1]</sup> also noted that vocational education programmes are geared towards the conservation and preservation of environmental resources.

Environmental adult education adopts the participatory method of teaching adults as it gives learners the opportunity to make connections between social issues and environmental problems as it affects them in an integrated way. The adult educator adopts the participatory method of teaching to instill the adult with basic knowledge of environmental problems and their causes, improve their skills to enable them engage in social activism to curb the problems, develop an attitude of respect and connection to the environmental resources and instill a desire to change certain socio-economic practices in order to protect the environment.

Environmental adult education covers a broad spectrum of environmental issues like physical development, urban planning, rural development, public health, housing, population dynamics, as well as recreation and tourism planning (Anil & Arnab 2014; Ibimilua & Ibimilua, 2013) <sup>[4, 15]</sup>. They went further and stated that environmental adult education enables the citizens obtain knowledge on the management of their environments and also make informed recommendations about individuals and societal behaviours that affect the environment. Environmental adult education propels people to take rational decisions about the protection and preservation of the environment. It inculcates in the people the knowledge to manage their environment, care for the environment so that the environment can take care of the people in returns (Anil & Arnab, 2014) <sup>[4]</sup>.

Finally, Santra (2011) <sup>[24]</sup> in his work stated that environmental adult education leads to positive changes in attitudes, commitments and civil actions, ethical values and responsibilities with respect to the protection and improvement of the environment with due consideration given to future generation. In respect to the above claim, the researchers viewed environmental adult education as the foundation duty of inculcating these values on both old and new citizens of the country on the required knowledge for effective utilization of the natural resources and other societal

value to ensure healthy environment and sustainable development in the country. To this end, environmental adult education is targeted at developing informed citizens that will understand environmental issues / problems facing their communities and educate them on the strategies for its management, thereby providing solution towards their environment.

### Conclusion

From the foregoing, it is evident that environmental adult education plays a significant role in environmental protection and management in Nigeria rural communities. It equips the adult with the skills and knowledge to confront the environmental challenges. Through environmental adult education, the harmful individuals' activities on the environment would be reduced, including the indiscriminate dumping of waste which have all contributed to the degradation of the environment, depletion of wildlife and other aspects of the entire ecosystem. It is expected that if the objective of EAE are implemented, the issue of environmental degradation would be over and the condition of living of the people would be improved.

### Recommendations

The following recommendations are proffered:

1. There is the need for government to intensify effort in carrying out campaign against indiscriminate use of the environment.
2. The government in conjunction with the stakeholders in the communities should organize seminars and workshops where the resource persons should discuss the relevance of environmental protection and management.
3. The government should equally pass law against the environmental abusers and they be punished accordingly.

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