Chapter 4

Empowering the Poor in Nigeria through Adult and Community Education: Implications for Education Policy Reform

Joshua Olusola Akande
and Adeola Bosede Ogunrin

Introduction

Poverty is a multidimensional phenomenon, encompassing the inability to satisfy basic needs, lack of control over resources, lack of education and skills, poor health, malnutrition, lack of shelter, poor access to water and sanitation, vulnerability to shocks, violence and crime, and lack of political freedom and voice.¹

Though a common condition in many parts of the world, poverty is more noticeable in the less developed nations of Asia and Africa.² Lending credence to this assertion, the World Bank (1998) reported in its executive summary:

- 291 million people had average incomes of below one US dollar per day in 1998.
- 124 million of those up to age 39 years were at risk of dying before 40.
- 43 million children were stunted as a result of malnutrition in 1995.
• 205 million were estimated to be without access to health services in 1990–1995.
• 249 million were without safe drinking water in 1990–1995.
• More than 2 million infants die annually before reaching their first birthday.
• 139 million youths and adults were illiterate in 1995.3

The above presentation gives the sobering profiles of African poverty. Whereas poverty is falling in other parts of the world, it is rising in South Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa. The scourge of poverty bites hard on the rural poor, the handicapped, abandoned aged, orphaned, refugees, and women (especially rural women), and the unemployed youth.4 The devastating poverty that exists among these categories of people is clearly visible in most African countries. In light of this, the international development community has focused its attention on poverty reduction and emphasized the need for policies and programs that would improve incomes and the standard of living of the poor.5

The objectives of this chapter are threefold. First, it examines the poverty situation in Nigeria. Second, it reviews the government’s investment in various sectors of education. Third, it articulates the link between all forms of education and socio-economic and political empowerment in addressing poverty reduction. These three areas are explored with a view to determine the effectiveness of adult and community education policy reform as a strategy to empower the poor and achieve poverty eradication and the establishment of human rights for all.

Poverty in Nigeria

In Nigeria, poverty has consistently increased since independence in 1960. The situation can be traced to myriad factors: long years of military rule, fiscal neglect, mismanagement, lack of investment, and lack of commitment to the social sector, among others.6 The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Report (2001) revealed that Nigeria focused just 0.2 percent of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) on healthcare and 0.7 percent on education, which left 69 percent of the population living below the official poverty line.7

Considering its devastating effects, the problem of poverty in Nigeria has attracted the attention of scholars, organizations, and institutions within and outside the country. It is the main cause of hunger and malnutrition that are aggravated through rapid