

BUILDING A SKILLED AND INCLUSIVE SOCIETY THROUGH ADULT EDUCATION AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMMES**¹Doreen Kobani, PhD**

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Abstract

This paper explores Building a Skilled and Inclusive Society through Adult Education and Community Development Programmes. The study examined the concept of Adult Education and Community Development and its significance in promoting skill acquisition, inclusion, and sustainable national growth. It was established that adult education and community development serves as an effective strategy for empowering individuals through lifelong learning, vocational education, and participatory community activities. The paper also discussed some key principles of inclusion, emphasizing equal access to learning opportunities irrespective of gender, age, creed or social status. The essence of building a skilled and inclusive society is to enable individuals to acquire relevant competencies that promote self-reliance, productivity, and social cohesion. The study further identified challenges such as inadequate funding, poor policy implementation, and limited community participation, which hinder the effectiveness of adult education and community development programmes. It was observed that when adult education and community-based initiatives are well-coordinated, they enhance human capital development and strengthen local economies. Therefore, the paper recommended that government and non-governmental organizations should intensify efforts in supporting adult education programmes through adequate funding, policy reform, and continuous advocacy. This will ensure that individuals and communities are well-equipped to contribute meaningfully to national development and global competitiveness.

Keywords: Adult Education, Build, Community Development, Inclusive Society, Skill.

Introduction

In an era defined by knowledge, technology, and transformation, no society can rise above the quality of its people. Nations that invest in their citizens' skills and ensure inclusive participation in development processes are those that thrive in today's competitive global landscape. A society's greatest asset is not its natural resources or infrastructure, but its people their creativity, competence, and capacity to learn. Building a skilled and inclusive society, therefore, begins with empowering adults and communities to take charge of their learning and development. The community development process is also geared towards mobilizing people to change and control their environments by recognizing the need to come together to analyse identified local problems

so as to find solutions to the problems. They also mobilize their resources or by external help take actions to solve the problems. To achieve this objective, organizational skills and knowledge are required. The possession of these requirements by members of a given people depends on their personal, social and educational experiences. Adult education has the traditional goal of assisting its recipients to develop their creative potential more effectively in a democratic society (Kobani & Alozie, 2019).

Adult Education and community development is not merely a policy option; it is a human necessity for social progress, economic growth, and democratic participation. Adult education serves as a transformative force that goes beyond literacy to promote empowerment, inclusion, and self-reliance. It creates pathways for those who missed formal education to acquire new competencies, participate in civic life, and contribute to national development. Samuel (2022) affirms that community-based adult learning programmes significantly enhance social inclusion and employability by addressing local learning needs and empowering marginalized groups. This supports the argument that adult education strengthens both human capacity and social inclusion. Similarly, Uzoagu & Oriji (2022) found that adult education fosters rural development in Nigeria by enabling skill acquisition and active community participation. This shows how adult education drives grassroots development and personal growth. However, it is noted that in many developing societies, millions of adults remain excluded from educational and economic opportunities due to illiteracy, unemployment, gender barriers, and poverty. Adult Education and community development initiatives offer a bridge between exclusion and empowerment. Igwe and Ezechinnah (2023) revealed that partnerships between government, NGOs, and communities help reduce illiteracy and social problems while improving the quality of family and community life. This citation demonstrates that collaborative adult education models produce measurable community benefits. Furthermore, in today's rapidly changing world, being "skilled" goes beyond reading and writing it involves mastering digital literacy, entrepreneurship, critical thinking, and civic awareness. Adult learning programmes across Africa have begun incorporating these new literacies to meet modern realities. For instance, Akomolafe, C., Nakimuli, J., & Mutebi, E. (2022) found that literacy and skills-training initiatives in Uganda's community learning centres empower adults economically and socially, fostering lifelong

learning habits. (This illustrates how skill-based adult learning supports empowerment and productivity). However, inclusive learning must intentionally remove barriers that prevent vulnerable groups from participating. In the same vein, Iwuagwu, C., Ogochukwu, V., & Osuala, E. (2023) emphasized that structural and social barriers hinder older persons with disabilities in Nigeria from achieving inclusion. This shows that true inclusion demands targeted interventions and accessible learning systems.

Community development complements adult education by turning knowledge into action through cooperation, self-help, and participatory planning that enable communities to identify and solve their own problems. Olawepo and Olatunji (2023) noted that community-based projects such as cooperative societies and skill centres promote self-reliance and reduce rural poverty. This citation supports the idea that community projects translate learning into livelihood outcomes. In the same vein, Okonkwo and Ude (2024) argued that adult education promotes sustainable development by improving literacy and decision-making capacities in rural areas. This highlights the synergy between adult learning and community progress. A truly skilled and inclusive society must also empower citizens politically and socially, not only economically. Adult education builds informed, active citizens capable of contributing to governance and nation-building.

Adeonipekun, Obashoro-John, and Ojo (2025) found that adult learning increases civic engagement, voter participation, and leadership skills among marginalized Nigerians. This demonstrates that adult education strengthens democracy and participatory governance. Despite its benefits, adult education and community development still faces challenges such as poor funding, weak institutional frameworks, and limited outreach. Ibe, Uzochukwu, and Chukwuma (2022) observed that rural-based adult education programmes in Nigeria struggle with inadequate resources, poor coordination, and lack of access to learning facilities. This underscores the need for stronger policy and infrastructure support. Overcoming these obstacles requires multi-sectoral collaboration between governments, NGOs, private actors, and communities to create inclusive, accessible, and sustainable learning opportunities for all citizens. The interplay of adult education and community development thus provides a powerful

means of reducing inequality, promoting self-reliance, and achieving sustainable national growth through people-centered strategies.

Building a skilled and inclusive society through adult education and community development is both an educational and moral imperative. It empowers individuals to become creators of change, strengthens communities as engines of innovation, and fosters national progress grounded in equity and participation. As emerging evidence shows, nations that invest in adult education and community development not only reduce inequality but also unlock the creative potential of their people (Samuel, 2022; Igwe & Ezechinnah, 2023; Adeonipekun et al., 2025). These cumulative findings reaffirm that human empowerment through learning remains the foundation of a just and prosperous society.

Concept of Adult Education and Community Development

Adult Education and community development is a holistic and participatory process that connects lifelong learning with local action to enhance individual and community well-being. It combines two complementary ideas: adult education, which provides learning opportunities for adults in formal, non-formal, and informal settings, and community development, which focuses on collective action to improve social and economic conditions. Together, these processes enable adults to identify their needs, acquire relevant skills, and collaborate to achieve sustainable growth. As noted by Belete (2022), adult education and community development views adults as active participants in their own learning and community transformation rather than as passive recipients of knowledge highlighting the transformative and participatory nature of the concept.

However, a fundamental principle underlying adult education and community development is lifelong learning, which recognizes that education continues throughout life and must adapt to changing realities of work, family, and society. The UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning (2022) emphasizes that adult learning and education are crucial for promoting citizenship, inclusion, and adaptability in a world shaped by digital innovation and social change. This underscores the global importance of lifelong learning for empowerment and inclusion. Through adult education and community education, individuals gain essential skills in literacy, digital competence, entrepreneurship, and civic engagement skills vital for participating productively in modern economies. Moreover, adult education and community development functions as a

strategy for empowerment and social inclusion, providing marginalized groups such as women, rural dwellers, and persons with disabilities with access to education and opportunities for self-improvement. In the same vein, Iwuagwu, Ogochukwu, and Osuala (2023) found that social and structural barriers often limit the inclusion of older persons and individuals with disabilities in adult education programmes, showing the need for inclusive learning systems that accommodate diverse learners. Similarly, Uzoagu and Oriji (2022) assert that adult education initiatives in rural Nigeria contribute to reducing poverty and promoting local participation by equipping adults with practical livelihood skills demonstrating the developmental role of adult education in community upliftment.

Furthermore, adult education and community development depends on partnerships among governments, civil society, and local communities. Effective implementation requires collaboration to mobilize resources, design culturally relevant programmes, and ensure sustainability. Ibe, Uzochukwu, and Chukwuma (2022) identified that many rural-based adult education programmes in Nigeria face challenges such as poor funding, weak coordination, and limited infrastructure, emphasizing the importance of institutional and financial support for successful implementation. In this regard, community learning centres, cooperative groups, and extension services act as vital platforms for organizing and sustaining adult education activities that reflect local needs and aspirations. The concept also reflects a strong emphasis on self-reliance and collective problem-solving. Olawepo and Olatunji (2023) observed that community-based projects such as skill acquisition centres, agricultural cooperatives, and micro-credit schemes encourage active participation and promote local ownership of development initiatives, highlighting the community-driven aspect of the concept. Modern approaches to adult education and community development also integrate digital literacy and environmental education.

According to Akomolafe, Nakimuli, and Mutebi (2022), community learning centres now combine traditional training with digital and entrepreneurial education, enabling adults to participate effectively in today's knowledge-based society showing how the concept evolves with technological and economic realities. The concept of adult education and community development represents a comprehensive strategy for individual empowerment and collective

progress. It blends lifelong learning with participatory community action, fostering inclusion, innovation, and sustainability. As Adeonipekun, Obashoro-John, and Ojo (2025) emphasize, educating and empowering adults enhances civic participation and strengthens democratic values, which are critical for building equitable and resilient societies. This conclusion connects adult education and community development to broader goals of national and global development.

Building a skilled and inclusive Society through Adult Education and community development Programmes

Adult education and community development plays a pivotal role in creating a skilled and inclusive society by providing lifelong learning opportunities, vocational training, and platforms for community participation. In modern societies marked by technological change and social inequality, adult education and community education bridges knowledge and empowerment, helping individuals adapt, contribute productively, and participate in national development. According to UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning (2022), societies that invest in adult education and community development strengthen human capital, reduce inequality, and enhance social cohesion highlighting its role in fostering inclusion and skill advancement.

1. Empowering Individuals through Lifelong Learning

Lifelong learning lies at the heart of adult education and community development. It offers continuous access to education, enabling individuals to acquire new knowledge and remain employable in a rapidly changing world. Belete (2022) notes that adult learning transforms individuals into agents of community change by fostering critical thinking, problem-solving, and social responsibility. In the same vein, Adeonipekun, Obashoro-John, and Ojo (2025) observe that adult education enhances civic engagement and democratic participation, empowering citizens to contribute meaningfully to governance and inclusion.

Through lifelong learning, adults develop confidence, resilience, and adaptability qualities essential for inclusive growth. Acquiring knowledge in literacy, entrepreneurship, and digital technology equips individuals to navigate modern challenges and opportunities. UNESCO (2022) emphasizes that lifelong learning supports social equity by reaching underserved

populations who missed formal education, thereby reducing inequality and promoting inclusion. Thus, lifelong education empowers individuals while advancing the broader goal of a skilled and inclusive society.

2. Vocational Education

Vocational education forms a cornerstone of adult education and community development by equipping individuals with technical and practical skills for employment and entrepreneurship. In developing contexts, unemployment and underemployment persist due to mismatches between academic training and market needs. Adult vocational programmes bridge this gap by offering training in areas such as carpentry, tailoring, ICT, agriculture, and craftsmanship. Uzoagu and Oriji (2022) affirm that vocational education fosters economic inclusion by providing employable skills that improve livelihoods and reduce poverty.

At the community level, vocational training strengthens local economies and promotes innovation. Similarly, Akomolafe, Nakimuli, and Mutebi (2022) notes that community learning centres integrating vocational and entrepreneurial education enable adults to start small-scale businesses, boosting local productivity and sustainability. Moreover, vocational education promotes gender inclusion by empowering women especially in rural areas with opportunities for income generation and independence. This enhances family welfare and community resilience. By aligning learning with employment and enterprise creation, adult vocational education becomes a key driver of a skilled workforce and sustainable national growth.

3. Participatory Community Activities

Participatory community activities represent the social dimension of adult education and community development. They promote collaboration, shared responsibility, and collective problem-solving allowing communities to identify and address their needs. Olawepo and Olatunji (2023) assert that participatory projects such as cooperatives, agricultural extension programmes, and literacy campaigns encourage active citizenship and social cohesion. These initiatives cultivate inclusiveness and self-reliance.

Adult participation in community-driven projects fosters leadership and interpersonal skills, as well as a sense of belonging and ownership. This participatory approach ensures that decision-making includes diverse voices, particularly those of marginalized groups. In the same vien,

Iwuagwu, Ogochukwu, and Osuala (2023) observe that participation strengthens social networks and integrates vulnerable populations including the elderly and persons with disabilities into development processes, thereby promoting equality and collective advancement.

Participatory community development also nurtures civic values such as cooperation, tolerance, and accountability key ingredients for peaceful coexistence in plural societies. As communities collaborate to solve local challenges, they build trust and resilience essential for sustainable development. Ibe, Uzochukwu, and Chukwuma (2022) emphasize that such collaboration encourages resource sharing, knowledge exchange, and grassroots innovation, all of which sustain inclusion and skills advancement over time. However, Adult education and community development plays a transformative role in building a skilled and inclusive society. Through lifelong learning, it empowers individuals with continuous opportunities to learn and adapt; through vocational education, it equips citizens with marketable and entrepreneurial skills; and through participatory community activities, it fosters social cohesion and shared responsibility. Together, these components form a dynamic framework for human capital development, equality, and national progress. As UNESCO (2022) and Adeonipekun et al. (2025) affirm, nations that prioritize adult education and community education build societies that are not only skilled and productive but also inclusive, resilient, and democratic.

Principles of Inclusion in Adult Education and Community Development

Inclusion in adult education and community development ensures that every individual regardless of gender, age, creed, or social status has equal access to learning and community participation. It reflects fairness, respect for diversity, and the belief that all people have the capacity to contribute to social progress (UNESCO, 2023). Inclusive practices enable individuals to acquire competencies that foster self-reliance, productivity, and social cohesion. Thus, inclusion is both a moral obligation and a developmental strategy essential for building a skilled and cohesive society (Adejumo, 2022).

1. Equal Access to Learning Opportunities

Equal access is the foundation of inclusion, ensuring that educational and training opportunities are available to all without discrimination. Adult education and community learning centers

should remove barriers such as cost, distance, or disability that hinder participation (UNESCO, 2022). Accessible and flexible learning programs allow women, the elderly, and persons with disabilities to benefit from lifelong learning. Digital and mobile-based education has further expanded opportunities for marginalized populations, particularly in rural areas (Okeke & Nwosu, 2021). By guaranteeing equal access, societies create fair systems that empower individuals to gain relevant skills for employment, civic engagement, and community improvement.

2. Equity and Non-Discrimination

Equity emphasizes fairness by addressing individual needs and circumstances rather than treating everyone identically. In adult education and community development, this means providing targeted support—such as scholarships for low-income learners or flexible programs for working adults—to ensure that everyone can succeed (International Labour Organization [ILO], 2021). Equity also involves dismantling systemic barriers, including gender bias, poverty, and illiteracy. For instance, promoting women’s participation in vocational training helps correct historical inequalities (Umar & Yusuf, 2023). Non-discrimination complements equity by guaranteeing respect and fairness in all educational processes. Together, these principles ensure that adult education and community development becomes a tool for social justice and inclusion (World Bank, 2022).

3. Participation and Empowerment

Participation and empowerment are vital to inclusive development. Inclusion requires not only access but also involvement in decision-making processes. When adults participate in shaping learning programmes, they develop ownership and confidence (Mezirow, 2020). Empowered learners become agents of change who can address local challenges through collective action. Community-driven projects that include residents in identifying needs or evaluating outcomes promote accountability and sustainability (Ogunleye, 2023). This participatory model ensures that adult and community development reflects real needs, strengthens local capacity, and builds stronger social networks for development.

4. Respect for Diversity

Respect for diversity acknowledges the variety of experiences, cultures, and learning abilities within communities. Valuing these differences enriches education and strengthens social bonds

(UNDP, 2023). Inclusive programmes should use culturally responsive curricula, multilingual materials, and safe learning environments where everyone feels valued. Such respect encourages mutual understanding and tolerance, essential for social cohesion and peace (Eze & Obi, 2022). By celebrating diversity, adult education and community development fosters unity in difference, preparing individuals to thrive in an increasingly interconnected world.

However, the principles of inclusion equal access, equity and non-discrimination, participation and empowerment, and respect for diversity form the backbone of sustainable adult education and community development. When applied effectively, they ensure that learning systems and community structures benefit all individuals, especially the marginalized. Inclusive practices cultivate human potential, drive productivity, and promote harmony, leading to the creation of a skilled and socially cohesive society. Inclusion, therefore, is not only about fairness but also about unlocking the collective strength of communities for national and global progress.

Challenges Hindering the Effectiveness of Adult Education and Community Development Programmes

1. Inadequate Funding

Inadequate funding remains one of the most persistent and crippling challenges confronting adult education and community development programmes across many developing nations. Effective implementation of adult learning initiatives requires consistent investment in infrastructure, qualified facilitators, instructional materials, and learner support systems. However, in most African countries including Nigeria adult education receives minimal attention in budgetary allocations compared to the formal education sector (Ogundele & Aminu, 2023). According to UNESCO's Global Report on Adult Learning and Education (GRALE 5), many governments allocate less than 1% of their national education budgets to adult education, making it difficult to sustain impactful and inclusive programmes (UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning, 2022).

This chronic underfunding leads to inadequate learning centres, insufficient teaching resources, poor teacher motivation, and limited outreach to marginalized populations (Rahman & Gichia, 2024). Adult learners often study in unconducive environments, discouraging participation and lowering retention rates. The lack of adequate funding also weakens monitoring and evaluation mechanisms, hindering accountability and long-term planning (Wami, 2023). Furthermore,

inadequate financial commitment intensifies other challenges such as weak policy implementation and low community involvement. Without sustainable funding mechanisms, the goals of adult education and community development empowerment, inclusion, and productivity remain largely unattained (Biao, 2022).

2. Poor Policy Implementation

Even where policies on adult education and community development exist, ineffective implementation continues to undermine progress. Many national education policies highlight lifelong learning and inclusion, yet these goals often remain on paper due to weak institutional frameworks, bureaucratic bottlenecks, and lack of political will (Okolie & Eze, 2023). In Nigeria, for example, several adult education policies have been developed since independence, but poor execution, inconsistent monitoring, and inadequate coordination between federal, state, and local agencies have limited their impact (Egunjobi & Ayinde, 2023).

In addition, policy implementation suffers from poor inter-ministerial collaboration and the absence of data-driven decision-making (Akanbi, 2024). This disconnect results in duplication of efforts, wastage of scarce resources, and limited alignment with community needs. The poor translation of policy objectives into concrete programmes also demoralizes adult educators and learners, reducing confidence in public education systems. Importantly, weak policy implementation is closely tied to underfunding when resources are insufficient, even well-designed policies cannot be executed effectively (Rahman & Gichia, 2024). Therefore, addressing the funding gap is a prerequisite for improving policy delivery and achieving the inclusive goals of adult and community education.

3. Limited Community Participation

Another critical challenge affecting the success of adult education and community development programmes is limited community participation. For adult learning initiatives to be effective, local communities must be actively involved in programme design, implementation, and evaluation. However, in many contexts, adult education is perceived as a government-driven initiative with little local ownership (Ogunyemi & Nwankwo, 2023). This top-down approach discourages participation, especially among rural dwellers who feel alienated from decision-making processes.

However, limited participation is also fueled by low awareness of the benefits of adult education, socio-cultural barriers, and economic pressures that prioritize immediate survival over learning (Nwosu & Oladipo, 2024). In many rural areas, adult learners, especially women, face restrictions from family responsibilities, lack of incentives, and limited access to nearby learning centres. When communities are excluded, programmes fail to address local needs, making them unsustainable in the long run. Furthermore, weak community engagement reduces accountability and limits the flow of local knowledge and resources that could enhance programme success (Egunjobi & Ayinde, 2023).

The interplay among these challenges funding shortages, weak policy execution, and poor community participation creates a cycle of inefficiency that hinders the transformative potential of adult education and community development. Sustainable progress can only be achieved when all three issues are addressed simultaneously through adequate resource allocation, inclusive policy frameworks, and genuine community involvement.

Conclusion

In conclusion, adult education and community development stands as a cornerstone for building a skilled, inclusive, and progressive society. It empowers individuals through lifelong learning, strengthens communities through participation, and promotes equality through inclusive education. The integration of vocational, civic, and digital skills within adult education equips citizens to adapt to changing socio-economic realities and contribute productively to national growth. Moreover, inclusive principles such as equity, participation, and respect for diversity ensure that no one is left behind in the quest for social advancement. By linking education to empowerment and community engagement, adult education and community development becomes not only a tool for human capital formation but also a vehicle for social justice, cohesion, and democratic participation.

However, achieving the full potential of adult education and community development requires addressing persistent challenges such as inadequate funding, poor policy implementation, and limited community involvement. Governments, civil society, and private stakeholders must collaborate to design sustainable frameworks that prioritize lifelong learning as a national development goal. Increased investment, effective policy coordination, and grassroots

participation will ensure that adult education programmes are inclusive, responsive, and impactful. Ultimately, nations that commit to empowering their citizens through adult education and community development build the foundations for sustainable progress, where every individual contributes meaningfully to collective prosperity and national transformation.

Recommendations

Adult education and community development is essential for building a skilled and inclusive society, yet challenges such as poor funding, weak policy implementation, and limited participation hinder its success. To maximize its impact, coordinated actions among government, NGOs, and communities are required. Therefore, the following recommendations are made:

1. Government and NGOs should intensify support for adult education and community development through adequate funding, policy reform, and sustained advocacy.
2. Policy makers should improve implementation and monitoring frameworks to ensure accountability and alignment with community needs.
3. Communities should be actively involved through bottom-up participation in programme design and execution to promote ownership and sustainability.
4. Capacity building for facilitators and community leaders should be prioritized to enhance digital literacy and inclusive teaching methods.
5. Public awareness campaigns should be intensified to promote lifelong learning and encourage participation among marginalized groups.

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