

## **Repositioning Adult Education Using Reflect Circle: A Non-Formal Education Strategy for Inclusiveness and Sustainable Development among Rural Women**

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**Abstract:** To achieve sustainable development (SD) is to strive to live a human and nature-friendly life in the present and future generation. Living such a life implies adding to nature more than one intends to remove from it. SD goals are 17 development goals created by the UN in September 2015 to enable the global community have common understanding of global problems and be committed towards them. This paper is concerned with SDG 4 which is focused on inclusiveness in education and promoting lifelong learning opportunities. To achieve SD goal 4, inclusiveness in learning is imperative. Inclusiveness bereft of community participation and particularly involvement of rural women implies that SD will hardly be achieved and gender gap in education will continually get widened. This is because rural women are drivers of all kinds of human development. Involving rural women in sustainable learning in order to achieve SD goal 4 implies that traditional form of learning which emphasizes pre-packaged curriculum and a teacher as a sage (know all) should be revisited. It implies further, that the need of the learner or participant in learning environment should be seen as paramount and the learner be seen as the focus of any learning enterprise. An approach for inclusive Non-formal Education (NFE) is therefore quite imperative for achieving inclusiveness among rural women in communities in Nigeria in order to save them from life of docility and resignation. This is necessary for them to be able to improve their choices and capabilities for living rewarding and productive lives. Such NFE approach recommended by this paper is the REFLECT Circle (A participatory adult learning approach developed by an International Organization named Action aid in 1993 to fight against poverty and injustice globally). REFLECT Circle is a participatory approach which combines the theories of Paulo Freire (A renowned Brazillian educator and Philosopher) with participatory rural appraisal (PRA). PRA is a philosophy and set of practical methods for consulting with non – literate communities about local development. The authors of this paper were of the view that REFLECT circle could be used to enable rural women get involved and participate in inclusive lifelong learning and decision making. The contributors were convinced that REFLECT Circle is an inclusive form of learning process which strives to increase women’s choices and capabilities and enable them assert their rights for achieving sustainable development in their local environment. Management of REFLECT Circle was discussed and Recommendations were made.

**Key words:** Repositioning, Adult Education, REFLECT Circle, Non- formal Education, Inclusiveness, Sustainable Development, Rural Women

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### **I. Introduction**

Achieving Sustainable Development Goals has been a prerequisite among the UN member States since the year 2015. These global goals are targets and indicators expected to be used by the member states to frame their political policies and socio-economic agenda in order to achieve an inclusive and resilient development. It aimed to fight poverty, inequality, injustice, tackle climate change and ensure that all people enjoy peace and prosperity. The SDGs comprise a set of 17 goals (See Fig. 1 Attached as Appendix A) with the year 2030 as the deadline. However, the concern of this paper lies on achieving Goal 4 “Ensure Inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunity for all” (UNDP, 2019) with a particular interest on rural women.

Globally, women have great numerical strength. UN Women (2019) report on education noted that women make up more than two-thirds of the 796 million illiterate people. Majority of them, particularly those residing in the rural areas are neglected and marginalized because most of them do not have voice in decision making in their homes, communities and the nation in general (Obidiegwu & Anurgwo, 2016). This issue of neglect and marginalization if not continually addressed will stand against efforts by the UN for inclusive development. In Nigeria, according to the 2006 census, women consist of 49% of the country’s population and

majority of them reside in the rural areas (Oyebanuiji & Amini-Philip, 2012). This by implication means that in order to achieve SDGs, mobilizing rural women using educational strategies is imperative and cannot be overlooked. In order to integrate rural women in Nigeria into the mainstream of community and national development and get them empowered, education remains the only weapon to achieve such a great feat.

There exists different kinds of education namely formal, informal and non-formal. However, this paper focuses on non-formal education (organized form of education out of school) because in reality it will pose difficulty for a rural woman to avail herself of formal education (organized form of education in school) because of its features which include rigidity in time and high cost. Most rural women cannot go back to school because traditionally they are tied to their families. This notwithstanding, they need lifelong learning opportunities to be made available for them so that they can be transformed from their culture of silence, resignation and docility to active participants on issues affecting their lives. This kind of lifelong opportunity can be made to be part and parcel of their lives and living and can be provided for them using adult and non-formal education (NFE) approach namely: Regenerated Freirean literacy through Empowering Community Techniques (REFLECT).

### **Regenerated Freirean Technique (REFLECT)**

REFLECT is a participatory approach in the field of Adult education. It was developed by ACTION AID (An international non-governmental organization whose primary aim is to work against poverty and injustice globally) based on participatory rural appraisal and Freirean method. The Action-Aid has explored the possible use of REFLECT to improve inclusion, participation and lives of rural women in different countries such as Bangladesh, Uganda, and El-savdor. In these countries REFLECT was used to fight poverty and injustice, achieve socio-political and economic development among rural women. It is therefore no gain saying that the SDGs and REFLECT are developed in order to improve the well being of global citizens.

REFLECT is seen by the contributors of this paper as a necessary ingredient for wholesome empowerment, and inclusiveness in development, among rural women. It is seen as a vehicle for achieving SDG 4 in Nigeria and among UN member countries. It is therefore the focus of this paper to discuss the need to adopt a lifelong learning approach for inclusive and continuing learning among rural women in order to achieve Sustainable Development in Nigeria. In order to achieve the purpose of this paper, the authors used logical and analytical reasoning to discuss the following:

- What is Sustainable Development?
- Women involvement and participation in educational activities as a necessity for achieving SDG4
- Need to achieve SDG4 using REFLECT
- Management of REFLECT circle
- The REFLECT Learning process
- Implication for rural, state and national development
- Conclusion
- References

### **Concept of Sustainable Development**

Sustainable development (SD) is a multifaceted and diverse concept which has been explained in various ways. It can be referred to as development which takes care of the present and future challenges of global citizens by finding better ways of doing things in order to promote personal wellbeing, inclusion, equal opportunities, better decision making, meeting diverse needs of people, protecting the environment, economic survival and good governance. According to IISD (2018) SD has been defined in various ways but the most frequently quoted definition is from the Brundtland report which defined “Sustainable development as the development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of the future generations to meet their own needs. This implies that SD strives to replenish and build up rather than take away and graze-down in order to sustain life and development endlessly and without limitation.

In order to achieve SD the United Nations (UN) general assembly in September 2015 created a common set of 17 development goals (See Fig. 1) to enable the entire global community have a common understanding of global problems and be committed towards them. It can be referred to as a blueprint geared towards continuing global success. These set of goals strive to hold governments of countries round the globe to account for their development effort from the year 2015 to 2030. To this end each of the goals has specific target to meet. SDGs aim at getting the global community to have common understanding about global problems and social ills of poverty, inequality and climate change in order to overcome them to avoid severe consequences on citizens. These goals can therefore be referred to as human friendly because they are geared towards promoting human life and living.

Achievement of SDGs call for countries and stakeholders to mobilize efforts both locally and nationally. It focuses on finding out better ways of doing things for the present and future generations by ensuring that communities have access to better and longer lives. It emphasizes that everyone should be carried

along and no one should be left behind for the common goal to be achieved. It is therefore inclusive in approach because it clamours for meeting diverse needs of people irrespective of their gender, socio-economic status, race, religion and location; which could be achieved through increasing participation in learning in different cultures and communities for increasing their capabilities. As noted by the former UN Secretary General Ban ki-moon (as cited in Onyido 2018 “SD is a pathway to the future we want for all”). It offers a framework to generate economic development, achieve social justice, exercise environmental stewardship and strengthen governance. As seen in Fig. 1, although the SDGs are 17 in number, this paper is focused on SDG4. “Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunity” (UNDP, 2019) with emphasis on rural women in Anambra State and Nigeria in general. This paper recognizes education as playing a key role to any form of sustainable development and a main vehicle towards achieving SDGs and building resilient communities. Furthermore, for any development effort to be achieved in different communities in Nigeria, involving women is imperative, hence, the saying educating a woman, means building a whole nation.

**Women Involvement in Educational Activities as a Necessity for Achieving SDG 4** Women and particularly rural women are seen as pivotal to survival and human development. This implies that any effort made towards empowerment of women will lead to actualizing SDGs. However, they seem not be effectively involved and included in community development efforts. They have limited opportunities and platforms for continuing learning where they can leash out their potentials for capacity building and collective decision making in their communities. Building women’s capacity in communities calls for creating inclusive, collaborative and sustainable learning environment and not a one-off arrangement (Obidiegwu & Anurugwo, 2016). This implies that there should be continuing learning platforms and fora for discussing and addressing women diverse needs in order to achieve SDGs. Such platforms would serve to encourage them take collective positive actions. This is because small actions taken collectively by rural women can add up to positive changes in their communities and result to building sustainable and resilient communities.

In Anambra State, according to 2006 population census women represent 49.3% of the population (Anambra State Nigeria, 2019) and the majority are rural women who are not fully empowered for participation, inclusion and representation in decision making circles for sustainable development. By virtue of their physiology as givers, nurturers of life and key players in their families they could be great forces in achieving sustainable development in their communities, if they are effectively mobilized and their potentials effectively utilized and harnessed. In the absence of worthwhile mobilizing platforms, in Anambra State and Nigeria in general, most rural women have developed a culture of silence, resignation and docility. According to Obidiegwu and Anurugwo (2016) the psyche and situation of rural women in Nigeria call for enabling them understand the realities of their existence, raising their awareness and sense of confidence and transforming their mindsets through sustainable mobilization programmes so that they can take action individually and collectively against impeding circumstances which limits their choices and capabilities towards their existence and enduring sustainability.

Although most rural women in Anambra State and Nigeria have potentials for increasing their capabilities, their lives are characterized by poor income, poverty, hunger, diseases, lack of portable water and good shelter, poor access to primary health care services, education and other facilities that make life worth living (Obidiegwu & Anurugwo 2016). In contrast to this situation, better means of livelihood and environment could have been achieved if their needs are addressed through providing opportunities for sustainable inclusive learning environment. Hunger Project (2019) noted that irrespective of the fact that rural women produce almost 80% of food consumed by the populace, they are the most marginalized group in terms of satisfaction of their needs. The body further noted that at least 60% of the world hungry are women. Hence, if this situation is not improved, there is lean hope for achievement of SD in Anambra State and Nigeria in general.

Considering the numerical strength of the rural women and their invaluable roles in rural development, involving and empowering them using inclusive non-formal education strategies in order to achieve sustainable development is apt and imperative. Inclusive non-formal education for women in this paper implies an education outfit which attends to and satisfy diverse learning needs of rural women, which views a rural woman as part of a bigger society (Obidiegwu, 2018). It implies an educational process which increases involvement and participation of women, provides equal opportunities, increases their choices and capabilities, raises awareness, and increases their ability to deal with everyday life. An education outfit which focuses on enhancing rural womens’ ability to solve their specific needs for positive performance and survival, which discusses rural women concern at community level, which preserves interest and asserts the rights of rural women, where rural women can see themselves as capable of transforming their situations (Obidiegwu & Anurugwo 2016). Inclusive non-formal education for rural women is further seen as a process which will give rural women a sense of purpose so that they will “be able to know the world” (Freire, 1970). According to Freire “this act of knowing involves a dialectical movement that goes from action to reflection and from reflection upon action to a new action”. This implies that through dialogue and conversational learning, rural women can continually reflect on their problems and situations, they can see their realities clearer and be able to take

progressive actions toward transforming their impeding realities for better livelihood in their societies. At this point in this paper therefore, the question is which non-formal education approach could be adopted in order to achieve SDG 4.

Such education must be inclusive, participatory, continuing and not a one-off process. Education which could help rural women assert their rights, challenge injustice and change their situations in the society. It should be action oriented and should involve working with people and not for them. This kind of quality education is seen in a participatory adult education approach called the REFLECT.

REFLECT is an acronym for Regenerated Freirean Literacy through Empowering Community Techniques. It is a participatory and inclusive approach in the field of adult learning and social change which combines the theories of Paulo Freire (A renounced Brazillian educator, philosopher) with participatory rural appraisal (PRA) (Pamoja, 2012). PRA is a philosophy and set of practical methods for working with non-literate communities in relation to local development.

### **NEED TO ACHIEVE SDG4 USING REFLECT**

REFLECT is a participatory approach in Adult Learning developed by Action Aid. Action Aid is an international non-governmental organization whose primary aim is to work against poverty and injustice globally. (Action Aid International, 1997). It focuses on participatory learning. It combines the theories of Paulo Freire with participatory rural appraisal (PRA). PRA is a people centered approach to development that aims at “bottom-up” approach. REFLECT Circle is focused on promoting inclusiveness and empowerment using Non-formal education for sustainable development for all in every community. REFLECT creates a democratic space where a group of people can meet and discuss issues relevant to their condition and local situation according to their priorities. It is done in a circle (group) hence the name REFLECT Circle (See Attached Appendix B, REFLECT Circle). It has wide range of applications. This implies that it is used to solve not just illiteracy challenges but tackles socio-economic, political, cultural problems and hindrances or impediments among groups of people. The basic tenet of REFLECT is the principle that the poor, underserved and marginalized can understand analyze, interpret and implement solutions to their challenges and take action against any impeding element. It therefore involves reflection for the purpose of action. Freire (as cited in Archer & Cottingham, 1996) criticized learning based on the use of primers (Basic textbook used in traditional literacy programmes) because according to him teachers chooses literacy words which suits their purposes and not the learners. According to Freire (1970) learners are “filled” with the words the teachers have chosen which makes them passive and “immersed in the culture of silence”, hence learning is not focused to the solution of problems of the learners.

Garavan (2010) citing Freire noted that culture of silence implies a life of docility whereby “thinking is difficult and speaking is forbidden” Friere’s philosophy frowns at non inclusion, non involvement and non-participation in learning. This can be described as the situation in which most rural women in Anambra State and Nigeria found themselves in the recent times, hence, according to (Momodu) as cited in Obidiegwu and Anurugwo (2016) rural women in Nigeria have developed a culture of silence, resignation and docility.

REFLECT involves an informal learning environment where everyone has a voice and the voices have equal weight, where people feel comfortable to meet and discuss issues relevant to them in their communities. Levana and Vitznam (2019) refers to Freire’s ideas as an approach to education that aims to transform oppressive structures by engaging people who have been marginalized and dehumanized to draw from what they already know. REFLECT practice is diverse, and can be referred to as a socio-political process which frowns at inequity as a result of gender, class, caste, race, physical or intellectual ability, hierarchy, status, language, appearance. This paper is of the view that REFLECT can be used to achieve involvement, participation, increased opportunities, choices, capabilities and visibility of rural women in Nigeria and Anambra State in particular.

Reflect was successfully piloted for helping rural women develop their communities by Action Aid in 1993 in Uganda, Bangladesh and El Salvador (Cottingham, Metcalf & Phynuyal, 1998).

REFLECT was used to promote economic empowerment for rural women, settle communal conflict, and promote literacy. It is basically adapted for solving varying problems in the local context of learners. The method won the United Nations Award in 2003, 2005, 2007, 2008 and 2010 because of its flexibility which was situationally relevant for learners (Hanermann, 2017 & Pamoja, 2012).

### **Management of REFLECT CIRCLE**

Managing a REFLECT Circle just as any other programme involve combination of both human and material resources to achieve the goal of such programme. It can equally be defined as working through people and with people to achieve the objective of a programme (Obidiegwu, 2014) and in this case a community programme. REFLECT programme is diverse depending on how a community (rural women) choose to

continually prioritize their needs and actualize them. They approach their needs one after the other as they evolve, hence, it is not a one-off process but a lifelong inclusive and sustainable process (Hanemann, 2017).

REFLECT Circle is managed by the local people themselves but with the assistance of the local authority as the need arises. Such help can come in form of advice, equipments, facilities and resource persons to support a circle. In this instance, the role of the adult and non formal education Units/Departments in the local and state government in collaboration with NMEC come into play because they have to listen to the challenges of different circles and render to them technical and or financial assistance as the case may be and as the local people may request. Education is an investment, it is a human right which drives other rights, economic activities, and human development and so, the government must always increase their budget and financial assistance on education, in formal and non formal sector for continuous human development to be achieved. This is because the rural community and particularly rural women are poverty-stricken in Nigeria. However, while rendering such assistance they should not impose their own view of the world on them because such imposition invade and impedes creativity and innovation. Organizations such as NGOs, FBOs, CSOs or philanthropic can also promote the affairs of a REFLECT Circle by giving suggestions and other necessary aids. Just like in any non-formal education programme, there should be facilitators, leaders and organizers of any circle among the local people and according to the choice of the people, roles can be ascribed, and resource persons invited as situation demands. Furthermore, any decision, agreement or consensus at any time is reached by the entire members in the group, hence, all voices have equal weight and learners are at the center of the entire process, hence the poor and marginalized can analyze their own realities and decide implementation and evaluation processes.

Each locality in every community agrees on a location or fora for discussion according to their choice. They can choose village square, Igwe's palace, town hall, market square, church or mosque compound or any other strategic centre to the locality as they may agree.

### **The REFLECT Learning Process**

The participants in a REFLECT Circle start learning activities by constructing maps or matrices, diagrams and charts of their environment based on the realities of their situations, and circumstances for critical reflection and action. This is based on the philosophy of Paulo Freire. (Cotingham, Metcalf & Phnuyal, 1998).

Such maps and matrices may include houses forests, rivers, agricultural resources, social life and status, inequality in the society, including gender inequality and gender role stereotypes, discrimination, caste, political processes, cultural practices and involvement, family planning, nutrition and other health issues. Areas of consideration in REFLECT are as broad as life itself based on existing need. The maps, diagrams and matrices are analysed and dialogued upon for further action. They can copy key words in exercise books (ie if basic literacy is among the objectives). Depending on a social problem the learning group intends to tackle they construct their own learning guide, manual or facilitators guide which lead to strong ownership of the issues and solutions they proffer for action to be taken.

The learning guide or the facilitators manual depicts the interests of the learners and is not a prepackaged content. It is adapted to only the concern and need of the immediate environment for interest and motivation. In REFLECT Circle there is always flexibility for creative input and innovation. For example in agriculture they may discuss planting of different crops, harvesting, soil fertility and infertility, trees, herbal leaves and their uses among others. In health, nutrition and malnutrition, cure for different diseases, diabetes, high and low blood pressure, and health management among others. Gender issues such as unpaid domestic works of women, dangers of gender stereotyping, child rearing, appropriate technology towards reducing the drudgery of home chores, higher productivity and enhancement of livelihood of rural women among others. Political and other issues can as well be discussed.

The REFLECT approach is applied in different contexts, situations and ways with process of mutual learning which is constantly being strengthened by mutual reciprocal relationships, sense of community and belonging. Experiences are shared and problems are solved by allowing people who have common objectives to give their voices in decision making so that real solutions are found to such problems. As long as the REFLECT Circle continues, participatory approaches and methods are used to engage learners in mutual democratic learning. Participatory approaches such as role play, drama, songs, dance, story telling, games proverbs are interwoven in the structure of the programme to keep the learners together. Learners decide time for meeting according to their schedule.

At the end of each session of REFLECT Circle each participant owns and becomes part of targeted objectives and also actions to be taken towards achievement of such objectives. He has maps and charts related to her environment from where problems are generated and solved. Through this process communities and particularly rural women plan and achieve their own development without waiting for external forces which they may not see, embark in inclusive lifelong learning and achieve sustainable development.

### **Implications of the Study**

There is need for the national and State assemblies to truly understand the importance of education (particularly non-formal education where REFLECT Circle is embued) in achieving human overall development. This will enable them to always seek to enhance budgetary provision and implementation for education sector and for non formal education in particular. There is also dire need for policy makers and researchers to probe more on the use of REFLECT as a tool for deepening awareness among rural populace so that in reality the rural women will feel sense of belonging to this country. This will encourage them to become agents of change in their communities and not accept their poverty – sticken lives and illiteracy as God’s will for them. Education is an investment which changes the world. It requires huge financial allocation for any country to move forward.

### **II. Conclusion**

Majority of the Nigerian rural women are illiterates, quite poor and ignorant. However, they have great potentials which can be harnessed for achievement of the SDGs before the deadline (2030). Efforts to integrate rural women into the mainstream of development could be achieved if learning using REFLECT Circle is encouraged in communities for continuing lifelong and inclusive development.

### **III. Recommendations**

1. The government of any progressive society cannot get tired of investing in education because education drives other sectors of the economy. The government should support and enhance establishment of REFLECT circles in all communities and sub communities in all localities in Nigeria. REFLECT should be included in the national policy documents on education in Nigeria. Mass literacy campaigns should be mounted by NMEC, State, and local governments to create awareness on the usefulness of the innovative approach for achieving SD goal 4 for greater integration participation inclusiveness and development of women and rural communities. Rural communities should be encouraged to use REFLECT Circle to increase their voices and assert their rights in local, state and national decision making and economic events. They can integrate feeding programme into the REFLECT programme for rural women and build relevant facilities such as restrooms and necessary equipments and pay for resource persons when need arises for continuous integration of the populace into the core of development processes. These will serve as incentives to the programme, when more rural women get educated, economy grows.
2. Budget should be made gender sensitive. Government should be committed to gender budgeting in order to build social equity and equality and balance both sexes in monetary allocation. Absence of gender budgeting affects the education of women. It affects terribly Non-formal education which is the type of education which the rural women can access. Non formal education should be given a pride of place by investing on the sector. Budgetary allocation on the sector should be given great consideration in the state and national budget.
3. NMEC in collaboration with all other ministries and parastatals concerned with advancing the course of education and sustainable development should send personnels to countries who have achieved success using REFLECT to understudy their processes, challenges, weaknesses and strengths in order to facilitate their continuous coordination of REFLECT programme among local communities through the state, local authorities and leaders.
4. NGOs, FBOs, CSOs, local leaders and women’s groups should be involved in this pursuit. In their roles as change agents they can provide necessary and continuing support, and aid different communities in various ways as volunteer facilitators and resource persons. International Organizations can also render support in diverse ways through financial assistance and advice among others for sustainability and human development.

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## APPENDIX A



**Fig 1: Sustainable Development Goals**  
**Source: UNDP (2019)**



APPENDIX B



REFLECT

SOURCE: Zakir (2012).

CIRCLE



REFLECT CIRCLE in Bangladesh: Adopted from Zakir (2012).

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