

# **Adults who learn: sharing literacy project experience from southwestern Nigeria**

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## **Abstract**

The paper reports the outcome of a funded non-formal, functional adult literacy project embarked upon in the University-based *Isoya* rural development programme area in southwestern Nigeria from 2005 - 2007. It specifically presents the approaches used in legitimising the literacy project amongst community people; and reports the positive impact of the project on community empowerment. A case study design was used to carry out the study amongst adult literacy class participants. It was found that the average income of learners per month in Nigerian Naira (NGN) at the commencement of the adult class increased from NGN 39 083.33 (~US\$ 253.71) to NGN 54 409.09 (~US\$ 353.19) after the first phase of the project. Also, participant-learners realised that they had acquired basic reading and writing skills and have, thus, acquired self esteem in addition to experiencing some socio-economic progress as well as the ability to better understand their ecological environment. Well over 88.0% of the adult learners perceived that they became more politically conscious as a result of the adult class they attended.

## **Background information**

Apparently showing the strong link between literacy and education, a renowned Nigerian politician, Chief Obafemi Awolowo [1929-1987], opines that ‘[i]n honest hands, literacy is the surest and most effective means to true education’. Indeed, good leadership and sincere political action guided by testable institutional framework and ideologies [not informed by mere incentives] are seen as a driver that enhances the potential of human personality. To meet the 2015 goal of achieving a 50.0% increase in literacy rates would depend on progress in the 12 countries where three quarters of those without literacy skills live (id21 education, 2006). Robinson (2005) comments on the transformative power of education and writes that ‘literacy can give some people power over others. Literacy enables people to take a fuller part in society, to have an influence and make their voices heard’. Elsewhere, UNESCO (1976) while providing a seemingly holistic objective of lifelong education acknowledges that adult literacy, which is a part of the lifelong education itself enhances peace and cooperation; enables people involved to master their environment and better appreciate the diversity of cultures; and are able to solve problems as the occasion warrants. When people are able to express themselves freely and make meaningful and critical judgment of their leaders, and at the same time able to appropriate the resources (both natural and human) at their disposal in a sustainable way, then, development has taken place. Kazemek (2004) cites Brandt (2001) who had shown ‘the connection between literacy as an individual development and literacy as an economic development’. Nonetheless, earlier attempts to find solutions to the challenges constituted by illiteracy in Nigeria had been fraught with diverse problems ranging from ‘...non-growth, inability to replicate activities, wastage, learner reluctance and rejection and ...failure to pursue the ultimate objective of asking learners to take over the literacy venture....’ (Omolewa, *et al.*, 1998).

Rural community people (particularly in a developing economy like Nigeria), who are mainly smallholder farmers are generally non-literate. If given the opportunity to learn new things based on their previous experience [through either or both adult basic education and non-formal functional adult literacy], their productivity level is bound to increase appreciably (see Bown, 1979). Where this occurs, people are thus freed from the shackles of poverty and deprivations. This is empowerment. Just as Worthman (2008) provides some clues on learners’ ability to enhance their empowerment and gratify

themselves by ‘...appropriating new ways’ of doing things, I reckon that the functional literacy project reported in this paper serves as an avenue for participants to achieve a measure of empowerment and self-liberation [I shall return to this later]. For instance, a villager, who once participated in the adult literacy class in Isoya rural development programme area [which eventually became comatose] and who also, has been a participant in the current project remarked:

...whoever lacks education lacks all things; she or he cannot be thorough in output; neither will she or he be able to contend favourably with life issues. I stand head and shoulders above my peers and colleagues because of the little knowledge, which I acquired during the adult literacy class that was, in the past, organized in our community.

This personal claim is remarkable and it underscores the importance placed on either formal or non-formal education by the grassroots people. Elsewhere, Usman (2009) provides a vivid report of the positive impact and transformative power of rural adult education on the health situations of the pastoral women of Northern Nigeria. In this paper, however, I address a functional literacy project implemented from 2005 – 2007 in *Awo* community of *Osun* state in southwestern Nigeria. The project was executed under the auspices of the already existing University-based community outreach development programme in *Isoya* and other satellite villages. The following section is thus devoted to highlighting the core activities of the rural development programme.

#### **A brief on *Isoya* rural development programme (IRDP): Its context and thrust**

As earlier indicated in the previous section, the IRDP is situated within *Osun* state, which lies within the Rainforest and Savanna belts in southwestern Nigeria. The state is one of the existing 36 states and a Federal Capital Territory in Nigeria. It comprises 30 Local Government Areas (LGAs) amongst which is *Egbedore* Local Government, where *Awo* community - the functional literacy site – is situated. The major sub-ethnic groups in the state are *Ife*, *Ijesha*, *Ibolo*, *Oyo* and *Igbomina* of the *Yoruba* extraction. The people practice Christianity, Islam and Traditional religions. By and large, the *Yoruba* people of Southwestern Nigeria in comparison with the people in other regions of the country are more cosmopolitan and educationally inclined, perhaps due to their earlier contact with the Europeans who brought Western education into Nigeria. It is

also important to note that even within grassroots communities of southwestern Nigeria, people are actively involved in political activities and as such, are more politically conscious and highly sensitive to the Nigerian political economy. Aside other occupations, the people are mainly engaged in farming and other agro-allied businesses as means of livelihoods.

The IRDP of the Department of Extension Education and Rural Sociology (now Department of Agricultural Extension and Rural Development) in the Faculty of Agriculture of the University of Ife (now Obafemi Awolowo University) came into being in about 1968 when the University moved from Ibadan [in southwestern Nigeria] to its permanent site in Ile-Ife [also in southwestern Nigeria]. It was conceived by the Vice Chancellor of the University at the time, Professor Hezekiah Oluwasanmi (who was himself of the Faculty of Agriculture), Professor S.K.T. Williams of the Department of Extension Education and Rural Sociology, and a host of others.

Thus, the thrust of the Isoya programme was to create an outlet for the University to bring about improvement in agricultural production in Ife Division and, thus, raise the level of living of rural inhabitants in the programme area. The initiative was a resemblance of what is now popularly known as corporate social responsibility (CSR) undertaken by local and international businesses and other corporate bodies. Initially, the programme focused on a number of rural communities in *Ife* area (the forest zone) but was later extended to *Ede* area (the savannah zone of *Osun* State also in southwestern Nigeria). The project, from inception, is headquartered in *Isoya*<sup>1</sup> village, which eventually became incorporated in the name of the programme itself.

The programme was financed at the early stages by the University of Ife. In 1972, a cooperative relationship was established with the Agricultural Extension and Rural Development Center, University of Reading, United Kingdom. Also, additional financial aid was obtained from the British Overseas Development Administration (ODA) [now Department for International Development (DfID)], through the Inter-University Council.

Some areas given crucial attention by the development programme were in agricultural production, technology and mechanisation, *adult literacy* (emphasis mine), health and nutrition etc. The literacy arm of the project was informed by the earlier success stories recorded by the University of Ibadan (formerly University College,

Ibadan) in the late 1960s when it collaborated with the Nigerian Tobacco Company in implementing the Oyo North Tobacco Growers' Experimental Literacy Project. At the time, it was found that there was a direct link between functional literacy and increased agricultural outputs (Oduaran, 1994; see also Omolewa *et al.*, 1998). Nonetheless, the *Isoya* programme at the on-set recorded enormous successes but as finances dwindled and due to lack of political will over the years, most of the incorporated projects (including the adult literacy project) became comatose. The questions as to what could be an immediate entry point to partly revitalise the IRDP; what the perceptions of the people are about adult learning in relation to development; and how policies particularly in adult literacy could be informed, therefore, arise.

As such, in a bid to partly resuscitate the waning programme and being aware of the crucial role, which literacy could play in the development process, the assistance of the International Reading Association (IRA) headquartered in the USA was sought by us under its *Developing countries support fund* with a view to resuscitating the moribund literacy project of *Isoya* RD programme. Having received the blessing of the organisation first in 2005, *Awo* community was, therefore, chosen as a pilot community for the literacy project, which sought not only to teach reading and writing skills but also all round functional education that would help the learner fit in appropriately into the socio-economic and political climate of his or her immediate environment. It was, thus, a *Content Area Literacy (CAL)* Project. *Awo* community, which is purely agrarian in nature, is situated in the savannah zone of the project and its choice was based on two reasons: (i) it was among the communities earlier investigated in one of the literacy research conducted by the project coordinator (Kolawole, 2009); and (ii) it is relatively more accessible by the project staff for monitoring and evaluation activities.

### **Objectives of the paper**

While the paper intends to highlight the IRA sponsored functional adult literacy project, which was implemented between 2005 and 2007, its major thrust will be to inform policy direction in the implementation of adult functional literacy programmes in southwestern Nigeria and elsewhere.

The specific objectives of the paper, among others, are to:

- (i) present the approaches used in legitimising the literacy project amongst community people;
- (ii) share the experience gained in the process of project execution with participants; and
- (iii) analyse and determine the impacts of the project on community empowerment.

### **Research methodology**

Fundamentally, this action research derives from an applied research on the literacy situation of grassroots people in the programme area (Kolawole, 2009). In essence, it is a cyclical move from a basic research to an applied research and then to a basic research. As earlier indicated, the respondents were purposively selected for a case study as a result of their participation in the adult literacy class in Awo community in *Egbedore* Local Government Area of Osun state, Nigeria. While the study employed descriptive analysis to summarise the data obtained (see table 1), qualitative analysis was done to obtain a veritable feedback from the learners themselves (see Omolewa *et al.*, 1998). Rather than rely solely on quantitative research in presenting social ‘facts’ whose in-depth nature cannot be fully explored by mere figures or statistical values, complimenting them with qualitative data provides valuable information on real life situations as they are perceived by the people themselves (see for instance, Kerlinger and Lee, 2000). This is even more appropriate in a case study design adopted in this study.

### **Sample size, data collection and measurement of variables**

Apparently because of the proposed project popularity amongst the grassroots people, some forty participants initially and voluntarily got enlisted as against the projected twenty. As time went by, however, only twenty-five of them completed the first phase of the adult literacy class. Both quantitative and qualitative data were, thus, derived from the participants at the end of the first phase through the use of structured interview schedules, records of attendance and focus group discussion (FGD) sessions. Nonetheless, income level of participants, which is the only quantitative variable subjected to statistical analysis, was measured by the amount of money earned from individuals’ businesses per month.

## **Data analysis**

Data were analysed using predictive analytical software (PASW) formerly known as statistical package on social sciences (SPSS). Descriptive statistics (such as percentages, mean, standard deviation and charts) were used in summarising the data. In a bid to hear participants voices, qualitative data obtained through FGD sessions were also analysed.

## **Discussions**

### **Project execution<sup>2</sup>**

Although limited in area coverage and independent of the extensive action literacy research carried out by the Rural Literacy Study Group at the University of Ibadan in Oyo state of southwestern Nigeria (see Omolewa *et al.*, 1998), the design of this project bears, to a large extent, semblance to the former in terms of procedures. Between June and August 2005, about forty adult learners (both men and women) were enlisted with the help of the community leadership and members themselves through series of consultations. In other words, legitimisation of the project was first sought through the community leadership structure (the king - referred to as the *Oba*, chiefs and opinion leaders), which later assisted in mobilising prospective participants (see also Kolawole, 2009b). It should, however, be noted that although twenty participants were projected in the proposal submitted to the IRA, over forty community people showed keen interest in the project. The selection and modality for implementing the project were made participatory in all ramifications. Prospective learners were allowed to determine class schedules, contents of teaching materials, etc. A detailed account of this has been provided elsewhere (see Kolawole, 2009b). As fund was very limited, two facilitators (that is, adult class teachers who were both male and female whose ages were between 38-45 years) were selected within the community and taken through a one-day intensive training programme in *Obafemi Awolowo* University, Ile-Ife, in August, 2005. Subsequently, the teachers were offered constant, in-built trainings on the job during the series of monitoring and evaluation activities of the technical team of the programme. A curriculum that sought to make the adult class a content area functional literacy (CAL) –

which incorporated practical farm activities [on designated farmers' field] and guided by improved packages of recommendations on farming activities in arable crops - was also developed in conformity with the objective of the project. Also, provision was made for learners' writing materials, which were mass produced for the purpose of learning the art of writing, arithmetic and English language. Graphic and written materials showing various farming activities and techniques, environmental management/sanitary measures, small scale enterprises and home economic activities were developed and made available for the purpose of teaching during class activities. Essentially, the teaching materials are designed based on the expectations and understanding of the learners; and are delivered using both Yoruba and elementary English Languages (See also Kolawole, 2009b).

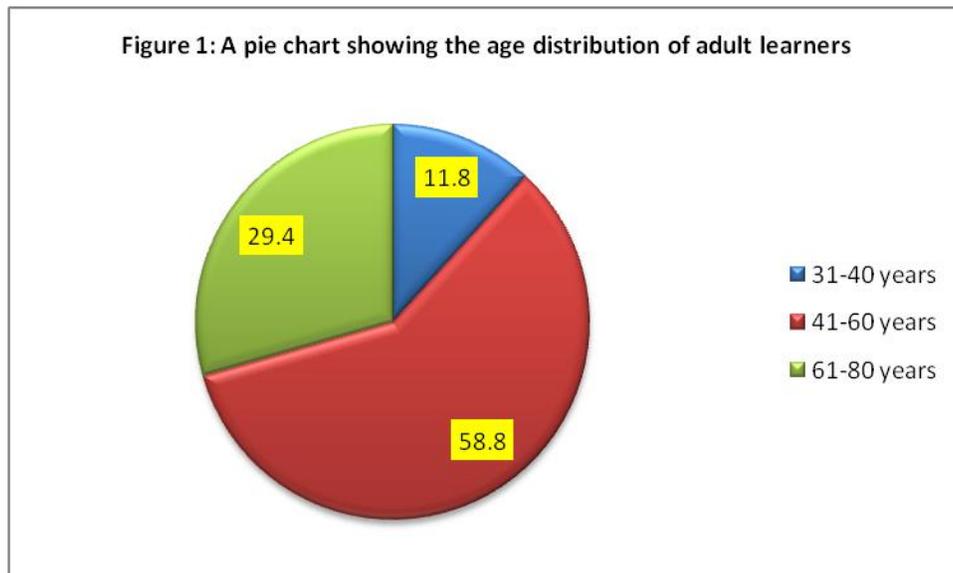
The adult literacy class, on commencement, was stratified into *Progressives* and *Beginners*. The Beginners-class comprised those participants who, until when the project commenced, never had any form of education, while the Progressives-class comprised those who had a bit of either formal or non-formal education. Over time, the project showed a remarkable progress in the performances of adult learners. An aged male learner once said during one of our series of monitoring activities:

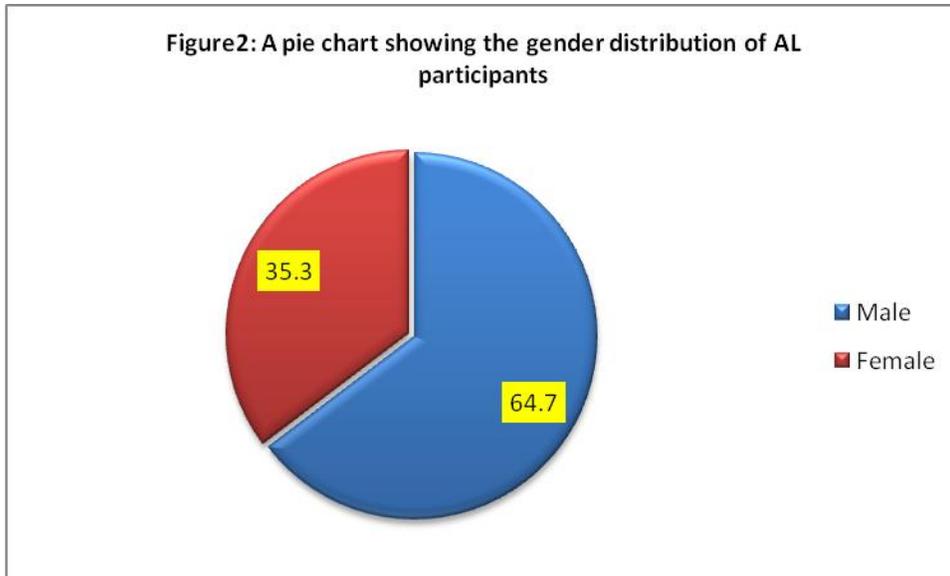
Personally, this literacy class is very important to me. As you can see for yourself, I am beginning to write my own name by myself without much effort. At the end of this programme, I shall have learnt how to read mails sent to me from relations outside the community.

Monitoring and evaluation activities were carried out by the staff members of the project. The activities are carried out on every Tuesday and Thursday between 4:00 pm and 6:00 pm during which classes held. Apart from the weekly routine monitoring activities, learners were evaluated at the middle and end of the project by subjecting them to written and oral examinations as well as by grading their attendance. Certificates of attendance were awarded to all participants while those who did well in the examinations were awarded special prizes. This has been detailed elsewhere (See Kolawole 2009b). Attempt is, therefore, made in this paper to highlight key issues in the implementation of a physical (functional literacy) project in a local community in south-western Nigeria.

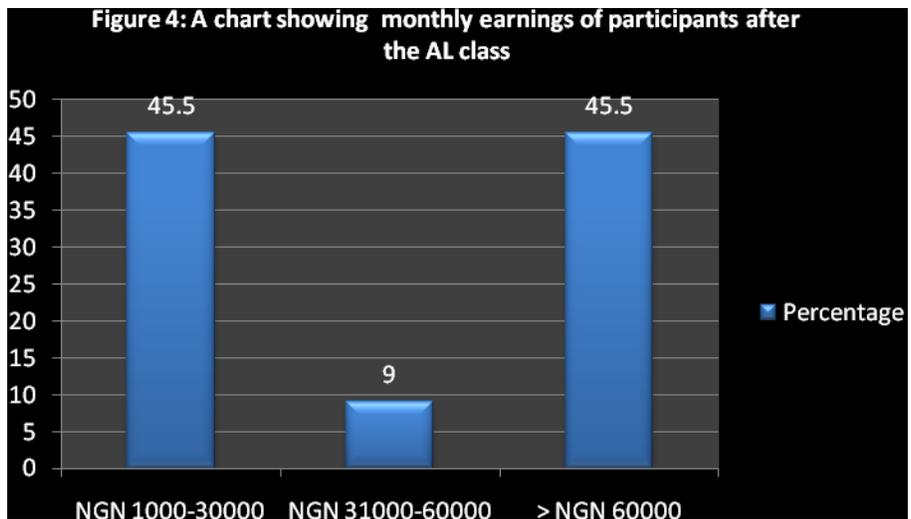
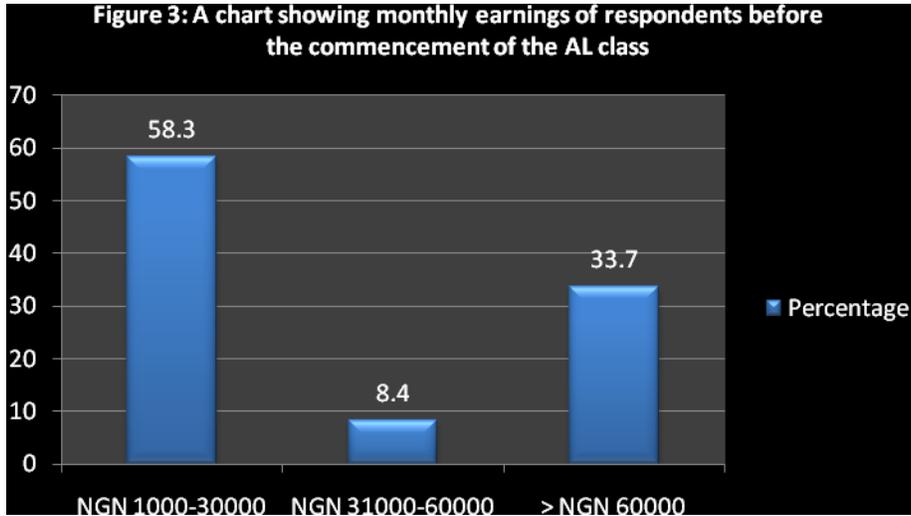
#### **Socio-economic attributes of adult learners**

Analysis as shown in table 2 reveals that the average age of the adult learners was 54.5 years with a standard deviation of 11.6. Those who were in the age bracket of 31 to 40 years constituted 11.8% of the population. While 58.8% of the learners were within the age bracket of 41 to 60 years, only about 29.4% constituted those who were in the age range of between 61 to 80 years (see Figure 1). About 64.7% of the adult learners were males while 35.3 percent were females (see Figure 2). This shows a somewhat lopsided gender participation not informed by any prejudice in project implementation. The disproportionate ratio of women to men in the project may have shown the disadvantaged position of the womenfolk. Nonetheless, this reality may also have been a limiting factor in the assessment of the success of the project.





Expectedly, all the learners (100.0 %) were married. Majority (41.2%) of the learners had engaged in non-farming activities. However, 35.3 and 23.5% of them were engaged in full time farming and both non-farming and farming activities, respectively. The average family size of the learners was 11 people with a standard deviation of 4.4. About 70.6% of the learners had between 5 to 10 family members while about 29.4% had between 11 and 20 members. The average income of learners in Nigerian Naira (NGN) <sup>3</sup> before the commencement of the adult class was NGN 39 083.33 per month (with a standard deviation of NGN 37 041.64) while it was NGN 54 409.09 per month (with a standard deviation of NGN 49 263.99) after the first phase of the project! About 58.3% of the learners had had an income of between NGN 1000.00 and NGN 30 000.00 while about 8.4 and 33.7% earned between NGN 31 000.00 to NGN 60 000.00 and NGN 61 000 and above per month, respectively, before the adult class. After the adult class, while 45.5% of the population earned between NGN 1000.00 to NGN 30 000.00 per month, 45.5% had earned above NGN 60 000.00 per month just as a mere 9.0 percent of the population earned between NGN 31 000.00 to NGN 60 000.00 per month (see Figures 3 and 4).



The increase in participants' incomes may have been influenced by the effect of literacy on the learners' attitudes to business and other day-to-day activities. For instance, a female participant (who retails household essential needs) commenting on the improvement recorded in her business said:

Aside the fact that I am beginning to have improvement in my daily sales, my accounting ability has improved tremendously. This has actually helped me in achieving a better return on investment. I reflected, and I thought the only reason for this rapid improvement could not have been due to any reason but my participation in the reading and writing class.

Adult learners who belonged to associations constituted 87.5% of the population while those who never belonged to any association formed just 12.5% of the total population.

Those who were committed to their associations constituted 93.8% of the learners while only 6.3% were mere ordinary members who never had any serious commitment to their associations.

### **Perceived influence of adult class on learner's social status**

This is the perception of community people about the individual in question as a result of his or her participation in the literacy class and how that individual learner now perceived him or herself. Available data show that 64.7% of the learners strongly agreed to the statement 'I have been seen as being responsible in my community' just as 29.4 and 5.9% agreed and undecided, respectively, to the same statement. About 47.1% strongly agreed to the statement 'I have been seen as a potential decision-maker in my community' while 35.3 and 17.6% agreed and undecided, respectively, to the same statement. Also, 52.9% of the learners strongly agreed to the fact that 'I have been accorded more respect in my community' just as 47.1% agreed with the same opinion. Apparently, while 70.6% of them just agreed with the statement: 'I have been seen as a man/woman of prestige in my community', 29.4% strongly agreed with the statement. Also, 70.6% agreed with the opinion that 'I have been seen as an enlightened individual in my community' just as 29.4% strongly agreed with the same statement. 'My prestige has soared in my community' was strongly admitted by 35.3% of the learners while 58.8% just agreed with the same opinion. Only 5.9% of the learners strongly disagreed with the statement. Most learners strongly agreed with the statement: 'I see myself as being socially responsible in the community'. About 17.6 and 11.8% agreed with and undecided about the statement, respectively. While 52.9% of them strongly agreed that 'I see myself as a potential decision-maker in my community', 35.3% merely agreed. However, 11.8% of them were undecided. Majority (58.8%) agreed that 'I see myself as an enlightened individual in my community' while 23.5% strongly agreed with that opinion. But then, 17.6% of the learners were undecided. Just as 58.8% strongly agreed with the opinion that 'I see myself as a respected individual in my community', some 41.2% agreed with the statement. Providing a clearer picture of how participants viewed themselves in relation to the adult class they had attended, a summary of how they perceived the impact of the programme on their social status are presented below:

To us, education comes across as a form of magic wand! It is actually a means to anything that could be perceived as rewarding. It has its transforming power, even. For

instance, those of us who have been attending this literacy class have continued to enjoy a measure of social prestige which we cannot quantify in any way. It has transformed the way people see us in the community. Besides, we can no longer be relegated in decision-making in the community circle. The reason is not far-fetched. People see us as informed people who could add value to community development programmes... (A consensus view by participants)

Perhaps worthy of mention is the adult male who eventually was employed in a government paid job all because he attended the literacy class. His comments are that:

[t]his literacy class has impacted positively on me. I have secured a paid job at the Local Government Council here in *Egbedore* because of the Certificate I received after the end of the first phase of this project. Honestly, I'm excited to have become a salary earner all of a sudden (A male participant).

Table 1 shows some of the vital questions, which the adult learners were asked in the study.

**Table 1 : Some key interview items**

**People's and self perception about (participant's) social status**

Indicate whether you 'Strongly Agree', 'Agree', 'Undecided', 'Disagree' or 'Strongly Disagree' to the following statements, which describe how your colleagues in the community now perceive you and how you perceive yourself since you commenced this adult class:

- (i) I have been seen as being responsible in my community
- (ii) I have been seen as a potential decision-maker in my community
- (iii) I have been accorded more respect in my community
- (iv) I have been seen as a man/woman of prestige in my community
- (v) I have been seen as an enlightened individual in my community
- (vi) My prestige has soared in the community
- (vii) I see myself as being responsible in the community
- (viii) I see myself as a potential decision-maker in my community
- (ix) I see myself as an enlightened individual in my community
- (x) I see myself as a respected individual in my community

**Perceived relevance of adult literacy**

Indicate whether you 'Strongly Agree', 'Agree', 'Undecided', 'Disagree' or 'Strongly Disagree' to the following statements:

- (i) I could only read before commencing the adult class
- (ii) I could read and write a little before commencing the adult class
- (iii) I was able to read and write very well before the commencement of the adult class
- (iv) I was neither able to read nor write before the commencement of the adult class
- (v) I have started reading and writing a bit after commencing this class
- (vi) I am still neither able to read nor write at all since I commenced this class
- (vii) I am now able to read and write properly since I commenced the adult class
- (viii) My numeracy skill has improved since I commenced this class
- (ix) My knowledge of Agriculture has improved since I started this class
- (x) My knowledge about my environment has improved since I started this class
- (xi) I have started to read my Bible and Quoran since I joined this class
- (xii) I have started to read newspapers/magazines/letters since I joined this class
- (xiii) My outlook about world views has changed since I commenced this class
- (xiv) My consciousness about good hygiene has awakened since I joined this class
- (xv) I am beginning to be more politically conscious as a result of my participation in the adult class

**Impediments to full participation in adult class**

Could you respond 'Yes' or 'No' to the following:

- (i) I have not been able to participate fully in the adult class because of family commitment.
- (ii) I have not been able to attend all the classes because I needed to participate in some religious obligations/festivities.
- (iii) I have not been able to attend all the classes because I needed to participate in cultural festivities.
- (iv) I have not been able to attend all the classes because I needed to attend some political, funeral and marriage ceremonies.
- (v) I could not attend all the classes because I needed to attend to my farm work.
- (vi) I could not attend all the classes because I needed to attend to other businesses other than my farm work.
- (vii) I could not attend all the classes because of health problems.
- (viii) I could not attend all the classes because I needed to take care of my husband.
- (ix) I could not attend all the classes because I needed to take care of my children.
- (x) I attended all the classes against all odds.

**Table 2: Some socio-economic attributes of learners**

Variable	Percentage	Measure of central tendency
<b>Age</b>		
31-40 years	11.8	Mean = 54.5
41-60 years	58.8	Standard Deviation = 11.6
61-80 years	29.4	
<b>Total</b>	<b>100.0</b>	
<b>Sex</b>		
Male	64.7	
Female	35.3	
<b>Total</b>	<b>100.0</b>	
<b>Occupation</b>		
Farming	35.3	
Non-farming	41.2	
Both	23.5	
<b>Total</b>	<b>100.0</b>	
<b>Family size</b>		
5-10 members	70.6	Mean = 11.0
11-20 members	29.4	Standard Deviation = 4.4
<b>Total</b>	<b>100.0</b>	
<b>Income before adult class (NGN '000)</b>		
1-30	58.3	Mean = 39,083:33
31-60	8.4	Standard Deviation = 37,041:64
>60	33.7	
<b>Total</b>	<b>100.0</b>	
<b>Income after adult class (NGN '000)</b>		
1-30	45.5	Mean = 54,409:09
31-60	9.0	Standard Deviation = 49,263:99
>60	45.5	
<b>Total</b>	<b>100.0</b>	

Source: Field Survey

### **Learner's class attendance/punctuality and challenges faced by learners**

Although implemented at a microcosm level when compared with the work of Omolewa *et al.* (1998), one major innovation of this work over the former in terms of participants' mobilisation was the involvement of the faith-based community within the project locale during project implementation. Islam is a predominant religion in the *Awo* community. Thus the mosque, through the use of its public address system (PAS), would assist the project team to alert participants when it was time for classes. As earlier

indicated, it must be noted that participants were always willing to attend classes because they had suggested appropriate time for classes at the inception of the project. This and other strategies for mobilisation were reported in details elsewhere (see Kolawole 2009b). As a follow up to this, data reveal that 17.6% of the adult learners recorded over 81.0% attendance in class sessions. Just as 23.5% had 21 to 40% and 41 to 60.0% apiece of attendance, about 29.4% of the population recorded between 61 to 80.0% attendance in adult class. Only 5.9% of the learners had a very poor record of attendance of between 1.0 to 20.0%. The average total score of attendance of learners was 60.1% with a standard deviation of 24.71. Attendance and participation in classes appear to have been determined by a number of factors. Boeren *et al.* (2010) argue that participation in any lifelong educational activity is informed by the demand (by individuals and companies), supply (by educational institutions) and government (in terms of regulations and supply). In a way, people themselves and institutional policies on education influence the degree of participation in educational activities. Thus, at the individual level, two dimensions of participation in educational activities are identified as socio-economic and cultural (Boeren *et al.* 2010); and psychological (Jung and Cervero, 2002 in Boeren *et al.* 2010). Asked about the possible impediments to their full participation and commitment to the adult class, only 6.3% of the learners affirmed that they could not participate fully because of some family commitment. About 11.8% of them opined that some religious obligations and festivities hindered their full participation. Only 5.9% of the adult learners were of the opinion that they could not attend all the classes because they needed to attend to some political, funeral and marriage ceremonies. Underneath are the views of one of the participants:

Although we know we have a high stake in the adult literacy project, we cannot avoid attending communal and political meetings when occasions call for them. Not only that, when a close relation is deceased, we would need to fulfill our obligations of attending the ceremony. During particular periods of the year, the whole area is agog with one festivity or the other. More often than not, this happens and one is obliged to perform his or her role. But we can always hope that this does not take away all the precious time from us (A male participant).

Of interest was the response obtained from 31.2% of the learners that they could not attend all the classes because they needed to attend to their farm work. This shows a

serious clash of diverse interests as clearly heard from the voice of one old man who participated in the adult class. He had said:

As you are well aware, farm work is time-specific. You get things done when they should be done. Otherwise, nothing comes out of one's farming efforts. Having to attend urgently to some of the farm work does impinge on class attendance. We know we set the time schedule for ourselves... but occasionally, some things have to give way to others. Even while away from classes, my mind is always there, thinking there is something I'm missing already...

Indeed, the foregoing is one of the issues to contend with in implementing a community development project. As 29.4% of them indicated that attending to other businesses other than farm work hindered their full attendance in class, 18.8% affirmed that health problems were the hindrances to full attendance in class. Also, 17.6% of the learners indicated that taking care of their spouse (husband) was an impediment to their full participation. A female participant remarked thus:

Women have the obligation to take care of the home front: As a wife, I need to cater for my husband and children. The Ramadan period proves herculean, particularly. We would need to prepare food in order to break our fasting. Although this is associated with Islamic tenets, major hitches in class attendance are only experienced during the period of fasting.

Obviously, this category forms about 50.0% of the womenfolk who participated in the adult class just as they constituted 35.3% of the total population. Thus, socio-cultural and religious barriers have significantly hindered women participation in adult literacy classes. Indeed, their diverse roles including production and reproduction within the family are of interest here (See for instance Elson 1995; Summers 2003; Daniels 2010). Elsewhere, Gouthro (2005) in Daniels (2010) remarked:

The ability of women to participate in lifelong education is frequently connected with the homeplace (sic) through the way that their identities are formed, relationships are negotiated, and through the expectations of unpaid labour that are placed primarily upon women.

Although, he argues from the perspective of women's participation in formal lifelong learning, the situation also applies to informal or non-formal setting. Without doubt, there are conflicting interests impinging on women's participation in an adult literacy classes. As such, making men-folk to come to terms with women's marginalisation is partly a recipe for progress. Overall, while 62.5% of the adult learners attended all the classes against all odds, 37.5% could not. This category of people was

those that had been bogged down by certain socio-politico-cultural and economic factors as indicated in their various responses.

### **Perceived relevance of adult literacy (AL) class**

This outline discusses the opinions of participants on the relevance of the adult literacy class to their situations. About 58.8% of the participants strongly disagreed with the opinion: 'I could only read before commencing the adult class'. However, 41.2% of them agreed with the statement. While 52.9% of them strongly disagreed with the opinion that 'I could read and write a little before commencing the adult class', 35.3 and 11.8% agreed and strongly agreed with the opinion, respectively. This submission reflects those who had had some measure of education before commencing the class. Again, 52.9% strongly disagreed with the statement: 'I was able to read and write very well before commencing the adult class'. Also, 35.3 and 11.8% of the learners agreed and strongly agreed with the statement, respectively. About 41.2% of the people strongly agreed with the statement: 'I was neither able to read nor write before commencing the adult class' just as 23.5% agreed with the opinion. However, 17.6% went apiece for strongly disagreed and disagreed opinions. Also, 43.8% went apiece for those who strongly disagreed and agreed with the statement that 'I have started reading and writing a bit after commencing the adult class'. About 12.5%, however, had a strong agreement with the opinion. While 52.9% strongly disagreed with the statement that 'I am still neither able to read nor write properly since I commenced the adult class', 17.6% went apiece for those who disagreed and agreed with the opinion, respectively. However, 11.8% of the learners strongly agreed with the statement. Interestingly, 76.5% of the population strongly agreed that 'My numeracy skill has improved since I commenced the adult class' while 17.6% agreed with the same opinion. But then, about 5.9% of the learners disagreed. In line with the claim on numeracy skill, some women traders who participated in the class had said in the FGD session that: *Our business record keeping and stock taking have been enhanced since we started the adult literacy class.* While 47.1% of the adult learners strongly agreed with the statement: 'My knowledge of agriculture has improved since I commenced the adult class', 52.9% agreed with the same opinion. Also, while 58.8% of the population strongly agreed with the opinion that

‘My knowledge about my environment has improved since I started the adult class’, 41.2% agreed with statement. Buttressing this claim, Walter (2009) provides a link between adult education and enhanced environmental knowledge of local people (See also Clover 2004). While 47.1% of them agreed with the opinion that ‘I have started to read my Bible and Quoran since I joined the adult class’, only 29.4% strongly agreed with the statement. However, 11.8% went apiece for those who strongly disagreed and disagreed, respectively. Just as 41.2 and 17.6% agreed and strongly agreed, respectively, with the statement: ‘I have started to read newspapers/magazines/letters since I joined this class’, 35.3 and 5.9% of the population disagreed and strongly disagreed with the opinion, respectively. Also, while 52.9% had agreed to the opinion: ‘My outlook about world views has changed since I commenced this class’, 35.3 and 11.8% strongly agreed with and were undecided about the statement, respectively. Good enough, 64.7 and 35.3% strongly agreed and agreed, respectively, with the opinion that ‘My consciousness about good hygiene has been awakened since I joined the adult class’. Just as Martin (2003) has shown the relationship between adult education, lifelong education and citizenship participation in politics, about 47.1 and 41.2% strongly agreed and agreed, respectively, with the opinion that ‘I am beginning to be more politically conscious as a result of the adult class’. Nonetheless, 5.9% went apiece for those individuals who disagreed with, and undecided about the statement. The grand mean of perceptual score of all the learners (43.5) translated to about 80.0% favourable perception. Participants who had a score, which was over and above 80.0% constituted 62.6% of the learners’ population, while those who had between 60 to 79.0% constituted 35.4% of the population! None of them either had an indifferent (neutral) or unfavourable perception. It could be inferred from the foregoing that learners had a strong and positive opinion about the adult literacy class. In addition to this, it is easy to discern that learners’ orientations had changed positively and considerably. In the FGD session conducted, one of the participants remarked:

We sincerely thank the initiators of this project for their commitment towards ensuring that we become a literate people. As you are aware, this community is predominantly an Islamic society. Thus, the role of the Mosque and particularly the Chief Imam, with respect to mobilising community people to participate in the adult class, is most appreciated. For me, this class has enabled me to have more awareness on and knowledge of the use of agro-chemicals in my farming activities.

One of the participants did share his personal experience thus:

The initial problem I had was the sniggering and ridiculous comments I received from my peers and colleagues when I first started this class. Today, I think I am now an object of envy of sort amongst this cynical people as a result of the change that they are beginning to notice in me.

Most learners, however, identified non-availability of reading materials as a major problem confronting them as learners during the first phase of the project. As reported elsewhere (Kolawole 2009b), suitable reading materials [replete with graphics, Yoruba proverbs and stories from which inference of the importance of team work in development are drawn, etc.] were designed and adapted for the learners during the second phase of the project.

### **Challenges encountered during project implementation**

Indeed, assistance was sought from the education arm of the *Egbedore* Local Government during the inauguration of the project. Yet, promises and pledges were given by the politicians. But none eventually came our way. Nonetheless, we found that the politicians had cunningly wanted to highjack the project just as the election year drew near. Not compromising our stance on the integrity of the project as a non-political machinery put genuinely in place to enhance development, we were left alone without any financial assistance. This has been reported in detail in another write-up (Kolawole, 2009b).

### **Conclusions and recommendation**

Generally, this article provides a brief history of a model University rural development programme that serves as a corporate social responsibility (CSR) of the Obafemi Awolowo University, Nigeria, to its surrounding communities [Section 2]. It has also presented the approaches used in legitimising the literacy project amongst community people in the IRDP area of southwestern Nigeria. It has shared the experience gained alongside participants in the process of project execution. It also gave an update on the methodology used in physical project execution; reported on the positive impact of the project on community empowerment; and presented all associated socio-politico-cultural and economic problems encountered during project execution [Section 3].

The results presented have, thus, shown some positive relationships between participants' improved socio-economic well-being and their participation in the adult

class. Incomes earned by participants just immediately after the commencement of the adult literacy were significantly different from those earned before the class. It is obvious in the analysis that participants in the project, apart from learning basic reading and writing skills, have, thus, acquired self esteem and have come to realise that they were beginning to experience some progress in their socio-economic life and in their ability to better understand their ecological environment. In addition to this, well over 88.0% of the adult learners perceived that they had started to be more politically conscious as a result of the adult class they attended. This may have had a positive impact on people's participation in politics and other civic responsibilities. Learners were, therefore, of the opinion that the project's sustainability is *sine qua non* to ensure continuity. Clearly, the experience learnt from this project serves a good model for community project implementation and its sustainability. The question to ask is this: Can adult still learn? Indeed, the answer from the project experience is 'yes'. Learners had acknowledged in the series of monitoring and evaluation made that the approach used was a radical departure from those used in the past, and to the extent that past literacy classes had never been so successful at least, in the area.

Nonetheless, the learners had identified dearth of reading materials in the first phase of the project as an impediment to realising the full goal of the project. It is, therefore, recommended that the provision of reading materials (that are well adapted to the learners' experience and situations); and placing more emphasis on participatory strategies in all the stages of project implementation need be given top priority in furtherance to the execution of any functional literacy class in any given socio-cultural context.

## Endnotes

1. Historically, *Ìsoya* community - situated within the South zone of Ife Division in the rainforest belt of South-western Nigeria - derived its name from some antecedents of warfare about 100 years or so ago. It is literally interpreted: *Be a custodian to my wife...* In those days when warriors in the surrounding villages were preparing for warfare elsewhere, they would seek cover and protection for their wives from some certain custodians in this remote village. It is, perhaps, by sheer coincidence that this village became the headquarters of the University of Ife rural development programme outreach (consisting of a conglomerate of about 19 villages situated within both the rainforest and savanna belts) later in late 1960s, or possibly because of its strategic location. Of course, the importance attached to the community as the nexus of all other villages

- within the programme area invariably resulted to its becoming a household name amongst researchers and technical staff such that *Isoya* itself almost overshadowed the entire name of the programme.
2. See IRA *Reading Today*, Vol. 24, No. 1, August/September 2006, p.8. It is interesting to note that the first phase of the project was carried out with a paltry sum of two thousand US dollars (\$2000.00) graciously granted by the IRA based in Newark, United States. Seen as a successful project, the IRA further granted a sum of two thousand, five hundred US dollars (\$2,500.00) to embark on the second phase of the project. It should be noted that the Awo Literacy project was one of the windows used in revamping the entire RD programme, which until recently was almost non-existent again.
  3. US\$1.00 is the equivalent of NGN 150:00 at the time of writing this paper.

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