



The Republic of Uganda

THE IMPACT OF NON-FORMAL EDUCATION IN THE ALLEVIATION OF POVERTY IN UGANDA

BY

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Abstract

This paper explores the role of nonformal education in the eradication of poverty in Uganda. The Government of Uganda and donors expect that their investments will provide permanent skills to illustrate and help alleviate poverty through reading of usable information. Poverty is one of the stumbling blocks to Uganda's economic growth and prosperity. The causes are varied, ranging from political, social, economic and environmental. Nonformal education is often referred to as a movement, dedicated to making things better, as well as providing professional expertise in teaching and in helping adults and children who did not get opportunity to attend to formal education to learn. There is a common commitment to making non-formal education work for social change. The prioritization of nonformal education by Uganda Government is to empower communities in the fight to alleviating poverty and achieve one of the MDGs of poverty eradication by 2015.

1.1. Background

Over the last few decades, a large number of countries have embarked upon the organisation of nationwide literacy programmes. Although the rationale behind these programmes varies from one country to another, the presumption is that efforts to increase the literacy levels of adults will have positive consequences for the learners, for their communities, and eventually for the nation as a whole. No country has succeeded if it has not educated its people. Not only is education important in reducing poverty, it is also a key to wealth creation. A commitment to poverty eradication is one of the most important plans of Uganda Government for Social Development under the prosperity for all programme, where abject poverty is considered a severe injustice and an abuse of human rights. Its action programme proposes to support livelihood systems and survival skills to help poor people to combat poverty.

The Eradication of Poverty confirms that nonformal education is central to the fight against poverty. This is the level of education through which most poor children pass and within which their achievements should assist them to break the cycle of poverty. In fact, education is the social institution that reaches the largest segment of the population with the goal of guiding it through a systematic learning process.

1.2. Nonformal education in Uganda (FAL)

Uganda's education system is both formal and nonformal. The government of Uganda has the conviction that illiteracy and inadequate basic education deprive the people of the opportunity to realise the potential and effectively participate in decisionmaking and other development activities¹. Non-formal education in Uganda dates back to the coming of Arab traders, European explorers, Missionaries and colonial officials in the late nineteenth century. In particular, the missionaries taught their new adult converts and lay brothers various skills including blacksmith work, carpentry, shoe-making, moulding tiles, brick-making, masonry, book binding, printing, binding etc. this was in addition to literacy, numeracy and agriculture.

Nonformal education in Uganda is viewed as all learning processes, activities or programs, intended to meet the needs of various individuals considered by society as adults, including out of school youths forced by circumstances to play the roles normally played by adults. The uses to which nonformal education is put into use in Uganda are similarly various: from skill training within an economic agenda to support job-getting or income generation and/or to do with the better use of human capital, to an overtly radical political Government is then committed to providing nonformal education with specific references to adult literacy with the following objectives:

- Attainment of permanent and functional literacy and numeracy;
- Acquisition of functional skills relevant to life in the community;
- Development of national awareness of individuals by building social, political and civic competencies, including instructions on national and international issues;
- Promotion of lifelong learning in the community in order to update professional competencies required by the world of work;
- Basic of fundamental education so as to make good the deficiencies many people experience because of curtailed education or non-existent period of formal schooling;
- Vocational and technical education necessary for the acquisition of certain specific skills

¹ Anthon okech e'tal (2001:5-11) Adult Literacy Programmes in Uganda, World Bank Publishers, Library of cataloging-in production

needed for the improvement of job performance;

In order to achieve these objectives, the Uganda Government in 1992 started nonformal (FAL) education programme with a pilot project in eight districts using the functional adult literacy approach. The functional adult literacy (FAL) approach since then has taken root and expanded to the entire nation and has yielded impressive results. For instance, adult learners from FAL classes are using their literacy numeracy skills to improve on income-generating activities. The FAL programme has become one of the major tools for the modernisation of agriculture and poverty eradication.

Education has been identified as a key component of human capital quality that is essential for higher incomes and sustainable economic development. Education is also an important ingredient in poverty eradication². The Poverty Eradication Action Plan, Uganda's planning framework, recognizes the important role education plays in strengthening civil institutions, building a democratic society, empowering women and protecting the environment. Nonformal education is therefore seen as supplement in Uganda's education progress.

1.3. Policy framework

There are number of policies, plans and strategies that are of relevance to the different aspects of formal and nonformal education. This section makes an effort to analyze these policies. For instance, Vision 2025 contains Uganda's long term development objectives and has as one of its visions "an enlightened, well informed and prosperous society" with an overriding goal of "increasing people's access to information and participation in self, community and national development.

The Poverty Eradication Action Plan (PEAP 2004) also known as The Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper is Uganda's guiding planning framework, which guides public action and interventions to eradicate poverty. Education is among the six sectors identified in the PEAP as

² National Report On the Development and State of the Art of Adult Learning and Education (ALE) in Uganda (2008:8)

priority areas that can make the strongest contribution to the PEAP's core challenge of accelerating pro-poor growth and development. As such, the share of the (formal) education sector as a proportion of the total national budget has increased over the medium term and is projected to increase over the long term.

In the PEAP, Government acknowledges illiteracy among the poorest people; it also acknowledges the need to provide the kind of education that would help to eradicate their poverty. The PEAP further states that: a well educated population is both a necessary condition for development and one of the central objectives of development. This is the reason the government has massively invested in the expansion of formal and nonformal education.

Adult learning is therefore one of the key education programs identified as crucial for increasing the ability of the poor to raise their incomes and enhance the quality of life of the poor. The PEAP recognizes the fruits of adult learning in the following statement:

“Improvement in Education and Functional Literacy has borne fruit in literacy rates. While there was no observable change by the expiry of the 1st PEAP in 2000, the national average literacy level rose from 65% in 1999/00 to 70% in 2002/03, mainly because of improvement in rural areas”. “These developments are; the shared achievement of the Education and Social Development sectors through Universal Primary Education (UPE) and Functional adult Literacy (FAL).” pp. 26³.

The Government White Paper on Education Policy Review Commission (1992:176)⁴ presented a more comprehensive and more elaborate Government policy on adult education and learning. It recognizes the importance of nonformal and adult education, specifying its objectives, implementation structures and coordination mechanisms. The white paper states thus:

“Uganda has now decided to regard nonformal education as extremely important...”

³ The Uganda's Poverty Eradication Action Plan (PEAP) 2000:26

⁴ The Government White paper on Education Review Commission (1992:176)

The White Paper spells out the objectives and strategies for the various components of nonformal education as identified below:

- Eradication of illiteracy;
- Post literacy and permanent functional literacy geared towards productivity for both rural and urban development;
- Livelihood skills or apprenticeship education for youth, especially primary school leavers;
- Continuing education for Uganda Certificate of Education (UCE) and Uganda Advanced Certificate of Education (UACE) certificate holders as well as working people who wish to better their professional and academic qualifications;
- Healthcare, population and family education programs;
- Basic education for community development;
- Training in improved agricultural, farming and other production practices;
- Civil participation programs; and
- Education for environment protection and development

The Government White paper recognized a number of organizations that would be involved in the implementation of adult education programmes including Government institutions, NGOs/CBOs, FBOs, business enterprises etc. It further proposed an institutional structure to coordinate the activities of the various actors. The proposed structure was as follows:

- National Council for Non-Formal and Adult Education, a semi autonomous body for the coordination, curriculum formulation, evaluation, resource mobilization, program formulation, training and provision of special programs for women;
- Directorate of non formal and adult education; and
- District committees for non-formal and adult education.

1.4. Expansion of Non-formal Education

Despite the success of Universal Primary Education (UPE), some children still do not have access to education for various social, economic and environmental reasons. These include over age children, children in pastoral areas and fishing villages and those in labour who are too old to

return to school. These are provided for in Non-formal setting. For example, programmes like Complementary Opportunity for Primary Education (COPE), Basic Education for the Urban Poor Areas (BEUPA), Alternative Basic Education for Karamoja (ABEK), and Child Centred Alternative Non-formal Community Based Education (CHANCE).

Post primary school levels modular courses are being prepared which are more flexible and relevant. In the case of those who cannot access Non-formal education, especially the youth and young adults, the Functional Adult Literacy (FAL) programme addresses their learning needs, covering literacy, numeracy and life skills. The FAL programme now covers the whole country and it is implemented by the Gender and Community Development Sector. Government is doing all these to ensure people come out of poverty and live decent peaceful lives. Hence, non-formal education is playing a very great role in Uganda Government's effort in alleviating poverty as per the MDGs prerequisite of alleviating poverty and hunger by 2015.

1.5. Poverty in Uganda

Some of the major factors behind the poverty in Uganda are low income and low purchasing power of the people. Political and ideological factors should also be considered behind the emergence of poverty in Uganda. The attributes of poverty can be assorted on the basis of geography, urban or rural groups, vulnerable groups and minorities. Government of Uganda designed some plans for the welfare of disadvantaged groups, such as orphans, slum dwellers, war widows and laid-off civil servants.

Government is also organizing some family planning campaign programmes to reduce the population growth and empower women in Uganda. The aim of poverty reduction in Uganda through investment in education raises issues of financing and the affordability of education for poor. That is why non-formal education is given priority in Uganda's effort to fight poverty. As for poverty, it is taken for granted that making things better is desirable and proper. Instead of, as once was the case, accepting that 'the poor are always with us' there is a general belief that poverty can and should at least be reduced if not eventually done away with.

2.0. Non-formal Education and Poverty eradication in Uganda

The Rural Development Strategy

In 2005, Government of Uganda formulated a far-reaching Rural Development Strategy. The aim is to boost agricultural production and alleviate poverty. Thus, Nonformal education was seen as a complementary in the implementation of the programme. The strategy is based on the following key components:

- The Plan for Modernization of Agriculture based on the premise that over 80% of the population depend on agriculture for their livelihood. Improvement in agriculture sector and most especially in agricultural production and productivity is a priority of Uganda Government. PMA interventions target subsistence farmers, who constitute the majority of the poor people. PMA seeks to transform agriculture production for better productivity and reorient subsistence farmers towards producing for market. The main goal of the PMA is:

“Poverty eradication through agriculture transformation and sustainable natural resource based livelihoods”

Non-formal education is therefore playing a great role to achieve PMA programme in Uganda, hence, alleviation of poverty among the poor

- Human development to address the quality of education and most specifically the dropout rates, reducing mortality and increasing people’s control over the size of their families. Nonformal education targets those who have not joined the formal school structures plus the drop outs among other beneficiaries. Nonformal education policy and strategies enable government to take care of those who drop out of school by imparting in them skills through the non formal system of education. It has also been seen in practice to reduce dropout rates as the parents come to appreciate the importance of education and also start to play an important and more active role in the education of their children, especially the girl child.
- Health education, a component of nonformal education is to address the issues of high mortality and population growth through education and sensitization on personal hygiene, sanitation, disease prevention and treatment, better nutrition, reproductive health and safe motherhood, plus HIV/AIDs education. Hence, alleviation of poverty.

- Restoring peace, dealing with the consequences of conflict, and improving regional equity. Due to the conflict and insecurity, many children dropped out of schools mainly due to lack of educational necessities, school facilities and general insecurity. One of the key objectives of the nonformal education policy is to target marginalized groups, out of school youths etc. These include children, the adults who have missed education opportunities, the former rebels and the abducted children, will be targeted for adult education activities.
- Furthermore, mobilization of communities is very crucial for resettlement, conflict resolution and reconciliation. Moreover livelihood and self sufficiency skills are to be imparted to the people, most of whom have been dependent on hand outs and relief for the past two decades.
- Enhancing rural micro finance services provision. The strengthening of financial institutions to rural areas is the priority of NRM Government under the prosperity for all programme. The financial institutions are situated in urban areas where the rural people do not have access to. This was due to ignorance and lack of knowledge loan services in those institutions. The opening of microfinance services in every Sub-county to enable rural farmers to access financial services calls for the need for nonformal education. This is because most of the members of those microfinance institutions are illiterate.
- Establishment of a community information system to report regularly on the progress of the rural poor. The planning process in local governments is bottom-up, where the most affected i.e. the poor come with development priorities in order to relieve them of poverty that has persisted in the country for long due varied reasons. In order to make appropriate choices, the local governments under the Ministry of Gender Labour and Social Development are entrusted to implement the nonformal education in their respective areas of jurisdiction to build the capacities of the stakeholders so that their priorities are in line with the PEAP priority areas.
- Agribusiness, agriculture is the backbone of Uganda's economy, but it has been practiced in a subsistence way which culminates to ever increasing poverty among the farmers. Uganda government has come up a modality of modernising agriculture under various programmes in order to improve productivity for quality agricultural products. For example, the Plan for Modernisation of Agriculture (PMA), the National Agricultural Advisory Services (NAADS) are programmes aimed at modernising agriculture. This programmes are yielding high just

because of the role nonformal education is playing in creating awareness and building the capacities of farmers in the country.

- Savings and Credit mobilization, one of the causes of increased poverty among the poor is lack of savings. This is associated to illiteracy and limited knowledge on the importance of savings. With the strengthening of financial services to rural areas, nonformal education has been blessing to pull people out of that ignorance and create awareness on the importance of saving. This has improved the saving culture among people and enables the existence of rural microfinance institutions. Hence, eradication of poverty.
- Under the Prosperity for All programme, the government is opening up Marketing cooperatives in every Lower Local Governments. This is aimed at enabling farmers to access better market options. Before that farmers used to sell their produce at the farm gate. The marketing cooperatives are helping farmers to have a uniform price for their produce. Nonformal education in conjunction with Community Development sector pioneer the sensitisation of farmers on marketing policies in order for their products to fetch higher prices. Hence, alleviation of poverty among the farmers.
- Nonformal education is helping in improving the quality of Uganda's labour force. Therefore, the government is necessitating an increased outreach for functional adult literacy and skills building programs for those who dropped out of school and are of working age and facilitating those still in school to attain higher levels of education. This leads to pay rise, hence, a decline in poverty level.
- Poverty is a violation of human rights on a massive scale. Poverty continues to intensify due to the exclusion of groups of people on the basis of class, caste, gender, disability, age, race and religion or other status. Nonformal education has been designed to fill this gap and ensure that all those who did not get opportunity to attend formal education do so in nonformal education without any social discrimination. Women's poorer access to economic and non-economic opportunities is often at the root of their lower status in many societies in Uganda. This has helped to reduce poverty especially among women who are victims of social discrimination.
- Nonformal education is used as a 'band aid' to maintain social structures and avoid reform. For example, schemes for unemployed youths in urban slums help to relieve the pressures on society and divert the youths from criminal activities. Such youths who have dropped out of

school are organised in groups and given vocational training and others trained as functional adult literacy instructors under nonformal education. This has helped to solve the problem of unemployment among the youth, hence, reduction of poverty.

- Directly increasing the ability of the poor to raise their incomes. Nonformal education has contributed a lot in increasing the household income of the poor by educating them on income generating activities like formation of community saving schemes, business skills, and agribusiness skills. Nonformal education has helped to achieve all these planned activities.
- Integration of HIV/AIDs in Non-formal education programme as means of alleviating poverty. The Government of Uganda has taken a lead globally on issues relating to HIV/AIDs prevention and management. Uganda education sector was among the first in the world to address the need to learn about HIV/AIDs as part of school curriculum. The advocacy programmes include school health programmes and sensitisation of the youth on HIV/AIDs. An education sector policy on HIV/AIDs is being prepared to formally integrate HIV/AIDs in both formal and nonformal education curriculum and school systems at all levels.

Non-formal education is therefore playing the role of educating the youth, sensitising the entire community and train/retool school authorities and teachers to handle the subject. HIV/AIDs is a stressful epidemic which makes its victims to lose hope in life and resort to non-productive activities, hence, increasing the gravity of poverty in the country.

- Restoring sustainable development in the incomes of the poor through increasing per capita consumption and reversing the increasing trend of inequality, as well as savings of the poor. To sustain growth, it must take place in a form that maintains and protects the environment and natural resources on which the majority of the poor derive their livelihood. Functional adult education is very crucial in imparting of income generating skills to the communities, especially the poor, improved farming techniques through agriculture extension services etc. Moreover, the sustainable utilization of natural resources is to be ensured through environment education, a key aspect of adult learning and education.

2.1. Conclusion

The aim of poverty reduction in Uganda through investment in education raises issues of financing and the affordability of education for poor. That is why non-formal education is given priority in Uganda's effort to fight poverty. As for poverty, it is taken for granted that making things better is desirable and proper. Instead of, as once was the case, accepting that 'the poor are always with us' there is a general belief that poverty can and should at least be reduced if not eventually done away with.

Uganda's economy is undergoing structural transformation, including the modernisation of agriculture, the development of industries which are built on demand and supply linkages from agriculture, and continued institutional development in the legal and financial sectors. The successful implementation of this strategy necessitates intensive programmes in adult education. Farmers, the majority of whom are uneducated and practicing subsistence agriculture, are gaining skills in record keeping, planning, savings and credit; etc the strategy is benefiting them to alleviate poverty. Nonformal education is playing a major role in Uganda government's effort to alleviate poverty. Indeed the sector should be developed further, to supplement and complement the formal system and even, in some circumstances, act as an alternative.

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