

THE ROLE OF MASS EDUCATION IN RURAL DEVELOPMENT
BY

MUHAMMAD G. DUKKU

INTRODUCTION

Throughout the developing world and more especially in Africa, the majority of the populations live in the country side. Although a lot of rhetorics were made by successive governments in Nigeria to develop the countryside less action was however witnessed and much lesser outcomes can be discerned. Thus, the majority of rural dwellers in Nigeria today live in the most harsh conditions of poverty, powerlessness, illiteracy, marginalization, poor health and several other constraining variables.

This paper attempts to discuss the roles of mass education in the development process of the rural people and their environment. However, it must be stated from the outset that mass education is not seen to be a panacea for rural underdevelopment. Other mass education is viewed to be one of the basic requirements of a comprehensive rural development strategy.

Meanwhile, in order to fully understand and appreciate the problems of tackling rural underdevelopment, (in Nigeria) it is worthwhile to attempt defining briefly the key phrases in the title of the paper i.e "rural development" and "mass education." This would help to clarify and given the paper a clear focus for which it is intended.

Rural Development

The concept, rural development is often defined according to the peculiar needs and problems of persons, organisations or countries defining it. The International Council for Adult Education (ICAE) defined rural development as:

"...a strategy through which the development of the rural populations and the rural areas is directed towards a total development of the people and their environment through concerted actions."

The International Labour Organisation (ILO) also gave its definition of rural development emphasising the role of agriculture and various non-agricultural activities. However, in its definition of rural development, the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) takes the cognisance of the fact that rural development is an integrated process which improves the overall well-being of the rural people. Therefore, the examination of various definitions on rural development reveals that, rural development is primarily concerned with the process of improving the living conditions as well as awareness of the rural people - and their environment.

Mass Education

Mass education has had a variety of meanings at different times and in different places. However, its ordinary meaning is the provision of education for the majority of the population of a given geographical unit. This had emerged from the European

rejection of an elitist or limited education and an acceptance of the principle of total enlightenment of the whole people. Mass education commenced in France during its Revolution; in England with the 1870 Education Act; in Sweden, in 1809 when compulsory schooling was introduced.

Thus, mass education meant an extension of education to every citizen irrespective of age, sex, and social status since education was seen to be an empowering tool that could equip the citizen to attain his full potentials in society. The introduction of mass education in Africa in the 1940s by the British colonial government was aimed at achieving universal literacy among both the young and the old in the colonies. Since the inception of *UNESCO*, the concept mass education had assumed several nomenclature i.e basic education, fundamental education, functional literacy, etc. Whatever, name or form it takes, mass education has come to be recognised to be a potent tool for national development and the consequent improvement of the living conditions of the oppressed and marginalised people - of both the rural and urban area of a nation.

Rural Development And Mass Education

Rural development connotes economic and social development of the people in the countryside. The gradual and overall improvement in the existential living conditions of the rural people is a major goal of rural development. Thus, in order to effectively meet challenges of the multifaceted nature of the development problems of the rural areas, a comprehended and integrated approach would be required. This approach entails the entire socio-economic as well political and cultural spheres within which the rural communities operate. Some of the projects relevant for an integrated rural development programme include: agriculture and cooperatives, water resources, sanitation public enlightenment, vocational training and adult literacy.

Meanwhile, there is often a widely held assumption that there is a direct relationship between man's level of awareness and his capacity to transform his community. This means the higher his awareness, the greater his ability to improve his objective condition. Hence, man is the central pivot to any development effort. Consequently, any attempt to address underdevelopment, poverty and powerlessness must address itself to the adult mind. When people are equipped with the right skills, information and attitude, it is believed that they would then be able to move towards a qualitative improvement of their living condition and improve their environment as well.

At this juncture, we must reiterate the argument that mass education in itself cannot solve the development problems of the rural dwellers unless and until it is linked with activities that are concrete and far-reaching. Thus mass education should focus on creating critical awareness among rural communities so that the latter can evolve and articulate sound responses to their development problems and needs. Mass education therefore, should be an integral component of any integrated rural development programme. The education aspect or component of any rural development programme must never be neglected.

For the purpose of this discussion, the experiences of two African Countries which employed mass education in their rural development drive are highlighted below. Within the last four decades these African countries i.e. Ghana and Tanzania embarked on huge rural development programmes mindful of the need to develop the rural people through education and training for the overall social and economic development of their countries.

Ghana

In Ghana during the 1950s and 1960s especially when there was some political and economic stability, the country embarked upon a comprehensive rural development drive which covered agricultural and cooperative extension, work with women's organisationa and youth clubs, and adult literacy. Through the mass education campaigns of the 1950s, Ghana was able to achieve 50% literacy rate, which was the highest in the whole west Africa region (Kumar 1979). Consequently, a large section of the rural population in Ghana became conscious of the problems of underdevelopment and the need for them to contribute in the development process. Apart from literacy, courses in women vocational training, social education and citizenship as well as agricultural extension programmes were organised. This had resulted into the developmet of the spirit of community developmet through self-help even when the country's economy was declining and the government could no longer support those programmes.

Tanzania

Tanzania, a country said to be one of the poorest in Africa, the government was able to achieve brilliant feats in its rural developmet progreammes surpassing many of its richer sister African couteries. In his famous Arusha Declaration of 1968, the Tanzanian president Julius Nyerere strongly criticised the earlier concept of development which focused on the development of structures to the detriment of the people using them. He believed that the development of a country is brought about by people, and not money. Money and wealth are the result and not the basis of development. Thus, true development meant the development of the poeple and not just things. It was on this premise that Nyerere equated rural development with national development which consequently led the governemnt to embark upon one of the most ambitious rural development programme s in Africa. Among the stategies used in Tanzania to develop the rural people and their environment was adult education.

Radio was extensively used in reaching the population in the very vast countryside. Using radio listening groups and extension agents in the country, literacy, agricultural extension, vocational training, sanitation and civic education programmes were effectively disseminated. The cooperation and support of every citizen was sought and the entire country was mobilized. Using the limited resoucrs available, greate success was recordced in educating and sensitizing alarge section of the population for the purpose of improving the living conditions of the people.

Today, the literacy rate in Tanzania is well over 60% and the rural population is highly mobilised. Tanzania is one of the poorest countries and yet it is ahead of many of its richer sister African states in terms of education, public health and social mobilisation for development. This has proved Nyerere's beliefr that the development of the people rather rthan structures should be accorded priority in any meaningful development drive.

What we have seen in both Ghana and Tanzania is a deliberate attempt to develop the human resoucrs as a basis for rural development and the nation at large. Both countries enjoyed the necessary political will of their governments i.e. Ghana under Dr. Kware Nkrumah and Tanzania under Dr. Julius Nyerere. This political will helped to bring wonderful achievements even with minimal resources as in the case of Tanzania. Furthermore, we have seen in both Ghana and Tanzania that involving the people is the better and can lead to more enduring development than just erecting

structures among the people without the latter knowing how to operate and maintain such structures.

From the foregoing, it is very clear that the human factor is no doubt the most central element in Anyu rural development effort. It is not enough to provide infrastructural facilities such as agricultural implements, feeder roads, rural electrification schemes, etc. without paying the necessary attention to the rural people who would be using the resources. Hence, any meaningful rural transformation drive must seek to engender the improvement in the welfare, productivity and general awareness of the rural population. Thus, through mass education, the rural people would benefit from public enlightenment campaigns, literacy and vocational training for higher productivity and participation in community development activities.

The Nigeria Experience.

In Nigeria, the business of rural development is not the monopoly of one government agency. Rather, several agencies are involved in harnessing both human and material resources towards rural transformation. Hence the need for a concerted and coordinated action is always required for a successful rural development programme.

In this country, quite a lot of resources have been invested and several government agencies on rural development set up since independence thirty five years ago. Large sums of money have been expended into various rural development activities such as agriculture, water supply, rural electrification, primary health care, road network, etc. Agencies such as the Agricultural Development Projects (ADPs), Rural Development Boards (RDBs), Directorate for Food, Road and Rural Infrastructures (DFRRI), etc. were set up to tackle the problems of underdevelopment in the rural areas. Although these agencies had met some successes it is a far cry when compared with the enormous resources invested in them. One explanation to this situation was that most of these agencies were executing their plans without really involving the people in the rural areas for whom those projects were targeted. Instead, you would have urban based bureaucrats and contractors deciding the type and location as well as execution of projects in the rural areas. This has been one of the major obstacles to a successful integrated rural development effort in this country.

Another major obstacle to speedy mass education and rural development in this country has been lack of political will on the part of successive Nigeria governments toward rural transformation. Too much rhetoric and little action on the ground could hardly advance the rural development drive. Hence, successive Mass Literacy Campaigns since the 1940s yielded only marginal successes.

Now that the rural development has been enjoying greater funding from both government and foreign sources, concerted efforts should be made to ensure that the money does not go down the drain. One of this insurance is to allow the planning and execution of rural development projects to be mainly spearheaded by the rural people themselves. Rural development agencies should simply guide the rural dwellers and it is the latter's responsibility to make the final determination on programme development and execution. This would however depend on the level of literacy and political consciousness of the rural communities vis-avis the kind of project earmarked for them.

The rural people therefore need to be sensitized through mass education so that they could become more aware of their problems and how to tackle such problems. Although mass education in itself, does not solve the underdevelopment state of the rural areas, it could yet play a catalytic role by conscientizing the people to stand up and

remove the development obstacles confronting them. It should therefore be pursued vigorously in the rural areas in order to help the people help themselves.

Consequently, for an integrated rural development programme to succeed in Nigeria, there must be a concerted action from the various rural development agencies as well as the necessity of genuine commitment and support from all the three tiers of government toward rural transformation. Specifically, there is a need for close cooperation and coordination of the activities of the various government agencies. Agencies responsible for agricultural extension and cooperatives, dissemination of information (i.e the mass media) and the state agencies for Mass Education must work closely together to educate and empower the rural people to the desired economic and social development. The activities of the agricultural extension agents and the mass education officers in the rural areas should be closely coordinated and where possible the mass education curriculum should incorporate all the major elements within the rural development package.

Conclusion

In conclusion, it must be reiterated that mass education in itself is not a panacea for rural underdevelopment. It should rather be an instrument for mind setting in which the rural people become better equipped for the development challenges of their communities. Mass education should actually implement the greater task of rural development which should seek to overcome the marginalization and powerlessness which currently bedevil the rural people in Nigeria. Rural development should be seen to be the same as national development and should therefore be pursued with vigour. Now that the Federal and State Governments with financial support from UNDP are focussing on a big mass literacy drive, rural development agencies in the country should seek to cooperate and coordinate their activities in order to advance their rural development objectives.

References

- International Council of Adult Education (1980) "Statement to the FAO World Conference on Agrarian Reform and Rural Development", In Adult Education and Development, 14.
- Kumar, A. (1979) "Education for Rural Development," In Bown, L. and S.H.O. Tomori(eds.) A Handbook of Adult Education For West Africa, London: Hutchinson, pp 207 - 219.
- Nyerere, J. (1980) "On Rural Development", In Adult Education and Development, 14, pp. 21 - 26.
- Tahir, G. (1994) "Rural Development and Directions For Mass Education Research," In Tahir, G.(ed). Contemporary Issues in Nigerian Mass Education, Yola: Damisa Newday Publishers. pp. 03 -109.
- Tahir, G. Kware, H.T, and M.G. Dukku (1991) "Transforming Rural Nigeria Through Non-Traditional Adult Education: The Case of Agricultural and Communication Media Agencies in Sokoto State". In Sokoto Educational Review, Vol. 30 pp. 35 - 42.