

## REFLECTION ON EDUCATIONAL PROVISION FOR MIGRANT FISHER FOLK IN NIGERIA: CHALLENGES AND PROSPECTS

Sirajo Alhaji Ladan, PhD<sup>1</sup> & Muhammad Lawal Ibrahim<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Nigeria Television Authority, NTA Sokoto Network Centre, Sokoto – Nigeria

<sup>2</sup> Department of Educational Foundations, Shehu Shagari College of Education, Sokoto – Nigeria

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### Abstract

The paper examined educational provision for migrant folk in Nigeria. As such concepts and sub-themes such as nomads, nomadic education, Migrant fisher folk, overview of educational provision for Migrant fisher folk in Nigeria, educational needs of Migrant fisher folk and challenges in educating them formed the sub-headings raised and discussed in the paper. On the basis of the discussion, the paper while acknowledging the progress made by the National Commission for Nomadic Education (NCNE) in providing education for Migrant Fisher folk through the National Nomadic Education programme, however observed some challenges hindering implementation of the programme such as Inadequate relevant teaching materials and Lack of enough qualified and suitable teachers among others. It was also part of the paper's observation that over the years Nomadic educational programmes for the Migrant fisher folk children has been available only in the southern part of the country. On this basis, the paper therefore suggested as part of the prospect for the education of migrant fisher folk and their children that, proactive measures should be taken by the stakeholders to address the challenges in order to improve educational delivery for migrant fisher folk and their children in Nigeria. Also, in Nomadic Education delivery more especially for Migrant fisher folk and their children, more emphasis should be given to carrying along other communities of Migrant fisher folk in different parts of Nigeria.

**Key Words:** Education, Migrant Fisher Folk, Nomad, Nomadism, Nomadic Education

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### Introduction

Education is a basic human right and necessary condition for development of individual for full participation in the society. Education being a human right implies that government has the responsibility to ensure provision of education to all citizens irrespective of socio-economic, political and cultural backgrounds as well as abilities. As noted by Rao and Chand (2019), it is an accepted working policy of all the democratic nations to make provision for equal opportunities. It is in view of this that provision of equal educational opportunities for all devoid of discriminatory tendencies and inequalities have been one of the priorities of the United Nations. Instances of such as global agenda were the Universal Declaration of Human Rights adopted in 1948 which considered education as basic human right, the world conferences on Education for all (EFA) such as Jomtien, Thailand and Dakar, Senegal, Salamanca, Spain conferences which drew attention to the provision of education for all.

In Nigeria, there were replications of these global efforts to provide universal and equal educational opportunities for all. For example, in 1955 the Western Region introduced free primary education and the Eastern Region followed suit in 1957. The Federal Government introduced the Universal Free Primary Education (UPE) in 1976 and in September 1999 Universal Basic Education (UBE) was launched. By Universal Basic Education it means that Federal Government of Nigeria as cited National Policy on Education (2013), is committed to ensuring that, all citizens should receive equal educational opportunities irrespective of any factor. However, as noted by Tahir (1998) there are certain socio-economic and cultural groups in Nigeria who stands educationally disadvantaged. This is because to such social groups, education has been curtailed by an irrelevant curriculum that does not address their educational needs by ignoring their culture and interest. Thus, *Migrant Fishermen* are part of the educationally disadvantaged groups.

The Migrant fishermen or preferably Migrant fisher folk since women are also part of the process, are group of nomads who constantly move from place to place mainly riverine and coastal areas of Nigeria. Indeed, children of Migrant fisher folk are forced by circumstances of birth and occupation to move along with their parents from one fishing post or settlement to another depending on the tide, time of the year and type of fish they catch. Therefore, like pastoralists, this pathetic and wandering way of life make it impossible for Migrant fisher folk and their children to benefit from conventional schools like sedentary people. Initially, the National Commission for Nomadic Education (NCNE), body established in 1989 and charged with the responsibilities of educating the nomads focused extensively on the provision of formal education to the nomadic pastoralists and their children. However, Tahir cited in Mahuta (2009) stated that as from 1990, efforts had been made to effectively incorporate the education of Migrant fisher folk and their children into the National Nomadic Education programme.

### **Conceptual Clarification**

The key concepts that need to be explained in this paper are namely: Migrant fisher folk, nomads, nomadism, and education.

**Nomads:** Nomads can be described as people that move from one place to another in search of livelihood. Nomads can also be referred to as traveling population, the migratory group, itinerant group and the wandering people. In the same vein, Akinkugbe cited in Ladan and Naabu (2023) refers to nomads as “ethnic or socio-professional groups which travel and migrate in large or small class groups in search of means of livelihood within a community, a nation or across international boundaries”.

**Nomadism:** Nomadism is considered as the constant movement from place to place in search of pasture and water and fish. Such wandering from one place to another usually cuts across local, state and political borders. Nomadism could also be referred to as any type of existence characterized by the absence of a fixed domicile. Examples are the hunters, food gatherers, itinerant workers, the pastoralists and the migrant fishermen. According to Awogbade in Mahuta (2009), nomadism or wandering pastoralism is the mode of existence of human communities totally or practically dependent on the husbanding of one or more species of domesticated animals.

**Education:** Education refers to development of certain qualities in order to enable individual to be productive, active and responsible member of society. It is for the betterment of not only an individual and his kin but the whole social system. Fafunwa (2002) noted that education is an aggregate of all processes by which a child or young adult develops the ability, attitudes and other forms of behaviours which are of positive value to the society. To Kolawale and Olusola (2010), education is a mechanism through which the society generates the knowledge and skills required for its survival and sustenance. Education enriches people's understanding of themselves and their world. It improves the quality of their lives and leads to broad social benefits to individuals and society. Education is a training which serves as a societal problem solving mechanism and by that, it means that most societal vices can be addressed through education.

### **Migrant Fisher Folk**

Migrant fisher folk are refers to group of nomads whose main occupation is fishing, thus they move from one fishing selling location to another with their children who are either too young to be left behind to attend distant schools or are used as helping hands by parents to whom fishing has become a way of life. The term Migrant fisher folk embrace both the fishermen or women and their children who are probably of formal school age, living and engaged in fishing activities with their parents as they move from one fishing port to another. National Commission Nomadic Education, (NCNE) (2000) observed that as early as the age of 12years, children are regarded as mature enough to begin their own career and therefore embark on distant fishing activities. This means that the training in fishing starts early in life. They also engage in essential work roles related to storage and preservation of fish and even in actual long distance fishing depending on their age. One of the distinctive features of the Migrant fisher folk is the existence of division of labour among the members of the household which is as follows:

- i. The father and the male children go for fishing. In the process, some male children serve as helping hands, while some assist in mending fishing implements.
- ii. The mother and the female children are responsible for selling and smoking fish and preparation of delicacies.

Nigeria is a country blessed with abundance potentials for fishing. For example, according to Fish for All Summit, (2005) there are more than 6 million coastal and riverine artisanal fisher folk fishing the 46,300km<sup>2</sup> of maritime area and 125, 470.82km<sup>2</sup> of inland water bodies. Migrant fisher folk are therefore found in unique geographical terrain under harsh aquatic ecological conditions. Nomadic Education programme for Migrant fisher folk focus more on fishing communities with their large population in Southern part of Nigeria such as states like Rivers, Bayelsa, Akwa-Ibom, Cross Rivers, Delta, Edo, Anambra, Ogun and Ondo States. There are however significant population of Migrant fisher folk in quite a number of states in northern Nigeria such as Niger, Kwara, Kogi, Benue, Kebbi and Borno States among others. Indeed, statistics found by Eheazu, cited in Befii (2022) revealed that, there are around 3.8 million migrant fish folk in Nigeria, including approximately 1.3 million school-aged children. Such statistic also revealed that Nigerian fisher folk contribute 85% of domestic fish consumption in Nigeria. The nature of their occupation constitutes formidable obstacles to their education in these areas. In some of these riverine areas, it is difficult to initiate long term educational development programme as some of the human settlements are very dispersed and transient. As noted by Fantula (2008) the migration of fishermen from one area to another, a concomitant of ecological and socio-economic factors, has profound effects on the education of their children.

### **Overview of Educational Provision for Migrant Fisher Folk in Nigeria**

Emphasis on Migrant fisher folk education in Nigeria began in 1990 when there were efforts by the National Commission for Nomadic Education (NCNE) to incorporate the education of Migrant fisher folk children into the National Nomadic Education programme. The approach introduced by the commission was to encourage states, local governments, communities, Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) and Community Based Organizations (CBOs) to set up schools while on its part the NCNE provides them with technical and financial support. Ten states that pioneered the programme were Rivers, Bayelsa, Akwa-Ibom, Cross Rivers, Delta, Edo, Niger, Anambra, Ogun and Ondo States. As noted by Tahir (1998) as at the end of 1996/97 academic session, there were 229 Migrant fisher folk children primary schools in 26 local governments in the participating states in the riverine and coastal areas of Nigeria. There were also 25, 097 pupils in these schools and 4, 691 girls and total of

591 teachers. As further explained by Tahir (1998) NCNE organized a national conference in June, 1996 to examine the modalities for the implementation of the education of the Migrant fisher folk children in Nigeria. A workshop was organized and held from 7-9 March, 1997, at the end of which a blue print was developed for the education of the migrant fisher folk children. Another workshop was organized and held at Rivers State College of Education, Port Harcourt from 7-9 October, 1997 at the end of which a curriculum guide was developed in five core subjects namely, English, Maths, Primary Science, Social Studies and Health Education.

Therefore, there is no gainsaying the fact that over the years, the NCNE achieved a lot in the Educational provision for Migrant fisher folk through the nomadic education programme. However, Yabo (2009) observed that, educational provision for children of Migrant fisher folk have been available only in the southern part of the country. Thus, Children and Adults in most Migrant fisher folk communities of Northern Nigeria have to contend with the educational arrangement designed for the sedentary people.

The need to widen the scope of educational provision for Migrant fisher folk to bringing fishing communities in different parts of Nigeria is of paramount importance considering their numerical strength. For example, as noted by Abu-Ubaida, Dahiru, Hassan and Abdullahi (2017) Yauri Emirate has been productive in fishing since its early years and serves as an important marketing center for smoked fish in the country. In the process however, many school aged children have their schooling disrupted as a result of their engagement in fishing because they serve as helping hands.

Similarly, Yabo (2009) surveyed fishing communities in Sokoto State and found out significant number of people are into fishing in the state with Local governments such as Goronyo, Shagari, Wamakko and Yabo among others having large concentration of fisher folk some of which adopt nomadism. In spite this; the researcher observes that, many children of these fisher folk are not in school because they are always with their parents or at times alone in the rivers for fishing.

### **Curriculum for Migrant fisher folk and their children in Nigeria**

As contained in the blue print on the education of Migrant fisher folk in Nigeria cited in NCNE (2000),

the curriculum for the Migrant fisher folk is divided into two namely:

- i. Curriculum for the Children
- ii. Curriculum for the Adults

The curriculum for the education of children from migrant fishing homes shall be the same as that for primary schools with some modification in time tabling and content to make allowance for the fishing times and reflect the cultural background of the children.

For the adult members, the following constitute the core of the curriculum for the literacy and non-formal education programmes for the adult members (men and women) of fisher folk:

- iii. Functional literacy
- iv. Vocational training
- v. Cooperative education
- vi. Training in capital formation and credit utilization
- vii. Environment and health education

As stated in the blue print the curriculum shall be open, flexible and relevant to the needs and contemporary problems of the Migrant fisher folk. In view of this, the curriculum of Migrant fisher folk in Nigeria has undergone series of transformation to suit the changing circumstances.

#### **Educational needs of Migrant fisher folk and their children in Nigeria**

Provision of quality education for all irrespective of gender, culture, region or any affiliation has been part and parcel of both national and international education conventions such as Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and Universal Basic Education (UBE). Therefore Migrant fisher folk and their children need specially education provisions different from conventional that suit their occupation and lifestyles. For the Migrant fisher folk to benefit maximally from the importance attached to education, NCNE (2000) revealed that it is obvious Migrant fisher folk need special educational provisions for both children and adult.

The Children of migrant fisher folk families require an educational programme that would be the same as that which is provided in conventional schools (especially in terms of the principles and concepts to be taught) but which shall be adapted to reflect their special environment. The idea here is to ensure that

those who may not proceed to the secondary level would be given opportunity to understand their environment in order to improve on it later, while those who could proceed to greater educational heights would be encouraged by early learning to engage in advanced studies that would be relevant for improving the environment and the general living conditions of the migrant fishing communities.

Drawing upon conclusion made by an empirical study which investigated the education of fishing communities living in 6 local governments namely; Kokuma-Opokima; southern Ijaw, Sagbama; Okrika, Ogu Bolo and Abua Odual of Bayelsa state, Atakpa (2012) asserted that, the migrant fishermen communities would want their children to be educated to fill in the gaps that they could not occupy due to their inability to access formal education during their childhood.

The Adult members of the families (most of whom are illiterates or school drop outs) require functional literacy and non-formal educational programmes which would aimed at integrating them into the main-stream and providing them with the relevant knowledge and skills to improve their general living conditions and occupational practices.

Indeed, the importance of education, generally, could not be overemphasized. Therefore, Migrant fisher folk and their children in Nigeria need to be educated. Generally, Yabo, cited in Abu-Ubaida, Dahiru, Hassan and Abdullahi (2017) considered the following as the anticipated positive effects of educating Migrant fisher folk and their children:

- i. It will equip them with skills of managing fish farm, which entails breeding, harvesting and marketing of fish products and the use of banking services.
- ii. They would be provided with the knowledge of adequately adopting of modern technologies in the development of fish farms, fish processing and privation.
- iii. Educating Migrant fisher folk is also useful in acquisition of knowledge of the prevention and control of hazards in fishing ecology.
- iv. Education would orient them on knowledge of their legal rights and privileges as Nigerian citizens.

- v. Education would provide them with the knowledge of how to maintain a healthy family.

### **Challenges in Educating Migrant fisher folk and their Children**

As the case with all forms of nomadic education programmes, such as education of nomadic pastoralists Fulani, educating the Migrant fisher folk is also characterized with lots of challenges, some of which are outlined and discussed under the following sub-headings:

- i. Inadequate relevant teaching materials
- ii. Lack of enough qualified and suitable teachers
- iii. Inadequate incentives to the teachers
- iv. Poor location of the schools
- v. Curriculum provisions that do not suit the lifestyle of fishing community

#### **Inadequate relevant teaching materials:**

Appropriate syllabus, schemes of work, textbooks and instructional materials based on the culture, tradition, social norms and the lifestyles of the migrant fisher folk is grossly inadequate.

#### **Lack of enough qualified and suitable teachers:**

There is lack of availability of native teachers and administrators who can communicate effectively.

#### **Inadequate incentives to the teachers:**

There is no adequate provision of alternative incentives for nomadic teachers in order to retain them.

#### **Poor location of schools:**

Effective and efficient educational delivery for the Migrant fisher folk and their children should adapt to their lifestyle, it require a situation whereby Schools are located within identified and accessible areas or the use of collapsible mobile classroom structures and boat schools for the more mobile groups and semi-nomadic settlement. These provisions are often not the case in Nigeria.

#### **Irrelevant Curriculum Provision for the fishing Communities:**

Irrelevance of Some Curriculum Provisions for the fishing Communities that do not suit the lifestyle of fishing community and their children is one of the major challenges encounter in the implementing of nomadic education in Nigeria. Commenting based on Tawari empirical study conducted involving fishing communities Atakpa (2012) stated that out of the one hundred and twenty (120) pupils from the school who were asked if

fishing affected their schooling. Only 45% or 54 of them responded positively. The reason being that the amount of fish, they would have caught is limited by the period they are in class learning. This according to Tawari cited in Atakpa (2012) accounts for low attendance as in the month of October. The researchers further observed that those who managed to attend classes are conscious that they are supposed to be out fishing immediately after school.

In addition to curriculum issues, Yabo, cited in Abu-Ubaida, Dahiru, Hassan and Abdullahi (2017) interviewed fisher folk in nine fishing communities of Sokoto states (Rimawa, Gidan Gijire, Muza, Kambama, Gidan Hussaini, Gidan Rakkal, and Gidan Gangan) and found the following as factors responsible for the non-participation of the fisher folk children educationally:

- i. High poverty level among parents
- ii. Lack of job opportunities after completing school
- iii. Poor quality of teaching
- iv. Lack of job after completing school
- v. Migrating nature of fisher folk

### **Conclusion**

Reflecting on education for Migrant Fisher folk in Nigeria, it can be concluded that, despite many challenges prominent among them are Inadequate relevant teaching materials and Lack of enough qualified and suitable teachers and so on, appreciable provisions were made for both children and adults through the nomadic education programme introduced by the NCNE. However, over the years such educational provision for the fisher folk children has been available only in the southern part of the country. Therefore the need to address challenges and widen the scope of educational provision for Migrant fisher folk to bringing other groups in different parts of northern Nigeria is of paramount importance considering their numerical strength.

### **Suggestions/Prospects**

Based on the discussion, the following suggestions were put forward:

- i. Proactive measures should be taken by the stakeholders to address the challenges on Nomadic Education programme in order to improve

- educational delivery for Migrant fisher folk and their children in Nigeria.
- ii. In Nomadic Education delivery, more especially for the Migrant fisher folk and their children more emphasis should be given to carrying along all fishing communities found in different parts of Nigeria.
  - iii. Governments more especially in Northern Nigeria should carry out adequate public enlightenment campaign to educate parents and school children in the migrant fisher folk communities on the values of acquiring formal education.
  - iv. More efforts should be made to reduce educational inequalities in the Universal Basic Education delivery. This can encourage and also fisher folk to send their children to school.
  - v. Nomadic educational provisions need to be reviewed to take into cognizance the Migrant fisher folk unique lifestyle more especially in timing and provision of teaching and learning materials and generally in the curriculum development so as to make education relevant for the Migrant fisher folk and their children.
  - vi. There is need to improve the quality of teachers teaching in nomadic schools meant for the children of Migrant fisher folk and other nomads. In this sense, the aspects of teacher recruitment and capacity building need to also be improved.
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